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ON ALIENATION IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE: THE MICROTRENDS¹

The essay article explores the concept of «alienation» and its connections with «identity»; the references to Herbert Marcuse and Frankfurt School and Mark Penn's «Microtrends» made, a methodological pattern for the analysis of alienation proposed.

Key words: alienation, identity, microtrends.

The matter of «alienation» intrinsically fascinates and concerns me since long ago. It appears to be the most enigmatic and deep substances human culture bore: firstly comprehended as «simple» (specially after the fashion of Marx's formulae), after the certain meditation seems an abyss of significandum. The quests on «alienation» essence, as a rule, been started many times in the different fields of thought: by the philosophers (like Aristotle, or Simmel) or economists (like Marx in that case), or psychologists (Freud) — started freely, in eternal, abstract cunning. But true resolutions could be found, for me, only in the sociocultural insight — which is capable to take into account the state of mind of certain epoch as well as to employ various historical schemata. After the elapse of many centuries, the mankind, in the process of constituting the social world led by Western civilization, still trying to get rid of alienation's restrain. Why and how mundane men endure alienation, seek it and fight it all at once? And persistently ignoring the obvious notion that alienation it is an integral part of the processes within society and within each individual?

The reasons of the alienation's encounter lay in the roots of three Universal religions. The idea of Deity opening itself to the Prophet and τέλος' Revelation denies alienation as such. With Unity under the supreme authority of the Word and the true Deity, alienation, thus, becomes an obsolete «fact», which, sooner or later, has to sink into Oblivion, to Letha. But, for various substantial reasons, that did not happen.

The last combat with «growing sense» of alienation in Western European culture comes to 60's of twentieth century. I often thought of this epoch,

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known as a cultural and philosophical renaissance after the Second World War. Paradoxically, it seems to me grim turning point in history; and symbolizes alienation almost visibly. Grim it was because the musical and ethical revolutions, pacifist movements and struggle for the civil rights and liberties, of course, had to change fundamentally the social ideals' representations, but how had that really happened? Back then many intellectuals believed: changes must occur; they believed as well in the rightfulness of that changes (no matter what grade and type). Perfect condition, entrenched, could be a mirror image of those vices that people have managed to overcome. However, none of these ideals became real.

Unexpectedly, but officially, the ideas of the 60's received a wide response among the people in Western Europe and North America. Worldviews became different (literally — alienated). «60's» (if we will take a date as a starting point) won, but in a very broad sense. So called «victory» been really unforeseen... and been comprehended thus only because the «revolutionary proclamations» were too positive and up-to-date for losing the chance to fulfill them. Still the fact is that European culture been celebrating symbolic victory, since not much left for «winners».

In the 60s they «felt success» in advance, realizing the positions of the opposing «parties». The past is always dark, senile and wrong then comes face-to-face with the bright and cheerful perceptions youths have. These are always direct antagonists, and take one the side is relatively easy. The old ideologies forced to exhaust themselves and their capabilities, and gave way to a new culture of freedom. Since then, victory was inevitable. And in the same time it ruined the myth of «new» civil society (society could be anything, but certainly it couldn't be «new»). Even cultural norms of the «opponents» were derived from the same «improper» culture. That old, despised, «wrong» culture gave to the «young» the opportunity to bear a different opinion, to disagree with the elder generation and protest openly against all the benefits they been granted at birth.

In the «60's» prominent revolutionary leaders sought conflicts for the changes, though, substantial change of conflict itself really took place. Public control of discrimination, segregation and any violent social action dreamed by many people, led to the triumph of total hypocrisy. Those who used to be enemies of Society have learned to hide. Society, instead of a healthy and straightforward opposition, produced a semblance of political and social institutions, tending to the same standards of public life as its virtual opponents. Open conflict, in words of Max Gluckman, — «healthy phenomenon in society», — ceased to exist openly. Conflicts or the outbreaks of the conflicts became the appendage of marginalized people who refused to be integrated into society. Before 60's integration into society could happen through career and/or wealth. After the 60's personality required to have certain «political reliability», which gave the chance to take more or less important position in society.

However, this inhibition of revolution of the 60's gave additional stimuli for the social theorists in the search for truth. The very structure of the so-

cial sciences has not remained unchanged. At a time when society needs in the most direct and objective analysis, social sciences tended to marginalize themselves.

