
MIMICRY OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION FOR THE MAJORITY DEVELOPMENT TENDENCIES OF MAINSTREAM CULTURE

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Abstract

Youth cultures came into existence after the Second World War. At first it was very hard to define them in the context of their motivations and other related aspects. Most people who lived in the post-war era still had to ‘find themselves’ and thus they tried hard to integrate into particular cultural groups. Many individuals eventually found the situation suitable for their needs and desires and therefore stayed within ‘closed’ subcultural groups but the majority turned the attention to popular, i.e. mainstream culture. The main reasons for such an attitude include reluctance to ‘rebellion’ and simplicity as well as ‘smoothness’ of this cultural stream which is related to its universal popularity. People create their own identities; inner development of human values and desires tends to be connected with various subcultural groups – such groups are often very influential and their collective principles are hard to ‘walk away’ from. Striving to fit into a specific group, individuals often change their behaviour and the closer fulfilment of their goals is, the bigger pressures they encounter. Over time, hand in hand with development of the mass media, cultural industry, and consumer way of life, the influence of subcultures has decreased and has been replaced by popularity and universal intelligibility of mainstream. The tendency to stick to a particular set of rules and express opinions within small closed communities was no longer in the spotlight. All aspects of human life have become globalized and mediated. Subcultural elements were incorporated into mass production and mediated subcultures often turned into mainstream. The members of alternative groups started to lose their beliefs – their values and opinions were subjected to an effort to be ‘cool’ and choose a new lifestyle that would have fitted in the dominant group. Mainstream, in its nature, is based on continual absorption of subcultural signs that are widely respected by the general public and almost all mainstream products thus originate in subcultures (the crucial factor here is popularity). These processes are, without any doubts, influenced by the mass media – their contents and global reach are able to shape people’s opinions on selected products all around the world.

Keywords: mainstream, subcultures, cultural industry, media

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1. Introduction

Non-existent boundaries between mainstream and subculture are associated with the fact that mainstream purposefully exploits popular subcultural forms. Subcultures are therefore the ‘living water’ of mainstream and cultural industry as a whole – the source of their ideas and innovations that are later transformed into potentially popular commercial products. By applying these procedures, mainstream binds people together to create dominant culture that bears selected subcultural signs. As a result, these cultural signs naturally lose their specifics and boundaries based on ‘otherness’ and diversity. Mainstream cannot function without subcultures and subcultures cannot exist without mainstream. These groups ‘live at the expense of each other’ – mainstream generates financial profit and subcultures’ profit is related to a variety of opinions. Mainstream is an environment created by people themselves. It integrates all values, beliefs, products, lifestyles or opinions that are popular with the general public and widely accepted. Mainstream products and activities include and ‘unite’ the greatest possible amount of people who are willing to invest their efforts and financial resources to acquire these products and activities and/or to make sure they ‘survive’. Commercialization of subcultures is an established process which cannot be stopped because the dominant society would otherwise lose the access to products and entertainment sources that satisfy intrinsic needs and desires of the people; it is, at least in terms of the nature of contemporary society and culture, unacceptable.

2. Development of mainstream culture

Increased popularity of cultural phenomena such as youth cultures, subcultures, and mainstream as well as general academic interest in related topics and discourse were the issues discussed by British cultural studies in the second half of 20th century, mainly by Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) and Manchester Institute of Popular Culture (MIPC). Whilst the first mentioned institution discussed mainstream as an opposite of subcultures, Manchester Institute of Popular Culture established a new scientific discipline, so called popular culture studies that introduced a new concept of club culture. MIPC’s main fields of interest were related to popular music, clubbing (going to the clubs) and formation of ‘global youth’ that functioned as a substitution for closed subcultures. The most influential authors who dealt with mainstream youth culture were Dick Hebdige (CCCS) and Sarah Thornton and Andy Bennett affiliated with MIPC. Dick Hebdige defines the term ‘dominant mainstream culture’ mostly as a symbol of parental generation [1]; Sarah Thornton [2] and Andy Bennett [3] understand the term also in the context of youth generation. All three authors, however, write about this conflict between generations which manifests itself at inter-generational level; Thornton and Bennett also take into account intra-generational level.

