# I. STUDIA I ROZPRAWY

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## POPULAR CULTURE AS AN EDUCATIONAL SPACE – DEPICTIONS OF UTOPIA IN POP CULTURE TEXTS

Abstract. Jakubowski Witold, *Popular Culture as Educational Space – Depictions of a Utopia in Pop Culture Texts* [Kultura popularna jako przestrzeń edukacyjna – obrazy utopii w tekstach popkultury]. Studia Edukacyjne nr 49, 2018, Poznań 2018, pp. 7-24. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISSN 1233-6688. DOI: 10.14746/se.2018.49.1

The aim of the text is to discuss the educational potential of popular culture. The first part focuses on theoretical opinions on the relationships of culture and education. Pedagogical thinking about culture is dominated by its **humanistic** understanding, in which a special sense of culture has been understood as one of the top of human achievement. In traditional pedagogical reflection, there is noticeable concentration on culture as "valuable for educational interactions". In such a perspective, the space of **popular culture** is ignored. Perceived as a bad Mr. Hyde of cultural space, it is treated as an area of threats to the development of children and youth. But culture is not only a canon of the achievements of past generations. In the **anthropological** sense, these are simply the ways of living a life in a society. Popular culture is the space where various aspects are commented on. Popular art plays a special role here.
The second part discusses the pop cultural texts that illustrate the characteristic elements of utopia: burial of the "old world", establishing a "perfect" order, protection against external destruction and against destruction from inside. Formed at different times and based on different means of expression, they address the dilemmas associated with thinking about a "better world". They present the mechanisms and consequences of building a new society "with their own language".

**Key words**: popular culture, informal education, critical pedagogy, cultural studies, utopia

*It is culture that provides the tools*
*for organizing and understanding our worlds*
*in communicable ways*[1]

### Culture and education

Pedagogues have long been aware of relationships between culture and education. However, a pedagogical view of culture is perceptibly predom-

[1] J. Bruner, *The Culture of Education*, London 1996, p. 3.

inated by its **humanistic** understanding, which probably results from the influences of German intellectual tradition, characteristically perceiving culture as a unique phenomenon, the ultimate achievement of human thought, thus encompassing everything that is outstanding in human creative effort. "Rather than encapsulating all human symbolic representation, German *Kultur* pointed us exclusively to levels of excellence in fine art, literature, music and individual personal perfection".[2] Yet, culture is not merely a canon of the achievements of past generations. In the **anthropological** view it is simply a society's way of life, which is succinctly expressed by a classic of anthropology, who writes:

> The term *culture*, as it is employed in scientific studies, carries none of the overtones of evaluation which attach to it in popular usage. It refers to the total way of life of any society, not simply to those parts of this way which the society regards as higher or more desirable.[3]

In other words, it is how we live, get married, what we eat and where, what we believe in, how we relax, what we consider an ideal of beauty that contributes to the picture of our culture, and each of these elements is described in its texts.

Dichotomy in understanding culture, pointed out by the American anthropologist, is reflected in the discourse on cultural education. Traditional concepts in particular tend to emphasise the significance of induction of an individual into the world of cultural achievements, perceiving it as their fundamental task.[4] They also stress the role of rendering high art commonly available and accessible as especially valuable from the educational point of view, which probably results from the fact that pedagogues' attitude to culture is profoundly rooted in the Enlightment tradition, where it is seen as the antithesis of barbarism. David Jones points out that

> Within the tradition of adult education in the 20th century, tutors saw it as their role to impose a sort of cultural' value system on the artistic life of the country. They identified and maintained a canon of great and good work and persuaded us that every educated gentleman, and it was mainly men in those days, should be familiar with this canon. The job of adult educators in these matters was to pass on this knowledge and these values from one generation to the next. They saw themselves, together with the great national galleries and museums, as the guardians of our cultural heritage.[5]

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[2] C. Jenks, *Culture*, London – New York 1993, p. 9.

[3] R. Linton, *The Cultural Background of Personality*, London – New York 1947, p. 20.

[4] See S. Szuman, *O sztuce i wychowaniu estetycznym*, Warszawa 1969.

[5] D.J. Jones, *Training art Tutors for adult education*, [in:] *Scholarly practitioners: The education of educators of adults*, Ed. R. Benn, Exeter 1998, p. 93.

