

Changing Topologies of the Class Struggle

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Abstract: The famous triad “race, gender, class” is widely regarded as an adequate list of parameters to describe the position of an individual in the social topology. However, a class position of any individual is permanently changing – due to the changing conditions of production and distribution of goods – whereas race and gender remain relatively stable. As a result, a new type of solidarity emerges – identitarian solidarity across the class divisions. As a result, the class struggle becomes impossible: the classes become united in the common culture of diversity. We have here to do with a new form of nationalism that presents itself as a politic of inclusion practiced by the good, old national states.

Keywords: Class, race, gender, Marxism, nationalism, cultural identity

1.

A class is not just a descriptive category to characterize people with different incomes and social status. Speaking about the class we inevitably think about the history of class struggle. The Marxist notion of the class was strategically directed against the notion of “nation” as it emerged as a result of the European bourgeois revolutions. After the French revolution the people of low birth, the Third Estate, got access to wealth and power. The system of domination and suppression that guaranteed the privileged positions of aristocracy vis a vis the common people has been abolished: now the citizen of a nation states were not divided by their birth rights and seemed to become equal. The Marxist notion of the class is directed precisely against this illusion of equality: According to Marx, the classes are different and unequal not because they consist of the individuals with different birth rights but because these individuals participate in different ways in the process of production, have different positions in the system of private property. The national homogeneity is an illusion and the national “common interest” - a phantom. There is no common interest that would unite the working class with the class of capitalists. Now, historically the process of production is permanently changing. That means that the composition and relationship of the classes is also permanently changing. Every new turn of the technological evolution changes the class topology of the society, divides it in a new way between economically and politically dominated and dominating social strata. The class definition and class divide are fluid – today they are not what they were yesterday and what they will be tomorrow. The class is what happens here and now. It has nothing to do with any transhistorical, natural determinations of the human bodies. But, of course, such a radically presentist notion of the class is only possible when all the hereditary, “natural” economic and political hierarchies are already overcome.

During the recent decades the notion of the class became increasingly incorporated into the famous triad “race, gender, class”. When one looks at this triad one has an impression that “class” functions inside the social topology on the same level as “gender” and “race” – that we have to do with three parameters that fix the social position of an individual in the three-dimensional public space. However, it is not the case. As it was already said, “class” is what happens today – it is radically presentist. As a member of a class one is immediately subjected to the movement of history. One always feels oneself in the middle of historical change – technological, social and political change. In fact, every morning one asks oneself to what class one belongs today – and what happens to his or her class position tomorrow: probably, some new professions and ways of life will emerge, the others – disappear, some industries will flourish, some other industries become obsolete, some upper and middle classes go down, some low classes rise. Accordingly, the class solidarity is also fluid and situational. When we look at the history of the Marxist theoretical discourse, we will see that its main topic was the class analysis of the society “at the current moment”. One permanently discussed which social groups can be allies of the working class at that particular moment – peasantry, petit bourgeoisie and/or intelligentsia – and which not. And one knew that they can be allies today even if they were not allies yesterday and will not be allies tomorrow – and vice versa. But the working class itself also was not regarded as a transhistorical unity and had to be permanently defined anew. For the class struggle it does mean that the topology of solidarity and contestation, or of friends and enemies, is also permanently changing: today’s friends could become tomorrow’s enemies and today’s enemies – tomorrow’s friends. In other words, in the context of the class struggle the definition of the class is necessarily strategic, tactical, situational and fluid.

On the contrary, race and gender are unhistorical. For every individual they are defined by the past – and will remain so also in the future. In our times both notions became further fragmented – the genders are proliferating as well as race and ethnic cultural identities. But this proliferation does not make them historical because every such fragmentary identity is supposed to have existed in the past and to exist in the future. The process is similar to the investigation of the elementary particles: the scientific research discovers more and more particles. But these particles as such are unhistorical. Their discovery belongs to the history of the science. But the particles themselves are supposed to be there before their discovery. Of course, one can change his or her gender and become “transgender” (it looks like one can not change a race). But that precisely means that the gender does not change itself without being changed – unlike the class. Not accidentally in recent decades the slogan “Let us change the world!” became so popular – as if the world

does not change without being changed. It shows what a long distance separates the contemporary left mentality from the Hegelian-Marxist conviction that the world is nothing else as the permanent movement that cannot be stopped.