Hebdige's most influential text *Subcultures: The Meaning of Style* established terms such as style and bricolage. Style is a term that defines practices of youth subcultures which include a transformation of meanings based on turning goods into cultural signs. This transformation relies on an active bricolage, i.e. on a comparison of – originally not related – signified objects which are created to produce a new meaning [4]. Basically, it is a process of creating something new by using already existing materials. Hebdige sees style and bricolage as manifestations of subcultural resistance against dominant adult culture.

Sarah Thornton analyzes club culture as an opposite to mainstream by using the concept of 'subcultural capital'. Her book titled *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* defines subcultural capital as a matter of taste (mostly in the context of fashion and music). On the other hand, Thornton does not determine mainstream as a communication space that excludes the youth but rather as a dominance of popular culture which suppresses both authenticity and cultural taste. Andy Bennett reflects on urban club scene and sees it as an opposition against mainstream (popular) music scene. His key text *Subcultures or Neo.tribes? Rethinking the Relationship between Youth, Style and Musical Taste*, discusses the relationships between youth and music style as one of the main actors in the merging fields of mainstream and subcultures.

Generally speaking, mainstream articulates a universal, commonly shared stream of ideas, values, and beliefs which is accepted by the majority of society [5]. Respecting this context, thinking may be understood as a common view that refers to similar concepts and processes including recognition, feelings, consciousness and imagination [6]. Mainstream is, mainly for this reason, seen as a synonym of normality and normalcy, as something typical – the mean, average, formality. The term 'mainstream' is often associated with artworks (mainstream music, literature, fashion and production) [7]. We may conclude that mainstream is common, usual and normal in the broadest sense. It is something familiar to the masses of people, something generally (and publicly) available [8].

The term 'mainstream' is mostly related to the notions of mass and popular culture, i.e. to types of culture typically disseminated by the mass media. Subcultures and underground cultures contradict mainstream [9]. Mainstream is a synonym of conformity which, together with norms, habits and compliance with rules of a specific group function as a tool for integration of individuals who see such a 'membership' in the given group as very important [10]. From these reasons, if we consider the wider scholarly awareness of mainstream, main cultural stream opposes individuality [11]. Douglas Harper's online dictionary even mentions a term 'sheeple' whose meaning is similar to Slovak pejorative expression (human) 'herd'. Such a notion is meant to characterize people who do not stand out from the 'herd', often blindly follow the others and do not try to be original. However, mainstream is a multi-dimensional space that does not position conformity, homogeneity and dominant cultural elements against creativity, heterogeneity and subcultures – it rather combines all these

components. The first combination refers to a space shared between generations, the second synchronizes homogeneity and heterogeneity and the third is related to a parallel fortification of conformity and creativity [12]. Essentially, mainstream is a space which allows the creation of new ideas, conceptions, and stories which are typically based on their older versions in order to be sold repeatedly, increase comfort of the consumers, and offer new experiences. Pyšnáková also defines mainstream as a space that is shared by generations. This way of thinking is related to the presumption that mainstream (as a set of norms, values, and opinions respected by the majority) is preserved within generational transmission, it is allowing us to ensure relative stability and endurance of the society. Mainstream was increasingly getting into connection with popular culture as its synonym throughout the past century. It is necessary to mention the notion of so called post-subcultural perspective that, in order to avoid using the term 'subculture' in the context of bringing people together, works with terms 'club cultures' and 'neo-tribes'. The mainstream youth expresses itself by experimenting with clothes and haircuts and by listening to both popular and alternative music. This kind of culture, unlike subcultures, is relatively compliant with the dominant culture.