There are a few reasons why educational activity ignores popular culture. One of them is the conviction that popular culture is primarily restricted to entertainment. A Polish pedagogue of culture writes: "While popular culture mainly satisfies the need of the masses for entertainment and maintaining social links, high culture satisfies a few more – those of intellectual experience, learning about the world and oneself".[6] This view assumes (perhaps unconsciously) that only the cultural phenomena that can be attributed to high culture are of any value and thus: "the fundamental task of cultural education of children and young people is to provide them with a chance to transgress the boundaries of popular culture and enable them to derive satisfaction also – or mainly – from participating in more sophisticated manifestations of cultural life".[7] Obviously, from such a perspective popular culture is primarily perceived as a sphere of ludic behaviour, where no competences are necessary to function.

Another reason why pedagogues are of such a low opinion of pop culture is that it is equated with popular *art* – the latter being traditionally criticised for its aesthetic immaturity and primitivism.[8] In view of such critical positions on popular culture and art (having their theoretical background in the views of the Frankfurt School), entertainment industry creators manipulate the mass audience, care only for their own profit, offering products that do not require intellectual commitment and are devoid of educational ambitions. Guided by market mechanisms, they lower the level of culture "in general". According to J. Gajda, accepting this state of affairs, that is the commercial nature of culture, has the following consequences:

> Firstly – the recreational and folk forms are preferred and developed by entertainment industry that satisfy the tastes of a wide audience.
> Secondly – there is a regression of an ambitious culture that is perceived as unprofitable so that it is why the good quality products of this trend have to be more expensive, and in turn, they become inaccessible to the people of low earnings. That deepens the division of the recipients into elite and popular culture.
> Thirdly – commercialization of culture causes the danger of lowering the aesthetic taste of the recipients and lowering the level of culture in general. Valuable things, for which there is no demand, do not appear on the market at all or appear as expensive and available in small amounts, and then die in a flood of easy, sometimes trivial content of mass entertainment.[9]

However, it is worth noting that the majority of critical arguments against mass art, put forward by Dwight Macdonald, Theodor Adorno and Clement

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[6] D. Jankowski, *Edukacja wobec zmiany*, Toruń 2002, p. 187.

[7] Ibidem.

[8] E.g. J. Plisiecki, *Wstęp*, [in:] *Sztuka – Nauczyciel – Uczeń*, Ed. J. Plisiecki, Lublin 1997, p. 6.

[9] J. Gajda, *Kultura jako „regnum homini" i kultura w katogoriach rynku – wyzwanie dla edukacji*, [in:] *Kultura inspiracją kształcenia ogólnego*, Eds. I. Wojnar, J. Kubin, Warszawa 1998, p. 141.

Greenberg, were long ago challenged and questioned.[10] Popular art does not necessarily have to be intellectually and aesthetically banal; the fact that it is addressed to mass audience does not mean that it is substandard; accessibility does not exclude artist's original expression and audience's active reception; industrial character of cultural production is not typical of solely "low" art today – standardisation is present in both "high" and "low" art, because conventions facilitate achieving particular forms and aesthetic effects. Even though film and contemporary popular music offer numerous examples of complexity and multi-dimensional attractiveness of popular art, many pedagogical texts frequently deny its value and usefulness in educational activity, ignoring the fact that mass nature of production and consumption of popular art is simply characteristic of today's societies.

There seems to be one more reason why pedagogy has for so long ignored popular culture, which is related to a unique kind of pleasure derived from experiencing it, and especially from experiencing works of art. Roland Barthes differentiates between *jouissance* and *plaisir*, i.e. two different types of pleasure.[11] *Jouissance* is interpreted as "delight", "ecstasy" (e.g. sexual) of sensual and carnal nature, and as such it is perhaps closer to nature. On the other hand, *plaisir* is the pleasure "controlled" by culture. The former type of pleasure should be associated with popular art. Emotions evoked by consumption of the works of popular art are "embarrassing", which is aptly illustrated by what Karol Irzykowski stated in the 1920s, when he wrote that a contemporary European "enjoys the cinema but is ashamed of it".[12] His words also give testimony to social hypocrisy: we like to experience "forbidden" pleasures of popular art, but at the same time we publicly claim that we despise it.

"Ordering" the phenomena occurring in culture (what is "low" and what is "high") may help an individual to define his or her place in the social sphere. The division into "high" and "low" culture frequently involves codes used by the participants of cultural life. Texts of high culture, aimed at formally prepared public, require the use of an intrinsic and advanced code rooted in common educational experience, while no formal education is necessary to read texts of popular culture, which – founded on restricted codes – are understood by everyone. We learn these codes during the process of socialisation. It is interesting that institutions engaged in cultural education emphasise the teaching of deriving pleasure of the *plaisir* type, requiring the knowledge of conventions, ability to read texts based on the codes of a narrow spectrum of influence.[13] It is equally interesting that our culture emphasises controlling

[10] R. Shusterman, *Estetyka pragmatyczna*, Wrocław 1998.