However, the current role of race and gender should not be merely criticized, confirmed or rejected. This role signals the failure of the liberal, bourgeois revolutions understood as attempts to achieve a state of the society in which everybody, independent of their race, gender and sexual orientation, will have the equal rights and same chances to achieve wealth and political power. What is offered to us today as a post-Marxist politics is, actually, an attempt to complete the pre-Marxist bourgeois revolutionary project. This is the project to guarantee the vertical mobility for all. To create the conditions for such a vertical mobility one needs solidarity. But it is not any more a horizontal class solidarity but the vertical solidarity. In the national states of 19th Century it was the national solidarity – in competition with other nations. Today it is solidarity inside certain identitarian groups in competition with other similar groups: it is, for example, solidarity among women or among people of color. It requires from the successful women to practice solidarity with their less successful sisters and from the successful people of color - to help their less successful brothers and sisters. And it requires from the non-successful parts of minorities to support, admire and imitate the success of their wealthy and prominent representatives. It is obvious that the identitarian vertical solidarity directly contradicts the horizontal class solidarity. Here we are confronted with the same problem with which the European societies were confronted after the French revolution – the belonging to the same nation requires national solidarity whereas class solidarity undermines the national unity and solidarity. We know that the European societies preferred the national solidarity to the class solidarity because in the situation of economic and political competition among different nations the national solidarity promised a faster success than the attempts to find common ground with the low classes of other nations.

The thematization of race and gender is often explained by the necessity to describe and overcome a specific form of exploitation and oppression to which certain “minorities” are subjected. This explanation is totally understandable, and the politics that has a goal to improve a lot of minorities deserves the unrestricted support. However, we currently see that the traditionally oppressed minorities - also due to this politics - begin to increasingly climb the ladder of vertical mobility. But now: what if a female or black entrepreneur, entertainer or politician does make a carrier? Should other women or blacks break their solidarity with them or not? On the one hand these particular female or black individuals have changed their position in the class struggle – moving from the side of the oppressed to the side of the oppressors. But we don't hear a call

for such a break – a call that would be similar to the Marxist call to the working classes of the European national states to break solidarity with the capitalist classes of their nations.

Today, the success of the few begins to be seen as the promise of a success for many, if not for all of the same minority. One begins to glorify the fact that now a woman can command a bomber aircraft (without asking the question if to bomb other people is a good practice). One celebrates the representatives of racial minorities when they accumulate big fortunes and become present in the media. In the films, TV-serials and novels one favorably presents princesses and queens of the feudal past as examples of female power. The female and black superheroes emerge on the side of the traditional white and male heroes. Of course, one can say: great, let it be. And, indeed, one is glad to contemplate this new diversity. The problem is only this: today these glorification and celebration of the successful representation of “minorities” inside the ruling class are presented as being “leftist”. And that is what is really surprising. To be on the left traditionally meant taking a side of the poor against the rich – not the side of a princess against the prince. Today, to be left does more and more mean to take a side of the “minority” members of the upper class against the “majority” members of the upper class. Thus, one criticizes the glass ceiling that prevents some women to become the CEOs of big corporations – instead of asking if to become a CEO is such a good thing.

This new vertical solidarity becomes directed against the poor and exploited because it suggests that the dominating order would be perfectly OK if only the racial and gender make-up of the upper class would reflect the statistical distribution of the identity characteristics of the general population. The individual success stories of the representatives of different minorities are celebrated as great victories and signs of the social change. But, of course, they change nothing. The ordinary people of all colors and genders remain where they were.

At the same time the make-up of the classes and borders between them are still permanently shifting. Today, when one speaks about the class, one mostly does not forget to mention that the working class in its traditional Marxist sense of industrial labor has become less numerous. However, one cannot overlook the growing proletarianization of the majority of contemporary society. The small shops, including the book shops, cafes and restaurants disappear. Everything small and economically independent is wiped out. The growing mass of people working in the IT industries is as “alienated” of the working process as the industrial workers in the 19th Century. The whole traditional cultural system became also totally proletarianized. I still remember very well the discussions about the role of power in the Academia and in the art system, especially, in the museums. Now it is clear enough that the Academia is, actually, poor and the position of a professor is economically non-attractive.