3. Mainstream as a basis of popular culture

Various representatives of Manchester Institute of Popular Culture have criticized Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies for not analyzing motivations of youth that has adopted various subcultural roles from either simple forms of entertainment or on a basis of a uncertain desire to "be 'in' or cool for a while". Some authors observe the fact that most teenagers and adolescents who originally used to be (or still are) members of the working class often choose between various subcultural groups, change their cultural identity [13] and generally they are not interested in the long-term membership [14] but rather seek a certain form of game that imitates the long-time affiliation [15]. Steve Redhead, David Muggleton and other representatives of cultural studies see the term 'subculture', defined as the name for groups of young people and their relationships in the context of styles, music genres and identities, as insufficient. These authors thus associate their research problems with the notion of youth club culture which is more suitable for the wide spectrum of specific styles and streams [16]. Sarah Thornton is one of the authors who deal with so called club culture. The club culture is, from this perspective, taste culture based on shared tastes, mostly in the context of music. Thornton differentiates the youth club culture from other cultural forms by taking into account the criterion of authenticity [2, p. 112]. Club culture and art world are, from this point of view, seen as an opposition against mass culture. According to the author, many artists are afraid of so called 'trickle-down effect', of an imitation of higher class' fashion style performed by lower classes. Prices of goods and products related to the given style therefore decrease [17]. Such an effect is periodic since the system is constantly looking for symbols [18] that distinguish higher classes

from lower and for symbols that, other way round, help bind these classes together [19]. Sarah Thornton, however, does not see the real threat in the fashion imitation but rather in popularization of underground subcultures and their transformation into mainstream pop hit parade which eliminates the original authenticity. The notion of club culture implies that various patterns of music consumption are intertwined with the common taste in music. Media are able to popularize the club cultures to such an extent that they eventually turn into commercial articles [20]. Since club cultures often inspire fashion and especially popular music industry, we can encounter many people who, at least outwardly, express elements of a subcultural membership – on the streets, in the clubs or in other public places. Whether these elements include haircuts, clothes or make-up, it is interesting that one style always prevails over the others [21]. Mainstream symbolizes a stream that is based on dynamics and versatile inclination. This fact basically proves the existence of mainstream youth that periodically adopts various elements of subcultures which are, at the moment, the sources of their inspiration or admiration.

Authenticity is thus a way by which club cultures differentiate themselves from the mainstream culture. Sarah Thornton observes this kind of differentiation mostly through music. The author sees the club culture from the viewpoint of variety of music styles – as very varied. The feeling of exclusivity and authenticity, however, makes it unified. Exclusivity is transformed via the presence of DJs who offer an authentic experience right on the spot (a momentary music composition). From the clubbers' perspective this kind of music is always original and does not lose its aura. Walter Benjamin understands 'aura' as a relationship between a feeling and an aesthetic experience [22]. Mainstream creates a network of music CD production, radio stations and their recipients, thus consists of those who do not receive the authenticity of music and experience because they do not listen to it directly in the clubs. The given concept is associated with media construction of the subcultural rebellion [2, p. 137]. Sarah Thornton also takes into consideration the media influence. She is aware of the connection between media and dominant ideology and discusses media as a tool of mainstream, i.e. popular culture. Positive 'medialization' of a certain music style is defined as the end of the subculture – as total incorporation of popular culture into mainstream. These remarks are followed by many discussions on media representation of the issues of mainstream and non-mainstream youth culture. From this point of view, subcultures are nothing but media constructs that are later perceived as 'the right ones' by young people. Applying such a perspective, Thornton addresses another deficiency of subcultural theory, namely the inadequacy of using subcultures as an objective sociological concept.

The creative element of mainstream culture is a tool that enables to adjust structural inequalities encountered by most young people. It is the space for those who are searching for the way of expressing their uniqueness but do not feel the need for opposing the dominant values [23]. Miles believes that young people always have been – to some extent – a part of dominant culture, mostly in

relation with consumption. Instead of being rebels, these people are willing to act in compliance with the dominant establishment. This willingness to adapt and arbitrarily realize one's own meanings strengthens conformity which is the characteristic element of mainstream. "Most young people do not have anything to revolt against. In this context young people are independent in terms of their opinions and at the same time, paradoxically, they are also conformists because they live in the world that increasingly exposes individual experience to surrounding influences and does so more and more homogeneously" [24].