[11] J. Fiske, *Television Culture*, London – New York 1987, p. 228-229.

[12] K. Irzykowski, *X Muza*, Warszawa 1924, p. 9.

[13] J. Fiske, *Wprowadzenie do badań nad komunikowaniem*, Wrocław 1999, p. 100.

emotions, while popular art fundamentally exploits them, which is probably responsible for the "obvious" aversion to everything that may be associated with uncontrolled pleasure – passion. The pleasure of this type involves fun, which in turn is associated with "low" entertainment. Sports games trigger off different emotions than those experienced during a theatrical performance, emotions evoked by a rock concert and a performance of a symphony orchestra differ fundamentally. It is in the audience's emotions that a difference between a nude and pornography is seen. If aesthetic contemplation is replaced by sexual excitement, the former inevitably becomes the latter.

While differentiating between various "levels of culture" is an ambitious task, it is hardly effective. The boundaries between popular and high culture determined by critics are not permanent and change continually. Today we are witnessing a tendency to abandon the pessimistic view of popular culture and its consumers rooted in the Frankfurt School's criticism of mass culture. Contemporary societies of the West hardly remind those apprehended by Ortega y Gasset, while contemporary mass culture differs fundamentally from that criticised by Dwight Macdonald. Contemporary research of media and their audience tends to depart from the view that the audience are homogenous, unquestioning mass, while dictatorial media impose the meaning of broadcast texts. Rather than that, it assumes that the audience are diversified, which offers an opportunity of another way of decoding the message. The division into high and popular culture is also becoming debatable. In the words of John Fiske: "'The lowest common denominator' may be a useful concept in arithmetic, but in the study of popularity its only possible value is to expose the prejudices of those who use it".[14] Culture is a living phenomenon:

> it can be developed only from within, it cannot be imposed from without or above. (…) A homogeneous, externally produced culture cannot be sold ready-made to the masses: culture simply does not work like that. Nor do the people behave or live like the masses, an aggregation of alienated, one-dimensional persons whose only consciousness is false, whose only relationship to the system that enslaves them is one of unwitting (if not willing) dupes. Popular culture is made by the people, not produced by the culture industry.[15]

In his opinion popular culture is not so much a culture of artistic objects and images, but a complex of cultural activity, thanks to which art trickles down to the customs and conditions of everyday life.[16]

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[14] J. Fiske, *Television Culture*, p. 309.

[15] J. Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, London 1989, p. 23-24.

[16] J. Fiske, *Postmodernizm i telewizja*, [in:] *Pejzaże audiowizualne. Telewizja – Wideo – Komputer*, Ed. A. Gwóźdź, Kraków 1997, p. 175.

An obvious question arises here: what is the educational potential of popular culture?

In the popular view education is narrowly equated with the school. In other words, the institutions where its formal dimension is practised "hold a monopoly" on educational activity. Yet, the fact that the everyday life is also an important sphere of learning escapes our attention, which is pointed out by Knud Illeris, who writes:

> As a parallel to everyday consciousness, a concept of *everyday learning* may be proposed, as that learning which occurs informally and apparently by chance in everyday life as one moves around the spaces of one's life, without consciously intending to learn anything, but often busily absorbed in getting everything to function and more or less understanding it.[17]

However, the "dimensions" of our "space of life" are different than thirty years ago. Media – an obvious environment of popular culture – intensify our experience, i.e. the experience that we have lived is complemented by the experience provided by media, which is a significant factor in constructing the identity of an individual. J.B. Thompson writes that someone watching a soap opera or reading a book does not only experience the narrative but also discovers imaginary alternatives, experimenting with the projection of his or her own identity. He says that, because the encounter with media opens up our biographies to media experience, we are involved in the events and social relations that take place beyond the place of our everyday existence.[18]

Popular culture recounts our reality. Similarly as folk tales, popular culture texts describe the rules governing the world. It is a sphere where contemporary myths are created and "live", the myths which explain various aspects of reality. All texts of popular culture reflect our values, passions, dreams and fears. Their aesthetic sophistication is of no consequence, because our reality is described not only in the canonical works displayed in museums. Pronouncing texts as valuable or worthless from the educational point of view seems to reflect the convictions of those pronouncing the verdict rather than do justice to the texts' actual pedagogical potential.

Popular culture is today an important sphere where the meanings essential for most of the participants of contemporary cultural life are created and negotiated; it is not a *worse* but *different* fragment of cultural reality. It displays many similarities with folk culture and is now increasingly more often interpreted as the folk culture of post-industrial societies. It is in the sphere of popular culture that we spontaneously participate in culture and our par-

[17] K. Illeris, *The Three Dimensions of Learning. Contemporary Learning Theory in the Tension Field between the Cognitive, the Emotional and the Social*, 2004, p. 178.