And the museums are irrelevant – money is circulating through the auction houses and big globalized galleries. At the same time outside the Academia and museum system the artists, writers and other “cultural workers” are reduced to “content providers” who feed the cultural industry with the raw material that this industry turns into the final product. The famous “creativity” became the opium for intellectuals and artists – the modern substitute for religion. The individual intellectuals and artists may still believe that they “give voice” to the proletarian masses or to this and that particular minorities. What they overlook is the fact that they themselves already long ago became a part of these proletarian masses. The epoch of Sartre and Picasso is gone. Today the sport heroes, pop musicians and fashion designers are prominent and have a voice. It is not accidental that it is they who are regularly asked to say their opinion on the matter of public concern – such as world peace or environmental issues. And it is obvious that sport, pop music and design are totally controlled by multinational corporations. The economic distance between the superrich and the mass of population is permanently growing – and the globalized class of superrich includes traders from Wall Street and CEOs from Silicon Valley alongside the sheikhs from OAE and Hongkong bankers. Race and gender play here no role – only money. We are living in the middle of a new industrial revolution and the working class changes its configuration even faster as usual. The class conflicts become also sharper. So one can expect that in the near future the identitarian solidarity will not be able any more to moderate the class struggle.

2.

In the Western countries the preference for minorities and a certain lack of interest for the majority sector of the working class on the side of the Left moved this sector towards the Right. The right-wing, nationalist parties are becoming increasingly influential in the former Western Europe – in France, Holland, Belgium and also in Germany. But even more influential they became in the former Eastern Europe. In the USA the MAGA movement began to play the same role. These parties and movements are time and again compared with the fascist parties from the European 1930s and 1940s. And, indeed, they use the similar racist, xenophobic rhetoric. Like their Fascist predecessors they want the “conservative revolution” directed against the main ideologies of the 20th Century, namely Liberalism and Socialism, as well as against the political institutions that are historically related to these ideologies. Their propaganda is directed against the similar groups inside their own countries: globalized, cosmopolitan elites and immigrants.

However, the New Right is different from the classical Fascist movements that were aggressive, expansionist, striving towards the

world domination and trying to establish a universal New Order. The Neo-Fascist New Right is, on the contrary, defensive and protectionist. The ideology of the New Right, including the Trumpian MAGA movement, can be seen as a return of the territorial into the world economy and politics. The post-Cold War era was a period of globalization – and, to use a Deleusian term, of de-territorialization. The main symbol of this era was the rhizomatic and at the same time global structure of the Internet. Today, one becomes reminded that the corporations and organisations that operate the Internet have certain addresses on the real, off-line territories that are controlled by certain states. Accordingly, these Internet corporations and agencies come under suspicion to represent the interests of these states. They become considered as instruments of surveillance, propaganda tools and sources of the fake news. Instead of constituting a virtual space beyond the state borders the Internet is seen today more and more as the privileged battlefield for the international information wars.

This is only one example of the re-territorialisation of the politics that we experience now. The second – and, actually, the most important example – is the fact that migration and, especially, immigration became the central point of the public concern. It is safe to say that it is primarily the attitude towards the immigration that structures the contemporary political landscape – at least in the Western countries. Now, the anti-immigration politics of the contemporary New Right parties is an effect of what can be characterized as the territorialisation of the identity politics. The main presupposition of the ideology of these parties is this: every cultural identity has to have its own territory on which it can and should flourish – undisturbed by the cultural influences from other cultural identities. The world is diverse and should be diverse. But the world's diversity can be guaranteed only by the territorial diversity. The mixture of different cultural identities on the same territory destroys these identities. The universalized world becomes uniform – boring, depressive. And what is even more important – non-profitable for the touristic industry that promises to the international tourists precisely the combination between a travel to a different territory and a meeting with a different culture.

