An ideology in mass society

AN IDEOLOGY IN MASS SOCIETY
UNA IDEOLOGÍA EN LA SOCIEDAD DE MASAS

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Abstract

This paper is devoted to the analysis of ideology as a way of building the integrity of the social matter in modern mass society. It turns out that a grey man possessing a number of disorganizing characteristics (non-reflexivity, passivity, averaging, orientation toward achieving utilitarian material wealth, etc.), is unable to integrate into the social structure of society using ideological mechanisms. An ideology that traditionally performed cognitive, legitimizing and integrative functions ceases to work today (or works differently). To identify the essence of the social hierarchy regulation mechanisms and new ways of integrating society, the paper considers two key concepts for disclosing this problem: the phenomenon of a commoner and ideology. The commoner represented in classical social theories as to the opposite to the elite, in real social practice is not its antipode, but only its reflection, since the elite today is the product of human mass, accumulating its needs and interests. This leads to the transformation of ideology: it can no longer appear as an external force in relation to the mass, building a system of the hierarchical structure of society. It is (or rather should be) the power of the internal regulation of society.

Keywords:mass, mass society, ideology, elite, social structure.

Este artículo está dedicado al análisis de la ideología como una forma de construir la integridad de la materia social en la sociedad de masas moderna. Resulta que un hombre gris que posee una serie de características desorganizadoras (no reflexividad, pasividad, promediación, orientación hacia el logro de la riqueza material utilitaria, etc.), es incapaz de integrarse en la estructura social de la sociedad utilizando mecanismos ideológicos. Una ideología que tradicionalmente realizaba funciones cognitivas, legitimadoras e integradoras deja de funcionar hoy (o funciona de manera diferente). Para identificar la esencia de los mecanismos de regulación de la jerarquía social y las nuevas formas de integración de la sociedad, el documento considera dos conceptos clave para revelar este problema: el fenómeno de un plebeyo y la ideología. El plebeyo representado en las teorías sociales clásicas en cuanto a lo opuesto a la élite, en la práctica social real no es su antípoda, sino solo su reflejo, ya que la élite de hoy es el producto de la masa humana, acumulando sus necesidades e intereses. Esto lleva a la transformación de la ideología: ya no puede aparecer como una fuerza externa en relación con la masa, construyendo un sistema de la estructura jerárquica de la sociedad. Es (o más bien debería ser) el poder de la regulación interna de la sociedad.

Palabras clave: masa, sociedad de masas, ideología, élite, estructura social.

Introduction

Modern society is often labelled as a mass society or consumer society. The passivity of society's members, the transformation of classical autonomous subjects into a substantial entity dependent on society, all this leads to qualitative changes both in the social structure itself and in the forms of subject-object interaction. At the same time, social tension is growing; new problems require more and more participation of people in political, social, and cultural life. But instead of caring for their own good and safety, we observe only passive contemplation: the mass, as if with popcorn at the mouth, is waiting for the next show, not even intending to make an effort to change something. But such behaviour is dangerous to society. Indifference, inattention and disunity can lead to disaster in the future.

One of the most effective ways to manipulate public consciousness is ideology and, as we believe it, acting as a social prism, it can draw the attention of society to problems that cannot be solved without the direct participation of the majority. Therefore, it is necessary to study a special way of ideology functioning in a mass society.

Despite that, the idea of mass society is not new and there are a huge number of works reflecting different approaches to understanding this problem, the topic of the connection between ideology and mass society is still poorly developed, which, of course, is included in the spectrum of socio-philosophical problems. However, this topic, of course, was raised in the literature earlier. So, for example, M.K. Mamardashvili, E.Y. Solovyov, V.S.Shvyrov in their famous paper "Classics and Modernity", examined the connection between ideology and mass society. They wrote that the problem of a person's ability to adaptive and opportunistic degradation as a feature of his mental organization is connected with the fact that it is ideology in modern bourgeois society that forces a commoner to degrade and adapt (Mamardashvili et al., 1972). It is worth paying special attention to the contribution of J. Baudrillard to solving the problem of ideology functioning in mass society. From the point of view of J. Baudrillard, ideology is directly related to the problem of a social. However, the nature of the mass does not allow a social to function, since its axiological component cannot be assimilated and reproduced. Bringing this logic to its logical conclusion, Baudrillard speaks of the "death of a social," and, consequently, the death of ideology as one of its forms. Here, at the stage when the classical sociality death is asserted, which means that in the conditions when the traditional way of society "gathering" and structuring is collapsed, the question arises: what are the mechanisms for regulation and coordination of actions of a person in the conditions of its existence as a commoner?