Theorists made an attempt to distance from the structure-function analysis of society and focused on vivid displaying of «life». The society found itself in a condition that Russian writer Andrei Platonov expressed as «nothing to live for». A person needs to move on, but society blocks the opportunities, claiming that he or she already reached desired conventional «peak» of development, and really has nowhere else to go. Such an attitude greatly influenced the social sciences, making them reveal some mistakes and flaws of so called «new» social order, not realizing that the nature of these mistakes stand at very root of the social order in question.

Philosophers of the Frankfurt School attract me with their «Don Quixote» standpoints. They are clearly aware of their impotence in the struggle against the ideology itself, criticizing Soviet socialism, and German fascism and the Western democracies «together». They, like many thinkers before them, tried to point out the failure of ideology, its alienating effect and its grasping essence. So they have not been heard neither before 60's, when they were one of the first harbingers of future revolutions, nor after when they tried to stop the process of the formation of a new ideology. Despite the fact Max Horkheimer called their philosophy «pessimistic Jewish transcendentalism,» their ideas did maintain the insights of early Christianity. That seems natural, considering their ideas took the logical beginning in philosophical anthropology of Max Scheler, Helmuth Plessner and Arnold Gehlen. Quests on the essence and nature of man, opened by these philosophers, became fundamental to the further mixing of their ideas with a much more mundane ones about human nature (Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud). This mixture of the idealistic conception of man as the center of universe, worth fighting for, and a man as a being who tending to commit self-destruction and death, made the basis for the development of Frankfurt school's ideas. Understanding that Christianity and the religious education of the person no longer give the opportunity to live in peace with someone's self (or «Soul»), they came to the conclusion that ideology should leave the human consciousness. The very thing that Herbert Marcuse called «the Great Refusal».

Nightmare of Marcuse's predictions is not in that they will come true at once. The real sense of «nightmare» is that the society described nearly 50 years ago, had changed only in form, having remained unchanged in content.

Marcuse as the most straightforward and declarative-revolutionary of Frankfurter scholars stands for the «premiere» (in other words, «doctrinal») author in the contemporary understanding of Alienation problem. I mean there the leading position in the field of ideas as well as «écriture» (style): for instance, if you ask the average student about what she or he had read «from Frankfurt School» — the answer will be almost surely — Marcuse, «One-dimensional Man». Being the spiritual leader of the student protests at the Sorbonne in 1968, Herbert Marcuse had the most profound impact on culture and social sciences in the «industrial society». His idea of «non-taking» the

Position, maneuvering between capitalism and communism turned out to be a crucial factor in the further establish of our time ideology(ies), which is so little differs from the worldview he described in the «One-Dimensional Man».

The new ideology, based on the material well-being and consumer values, could not deploy propaganda against itself. Ideologists forced to take practical selection of Marcuse's and the Frankfurt School ideas to be suitable for further reproduction; they sometimes acquire «the line» of constant pseudo-constructive criticism of the system, targeted at the Result but not at the Cause. This is the only permissible criticism, «bloating» of epithets like «grumbling» and «dissatisfaction». In the post-industrial society not many people dare to evaluate and criticize the «very structure» constructively, looking forward and trying to «find the Way»; only its «products and consequences» are criticized. Rather, its observable or hypothetical «imperfections».

Cultural sociology and anthropology did not escape that universal ideological influence. So called «Marcuse's effect» had gone beyond margins of philosophy and sociology. Prominent anthropologists of 60s and post-60's, in my opinion, took this constant criticism's standpoint in the analysis of industrial and later post-industrial societies, perceiving themselves as a cultural group of intellectuals (intelligentsia — Russian word is so correct in this case!), intended to produce a sort final «ideological truth» (explanation, interpretation, or calculation — choose the right term, reader). Their opuses, in fact, are not «researches» in the strict meaning («scientism» is not the word for them, and naturally, they totally despise «scientism»); carrying out a projects of new «system control», which, to a greater or lesser extent, worth a separate study. Object and subject of study thus no longer an independent fragments. They become an integral part of the struggle, the symbolic elements of the global injustice of Western civilization, both in relation to itself, to the world and people — the global Alienation. Significant, that many scholars, nowadays, tend to employ the word «identity» (and even try to build a kind of Methodology on it!). I assume that many colleagues without any reflections would condemn my «attentate» on this concept, so important for sociocultural studies. But I still convinced that *identity (even in the «postmodern» plural mode — identities)* is the essence, which stands as a major goal, «raison d'être» for *ideology (ideologies)*, the latter understood in the strictest Marcusean sense. Really, genuine facts (I mean multiple sociological researches' data) prove that so called «postmodern» identities are variable, mutating, even «migrating». The last precise epithet comes from the title of modern art exhibition in San Francisco this summer. Doubtless, the artistic comprehension and artistic discourse either are more free and expressive than humanitarian sciences' ones. But, otherwise, all sociologists know that the construction of any level's sociological theory often involves actions like corroboration of some *tropes by digits*, more or less. Both «identity» and «alienation» (finally!) are tropes — metaphors, and to the both any researcher could apply certain logic of definition and «proper» figures. In case of identity the «thematic grid», as linguists say, will lead us to «consolidation», «unity», «match», and — at last — to «One-Dimension». In other — meaning of «alienation» would be connected

