

# Bourgeois Culture is a Cadaver, It Cannot Produce Anything New

JUNE 12, 2021

STRUGGLESSESSIONS

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by Cathal

“During the course of the nineteenth century, the bourgeoisie, feeling with varying degrees of alarm how iniquitous and precarious was its power over the masses of the toiling people, tried to vindicate its existence by the philosophy of criticism, positivism, rationalism, pragmatism and other attempts to distort the purely materialist thought emanating from the processes of labour. These attempts revealed, one by one, their powerlessness to ‘explain’ the world, and in the twentieth century we find that the reputed leader of philosophical thought is the idealist Bergson, whose teaching, by the way, is ‘favourable to the Catholic religion.’ Here you have a definite admission of the need for regression. Add to this the present wailings of the bourgeoisie concerning the disastrous portent of the irresistible growth of technique, which has created fantastic riches for the capitalists, and you will obtain a pretty clear idea of the degree of intellectual pauperism to which the bourgeoisie has fallen, and of the necessity of destroying it as a historical relic which, in decay, is contaminating the world with the cadaveric poison of its decomposition. The cause of intellectual impoverishment is always to be found in a refusal to recognize the basic meaning of real phenomena, in an escape from life through fear of it, or through an egotistical craving for quiet, through social indifference created by the sordid and loathsome anarchism of the capitalist state.

“...Bourgeois society, as we see, has completely lost the capacity for invention in art.”

— Maxim Gorky, “Soviet Literature”

### *Introduction*

Liberal society produced by the bourgeoisie underwent degeneration and mutation in the age of imperialism and even before this, almost immediately in fact; it was forced by its own contradictions to attack within itself all that is virtuous or progressive in order to sustain its colossal weight. Marxism broke through the liberal cracks and burst forth in its own right. In the stagnant body of liberalism are trends which still reside within it: anarchism, and today postmodernism—both posing as anti-liberalism, and both preserving what is metaphysical and backward.

Just as imperialist contradictions provoked fascism as its most reactionary wing to annihilate all vestiges of bourgeois democratic rights, imperialist crisis likewise must produce new forms of old ideas which preserve bourgeois ideology's reactionary character while further eliminating its rational kernel. Postmodernism is the main form which this takes today and not enough can be said negatively about it until it is swept into the trash heap forever.

Postmodernism is liberalism attacking itself and the reason for this attack is really to combat Marxism—that is, to combat the scientific, rational, material and dialectical basis of Marxism. Postmodernism and Marxism are antagonistic and irreconcilable.

Anarchism, liberalism's older bastard child, is based on extreme individualism and was never inoculated against the rising spawn postmodernism, and so has been all but completely infected by it. The same is largely true for partial-Marxist trends and revisionism; they cannot withstand the corrosive influence

of bourgeois culture and have fallen to postmodernism, which assimilates itself to whatever thing it infects.

Hence the activist in any given struggle encounters a shifting landscape of dogmatic terminology. The framework for understanding the world is no longer class struggle—the exploiter vs. exploited, the oppressor vs. oppressed—but one that is anti-masses and elitist, the framework of the “franchised vs. disenfranchised” or the “marginalized vs. the maximal,” all of which seek to transform the subject of the revolutionary masses—the vast majority of the world’s people—into a fractional interest, whittled down of all potential and zeroed in on the most minute individual. After all, postmodernism raised its lance against all “totalizing” theory, chief among them Marxism which treats “the history of all hitherto existing society” as it is, as “the history of class struggle.” Postmodernism raises its shield against “authoritarianism” and chiefly among the most inherently authoritarian ideology, Marxism, which stands for “everywhere combined action, the complication of processes dependent upon each other, [which] displaces independent action by individuals.”

## I. The Capacity for Art

Bourgeois society has long lost its capacity to invent art, in the true sense; new art can only be art which serves the proletariat, or in certain conditions the revolutionary peasantry and intellectuals. It can only be revolutionary art which is new, art blooming from rebellion, suppressed and drenched in blood.

This is because bourgeois society has lost its capacity to produce anything new at all; it rots, and hence produces decomposition socially and culturally. It is reactionary all along the line.