Now the right-wing propaganda sees the globalized, de-territorialized elites as the main enemy of the re-territorialized, diversified world order. The elites – the famous 1% - are accused by the rightwing propaganda to be interested only in the global financial markets and not in the fate of the populations of their countries. Not in the wellbeing of these populations, not in the technological infrastructure installed on their territories. It was and still is one of the big themes of Trump's campaign. The globalization is seen as creating a line of division inside every individual society. A small minority profits from globalization – but the majority remains left behind. This majority

becomes additionally endangered by the immigration. The global trends, financial, technological and informational, destroy the traditional lifestyles and professions, make the acquired skills and cultural habits useless – the skills and habits that were practiced through generations. This loss of traditional professions and work habits becomes further aggravated by the influx of immigrants from the countries with different cultural backgrounds and lifestyles – an influx that creates a reservoir of the cheap working force and thus contributes to the general misery of the working class. And the elites do not do anything against it. So the working population begins to feel that the elites betrayed them and that now is the time to do something against it. The question is only: what has to be done?

Historically, we know only two answers to this question: Socialism and Nationalism. It is obvious that – at least at the moment - the populations of the Western countries reject the Socialist choice and tend to accept the Nationalist choice. The reason for this choice is also pretty obvious: it is an effect of the victory of the Neo-Liberal globalism over the Socialist internationalism at the end of the Cold War. Indeed, during the historical period after the Fall of the Berlin Wall the Western Left was systematically destroyed – first of all the Western Communist parties and then the Social-Democracy. All the Socialist models – radical or moderate - were proclaimed to be economically inefficient, historically discredited and obsolete. So during the recent decades a certain consensus was formed: Socialism is economically inefficient and, generally, bad. And that is an actual reason for the Nationalist, Neo-Fascist choice: after the neo-liberal, anti-Socialist propaganda managed to persuade the wider populations that Socialism is economically ruinous the Socialist choice became blocked – and only the Neo-Fascist choice remained possible. Of course, it is not the result that the theoreticians of the Neo-Liberalism expected. But they did not expect it only because they overlooked a couple of things. Let us now consider these things more attentively.

What is, actually, the difference between Socialist internationalism and Neo-Liberal globalism? The Socialist internationalism is based on the international solidarity whereas the Neo-Liberal globalism is based on the global competition. In the context of the global markets everybody competes against everybody – every individual is competing against every other individual, every country against every other country, every identity against every other identity etc. Of course, the Socialism – being based on Solidarity – is inefficient in the context of competition. If one believes that the competition is what people should do the Socialism becomes automatically discarded. And that is, indeed, what the Neo-Liberal ideology believes: competition makes the business flourish. Of course, the belief in the competition also presupposes that the competition is fair. But who is responsible for the fairness of the global

competition? Such an institution does not exist. Of course, the American politicians say time and again that they feel themselves responsible for the global affairs. But then the suspicion emerges that they interpret this responsibility in a way that serves their own interests to the detriment of the interests of the others.

And then: what is, actually, fairness? Is a competition fair when it is reduced to the success on the markets? Maybe such a competition is unfair because it always favors a certain human type, a certain cultural identity, a certain way of life based on the economic success? Maybe it would be a good idea to protect people with the cultural identities that do not fit so easily into the global competitive framework – help them, defend them, maybe even using institutional and military coercion? For example: what happens when the American commodities are not so successful and the American work force is not well enough trained? Then the state may say: buy American and hire American.

Here the way from Neo-Liberalism to Neo-Fascism becomes clear enough. And this way is very short, indeed. Both Neo-Liberalism and Neo-Fascism believe in competition – here is their difference from the international Socialism. The Western Neo-Liberals tend to think that they will always be the winners of this competition. The loser will be always the famous Other. The Liberals are ready to preach the recognition of the Other, respect for the Other etc. But it seems that they can hardly imagine the situation in which they themselves become the Others. For the Western liberals the others are always the others. I remember listening to a talk of a liberal Berliner Professor on the German TV in the times as a right-wing movement against the immigration policy of Angela Merkel started. He said that the Germans should accept the immigrants because they will always remain in the lowest sector of the German society – and thus will not present any danger for the majority of the Germans. However, the German right-wing protestors were not so sure about it – and it was precisely this uncertainty that moved them towards the right radicalism. One can safely say that the desire to change the rules of competition comes from the uncertainty that these rules are fair – and fair is mostly understood as favorable. There is always a suspicion that the famous requirement “to play by the rules” is formulated by the actors that profit from these rules to guarantee their profits. Thus, Trump says time and again that the trade deals between USA and other countries, especially China, are unfair – and here unfair means simply not favorable for the USA.