with «difference», «otherness», «encounter», and «revolution» — to «Variety». So, we see the tropes interconnected in meaning's field, and both are *ideologically employed*, each on different level, of course.

Marcuse's notions about total revolution, surely, couldn't be replicated in reality, and I can guess that the author himself was aware of «Revolutionary myth» emerging about him. The imploration of his ideas fully was not possible ever, and since that commonplace ideologies persist in taking the path of borrowing «convenient» ideas, playing with them, and silencing on «inconvenient» ones. Ideological thinking tends to perceive Marcuse as «revolutionary» more than an «intellectual». The direct impact of Marcuse's ideas of on cultural and social studies difficult to assess to the full extent of one's power, because not many authors link directly to his works. However, with the number of indirect references to Marcuse and wringed citations from «One-Dimension Man», we can imagine he was not unlike «the grim poet» of Alienation: «Underneath its obvious dynamics, this society is a thoroughly static system of life: self-propelling in its oppressive productivity and in its beneficial coordination. Containment of technical progress goes hand in hand with its growth in the established direction. In spite of the political fetters imposed by the status quo, the more technology appears capable of creating the conditions for pacification, the more are the minds and bodies of man organized against this alternative...» [1].

The influence of well-known theorists and philosophers on Marcuse and the Frankfurt school studied rather well. But there are two thinkers, which, I reckon, should be mentioned in primo context of their «inner connection» with Frankfurt scholars, especially considering the «alienation-identity» problem. Their effect is not as evident (if any at all?) and surely not referenced by authoritative sources. They are Ernest Renan and Dmitry Merezhkovsky.

Nature of the philosophy of Herbert Marcuse and his partners lies not only in the nature of dialectics or «negative dialectics» of Adorno, but in the continuity of early-Christian traditions. These ideals mixing of early Christianity with the Old Testament (it is known that Jesus visited the synagogue on the Sabbath, observed the Torah, was circumcised, and so on) have been central to the understanding of the very expression of Horkheimer's «pessimistic Jewish transcendentalism». We are dealing with a romantic interpretation of early Christianity, which has departed from the tenets of the Jewish faith, but have not yet created an official ecclesiastical Christianity. At this point, there was a short combination of earthly and heavenly, rational and irrational.

Could not be denied the fact that Frankfurt scholars (even not always willingly) had in their philosophical systems deeply rooted Christian tradition. Their commitment to the triumph of individualism over the total subjugation, denial of life in society as a conceding, desire to release with a revolutionary way to overthrow the existing lack of freedom, inspired the interest in cults of early Christianity, from the time of the Apostolic Age to the time of Constantine the Great (not taking into account the Christianization of Armenia and Georgia).

Similar ideas, the debating of ecclesiastical understanding of Christianity and bringing it closer to the «earthly» way of life emerged at first in Ernest Renan's work «Life of Jesus». The book set a public scandal and gained extreme popularity in late XIX century, because of Christ was presented as a man who combines the desire for God with human life. One does not negate the other, but makes a complementary.

Renan was not an orthodox Catholic, which did not prevent him from being a believer in the humanity of Christ, named Joshua, who studied Philo, planned and organized the Jewish revolt. This anarchism as the Christ in the book of Renan and Renan himself could not go unnoticed. This is, largely, control of one-dimensional, traditional perceptions of Christ dogmatically accepted for centuries [2].