[18] J.B. Thompson, *Media i nowoczesność. Społeczna teoria mediów*, Wrocław 2006, p. 230.

ticipation is by no means reduced to "cheap entertainment". Popular culture is becoming an area where not only the young generation are forming their identity. Here popular art performs vital social functions. Noël Carroll remarks that people like to experience the same works of art as their neighbours so that they can later talk about them. And this is what the socialising role of art consists in. In Carroll's words, it is an important component of cultural community.[19]

Many researchers point out to popular culture's "shift" towards the dominating culture.[20] Cultural practices that used to constitute the "high" canon are no longer a point of reference for an individual looking for his or her place in the social structure. Nowadays life styles are to a considerably greater degree defined by the fact of participating in popular culture. Especially for young people popular culture is a significant factor affecting relations inside a peer group.

> It is appropriate and competent participation in pop cultural practices seen as preferable by a group that is largely decisive for an individual's place in the groups' structure, for being accepted or marginalised within it. Thus, popular culture constitutes – at least at the micro level – a powerful stratification factor.[21]

Is it then still justified to insist on dividing culture into "good" and "bad"? According to G. Kerchensteiner, all cultural achievements stem from the individual or collective spirit. "They are the artefacts exposed to the world of phenomena by the beings full of sense with the purpose of rendering them comprehensible for others, so that the same sense can be found in them".[22] The cultural achievements in question constitute the "background" offering support in the process of education. These words of a classic of pedagogy of culture are by all means still valid. We all live in the sphere of culture, which distinguishes us from the animal world. Ranking the artefacts of culture, however interesting, is hardly relevant when reflecting on their "pedagogical impact". All manifestations of culture describe our world, while culture's pedagogical aspect involves the process of creating symbolic representations of practices in which they are entangled.[23] Thus, the analysis of phenomena occurring in culture acquires pedagogical dimensions.

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[19] N. Carroll, *Filozofia sztuki masowej*, Gdańsk 2011, p. 23.

[20] E.g. M. Krajewski, *Kultury kultury popularnej*, Poznań 2003; Z. Melosik, *Kultura popularna i tożsamość młodzieży. W niewoli władzy i wolności*, Kraków 2013.

[21] Z. Melosik, *Kultura popularna i tożsamość młodzieży*, p. 34.

[22] G. Kerschensteiner, *Pojęcie szkoły pracy. Podstawowy aksjomat procesu kształcenia*, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków 1970, p. 107.

[23] H.A. Giroux, *Wobec wyzwań tożsamości i różnicy (poza dyskurs edukacji wielokulturowej)*, [in:] *Edukacja wobec zmiany społecznej*, Eds. Z. Brzeziński, L. Witkowski, Poznań – Toruń 1994, p. 432.

Popular culture related to modern media, is an important element of contemporary cultural reality. It participates in the formation of "new world" that a human being inhabits and where he or she gains life experience. Everyone who watches television (not only "educational" program), reads glossy press or listens to popular music is subjected to **informal education** which "dimensions" and "power of influence" are often much stronger than what is offered by the formal education. It is a lifelong process that encompasses acquisition of knowledge, skills and everyday experience. It is a continuous process: at home, at work, and while entertaining. Therefore no matter what we do: whether we are on holidays, read magazines and books, watch television or movies – we are always learning.[24]

The consequence of this is the emergence of new competences of a contemporary participant in culture: the ability to analyse and interpret critically cultural texts regardless of their "position" in the hierarchy resulting from their aesthetic classification. Transferring these competences is becoming one of the important objectives for the pedagogues of culture. Popular culture is now unveiling its other face, decisively more complex than that formed by a simple opposition between what is "vulgar" and what is "noble". Even "ordinary" ways of participating in culture engage the audience and require that they possess the competences of reading and interpreting its texts. And popular art plays here an exceptional role.

The point is thus not to "subjugate" popular culture and impart the "educational meaning" to it, because it already has this pedagogical dimension, since popular culture is not a "commodity for sale" as the critics of mass culture would like to perceive it. Its essence is the emotional involvement of the audience with the issues which are addressed – the protagonists of popular culture are embroiled in the adventures and mishaps which are by no means alien to the audience, who are often confronted with the same dilemmas and situations as the characters in a TV series. Popular culture will cease to function once it fails to appeal to the audience's subconscious, fears, hopes and dreams; if it no longer alludes to everyday myths and fails to create new ones. Only upon meeting these conditions can it be truly *popular*.[25] It "reflects" the meanings that people impart to their social world. Television series, feature programmes, lyrics of pop songs, video clips, cartoons are not only pleasant entertainment but they also carry narrations predominating in the society. Visions of the future shown in *science fiction* films tell more about our fears concerning the present, while formally banal telenovelas comment on real social issues. Texts of popular culture and art tell the tale of our world and may

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[24] W. Jakubowski, *Popular Culture as a 'New World' of Learning*, [in:] *'Old' and 'New' Worlds of Adult Learning*, Eds. A. Bron, E. Kurantowicz, H. Salling Olesen, L. West, Wrocław 2005.