4. Mass and popular culture as synonyms of mainstream

It may seem that the cultural forms in question represent the same range of experiences but the opposite is true. Yes, they have many aspects in common but there always are hints that allow us to use the right term in context of a specific situation. "Mass culture and popular culture are not synonyms," claims Barker [4, p. 113] and explains that, generally speaking, those critics who place emphasis on the production aspect of culture tend to use the term 'mass culture'. Those who point out the processes of cultural consumption prefer the notion of 'popular culture'. Alexander Plencner's text titled *Mass Culture and Pop Culture as Cultural Systems* addresses these issues and determines mass culture and popular culture in the context of culture as a whole. His understanding of mass culture defines the cultural sphere in question as a set of stories, ideas, information, and visions that create content typical for mass communication channels and meant for the mass audiences. Mass culture's origins, according to the author, are related to the processes of urbanization, industrialization and creation of middle classes within the society that communicates mostly through mass media [25]. Popular culture is, however, mostly created by forms of entertainment which are watched, read or attended by masses of people. Plencner claims that popular culture is, comparing to mass culture, a broader category since it is not limited to the mass media production. Its consumers are 'members of mainstream'. One of the most typical aspects of popular culture seems to be the fact that it is the most widespread symbolic culture of our times which offers pleasure and conformity for everyone. Its field of activity involves reflecting on 'everydayness' and influencing human lives. Both mentioned cultures began to form along with the middle classes and, step by step, they have created specific conditions for modern ways of spending free time.

Mass culture has been determined by comparison to earlier cultural forms, e.g. to traditional folk culture that originates from the folk creativity and usually precedes mass media and mass cultural production (or it is not dependent on them). "Original folk culture that expresses itself through folk clothes, habits, songs and dances started to be discovered throughout the whole Europe in 19th century (sometimes for reasons linked to increased nationalism, another time as a part of the cultural movement based on folk crafts and romantic reactions to industrialism), thus at the same time when it quickly vanished due to dynamic social changes." [26]

Folk culture began its formation unwittingly; it used traditional forms, materials, and topics and was usually fully integrated into the everyday life. Critics of mass culture often regret the loss of integrity and simplicity of folk art. The first ‘users’ of mass culture were also members of the new urban working class in the Western Europe and the Northern America. There is no doubt that mass media themselves offered some streams of generally attractive culture and – at the same time – adjusted other cultural streams to the conditions of urban life in order to fill the emptiness created by industrialization. According to McQuail, such critics see these processes only as a cultural loss. Traditional way of life was suppressed by much faster urban life, the amount of social activities increased very quickly. Plencner states that precisely in that era mass media began to function as a helpful tool for social integration since they disseminated information meant for anonymous and collective recipients – the mass [25, p. 188]. The term ‘mass communication’ has been used since late 1930s. The ideas of mass society – along with the first critical conceptions of mass culture – were introduced shortly after the end of The Second World War.

