

FROM THE PRESENTATION CULTURE TO THE CULTURE OF PRESENCE

(NEO-MARXIST REFLECTIONS ABOUT THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION OF THE MODERN TIMES)

1. In the year of the 200th anniversary of Karl Marx one involuntarily notices that the shadow of the founder of new understanding of the history of society and culture constantly hovers over our reflections about the world and an individual, especially now, when revolutionary changes in the neo-European culture become more and more evident. And who but Karl Marx understood best of all what revolutions are and what brings them about in history?

2. The title of the book by Oswald Spengler *The Decline of the West* (Der Untergang des Abendlandes), in which it's impossible not to hear a peculiar echo of the final words from *Capital* by Marx, became an original epigraph to intellectual reflections in the 20th century about the fates of the European culture and civilization. The best minds of the 19th century lived with the idea that all problems of the human society could be solved, that development of science and technology fully guaranteed that, that there were true values, which in the end would be able to convince everyone and become the foundation of happy life. But world wars of the 20th century, death camps, the threat of a nuclear catastrophe, environmental crises – all that and similar to that made the best minds of the 20th century doubt a possibility of an easy solution of the human society's problems and possibilities of culture. "Auschwitz proved that culture utterly failed", Neo-Marxist Theodor Adorno says. He comes to the conclusion that "After Auschwitz any culture together with any humiliating it criticism are just rubbish"¹. Wasn't that attitude to culture the reason of its treatment that got the name of "postmodernism"? Postmodernism as it is usually presented is freedom of ideas and styles – there are no canons now (God is dead!); allusions, quotations, remakes

¹ Adorno T.W. *Negative Dialectics*. Moscow: Scientific World, 2003. P. 327

– there is no author now (Author’s death!); combination of this or that with anything – there is no harmony now (Rhizome!); constant worry, alarm – something will happen, something is impending (Waiting for Godot!). But much more serious cultural processes are evidently hidden behind the stylistic symptoms. These processes are revolutionary shifts in culture, change of dominant messages of the culture of the Enlightenment, or modernity culture.

3. The culture of the New Times (modernity culture) established as a result of the multi-stage cultural revolution – Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment – built an orderly and clear picture of life for the society and individual.

This picture included:

- precise division of kinds of activities – division of labour in material production, specialist fields in science (establishment of science structured according branches of knowledge), division of kinds of arts, etc.;

- normative arrangement of each kind of activities in accordance with a certain logic – philosophy (Bacon, Descartes, Kant, Hegel) determined methods and logic of science, “The Grammar of Port-Royal” (Grammaire générale et raisonnée de Port-Royal) structured the language, Bach’s “well-tempered piano score” put the musical language in order, “Poetics” by Boileau established the method of Classicism in arts (after which the very idea of artistic method originated), Barrême rules regulate accounting, etc.;

- monologue of the mind, which is acknowledged as the manager and holder of the only for all Truth (the mind respects only those “who can hold one’s ground under its free and open test” [Kant], “The sensible is real, the real is sensible” [Hegel]);

- utilitarian attitude and private interests dominate over the values: usefulness or attitude to usefulness serve as the final justification of any action (J. Bentham says that the principle of usefulness does not require and does not recognize any other regulator except itself. But Marx says that everything that is useful for “a

modern fillister and, in particular, English fillister”² turns out to be usefulness for Bentham).

An individual in culture organized in such a way becomes subordinate to those kinds of activities, the experience and contents of which determine the meanings and values of culture. The modernity culture, regulating methods and logic of activities in various fields of life, creates a certain, whole and unified *idea* of the world and an individual acting in this world. The world, *represented in knowledge*, is the world of Kant (let’s remember his Copernican Revolution), this is the world of the Enlightenment culture. A well-structured text becomes a representative of this world. Text *presents* to an individual of the Enlightenment the world in which he lives. A scientific text is the world of nature in accordance with governing laws, a fictional text of a novel is the world of family and public life, painting (text of a picture) is the world of things and the look of an individual, music (text of a music piece) is feelings and sentiments of an individual. The ideas of the author of text present the logic of the mind, beauty, justice and moral ideas of human life. The right perception of these ideas was directed and controlled by critics and the system of education. A printed book becomes the material form of the *presentation culture* existence – the world of the Gutenberg Galaxy as Marshall McLuhan said. Reproduction and repetition of printed text strengthened the idea of the constancy of truth and existence of universal interest.