Methods

The methodological basis of the paper is the rational reconstruction method described in the work of Richard Rorty (Rorty, 1984). An additional methodological resource for the paper is contained in the social reality analysis methods set forth within the framework of the hermeneutic approach as a way for the socio-philosophical interpretation of mass society institutional context (Tereschenko & Snarskaya, 2017; Oveisi et al., 2018a).

Results And Discussion

Ideology is a concept linking the phenomena of masses and elite from the epistemological and axiological perspective. This has been the case since the 18th century.

But is that so today? In the socio-philosophical discourse, one can observe the theoretical evolution of these concepts.

Thus, Marx divides society at its various stages, now into feudal lords and peasants, and then into capitalists and workers. Ideology, in his view, is even "false consciousness" (Engels, 2017), but not double-tongued, and yet it is created in the interests of the ruling class. K. Mannheim holds a similar position. He notes that ideology primarily expresses the interests of certain groups in power and wanting to maintain the existing order of things (Mannheim, 2013). The idea of dividing society by R. Barthes is not expressed so clearly, but it is implied when he starts to analyse specific myths. Examples with an article in a newspaper about lowering prices for vegetables and with a photo of an African American illustrate the efforts of a minority, in this case, the political elite, to create the most profitable self-image among ordinary citizens (Barthes, 1972).

Theorists of mass society most often use the concepts of "minority" and "mass" or "elite" and "mass" to refer to two opposing groups of society. So, J. Ortega Y Gasset writes about the division into minorities and masses, which is observed in society (Gasset, 1993). The first is a person or a group of persons, who are capable of managing and who were once at the helm of society, while the second is an average, ordinary person deprived of individuality, some "common type".

Of the major theorists, it is also worth highlighting Baudrillard, who does not quite fit into our logic of the division of society with his idea of the universality and totality of the masses. According to Baudrillard, any individual immersed in the mass, and absorbed by it, dissolves in this "humannery". And, therefore, the opposition between society and the individual nullifies, since the border between the two spheres of opposite meanings disappears. This, in turn, leads to the termination of semantic exchange, and subsequently violates the order and ruins the operation of the classical structure of society. But, in his concept, a personality still remains, even in the person of Baudrillard himself. There is another problem that is already associated with ideology in mass society. In the situation described by Baudrillard, the mass turns into a "silent majority" unable to absorb any message, any impulse without a referent; such conditions are created under which ideological influence on the masses is impossible, but we see by experience how ideology continues to interact with society (Baudrillard, 1994).

Perhaps Baudrillard did not take into account that even in the event when social institutions are destructed, which, of course, are something external to the masses, their "ghost" will continue to fulfil its functions for a long time, which we are now observing.

Like a black hole, mass distorts and absorbs any energy, and in modern society, energy acts as information that is perceived very superficially. Most of the meanings are drowning in the bottomless ocean of silent mass... Therefore, in order to be able to manipulate the majority, reaching at least a fraction of the meaning, the format of slogans is used. The masses are explained clearly and intelligibly, in an understandable form; what is required of them. We do not mean the slogans to demonstrate and not to shout out individual formulas, but to include these formulas and their multiple repetitions in individual media publications, in literature and even in the process of education. The "elite" is pumping tons of information with all its might and sees in its paramount task to ensure its accessibility. But we should not think that the "elite" which consists mostly of the masses'

thoughts about someone's well-being more than their own, therefore it is logical that the number of sources of information is very limited. Masses are allowed only to the information which has the correct structure and takes into account the interests of the "elite". The information flow integrity which has specific ideological settings is ensured by enhanced "pumping". As a result, this leads to some understanding of what is required of the people mass is being formed, and it obediently fulfils the main tasks assigned to it. Continuous exposure through multiple repetitions of short, concise slogans programs the behaviour of the "silent majority."