Phenomenon of kitsch began to appear in 19th century, in association with mass culture. The first cultural critic to offer the term’s thorough definition was American author Clement Greenberg who wrote the essay titled *Avant-garde and Kitsch* [27]. The author claims that creation of kitsch assumes the existence of mature and highly developed cultural tradition. Kitsch profits from its discoveries even though it does not bring anything original. It rather offers a spectacle in a form that does not expect the audiences to take personal stances. Greenberg defines the specific aspects of kitsch as efforts to achieve instant emotional affects, fulfil aspirations of universality, and perform exploitation of previously successful characteristics and forms. Zygmunt Bauman has come with an idea that mass culture is caused by mass media. However, he also states that mass media are (and were) just a tool for formation of tendencies that would otherwise result from the increasing homogeneity of nations. The phenomenon of mass culture is, in Bauman’s opinion, just a more universal, standardized culture [28]. The process of standardization of culture is (and really has been) influenced by various aspects of mass communication, mostly by dependence on the market, domination of large corporations and employment of new technologies within the processes of cultural production. Such an attitude to mass culture can be seen as one of those which are quite unbiased. On the other hand, mass culture was widely criticized by Frankfurt School. It involved a group of German intellectuals affiliated with The Institute for Social Research at the Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main, founded in 1923. The authors claim that the formation and development of mass culture are associated with the phenomena of so called cultural industry – mass industrial production of goods meant for consumption during free time. The term ‘cultural industry’ was first mentioned by Theodor W. Adorno in his book titled *Dialectics of Enlightenment* [29]. Adorno stated that film, radio broadcasting, cartoons, jazz music and illustrated magazines were all forms of the cultural industry with anti-enlightening consequences. According to the author, the essential aspect of the

cultural industry was not meant to provide any liberation from social pressures but rather maximization of profit. The cultural industry represented and supported contradictions of enlightenment, liberation and authenticity. Using the cultural industry, the society controls individuals by the products of culture, advertising, mass communication and media. The cultural industry therefore, on the one hand, satisfies the needs of mass man but, on the other hand, it also creates those needs. The key element of the cultural industry is commodity. Commodities are cultural products that aim to generate profit on the market by turning ideas into goods. According to Plencner, Adorno and Horkheimer criticized the cultural industry's tendency to support consumerism and reduce individuals to mass consumers.

Theodor W. Adorno also states that the industrially produced culture is intertwined with advertising. He critically remarks that advertising prevents us from distinguishing between the cultural industry and practical life. Its aesthetic character thus becomes a 'gold leaf' transmitted by advertising and absorbed by the advertised goods. Adorno's arguments claim that works of art are perceived as artistic only intermittently. They become their own "substance" and act as a form of reproduction technique as well as a form of presentation and distribution of something real. Adorno also addresses the issue of specific products. He observes that such products are divided into episodes, adventures, not into acts. Quality content is replaced by sensations and shocking spectacles. The basis of this production strategy lies in weak memory of the consumers and no one is expected to remember anything; the only important thing is the product which is being offered at the moment. Plencner talks about two peaks reached by mass culture during the past century – the first one is related to 1920s and development of film and radio, the second is situated to 1950s and associated with development of television broadcasting. He also offers examples of mass cultural products such as folk novels, popular music, comics, commercial movies, television drama series or cheap reproductions of artworks.

In 1953, cultural critics in the United States of America started to discuss elite and low culture and kitsch. These considerations were deepened by American journalist Dwight MacDonal in his article titled *A Theory of Mass Culture* [30] where he states that mass culture is made of products and goods meant for mass consumption – it abuses the needs of masses to cumulate profit. Another world-renowned author who deals with the issue of mass culture is Italian semiotician Umberto Eco who expresses an opinion that the typical aspect of mass cultural products is homogenization and the fact that, despite its generally negative character, it may offer significant positive effects (e.g. reduction of prejudices related to other nations, races, cultures). The arguments of Canadian philosopher and literary scientist Marshall McLuhan also aim to discuss the issues of mass culture. His (probably) most influential work, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, introduces the term 'mass man' [31]. Mass man is defined as a final product of the whole system of mass culture. Mass culture was forced to the audiences externally and created a kind of 'shared consciousness' inside them. Mass man is a part of the media audiences

that were formed as outcome of the new functions of mass media. This notion also inspired McLuhan to elaborate the concept of 'information society'. Such development tendencies of the media theory result in the need for distinguishing between the terms 'crowd' and 'mass' since mass culture would not be able to function without them. These notions were once seen as synonyms but the emergence of mass communication later lead to their appropriate separation. The basic difference is related to the fact that 'crowd' can be specifically determined in terms of space and time.