The result of the modernity culture’s activity is an individual identifying himself thanks to acquired ideas with a certain community (nation, class/stratum, state), having certain knowledge, skills and ability to use his brain (*Sapere aude!* as Kant calls to do), acting freely in accordance with the cognized necessity. In 1862, Thomas Huxley expressed the idea of a worthy representative of the Enlightenment culture as follows: “I think that only the one who got the free man education can speak, the one who from his youth taught his body to be an obedient servant of his will and has the strength to perform the work he is capable of like a machine, easily and happily; whose mind is clear, cool like a counting mechanism,

² Marx K. and Engels F., Collected Works. 2nd edition. V. 23, P. 623.

where all parts function in time and with the same efficiency; the one who is ready like a steam engine to find how to apply his abilities in any kind of occupation...”³.

Surely, this is the idealized image of the Gutenberg Galaxy resident but it highlights the cultural and genetic code of understanding freedom by an individual from the Age of Enlightenment: freedom is achieved via knowledge of the objective necessity and assertion of reasonable reality. And the idea of that was in abundance provided by the book galaxy. The civilization progress and freedom in the society are undoubtedly inseparable from the Age of Enlightenment thinking, which is established by the modernity culture. But at the same time, “the established by ‘the victory of mind’ social and political institutions turned out to be an evil, bringing about bitter disappointment as a caricature of the brilliant promises by representatives of the Enlightenment”, F. Engels wrote⁴. The Enlightenment thinking became the reason of the Enlightenment’s self-destruction. According to Neo-Marxists Horkheimer and Adorno, “the idea of exactly this thinking, in no less extent than concrete historical forms, the institutions of the society, with which it is inseparably interlinked, already contains an embryo of the regress that is viewed everywhere today”⁵.

Nowadays, more than half a century after these words were said, the European culture is looking for the ways to overcome the crisis, in which the culture of the Enlightenment found itself.

4. The direction of this search is related to return of freedom to the individual of the technological civilization and bourgeois society, of freedom expropriated from him, as an individual, subjected to his requirements expropriated from him, is not a free man either in the spiritual sense or body sense⁶. This struggle against expropriation is manifested in culture that starts destroying partitions, separating meanings, values and kinds of activities that divide people.

³ Quoted by: McLuhan M. *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. Translated from the English by A. Yudin. Kiev, Nika-Center, 2003. P. 254.

⁴ Marx K. and Engels F., *Collected Works*. 2nd edition. V. 19, p. 193.

⁵ Adorno T., Horkheimer M. *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*. *Philosophical Fragments*. Translated from the German by M. Kuznetsov. Moscow-St. Petersburg: Medium, Juventa, 1997. P. 10-11.

⁶ See: Marx K. and Engels F., *Collected Works*. 2nd edition. V. 42, p. 101.

The contemporary culture

- stopped being the culture of sectors, it is a mosaic culture (A. Mohl), and that is directly demonstrated by TV screens in every house;
- is aleatory and not normative: randomness often plays the decisive role both in case of arrangement and carrying out activities;
- dialogue of consciousnesses and not the mind's monologue determines the Truth and Value;
- not usefulness but action *a recentiori* (according to the situation, proceeding from the situation) manages humans, uniqueness and individuality are becoming the domineering values.

An individual in the culture arranged like that runs across the necessity to arrange his actions himself, orienting to the requirements of a certain situation. *Presence* here and now, a certain situation and not an *idea* and knowledge about repeating circumstances, becomes the basis for action in the contemporary culture. The world of ideas is the world, in which life is mediated by texts presenting it. And the world of presence is the world in which life expresses itself by events. These are two different types of culture, two different types of being.

The importance of human presence in the world on the philosophical level was expressed by M. Bakhtin by existentiality of “my non-alibi in being”: “The uniqueness of the present being is forcibly obligatory. This fact of *my non-alibi in being*, as the foundation of the most concrete and unique obligation of action, is **not recognized and not cognized** by me but is **acknowledged and asserted** in a unique way”⁷. Pay attention – not recognized and not cognized but acknowledged and asserted, i.e. *my non-alibi in being*, my *presence* is not revealed to me by someone or something (knowledge, tradition, rule) but is stated and acknowledged. Revealing the existential meaning of *my non-alibi in being*, Bakhtin unrolls the Marx's teaching about the social being in a new way, demonstrating that there is no history without actions of a certain individual. In 2004, 80 years after Bakhtin,

⁷ Bakhtin M.M. To the Philosophy of Action (publication and introductory note by S.G. Bocharov, notes by S.S. Averintsev) // Philosophy and Sociology of Science and Technology. Almanac 1094-1985. Moscow: Science, 1986. P. 112. (Italics by Bakhtin, bold print mine – V.K.)