With such tightened ideological control, social inequality plays an important role. Modern society is capable of producing a large number of goods and services that could satisfy the needs of each member of society, but we see the opposite situation. "This phenomenon is of a symbolic nature, the system needs a fundamental "simulacrum " that has universal effectiveness; this is expressed in the popular mass culture of the "American dream", the realization of the possibility of unlimited and status consumption" (Stoyan, 2016). Thus, the goal is given to the commoner. He becomes dependent on his desire to live for consumption and no longer notices anything around (neither any other opportunities nor goals), which is very beneficial for the "elite" because in this way the mass becomes more predictable. But there is a problem: the "elite", of course, can endlessly try to make the mass obedient, yet the paradox of the masses lies in the fact that they cannot be either a subject or an object. The first is not available to them, because they do not have their own autonomous consciousness. The second is not available to them, too; since an object is obliged to obey certain laws, and the mass does not do this, it is impossible to develop one definite method of influence for it. Any impact that threatens to violate the autonomy of the masses is absorbed, distorted and dispersed. Therefore, it is simply necessary that the ideological impact is continuous and has an easily digestible form (Agara, 2017; Kord et al., 2017; Varela et al., 2017).

A degrading "elite" can very easily fall under the general mood of uncontrolled consumption, and then its main goal may not be retention and development of the management system, but indulging your own needs (to possess more and more wealth demonstrating status). And as a result, we observe a dismissive attitude towards our leading role and duty to observe the correct work of the ideological system (Kuznetsov, 2007; Oveisi et al., 2018b). The degrading essence of the "elite" ruins the system.

Summary

The problem of ideology as a way of constructing sociality seems to be a key to modern society. The subject of ideology today cannot be represented either as an autonomous individual, or as a specific social group, or the elite. But the object of ideology is also transforming: a mass society is unable to be the object of influence for external factors. Changing the subject-and-object functioning entails a revision of the basic characteristics of ideology in all areas of its presentation which are epistemology and axiology.

Conclusions

We see only two paths that ideology can take in the future: ideology will either cease to exist along with the social that Baudrillard predicted at the end of the last century, or it will evolve ceasing to be a form of the class struggle and will find other creators and

carriers. In both the first and second cases, the political "elites" will continue their parasitic existence. But if ideology disappears, then the masses are likely to continue to live as before, simply not receiving a fraction of the increased impact. If ideology develops, it will need to look for new ideologues who, oddly enough, will again be the elites, but not those who participate in the management of society, who are the creators of the official ideology, but those who remained on their own personal convictions or by chance aside from political life. They did not degrade under the influence of the general mood of consumption; they were not tempted by wealth and luxury which allowed them to preserve a true elitist essence. At the same time, this new elite, was not torn from society into a separate social institution, represents a certain internal force in the mass itself, which does not belong to it, but does not oppose it. In modern society, similar processes are observed in some countries: some people declare their position regarding morality, politics, economics, etc. using the Internet. They create their own ideology, and it is created by the forces, though not of the mass itself, but by those who are included in it and are perceived by the mass itself as part of it. Such an ideology is more enlightening than manipulative in nature: the mass is accustomed to traditional values, informed about the historical past, explaining how people got their rights and how they should dispose of them now. Thus, one could say that inside a bottomless, cold, dark, and desert ocean, the light of hope is born. But ideology is a distorted consciousness, and an ideologist, pursuing even good goals, will always look at the world from just one point of view, replacing one gloom with another.

How will ideology manifest itself outside the framework of the class struggle? Who will be new ideologists? Will mass society disappear under the influence of a new ideology? What should be the new ideology? These issues require detailed consideration because conformism and disunity along with the lack of a common idea give rise to inattention to common problems, which can lead to disaster for the whole society. That is why ideology is necessary for mass society, but not in the form of external imposition, but in the form of internal strength.

Acknowledgement

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