[25] See W. Jakubowski, *Edukacja w świecie kultury popularnej*, Kraków 2006.

provide many answers to the question about how to function in it, but – more significantly – are we able to formulate the question appropriately?

Popular culture is becoming an interesting area of multi-dimensional pedagogical research and analyses.[26] Cultural studies, which reject the understanding of pedagogy as a "technique" or a repository of skills for "development management", are becoming a theoretical and methodological base for the pedagogy of pop culture. Pedagogy is perceived here as a cultural practice which is comprehensible when seen from the perspective of history, politics, power and culture. In such a case pedagogy becomes an area of critical analysis of the multitude of discourses present in culture; the discourses experienced by all of us immersed in the culture of media. In the words of Henry A. Giroux, traditional academic disciplines are unable to describe the great diversity of cultural and social phenomena. Dissemination of electronic culture into all spheres of everyday (intellectual and artistic) life plays an important role here. Proponents of culture studies stress that the role of media culture, and primarily the unstoppable force of mass media in transmitting knowledge, is of key importance in understanding society's structure and everyday life.[27]

As it was said above, popular culture tells "in its own words" the tale about the issues important for the society. Talking about reality has always had its educational dimension. Classical drama of antiquity was created "for entertainment" but also "to provide an opportunity to make an effort to understand one's own humanness, full of struggle, contradictions and internal contrasts as well as the questions about the possibility to overcome them".[28] Contemporary texts are similar, because culture provides narrative structures which become the focal point of our lives.[29] Ch. Barker writes that texts of culture are the forms of narration, i.e. ordered descriptions recording events. Narrations are stories attempting to explain the functioning of social reality. "Narratives offer us frameworks of understanding and rules of reference about the way the social order is constructed and in doing so supply answers to the question: how shall we live?[30]"

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[26] See W. Jakubowski (Ed.) *Pedagogika kultury popularnej – teorie, metody i obszary badań*, Kraków 2016.

[27] H.A. Giroux, *Is there a place for cultural studies in colleges of education*, [in:] *Counternarratives: Cultural studies and critical pedagogies in postmodern spacies*, Eds. H.A. Giroux, P. MacLaren, M.A. Peters, C. Lankshear, London 1996, p. 45.

[28] J. Rutkowiak, *O dialogu edukacyjnym. Rusztowanie kategorialne*, [in:] *Pytanie, dialog, wychowanie*, Ed. J. Rutkowiak, Warszawa 1992, p. 18.

[29] T. Benton, I. Craib, *Filozofia nauk społecznych. Od pozytywizmu do postmodernizmu*, Wrocław 2003, p. 121-122.

[30] Ch. Barker, *Cultural Studies. Theory and Practice*, London – Thousand Oaks – New Delhi 2000, p. 31.

## Depictions of utopia in pop culture texts

For the sake of reflection on the educational potential of popular culture it is interesting to see what its texts talk about, which – contrary to what critics think – is not always banal. An interesting area illustrating the deliberations undertaken in this article is pop-culture depictions of utopia. Creating a utopia usually resulted from the need of social change – visions of alternative future were inspired by the questioning the "evil" present. These social projects of the "new world" were indebted in pedagogical ideas of forming a "new human being". However, the hopes of the "brave new world" were accompanied by anxieties concerning the inevitable cost of its construction. Let us then have a look at a few selected examples of the visions of the "better world" presented in the texts of pop-culture. Created at different times and employing different means of expression, they tell about dilemmas in the thinking of the "better world". Speaking "their own language", they present mechanisms and consequences of constructing a new society.

Researchers distinguish a few typical elements of utopia.[31] The first is **burying the "old world"**. A utopia is constructed in opposition to particular, defined evil. A utopia destroys the old world, rejects the experiences of previous generations and in its place constructs the new world free from that evil. Negation of the inherited reality is the premise for constructing a new one.

Another element is **establishing the "perfect" order**. The father of the nation or the council of the elders impose perfect civil laws and social norms, and decide once and for all what is good and what is bad, even considering such minute details as clothes. After particular causes of evil, e.g. private property, are eliminated, all conflicts should cease.