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht will say in his book *Production of Presence*, which became very popular, that in the contemporary culture “the interest shifted from identifying meanings (from ‘interpretation’) to the problems related to origination of meaning both at the certain historical and meta-historical levels”⁸, where origination of meaning is tied with certain situations. The significance of presence reveals itself at the level of common consciousness and everyday behaviour by the most widespread questions, with which the talk over the cell phone begins: “Where are you?” or “Can you speak now?”⁹.

The direction of the contemporary culture’s activities is built in such a way as to put an individual in the situation of presence all the time, where he has to attest himself and choose the adequate for this situation behaviour. As situations are always concrete, they always differ in something, and human actions cannot be constructed based on established norms, patterns but require flexible algorithms, inventiveness, innovations, insight into the essence of the situation, understanding the situation as a here-and-now point, where all the global forces cross at this moment. The concreteness of the situation (environment) puts not the “what?” question to the action, but “how?”. Individuality as a person’s characteristic as well as uniqueness, originality as characteristics of the works of culture acquire the status of value in the culture of presence.

5. Establishment of the value of individualization in the contemporary culture reveals its historical meaning. The culture of presence should be understood as realization of the new variant of the modernity culture. This is not what is usually called postmodernism. Postmodernism originated as a certain trend in style, which refused from “purity” of style – this is mosaic character of style, in which the sector character of the contemporary culture was reflected. The

⁸ Gumbrecht H.U. *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*. Moscow: New Literary Review, 2006. P. 26.

⁹ Italian philosopher Maurizio Ferraris rightly comes to the conclusion in his book *Where Are You? An Ontology of the Cell Phone* that “there is a problem of *omnipresence* and *individuality* hidden in ‘being by phone’: you and only you (individuality) can be found anywhere (omnipresence)”, that “the phone [cell phone – V.K.] can without exaggeration be characterized as ‘being always mine’ (Jemeinnikeit)” (Ferraris M. *Where Are you? An Ontology of the Cell Phone*. Translated from the Italian by K. Timenchik, M. Ustyuzhaninova. Moscow: New Literary Review, 2010. P. 44.

contemporary state of the European culture's development (and Russian culture is a national form of its existence) did not start from appearance of postmodernist works, it started much earlier. Establishment of the contemporary state of culture, which modifies the idea of private interest of a modernity culture individual into the idea of personal, individual striving of a *new* modernity culture individual, takes place in the form of a new cultural revolution, which is like a new European revolution that established the modernity culture.

The first step of this new cultural revolution is revival of the idea of freedom of the man, not tied up by any limitations. This idea of freedom was developed by Friedrich Nietzsche in his philosophy, he connected it with the image of a superman for whom the strength of the life's establishment is the only justification of actions. Nietzsche, like the Renaissance humanists, turns to the antiquity but not the tradition of Apollo relying on the strength of form, but the tradition of Dionysus giving priority to the strength of elements and passion. Nietzsche emphasized the aspects in the contents of freedom that were typical for the Renaissance humanists as well, but which were emasculated by the Enlightenment rationalism. This is mentioned by Thomas Mann, who says that the Nietzsche's philosophy called "to come to a new, deeper understanding of humanism, alien to self-satisfied limitedness, characterizing the humanism of the bourgeois era"¹⁰. It's not accidental that the Nietzschean tradition became one of the sources for the new renewal of culture – the new modernity of the late 19th century and early 20th century.

But a new cultural revolution also requires "reformation" of the domineering sphere in culture. And that was science in the culture of the Enlightenment, it answered for preservation and justification of presentation of truth and rationalism. A new attitude to truth and rational thinking was to originate inside science. And that new attitude originated in science thanks to Einstein's theory of relativity and quantum physics. The science itself demonstrated that there is no single truth, and

¹⁰ Mann T. Nietzsche's Philosophy in the Light of Our Experience // Mann T. Collected Works in 10 volumes, V. 10. Moscow: Fiction State Publishing House, 1961. P. 389.

what is logical for the macroworld turns out to be illogical for the world of elementary particles. Physicists of the early 20th century performed not only as reformers of science but also reformers of the consciousness sphere, which was picked up by arts and literature. It's not accidental that artists and writers of the early 20th century all the time refer to achievements of new physics.

What will be the third step for establishment of the new modernity culture? The Enlightenment of the 18th century fixed institutional responsibility for establishment of unified truth and freedom based on knowledge and presentation of the necessity in the first modernity culture, as the function of science based on *cogito* rationality represented by Kant's pure reason and Hegel's science of logic, and "enlightenment of the mind" based on mastering the rules of dealing with the acquired knowledge. And what institution or sphere of culture will take upon itself the responsibility for establishment of individuality?