Even more, Dmitry Merezhkovsky, is interesting in this respect. His cunning intellect and constant dialectical style of thought remotely resemble Frankfurt school in their pursuit to explore the gap between the visionary idealism and material reality. In his famous trilogy «Christ and Antichrist» (and this is most fully expressed in the first part «The Death of the Gods. Julian the Apostate»), he explored the poignant choice and the incompatibility of the spiritual and the physical. The historical novel devoted to the reign of the Roman Emperor Julian the Apostate, who in opposition to the spread of Christianity forcefully tried to revive lustrous Greco-Roman polytheism. The author's interpretation at the same time attracts and repels the reader from Christianity, with the awareness of this religion of Good not able to exist in this world. Co-existence of «stillborn» Christianity, full of asceticism, mortification, and escape from earthly life (which is vaguely reminiscent of the Freudian death wish), and «exhausted» Apollo cult, bereaved of life and joy, provoked the main hero's urge to understand heavenly and human nature of Religion. Julian, who, finally, chose «dead» Greek gods, was fascinated by Christ, but rejected by His people, emphasizes the rivalry between spirit and flesh, the darkness and light. It is required to the soul not to accept the flesh, to reject self, to lie, to become a hypocrite or slayer. The unattainable Unity, the eternal alienation literally breaks Julian's heart — the heart of great sinner and hero. The final wit he says at the deathbed: «*Heaven is up, Heaven beneath, if you take thus, Glory to thee*» (poetic translation from Russian, italic highlight mine. — E. F.) [3].

It is not just my hypothesis, but my direct standpoint, that the really deep understanding of «identity-alienation» social «gear» comes along with religious, spiritual (not political, economical, anthropological, or even philosophical) quest and discourse. That is neither matter of calculation or speculation, nor any kind of measurement or structuralism... I think the matter is in the intent and expression, and requires some artistic skill; a photo or narration would be better understood, than table or graph...

But what if someone wishes to «operationally refer» to, for instance, some «regional», «subcultural», even «virtual» identity and conduct a rightful sociological research? Bearing in mind all theories worth each other? The problem (problem taken in the original severe Greek meaning — as an obstacle)

lays in simple notion: exploring identities, we often forget that we are searching for something «solid» (consolidating) in truly proliferating varieties... Not «identification lays» beneath the variety, but... alienation? By the way, the trope «multiple alienation» sounds like simple metaphor, and «multiple identity» — more like oxymoron?

So, gradually transiting from «multiple identity» to «variable alienation» we need a text giving the logical path in «structuring — measuring», as we had had — in the meaning — when referred to Marcuse and Frankfurt.

And such a book luckily exists — I mean Mark Penn's «Microtrends», first published in 2007. I must admit the certain lack of interest to this work (very well known and celebrated in USA and Europe) from sociologists in Ukraine and Russia.

Penn argues that the core trends the modern culture, are the microtrends — the smaller trends that go unnoticed or even ignored. One percent of the USA nation, or 3 million people, can create new markets for a business, spark a social movement, or produce political change.

«Microtrends» takes the reader deep into the worlds of polling (the author is one of the «iconic» pollsters in USA, leader of few presidential campaigns) targeting, and psychographic analysis, reaching tantalizing conclusions through lively analysis. «Microtrends» highlights everything from business and politics to leisure and relationships, exploring the process' mechanisms of social trends' constituting. Significantly, the book attracts not only with its conclusions (which are rather open), but with Method — strictly sociological, clear, systematic... [4].

I think that careful application of this Method will give a new, more deep insights on cultural studies in general (as it done already on marketing studies). The prospect effects — is the matter of future discussions, I hope.

Referecies

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ОБ ОТЧУЖДЕНИИ В СОВРЕМЕННОЙ КУЛЬТУРЕ: МИКРОТРЕНДЫ

Резюме

В статье-эссе рассматривается взаимосвязь концептов «отчуждения» и «идентичности», анализируются работы Г. Маркузе и М. Пенна, предлагается методология анализа тенденций отчуждения в современной культуре.

Ключевые слова: отчуждение, идентичность, микротренды.

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ПРО ВІДЧУДЖЕННЯ У СУЧАСНІЙ КУЛЬТУРІ: МІКРОТРЕНДИ

Резюме

У статті-есе розглядається взаємозв'язок між поняттями «відчуження» та «ідентичності», аналізуються роботи Г. Маркузе та М. Пенна, пропонується методологія аналізу тенденцій відчуження у сучасній культурі.

Ключові слова: відчуження, ідентичність, мікротренди.