It is not coincidental that postmodernism came about as a cultural movement in literature and art, just as it is not at all surprising that it has swept these

fields, emerging from an intellectual and academic pursuit to a populist one on this very terrain.

Bourgeois liberal–democratic society is always at odds with itself: it must preserve the old order of reaction, and at that very moment disguise itself as constantly improving. It does this with reforms as well as with mutations in the cultural sphere. Its concessions are always those which do not significantly harm its mode of production. Postmodernism offers an important cultural lifeline to the bourgeoisie for this very reason: it can now market itself as “inclusive” with “representation” without the risk posed by Marxism. Some reactionaries, unaware of how bourgeois culture operates—and the fact that it cannot develop any higher—use the occasion to confuse people by claiming that these postmodern productions now marketed to the general population are “cultural Marxism” when, in fact, they are anti–Marxist and counter–revolutionary.

One is scarcely able to take even the most modest dip into bourgeois culture without obtaining the stains of postmodernism. All it takes to substantiate this charge is a glimpse at any of the major entertainment corporations and look at what they are making. It is so prevalent in fact, that even those who decry “cultural Marxism” as well as a new generation of self–proclaimed Marxists are tainted by postmodern influence by way of bourgeois cultural indoctrination. Across the political spectrum there is no shortage of identity politics, of superficial and pedantic focus on anything but the masses of workers, etc.

## II. Examining Imperialist Entertainment Monopolies

The imperialist ruling class owns the means of communication, news, and recreational entertainment. After all, the superstructure is produced by and influences the economic base. These points are fairly unobjectionable to Marxists but they are often not comprehended correctly.

This being the case, what follows is that everything from Fox News to Netflix or Youtube has a stake in preserving the dictatorship of the monopoly capitalist over the oppressed and exploited classes, which for the US is mainly the proletarian majority. Hence, they cannot produce anything new or revolutionary; they cannot even produce anything progressive without running a great risk in the propaganda sense. Still, the new world is fighting to be born and bourgeois democracy has to grant “oppositional views” to some extent.

In terms of what is promoted, what is standardized, and what is produced, the ruling class maintains their cultural grip. Liberals rejoice at the “inclusivity” provided to them for entertainment from their imperialist masters. The feeling of “empowerment” sweeps over the “marginalized” and of course there is predictable hostility to this from other reactionaries.

Monopoly media has thus created a plethora of programs which include “non-binary” characters, token transgender characters, and at least one or two gay characters in them. This is most prominent when it comes to entertainment marketed to youth audiences: on Netflix, programs following postmodernist frameworks exemplify this trend with shows such as *Trinkets*, the new *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, the new *Degrassi Junior High*, *Dear White People*, and *13 Reasons Why*. Longer standing monopolies such as HBO cannot help putting their hand to the task too, with programs like *Lovecraft Country*, *Watchmen*, *Euphoria*, and *The Duce*.

Bourgeois monopoly media is replete with notions of “body positivity,” sexual consumer choices, pro-prostitution appeals, identity politics, and other anti-social, indulgent, and libertine notions of the bourgeois “free-spirit.” Stigma instead of exploitation is presented as the leading cause of societal problems, and the blame is placed on the people and not the system itself. This is all rooted in the bourgeois literary tradition which predates the capitalist mode of production. Marketed once as the gentleman thief etc., heroes and villains have both followed the model of exceptional individuals to be envied and imitated by the masses—to hell with the common working men and women.

The masses are treated as nothing but tedious and boring props, their labor and toil is obscured, never heroic.

Monopoly media has no interest at all in social progression, and so it must be understood that their role is to condition society into whatever best suits imperialist production. There are the obvious examples of war-based simulation video games, shows and films to this end like *Call of Duty*, sponsored by the US imperialist Army itself not only as a recruitment mechanism, but for ideological purposes too. In one iteration of the game the slogan “There is no truth, only who you choose to believe!” is promoted, a metaphysical slogan which is totally postmodern. Postmodernism permeates the more obviously conservative projects just as much as it does the so-called left, with *irrationalism* promoted all the way down the line.