The third element is the **protection against destruction from outside**. Utopian thinking, based on the premise that the world is inherently evil, is pessimistic, which justifies the need to create an island – an enclave of specifically understood good. Perfect order requires isolating the reformed community. Sometimes it is subject to "improvements", which shows the intention of creating a "new human being", e.g. through genetic adjustments.

The last element is the **protection against destruction from within**. It is necessary to protect the new order against the evil coming from inside. The order is kept by censors and the system of justice (judges, prosecutors). Fear of destruction of the order forces everyone to be vigilant, e.g. priests, officials, teachers – all those who have been appointed to maintain it.[32]

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[31] A. Dróżdż, *Mity i utopie pedagogiczne*, Kraków 2000.

[32] Ibidem, p. 68-72.

How are the elements of utopia illustrated in the texts of popular culture? I will refer to a novel by a Polish writer Stanisław Lem *Return from the Stars* for the first example.

Returning from a trans-galactic expedition an astronaut Hal Bregg lands on Earth, which has been completely transformed during the one hundred twenty seven years of his absence. It is no longer the same planet that he left years before, which does not concern only technological innovations making life easier; the greatest change concerns people, whose lives are defined by different values and aims. The "new human being" was created as a result of a medical-chemical treatment carried out in infancy, known as "betrisation", which removes all aggressive instincts. There is peace and an unprecedented "technological leap" has taken place, but their consequence is a change in the hierarchy of human values and loss of many features (e.g. competitiveness, a tendency to take risks). The inhabitants of Earth are no longer interested in conquest of space, while long-distance and dangerous space missions were abandoned long before, and thus what Hal Bregg has devoted his life to is of no significance to anyone. Thanks to Einstein's time paradox, he has an opportunity to get to know two worlds: the world which he left behind setting off at the age of thirty and the world which he arrived in after a ten-year journey.

The novel's merits should not be reduced to simple recounting of its author's "hits" in predicting the future, even though there are quite a few (calsters – equivalents of today's debit cards, optons and lectons as equivalents of e-books and audiobooks or virtual reality); his predictions concerning social changes are also interesting (cult of youth and the resulting plastic surgery, all kinds of rejuvenating treatments). However, the most interesting in my opinion are Bregg's impressions and reflections, when he is trying to make sense of the unknown reality. The effect is intensified by the narration is in the first person singular. Bregg feels alienated in the reality – in every respect so friendly and helpful to people. He has not been socialised to live in it and has to learn to live in the world which he does not understand.

Lem's novel superbly illustrates all the elements of utopia mentioned above. The old world was destroyed, because it was the only way to create the new. Changes – even though they require time – are introduced systematically and with revolutionary consistency (on Bregg's return to Earth, the third generation has already been "betrised"). The construction of the new order is based on scientific foundations. The school education of children reinforces the new order. The process of education and the whole mechanism of socialisation are subordinated to the idea of "betrisation" and aim at legitimising the creation of this "brave, new world" devoid of violence. All the "inconvenient" issues have been removed from school curricula, while course books' narration is subordinated to the binding idea of the "new order". The mechanisms and inherent dangers of constructing a utopia presented in Lem's book are universal, which is the reason why it may be interpreted as something more than a simple criticism of the vision of a communist society of prosperity. The search for a better world often becomes an excuse for a dictatorship that manipulates society in a variety of ways. As noted by A. Huxley in his text: *Brave New World Revisited*, the effectiveness of propaganda of all kinds (religious or political) depends on the methods used, not on the principles proclaimed. If indoctrination is given in a "right way", practically taking into account the appropriate conditions, everyone can be converted to any doctrine.[33]

Another example is Gary Ross's film *Pleasantville* (1998). In its storyline it employs all the well-known formal devices, often emulating television aesthetics. The film provokes intellectual rather than emotional reactions and thus may be treated as an example of postmodern cinema. The film is set "somewhere in America"; its protagonists are young people living in a way typical of the 1990s, dividing their time between leisure and school. The main character's passion is watching old, black and white TV programmes broadcast by the "TV Time" station, which has just announced that it will show a long-running series *Pleasantville* from the 1950s involving a competition for the viewers, exceptionally popular with the young audience. The series' trailer reveals its didactic character, offering instruction about "healthy food", "proper ways of greeting each other" and "safe sex". In a sense it illustrates the idea of paleo television as an institution whose functioning is based on a pedagogical communication contract – its characteristic features are the transfer of skills as the objective of communication, directional nature of communication as well as division and hierarchy of roles – into those who possess knowledge, "teachers", and those who this knowledge is passed to.[34] It represents a normative model, which ensures an institutional way of communicating the dominating culture.