The goal of the identity politics is to defend minorities from the cultural, political and economic domination by the majority – the domination of the weak by the strong. Therefore, in the USA the identity politics is traditionally considered as Leftist politics. Thus, the white majority started the identity politics from the Right. However, the reason for both identity politics is the same. Today the USA do not

feel themselves strong enough – being confronted by the competition from all over the world, including China, India, Mexico etc. In the global context the white Americans are not majority but minority. They can feel themselves strong at home but internationally they experience themselves as increasingly weak. It is this feeling of weakness that Trump embraced and exploited. It was especially interesting to see his performance during the discussions with his Republican competitors during 2016 presidential campaign. All of them praised America and everything American at any opportunity: greatest people of the Earth, greatest civilization in the human history and, generally, a shining city on the hill. Trump alone spoke about everything American as disaster, catastrophe and disgrace – airports, highways, inner cities, wars and peace treaties. He presented USA not as a historical winner but as a historical loser. And that is how he captured minds and hearts of so many Americans. Not by celebrating American supremacy but by painting the perspective of the ultimate American defeat. Here America was presented as a losing identity, the whole global system of competition as destroying USA, the Americans as the first victims of the post-cold war order that they themselves created and the American elites as traitors selling USA at the globalized markets. The results of the election have shown that the American population in its majority also sees the USA as a power in decline – and itself as a victim of the historical process. USA think about itself as an unhappy country, even masochistic country – accepting having been exploited and ripped by everybody. The goal of saving and keeping American identity becomes urgent – and the identity politics becomes truly neo-fascist because it begins to address not the minorities but the whole country.

3.

Here is important to realize: the definition of a so-called cultural identity of a person has nothing to do with the question how this person identifies himself or herself. The identity, as it is currently understood, is not a subjective attitude but a genealogical or sociological fact. This identity is defined by the identity of the parents and by place and date of birth. Of course, somebody born, for example, as Jewish or German can reject his or her identity. But in the eyes of the others such a rejection would only confirm and reproduce a certain pattern of self-denial that is already historically well known – and perceived as being typical for these cultural identities. One has no power of definition, no sovereignty over one's own cultural identity. The production of identities is always a work of the others. The current popularity of the notion of identity has to do with the proliferation of the identity documents, like passports and birth certificates but also other bureaucratic forms that allow the society to become informed about the individuals' genealogy – and, thus, also about

their identities. The Internet made this genealogical documentation much easily available than it was ever before. Today it became relatively easy to find out one's genealogical past. The contemporary notion of identity is dependent on the global networks of information and applied to the individuals as far as their genealogies are documented are circulating in these networks. And under the conditions of the informational age almost nobody can escape the genealogical control.

Now genealogy is closely related to ecology. The reproduction of certain kinds of animals - with the same identities - requires the sustainability of the biotopes in which this reproduction takes place. That is the whole point of the ecology and ecological movement: to keep the biotopes intact and thus guarantee the reproducibility of certain animals or plants. It is easy enough to expand the ecological care from the non-human on human animals. That is precisely what the rightist parties do. The thinking of the rightist parties is not so much cultural or economical as it is ecological. These parties expand the ecological concerns on the human animals and try to organize the social ecosystems in a way that they would favor the (re)production of the human bodies with certain identity characteristics. And as in the case of other animals the main concern is the stability of the ecosystems, their defense against the intruder-animals that potentially would destroy the already existing ecological balance. Accordingly, the immigrants are rejected not as "people with a different identity" but, rather, as agents of the "globalized world" in which all identities dissolve. In Brussels I often heard from my Flemish friends that their main problem with the immigrants is that the immigrants prefer French to Flemish. The same I heard in Germany - among many other things the immigrants are made responsible for Americanisation of Germany including the everyday use of English language instead of German. Analogous to the fear of disappearance of certain kinds of animals and plants one becomes to be concerned with the possible disappearance of the Germans or Flemish. In the European countries there is a lot of a talk about the necessity of the "integration" of the immigrants into the respective national European cultures. But it is obvious for everybody that the opposite process takes place: the influx of immigrants speeds the integration of the local European cultures into the globalized, English-speaking world. The immigrants are perceived as the agents of the Empire. The anti-immigrant affect is, actually, the anti-imperial affect. The characterization of the migrants as "minority" is misleading. The migrants are seen, rather, as agents of the global majority - and rejected or accepted as such. They are resented in the name of the protection of the local culture. And they are accepted as the chance to join the global mainstream.