Late 1960s brought a whole new approach to mass culture critique that significantly influenced further development of the cultural theory. Previously preferred critical discussions on aesthetic value of the industrial cultural production turned their attention to studying media texts and meanings, subcultures and audience behaviour. Popularity quickly joined the mass character of the industrially produced culture and became another typical aspect of the cultural industry, now called 'show business'. As a result, the theory of mass culture was partly replaced and further developed through the notion of popular culture.

5. Popularity in popular culture

The following text works with the previous arguments and focuses on the modern phenomenon of popular culture by discussing its elements and the fact that this form of culture may be seen as a certain combination of mainstream, subcultures, popularity and people. The outlined field of interest also has to follow the potential which helps many cultures transform into mainstream. The issue of determination of popular culture has been addressed by many philosophers and sociologists.

The term 'popular' is related to the acronym 'pop' that has been used since the second half of 20th century. This abbreviation was originally mentioned in 1956 by artist Richard Hamilton. His collage included the following text: "Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?". Formulation of the term 'pop-art' followed shortly afterwards and was first used by English art critic Lawrence Alloway who stated that the term pop-art referred to artworks that celebrated materialism and consumerism and tended to work with images taken from the mass media, advertising products or goods intended for immediate consumption [32]. Pop-culture is a complex of behaviour elements and experience which may be identified mostly within the sphere of spending free time, especially in case of the societal majority. It is necessary to point out here that the key difference between mass culture and popular culture is associated with popularity. These two cultural forms are not identical because mass culture is directly dependent on the means of mass communication and popular culture also involves many forms of expression that do not have to be produced by the mass media, e.g. slogans on T-shirts, dance moves, fashion trends, haircuts as well as quotations of popular people that have made their way into communication practices of the common people. Plencner states that mass

culture is, actually, just a part of the broader sphere of popular culture [25, p. 202]. Juraj Malíček discusses the issue of differentiating between mass and popular culture from both qualitative and quantitative point of view [33]. He favours the term pop-culture and believes that the synonymic connection with the term mass culture is quite problematic. According to the author, mass culture is related to quantity (mass) while pop-culture is associated with quality. Australian media theorist and pioneering critic of popular culture John Fiske claims that popular culture is not created by the cultural industry but rather by the people [34]. Fiske thus denies the definition of popularity which implies that popular culture serves only the interests of producers and distributors of cultural commodities. The author works with new notions of ‘meanings’ and ‘pleasures’ and sees them as intrinsic qualities of media texts. Any media text is a result of readings and pleasures related to its recipients. Popularity is therefore an extent to which the given form of culture is able to satisfy the desires of its consumers. Renowned sociologist Anthony Giddens defines popular culture as forms of entertainment that are watched, read or attended by hundreds of thousands, even millions of people [35]. Similar definition is offered by Slovak Dictionary of Social Sciences that determines popular culture as cultural sphere that is created with emphasis on the following goals – to be universally understandable and liked by the largest possible range of people. It involves cultural products meant for mass distribution and consumption and its structure is therefore relatively simple [36]. Other definitions of popular culture are included in Dictionary of Media Communication and Dictionary of Cultural Studies which describe popular culture as a complex of actions and experience (or media products leading to achieve them) that are evaluated mostly as trivial, not intellectually challenging, even threatening in the context of cultural taste of the majority. It (popular culture) is not just about messages that are often produced, distributed and consumed through information technologies; it is rather a whole complex of objects and ideas that have become a part of everyday life. Dictionary of Cultural Studies states that the term popular culture, after establishment of elite culture canon, traditionally refers to the cultural forms that do not fit into the mentioned canon and/or to the mass-produced commodity culture of consumer capitalism. Popular culture may be seen as a set of meanings and practices that are employed by ... the audience in the moment of consumption [4, p. 145]. Plecner discusses typical aspects of popular culture. Firstly, he mentions the fact that popular culture is the most widespread symbolic culture of our time; it offers pleasures for everyone, reflects on everyday reality, and influences human lives [25, p. 203].