When a different audience is needed both for profits and conditioning, monopolies will produce acclaimed “progressive” programs. One of the most glaring examples is the highly rated ABC spinoff *The Connors*. The show came about after the network cancelled *Rosanne* due to Rosanne Barr, who played the main character, publicizing racist comments. ABC made this a marketing victory with *The Connors* which includes near endless appeals to the audience promoting the Democratic Party, “gender inclusivity” and other hallmarks of postmodernism. This is nothing but a contemporary twist on what the program had always been—an effort to appeal to blue collar sensibilities in imperialism’s cultural interests. 80s television was aware of the consumer, middle American and blue collar. Monopoly media-produced entertainment is everything but materialist; their “inclusiveness” commonly extends to period pieces that ignore the history of slavery by giving supporting roles to Black people, casting them into characters that could never have existed; thus sanitizing the bloody history of the US.

Why does the monopoly capitalist create such entertainment? because the ruling class benefits from postmodern ideology being taken up as common sense. Because postmodern ideology divides and cannot unite. It can only seek the most “marginalized” and see that they be included in imperialism more

effectively. It cannot expose the enemy or answer the question “who are our enemies, who are our friends” from a Marxist proletarian viewpoint.

The decrepit and cadaverous bourgeoisie finds new ways to market itself, but it does not produce new art, or art which serves the people. It is clear that the popular consumption of such programming has a political affect on the thinking of the people, and well beyond the college campuses where Deleuze, Fanon, Hooks, Spivak, Foucault, Butler and so on have replaced Marxists, and terms such as “lived experience,” “intersectional,” “oppressed genders,” “hetero-normalcy,” “skin privilege” and “cis” have become common and metaphysical stand-ins for scientific and Marxist analysis, terms wielded against the masses which are maximal and “franchised.” All such concepts do not seek to comprehend differences among the whole—the masses—but seek to *part out* the masses and turn masses against masses, the ideological complement to the most cutting edge counter-insurgency military campaigns promoted in places like Latin America and Asia.

What is more, this terminology has become something like sacred cows, beyond interrogation, where the slightest lack of confidence in it is heresy. A knee-jerk reaction develops which considers the most minor transgression against the dogma to be too “problematic.” All the while, these bourgeois ideological trends pride themselves on whatever is hedonistic, self-indulgent, self-referential, etc. Prostitution, which is the utmost violence against women, gets sanitized as “sex work,” child rapists and those who admit a desire to rape children, the most reviled creature in society, the pedophile, get sanitized as a “minor attracted person.” Identity becomes social currency. It is not enough to observe one’s nationality or ethnicity: groupings and sub-groupings have to be developed. “People of color” then must be organized along a hierarchy with “Black and Indigenous People of Color,” an endless division. The abbreviations get used to describe an individual, even if their ethnicity and nationality is well-known, becoming a ritual of redundancy.

The proletariat as a class finds no appropriate representation or affirmation in such culture; its affirmation comes only in class struggle against the exploiting

parasitic class.

### III. What is New Fights to Emerge

The Great October Socialist Revolution ended the age of bourgeois revolution forever; it ushered in the age of proletarian revolution, and with it came great achievements in literature and art. This includes experimental art with limited appeal to the masses but which pushed the boundaries of art itself before running its course and becoming elitist then disused. It also produced genuinely popular art oriented toward the masses of people. Socialist Realism is so often reviled by the bourgeois critic for this very important feature: its portrayal of common working men and women, their moral, productive, and revolutionary character. All of this is considered boring by the bourgeoisie, but it is incredibly valuable to the march of new society. There are always two basic class viewpoints in contention.

Soviet art broke ground and represented something new, leaving a mark on even the bourgeoisie in terms of documentary film making, with for instance the landmark Kino Pravda series, or the influence of brilliant Soviet designers on modern graphic design. These new forms of proletarian art burst from revolutionary enthusiasm linked to the masses and were financed by the world's first socialist state. In Soviet society, art was considered valuable and artists were not starving or struggling to survive as they do under capitalism. Art was a legitimate profession and a social necessity; artists were employed by the state into collectives with a task and hand in constructing socialism. Socialism as a transitional epoch toward the unalterable goal of communism saw teams of professional artists; like the class they represent, these were to abolish themselves, as Marx pointed out, as in a communist society anyone would be an artist, but none would have art as a profession.