When the right-wing parties insist on protecting a certain cultural identity, they mean the everyday, habitual, "non-formalized", ecological aspect of culture - that has nothing to do with production

and distribution of the cultural commodities or circulation of cultural information. This cultural circulation is accused to destroy the ecological diversity and produce the global cultural uniformity. So, one calls to the defense of the local cultures and resistance against their globalization and homogenization. This call seems seductive to many people. However, there is one problem with this call: it can be realized only through mechanisms of control and repression. And these mechanisms are similar all around the world – even if the cultural identities that these mechanisms protect are different. For example, one tries to protect Iranian or Russian cultural identities. They are, of course, very different – however, when one begins to look into the practices of their conservation one is impressed by the uniformity of these practices. And this uniformity is precisely what the population of these different places is primarily confronted with in its everyday life – the diversity can be experienced only by the global tourists and international journalists.

The globalization inevitably leads to global uniformity – and the resistance to globalization also leads to global uniformity. If it is so why the contemporary politics, be it neo-liberal and neo-rightist, is not ready to accept this fact and continues to insist on difference and diversity? The reason is that the cultural uniformity is associated with Socialism – and after the end of the Cold War everything that is related to Socialism is tabu. To illustrate this point let me mention a text that was written at the beginning of the Cold War and treats precisely this point. In his “Notes towards the Definition of Culture” (1948) T.S. Eliot speaks about the perspective of the universal and homogeneous culture as an inevitable perspective.¹ Eliot is a conservative author and his notion of culture contradicts the liberal understanding of culture as a sum of cultural goods. He understands culture more or less in the same way as contemporary rightist parties do it – as an ecologically defined biotope for the re-production of the specific kinds of human animals. At the same time, he does not believe that the protection of such biotopes could be effective. And he also does not believe that this protection is beneficial.

The reason for this skepticism is Eliot’s analysis of the shift in the functioning of migration. Earlier the individual tribes and small ethnic groups, he writes, migrated in their entirety – so that they brought their culture, their way of life with them. However, today the migration does not happen on the level of the whole *Volk*. The contemporary migrants are the individuals who left the centers and original areas of their culture – and thus do not transport their culture in its entirety but mix it with the culture of the populations in the middle of which they are living. Eliot speaks about this new type of migration in relationship to the phenomenon of colonialism. He worries about the influence of the Europeans on the sustainability of the non-Western cultures. However,

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¹ Eliot 1962. P.62

today the migration is more associated with the movement of people from the non-Western countries into the countries of the West. Thus, for the contemporary Europeans the worries that were formulated by Eliot become even more acute.

But Eliot does not believe in the possibility of stopping migration and protecting the European cultural biotope. He writes: "For if we content ourselves with the ideal of "European culture" we shall be unable to fix any definite frontiers. European culture has an area but no definite frontiers: and you cannot build Chinese walls. A notion of the self-contained European culture would be as the notion of the self-contained national culture: in the end as absurd as the notion of preserving a local uncontaminated culture in a single county or village in England. We are therefore pressed to maintain the ideal of a world culture, while admitting that it is something that we cannot *imagine*".²

Now one has to ask: Why such a culture is unimaginable? Eliot answers this question by rejecting all the efforts by the "world planners" of the Hegelian-Marxist traditions to create a world state. In the spirit of the beginning Cold War, he accuses "our Russian friends", as he writes, of the desire to eradicate all the cultural differences and create a "uniform" world culture that would dehumanize the humanity. Basically, it is a kind of Nietzschean aversion against the perspective of the pacified, post-historical, Socialist humanity that motivates Eliot to proclaim the world culture to be an unimaginable project. It is the same aversion that today unites the nationalists and liberals in the common celebration of the human capital, creativity and diversity. Today we are back in the 19th Century – in a combination between globalized markets and localized cultures, of Internet and Marine Le Pen. And as in the 19th Century, the only alternative to this combination is the Socialist one. But this alternative requires a redefinition of our notions of culture and cultural identity.

4.