6. Surely, individuality is formed in the certain environment, but its meaning is in the fact that its being is self-sufficient, it is free in its manifestations, and these manifestations are always its. Freedom is the field for establishment of personal peculiarity. The first modern culture (culture of the Enlightenment) uncovered freedom as understanding and comprehended use of the necessity, the necessity controlled freedom¹¹, the new modernity culture (culture of presence) adds a new motive to that – within what framework an individual can do anything he wants and be anyone he desires¹², i.e. where the limits of freedom are. The presence cultivated by the current state of the culture's development, places certain demands on an individual. He even has to present or show himself – either reveal

¹¹ B. Spinoza: "Freedom is such a thing that exists only because of the necessity of its own nature and is determined for action only by itself" (Spinoza "The Ethics" / Spinoza B. Selected Works in 2 volumes. V.1. Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1957. P. 362.

¹² I. Berlin about the two meanings of freedom: "The first of these meanings or essences, which, after many precedents, I call 'negative', is contained in the answer to the question: 'Is the space, within the limits of which an individual or a group of people can do anything they want or be like they want to be, big?'. The second meaning, which I call 'positive' originates in the answer to the question: 'Where is the source of pressure or intrusion that makes someone do this and not that, or be like this and not like that?'. These questions are different, though answers to them may partly coincide" (Berlin I. The Philosophy of Freedom. Europe. Moscow: New Literary Review, 2001. P. 126). However, answering these questions, Berlin thinks that the borders for the space of freedom are set not by the one using freedom but by some external for him force, because of that freedom here is also limited (subjected) by/to necessity.

his name or close his face with a mask (a nickname, avatar on the Internet). In both cases the individual enters a responsibility area determined by his own actions. “My non-alibi in being” is always an impact on the world. What borders can I reach in this impact? In 1974, the well-known artist specializing in actual arts Marina Abramovich held a significant performance-test “Rhythm 0”: “Do anything you want with my body with the offered items – from scissors to loaded gun”. A viewer/participant of performance finds himself in the situation where his freedom is tested. What borders can I reach “doing anything I want”? This is the freedom’s challenge – what will you dare to do? “An individual *should not* be free, he is *destined* to be free!” Sartre said. So, a new attitude to freedom appears, the attitude of experiencing freedom itself, comprehension of *what* freedom means to an individual, *what* the new situation means for him, the one that does not demand any duty but presents itself to him as an open opportunity for action – “Take everything from life!”. This is the test for freedom, *freedom’s challenge*.

The task of the new culture coming to replace the culture of the Enlightenment is to answer this challenge. Freedom in the culture of the Enlightenment is the answer to the call of the necessity, the knowledge of the necessity and action in accordance with it were guarantees of freedom. In case of the new modernity culture variant, modernity not in the presentation variant but the presence variant, the answer to freedom’s challenge is rooted in the *experience of freedom* an individual has. Marx’s words come to mind: “The Kingdom of Freedom really begins only where the work, dictated by need and external expediency, ends, consequently, according to the nature of things, it lies on the other side of the area of strictly material production”¹³.

Where and how is the experience of freedom acquired? It is acquired when an individual puts his actions in relation to the limit, in relation to overcoming borders as testing his potentialities and abilities. Freedom is tension of transgression, ability to see the limits, to which your actions are directed and which charge them. How can this be realized? It’s hardly possible to imagine a

¹³ Marx K. and Engels F., Collected Works. 2nd edition. V. 25. Part 2. P. 386-387.

methodical complex, which could point at certain practices, definitely leading to achievement of the goal one looks for. It's clear that experience of freedom is not just a personal experience but also a deeply individual experience, acquired in the process of individualization itself. Cultivation of the ability to recognize individualization and understanding its value should determine the logic of the contemporary culture's actions.

If a text in the form of a printed book (the Gutenberg Galaxy) created the ideal environment for establishment of the presentation culture, appearance of “the *book of faces*” – *Facebook*, and the galaxy of new information technologies (the Zuckerberg Galaxy) creates a new space, requiring the acting individual to be directly present, provokes a new culture, which is capable to inhabit this space.

The contemporary historical development of social systems, the contemporary state and changes taking place in the European civilization and culture show that the forces having a cardinal impact on changes of the civilization development, are not the ones pointed at by Karl Marx, but that very development is not accidental, not chaotic but is governed by laws. The cultural being of humans is an objective reality as the economic being. And currently the latter is becoming dependent of the former.