During a scuffle between David and his sister the remote control is damaged and the TV set becomes unoperational. A mysterious elderly gentleman arrives to help and gives David a new, slightly "souped-up" remote, which magically transfers the two young people to the black and white world of the 1950s from the television series. David and his sister begin to play the role of siblings – the protagonists of the series; the inhabitants of the eponymous town do not perceive them as "alien".

Pleasantville is a place where everything is the way it should be: life is simple, people are ideal and everything is black and white. No-one is home-

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[33] A. Huxley, *Nowy wspaniały świat poprawiony* (*Brave New World Revisited*), Paryż 1960, p. 67.

[34] W. Godzic, *Oglądanie i inne przyjemności kultury popularnej*, Kraków 1996, p. 92.

less – that is the way it is! There are no fires and the fire brigade is called only to take a cat off a tree. Everyone is polite, eats healthily and no improper thoughts cross anyone's mind. It does not even rain; everything that is undesirable has been eliminated. It is embodiment of the "idea of purity". According to Zygmunt Bauman it is

> a vision of an ideal state of things, where everything is just right – nothing is lacking and nothing needs to be eliminated; it is a state that has to be created and once it is created, it has to be protected with great care against threats – both real and any other: those which can be imagined and those which can not yet be imagined.[35]

But most importantly, the residents of Pleasantville can not imagine that there is another reality beyond their town, because theirs is the ideal world, the "best of all worlds". Isolation from the world outside is primarily mental in nature; no-one asks what is outside Pleasantville.

David and his sister have a certain advantage over the remaining protagonists. Not only do they realise where they are but they are also aware of the emotions and passions that never appear in the "cultured" world of the television series. But when these emotions are activated, the world begins to acquire colour. Initially it is an ordinary flower, which changes from grey to red, but with time some residents of Pleasantville – especially those who abandon themselves to the previously unknown pleasures – become coloured, which is not the biased notion concerning one's ethnic background – everyone's colour was that from the black and white television, but now they "acquire colour" and consequently become "alien" in the acceptable order of things. Zygmunt Bauman quoted above remarks that modern utopias are lucid. In this world everything must be "in its place". "The Perfect World dreamt up by the mind was, in defiance of modern reality, eternally pure, knowing no dirt; the world without strangers".[36]

"Genuine" residents of Pleasantville experience only the "permissible" pleasures, considering other as "improper" or vulgar. In a sense this illustrates the distinction into *jouissance* and *plaisir* mentioned above, i.e. what is "natural" and what is "cultural" in us. A double bed displayed in a shop window causes universal indignation, while the appearance of "coloured" denizens provokes special concern. "Coloured" becomes a pejorative term. A contemptuous sentence uttered by one of David's friends: "maybe you are too busy entertaining your 'coloured' girlfriend" unambiguously shows who is now who in Pleasantville. This brings to mind Victor Klemperer's deliberations on the role of language in constructing the social sphere, where one word may

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[35] Z. Bauman, *Ponowoczesność jako źródło cierpień*, Warszawa 2000, p. 12.

[36] Ibidem, p. 25.

polarise it along the lines: "You are nothing, I am everything".[37] One may become "coloured" not only abandoning oneself to carnal pleasures; equally harmful is listening to rock and roll music or experiencing any uncontrolled emotions, e.g. reading books, which so far have been sitting forgotten on the library shelves gathering dust and no-one knew what they are about (the first books read by the young people in Pleasantville are the "rebellious" novels: M. Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and J. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*). When the people of Pleasantville have discovered the library, it turns out that even reproductions of the works by Monet, Rembrandt or Titian may trigger off a similar effect. The town begins to change and the changes primarily worry the adults; the young people submit to them surprisingly easily. The ideal order in the world of Pleasantville invented by television screenwriters falls apart in confrontation with authentic albeit suppressed emotions. The film straightforwardly mirrors what is rooted in our nature and what is imposed by culture.

Pleasantville ceases to be "pleasant". A spring storm and the first real rain cause a nervous reaction of the town's authorities. The residents meet to decide how to restore order. In the mayor's words: "The first thing we have to do is separate out the things that are pleasant from the things that are unpleasant". They decide on the rules which will enable the "genuine citizens" to restore the old order so that everything is the way it used to be. The regulations dictate that all the town's residents must treat each other with respect, but they also say what music may be played in public places (military marches), what colours can be used (black, white and grey), while the school curriculum should emphasise superiority of stability over evolution. The beds available in shops can not be wider than 90 cm and sale of umbrellas is banned.