Art was to be no longer frivolous, self-indulgent, or decadent as it is under capitalism, but radical and real. Nothing emerges without struggle, however,

and Soviet art had to contend with bourgeois influence from both the old culture as well as imperialist influence and intrigue. Comrade Stalin remarked that:

“While talking about the future development of Soviet art, literature and music, it must be taken into consideration that it is developing in a condition of unprecedented secret war, a war that has been unleashed upon us and our art, literature and music by the world’s imperialist circles. The job of our own foreign agents in our country is to penetrate Soviet organizations dealing with culture, to capture the editorships of major newspapers and journals, to influence decisively the repertoire of theatres and movies and in the publication of fiction and poetry. To stop by any means possible the publication of revolutionary works that awaken patriotism and lead the Soviet people towards creating communism. They support and publish works where some failures of socialist ideals and communism are preached. They are ecstatic in their support and propaganda of the capitalist method of capitalist production and the bourgeois life style.

“At the same time these agents are asked to popularize in art and literature the feelings of pessimism, decadence and demoralization.

“... *There is no art for art’s sake.* There are no, and cannot be ‘free’ artists, writers, poets, dramatists, directors or journalists, standing above the society. Nobody needs them.”

To avoid risk of misinterpreting the words of Comrade Stalin it must be stressed that while art became a trench taken up by agents of imperialism, the old ideas of the old society continue to assert their influence in culture. We can examine Marx who summed the matter up well:

“Men make their own history but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of

the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up spirits of the past in their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honored disguise and this borrowed language.”

As new art fights to emerge, the bourgeoisie mount their attacks from within and from without. This truth asserted itself most clearly in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China which transcended the old art in the most remarkable way, and, from a firm dialectal materialist understanding Chairman Mao, Comrade Jiang Qing and others guided this effort, based firmly on the law of contradiction.

At the peak of the GPCR, old-ideas, old-customs, and old-habits were attacked by the new. New socialist operas orienting toward the broadest masses were produced and criticism campaigns were launched against the classics. In all of this, great strides were made to promote workers themselves as artists, divisions were broken down, and revolutionary art was produced on a mass scale with collective labor.

Chairman Mao provided the basis for such a massive wave of proletarian art long before the GPCR:

“...our literature and art are first for the workers, the class that leads the revolution. Secondly, they are for the peasants, the most numerous and most steadfast of our allies in the revolution. Thirdly, they are for the armed workers and peasants, namely, the Eighth Route and New Fourth Armies and the other armed units of the people, which are the main forces of the revolutionary war. Fourthly, they are for the labouring masses of the urban petty bourgeoisie and for the petty-bourgeois intellectuals, both of whom are also our allies in the revolution and capable of long-term co-operation with us. These four kinds of people constitute the overwhelming majority of the Chinese nation, the broadest masses of the people.

“...we must take the class stand of the proletariat and not that of the petty bourgeoisie. Today, writers who cling to an individualist, petty-bourgeois stand cannot truly serve the masses of revolutionary workers, peasants and soldiers. Their interest is mainly focused on the small number of petty-bourgeois intellectuals. This is the crucial reason why some of our comrades cannot correctly solve the problem of ‘for whom?’”

It is easy enough to witness how the monopoly capitalist-owned media seeks to distort this history of the great uplifting of the masses with their same old tricks, by focusing on the woes of this or that individual who ran afoul of the revolution through their roguish, bourgeois “free-spirit” or pleasure-seeking. The working masses are obscured as “brainwashed” props of destruction without reason, having mechanical adherence to Mao, etc.

Socialism is that which is new, is that which is revolutionary, and the only class that can lead is the proletariat. The future of all art and culture rests on and depends upon this class. The bourgeoisie will keep serving its same old rotten slop with variations in marketing; they change only their tactics, damned already to history.

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