T.S. Elliot's confession that he cannot imagine such a thing as the world culture reminds one of a similar confession by Clement Greenberg. In his "The Plight of Culture" (1953) he diagnoses the decline of the bourgeois culture and writes: 'The only solution for culture that I conceive of under these conditions is to shift its centre of gravity away from leisure and place it squarely in the middle of work'.³ But then he writes further about the proposed solution: 'I am suggesting something whose outcome I cannot imagine... Beyond this speculation, which is admittedly schematic and abstract, I cannot go... But at least it helps if we do not have to

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² Ibid., pp. 61-62

³ Greenberg 1961, p.32

despair of the ultimate consequences for culture of industrialism. And it also helps if we do not have to stop thinking at the point where Spengler and Toynbee and Eliot do'.⁴ This passage shows that Greenberg has seen clearly that the traditional association between culture and free time leads towards the historical impasse. At the same time, he could not liberate his thinking from this connection. In his famous article "Avant-garde and Kitsch" (1939) he wrote that the work of art can be appreciated only by those who 'could command leisure and comfort that always goes hand and hand with cultivation of some sort'.⁵ For Greenberg this means that also the avant-garde art can hope to get its financial and social support only from the same 'rich and cultivated' people who historically supported traditional art. Thus the avant-garde remains attached to the bourgeois ruling class 'by an umbilical cord of gold'.⁶

In fact, it is surprising that even in 1953 Greenberg is still incapable to imagine the culture not in the context of consumption but in the context of work – some decades after Proletkul't, Vkhutemas and Bauhaus. This is why Greenberg comes to the somewhat counter-intuitive assumption that only the ruling class, excluded from the production process, has enough leisure time to contemplate and aesthetically appreciate the technical, constructivist, "formal" aspects of art whereas the working class can respond only to Kitsch that appeals to the elementary drives and feelings that are not refined by upbringing and education. In other words, Greenberg speaks about art not from the position of its producer but, rather, from the position of its bourgeois spectator. And more generally, culture is for Eliot and Greenberg the sphere of free, leisure time – ultimately, the sphere of consumption. And it is only consequential that for them culture correlates with the life-style of the upper class and not with the technical production in which the working class is involved. Accordingly, the cultural identity of a nation or ethnicity is also identified with the culture of its upper class.

However, already in 1920s, in the framework of Russian Constructivism and Bauhaus, art and culture began to be understood as the organization of the working process. The working process is, indeed, not solely defined by the necessities of the industrial production. Every work, including the industrial work, requires certain mode of collaboration between the workers. The agricultural work was organized according to some historically inherited patterns but the technology is changing all the times – and, thus, the culture of work has also to change. That is especially true for our time. At the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries art entered a new era –

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4 Ibid., pp. 32-33

5 Ibid., p.9

6 Ibid., p.8

namely, an era of mass artistic production that followed the era of mass art consumption as it was described by many influential theoreticians: as an era of Kitsch (Greenberg), of 'cultural industry' (Adorno) or as a society of spectacle (Guy Debord). This was the era of art that was made for the masses, of art that wanted to seduce the masses and be consumed by them. Now, the situation has changed. Contemporary means of communications and social networks like Facebook, Youtube, and Twitter give to global populations the possibility of offer their photos, videos and texts to the global audiences. Contemporary design gives to the same populations the possibility of shaping and experiencing their own bodies, homes or work places as artistic objects and installations. For a long time, this everyday level of shared artistic practice remained overlooked, even if many art theorists such as the Russian formalists, or artists like Marcel Duchamp, tried time and again to attract our attention to everyday life as a field of art. In our own time everyday life has become even more artificial, theatricalised and designed. To be an artist has ceased to be an exclusive fate – instead, it has become representative of society as a whole on its most intimate, everyday level. In other words, with few exceptions the artists have become a part of the working class. And their life is organized around the production process and technological change. Now the technology transcends the traditional, inherited cultural identities. It creates an alternative and purely contemporary diversity of professions and life styles. Here we see that “the world culture” and “culture in the middle of the working process” are the same – that is why Elliot and Greenberg could not imagine them. Indeed, as far as culture is thought as belonging to the sphere of leisure and consumption it is shaped by the consumers' cultural identities. However, when culture is considered as belonging to the sphere of production it becomes to be defined by the global technological change. Here one can speak about the class struggle in culture that was started by the avant-gardes of the 20th Century and that we can expect again after the new technological revolution will solidify its grip on the majority of the world population.

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