Gary Ross's film superbly illustrates the consequences of introducing a utopian social order, which must be kept "at all costs". Strict preventive measures serve the public interest and as such they are legitimate. Thanks to them the process of socialisation of young people may go on unhindered. Destruction from within must be stopped, the guilty of the changes must be punished and the "dangerous" books must be burnt. As Huxley points out earlier, the enemies of freedom contaminate the language through their methodical propaganda to seduce and compel their victims to think and act like them. They are manipulators of the mind, they wish to be thought, felt and acted like them. To learn freedom is also to learn to use speech properly.[38]

[37] V. Klemperer, *LTI. Notatnik filologa*, Warszawa 2014, p. 48.

[38] A. Huxley, *Nowy wspaniały*, p. 108.

The last example is *The Village* – a film by M.N. Shyamalan. The time when the story is set is initially difficult to determine as the costumes and the film set give no clues; the viewer intuitively guesses that it must be the 19th century. The reality presented in the film is an embodiment of order. The elders watch over the rituals dictating the rhythm of the community life. The peace is only disturbed by the awareness of the threats lurking in the woods surrounding the village. The rules regulating the life of the residents of the eponymous village are based on a pact concluded with the woods' mysterious inhabitants – Those-we-don't-speak-of: "We do not go to their woods and they do not come to our village". The village's authorities (undoubtedly guided by noble intentions) invent a consistent mythology, whose purpose is to scare the villagers off the woods. The fear of leaving the village is instilled in the younger generation. The task of the "council of the elders" is to convince everyone that it is perilous to venture into this dangerous, alien area. "Normal" people do not go there, only a blind girl and a mad boy are able to escape the tragic consequences of entering the woods, because only they – due to their disabilities – do not give in to the pressure of the restrictions imposed by the dominating culture. The girl does not see the conventional boundaries of the pre-determined order, while the boy is not aware of them.

The film's final scenes show that the world of the village was artificially created. The council of the elders is in reality a group of frustrated people hurt by various unfortunate incidents. Disappointed with the 20th century, they decided to break off with it and, in separation from evil but also relinquishing the goods of modern civilisation, they decided to live away from its hustle and bustle, bearing all the consequences of their decision. The longing for "paradise lost" made them establish their own society, whose functioning is based on the rules closer to nature. The village is separated from the hostile world by the woods, while the mythology based on fear ensures that no-one will attempt to know the truth. This is a superb illustration of the third characteristic feature of utopia – the village is an "island" of specifically interpreted good, as maintaining the perfect order requires that the reformed community is isolated.

Both cinematic presentations of a utopian world as well as Stanisław Lem's novel emphasise the role of school as an institution providing protection against the destruction from within. On the one hand the school legitimises the binding order, on the other, it instils fear of change. The school is a controlling institution, ensuring the stability of the social world. Its mission is not to cater for its pupils' individual needs *as they are*; it exists to accomplish a "nobler task" – to form people *as they should be*. This reflects the aspirations of all totalitarian systems to subjugate the school and instil the binding ideology and the decreed social order in its curricula.

## Conclusion

Wojciech J. Burszta points out that when discussing the relationship between education and popular culture we have to be aware that taking into account the content of the second one in the school curricula forces us to adopt a non-fundamentalist option. In his view "such culture does not form any system but is a sort of a discourse on events and processes".[39] Such discursive dimension (not the mass perception) that Burszta mentions is in my view the most interesting, from the point of view of education, feature of popular culture. Popular culture is a part of cultural reality of contemporary world. The social discourse takes place exactly on its basis. Internet discussion groups, pop music, TV series, film are the place of circulating and exchange an information about reality. In popular culture texts people are searching an inspiration for their lives. It is a space of sharing peoples experience. In the words of J. Bruner

> we seem to construct stories of the real world, so called, much as we construct fictional ones: the same forming rules, the same narrative structures. We simply do not know, nor will we ever whether we learn about narrative from life or life from narrative: probably both.[40]

The presented depictions of utopia, which are briefly discussed here, are by no means the only ones that may be found in the texts of pop culture. Reading them, we often encounter extremely accurate diagnoses of current reality. Thanks to them young people and adults may see more clearly all the entanglements of politics and manipulative practices of those in power by discovering parallels to the present time. Our world is by no means brave, but this is the world that we are living in and we can understand it better thanks to such texts.

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[39] W. Burszta, *O kulturze, kulturze popularnej i edukacji*, [in:] *Edukacja w czasach popkultury*, Eds. W.J. Burszta, A. de Tchorzewski, Bydgoszcz 2002, p. 41.

[40] J. Bruner, *The Culture*, p. 94.

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