Popular culture also disseminates various ideas, confirms dominant opinions and stereotypes [37], and encourages formation of new subcultures [38]. Sources of popular culture include the institutions and corporations which produce various cultural materials [39] (music industry as well as film, television and radio companies). These are all parts of the entertainment industry which is also called ‘show business’. At present, one of the mentioned questions and issues still remains open – the unequal approach to popular and elite culture

[40]. The main problems related to popular culture involve its generally low aesthetic quality [41], commercialization and conformity [42]. Moreover, subcultures are no exception here – they used to strongly oppose against mainstream and commercialism only to become a part of mainstream themselves.

Our previous argumentation mentioned definitions of popular culture in the context of mass cultural production. The following part of the text will articulate the issue of popular culture by adopting John Fiske's viewpoint. The author, besides stating that popular culture is, in fact, 'culture of the people', also argues that it is created within communication space which merges the products of cultural industry and everyday life. As Fiske says, the users are not offered popular culture by force, it is created among them. Popular culture is an art of working creatively with materials provided by the system [34, p. 25]. The users re-create these materials in order to produce their own popular culture. Fiske often uses the term 'people'. He further specifies the users of popular culture as consumers and audiences.

Fiske elaborates other relevant terms, e.g. dominant ideology and experience of subordination or helplessness of the majority of users in relation with common characteristics of the largest spectrum of people. The economic needs of producers seem to be identical with the imperatives of social and ideological control that dominate the cultural system. Cultural commodities are therefore tools for centralization, control, 'massification' and commoditization [34, p. 28]. Sticking to this opinion, Fiske addresses the issue of promoting cultural products in a similar manner. He claims that no advertising product is able to imply the full cultural meaning of the advertised product. Popular culture contents circulate in three different forms – as 'primary texts' (original cultural products), 'secondary texts' (advertising, the press, information, reviews and critiques), and 'tertiary' texts (conversation, ways of dressing, housing and shopping, adaptation of dance moves seen in music videos, etc.). Fiske also notes that the pleasure related to contacts between people and products of popular culture is not included in the cultural products themselves but the feeling is expressed in the moment of their use, reception, experiencing. Pleasure associated with popular culture has sensual, even physical nature. The users may experience it as pure physical pleasure, i.e. delight related to either encountering cultural products and entertainment forms or creating their own meanings. Fiske sees these pleasurable experiences as the basis of creating a space of freedom and self-realization which is meant for subjugated social classes.

6. Conclusions

Products of popular culture must reflect on everyday lives of their users – if the users do not 'find themselves' in popular cultural products, these products will not be able to gain the status of popularity. The power of popular culture lies in the numbers of its users who are given a chance to independently construct their own social identities. Popular culture is also a source of

inspiration, an impulse leading to certain transformations of one's own social situation. Both popular culture and mass culture can be seen, if we take into consideration their mass production, as two different understandings of one industrially produced culture. The key difference between them is related to the phenomenon of popularity that cannot be created by employment of – whatever advanced – production technologies. The users always choose the products that will become popular and will serve them as sources of pleasure and fulfilment of their intrinsic and physical needs.

Popular culture thus serves the interests of both its producers and users. On the one hand, it fulfils the economic needs of mass media and producers in the cultural industry. It is quite understandable that the more users buy a specific product or attend a particular event, the more profit the producers gain and the more popular the product is. On the other hand, we have to take into account the users' point of view and their needs. To them, cultural products are 'raw materials' that help generate feelings of pleasure or encourage fulfilment of cultural absence. Popular culture is typical for its ambiguity which is a result of social inequalities in the society. In order to be popular, cultural products have to offer relevant meanings that are suitable for people belonging to various social groups. The more levels of meanings such cultural products and forms of entertainment offer, the more likely they will become popular.

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