The Inert Aspect in Cultures and its reflection in the Media

Abstract

Analysing texts originating in mass communication media like books, newspapers and television - mainly humoristic – and certainly such texts that extend over a long period of time, say 50 to 100 years or more, the most enduring elements of culture can become more exposed and apparent in a more accurate fashion. Cultural phenomena that are usually concealed could thus be revealed. These phenomena have been described by Victor Turner as "the brick stones and what is obvious of society."[1]

This type of analysis can enable the narrowing of cultural gaps between nations, cultures and sub-cultures. Moreover, it could enable the bridging of important things that are conceived as separated and greater networking across national and cultural boundaries.

The attempt made here, is to deal with the problem of time perspective in culture research, while also suggesting a technique, or a method, that might help solving – at least to an extent - the problems arising from the lack of understanding the deepest cultural processes.

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I

Jerome K. Jerome,[2] had made the following observation:

> "The worst that can be said against them [*the Germans*], is that they have their failings. They themselves do not know this; they consider themselves perfect, which is foolish of them. They even go so far as to think themselves superior to the Anglo-Saxon: this is incomprehensible. One feels they must be pretending."

In this paragraph from his 1900 book, Jerome K. Jerome might have referred, possibly unnoticeably, to a highly influential yet concealed, cultural component possessed by the individuals within the society he observed. His sharp perception, his sense of humour and the very nature of literature used to expose hidden aspects of cultures, made it possible for his book to be somewhat unique, humorous observational diary of the German people.

Researching human culture tends to lack time perspective. Processes and developments in cultures can only be observed through lengthy studies, as often seen in studies of anthropologists who study simple societies. But even a 40-year study and observation, indeed a life time endeavour, might prove too short when we deal with complex societies. In this case lack of time perspective is much more crucial. Historical, technical, scientific, political and other evolutions and the many arenas, in which complex society operates simultaneously, make comprehensive anthropological observation of such societies an impossible mission.

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[1]   Turner, V. (1977)."Process, system, and symbol: A new anthropological synthesis" [Hebrew], in E. Katz & I. Yanovitzki (Eds.), *Culture, Communication and Leisure in Israel* (pp. 117-144). Tel-Aviv, The Open University (Source: *Deadalus*, 106: 66- 74)

[2]   In his famous *Three Men on the Bummell* - published in 1900; [Hebrew, 1982]. Tel Aviv: Gamir

There is yet another obstacle that hinders the accomplishment of a useful scientific observation and study of complex societies. This springs from the inevitable fact that the researchers are part of thee societies and cultures they study. This situation creates difficulties over the attempts to analyse mainly what was described by Victor Turner (1977) as "the brick stones and what is obvious of society."[3] Turner attempts to shed some light on cultural values that escape their own bearer eyes, possibly because they are so obvious and of daily routine.

It is suggested here, that better understanding of cultures could result from the analysis of texts originated in mass communication media such as literary works (books), newspapers and television – and more particularly, at least in as much as television is concerned, mainly entertainment programmes. The items analysed, pertain to specific one issue and they cover a period of some hundred years, which is by all means a long time. Analysing the examined materials and texts, while paying special attention to humoristic texts, would enable us to see more accurately the most enduring elements of culture. Also, cultural phenomena which are usually concealed would be revealed and come to light.

The approach taken here is interdisciplinary, endeavouring to bring forward theoretical aspects in cultural research, through an interpretation of text. To this end the process and method suggested here are actually employed from the very inception of this project. It must be emphasised that this illustration is not a completer research in itself and is only brought here as an example and theoretical model. Thus, only four sources are analysed here, just to demonstrate the powerful methodology and theoretical perspectives suggested here.

The first source referred to is Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men on a Bummell*, published in 1900, eleven years after he published his most famous work - *Three Men in a Boat, to Say Nothing of the Dog*. The second source is a series of publications taken from Israeli newspapers that brought out, for the first time, excerpts of Adolf Eichmann's notes taken by him while in the Israeli prison in 1961. The third source is an article, originally published in *The New York Times* and also, in Hebrew, in the Israeli leading daily *Ha'Aretz*, on 27.6.2000. This article dealt with a public uproar that arose in Germany following the attempt to ban ownership of assault dogs in that country. The forth source is an excerpt from a "Candid Camera" show that was filmed in Venice, Italy, on 6.7.1999 and was telecasted on Israeli commercial television in 2000.

It should be noted that all four sources have references to Germans or to what could well be determined as facets in the German culture. Also, two of the sources, namely the first and the forth had been made with the intention to entertain readers and viewers.

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II

Many researchers and philosophers have tried, since ancient times, to analyse the nature of cultures and the reason for its development into what it has become. But the more systematic approach to the understanding of culture did not evolve until the 19th Century. Max Weber, for instance, looked at the influence of religion on the development and characteristics of culture. He argued that the Protestant Calvinist ethics motivated those societies that embraced it, to adopt strict regimes of work and rational effort - aimed at the attainment of wealth. The

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[3]   Referred to in f.n. No. 1, p. 1 above.

Protestant religion influenced the formation of values and cultural norms and thus it became a significant determinant in the development and achievements of Northern European Capitalism and in the course of time – also of the North American Capitalism.

Erich Fromm looks at the distinct cultural aspects of different societies by defining what he called "social character." He refers to:

> "… the pattern of the common character of a group (for instance, nation or class) that actively determines the actions and thoughts of its members." [4]

Fromm expands on Freud's concept of personal character and defines a broader concept of "social character," which refers to patterns and characters that are shared by or common to, the group "en mass." In this he follows a Marxist assertion which suggests that the most basic factor in shaping of "social character" is:

> "Life's praxis as determined by the mode of production and the social stratification evolving from it."

From this assertion, Fromm concludes that:

> Society creates social character and social character tends to create and hold ideals and ideologies that suit that society and feed on it. [5]

The other end of this discussion is well represented by Samuel Huntington [6] Huntington expands the scope, pointing at the level of civilisations, rather than at specific nations or isolated societies. In his view, a civilisation would encompass a large number of nations and societies sharing common denominators. This is the highest stage where human cultures differ from one another and according to him it is civilisation that determines people's cultural identity. Huntington argues that civilisation is defined both by objective elements shared by humans - such as language, history, religions, behavioural patterns and traditions - and by their subjective self-identification. [7]

As it were, it seems that there are two contradicting cultural processes that evolve simultaneously in the world. In some parts of the world, post-modern fragmentary processes can be traced. At the same time, traditional societies undergo processes of modernisation which are inspired, possibly even influenced, by of media to areas where they had not been present hitherto. The foundations of the inert processes of culture are exposed also here.

Taking, for instance, the case of India, such fundamental cultural processes might appear, on the face of it, to be "inferior" to such television-inspired changes that can be seen in India when compared to the modernisation processes.

A thorough study by K. Johnson on the impact of television penetration into Indian villages, argues that:

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[4]   E. Fromm (Ed.), *Socialist Humanism an International Symposium* [Hebrew], Tel-Aviv, Sifriat Hapoalim, pp.188-201

[5]   *Ibid.*

[6]   Huntington, S. P. (1993). "The clash of civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs*, Summer, 22-49

[7]   *Ibid.*, pp. 22-49

"The normative structure and parameters of relationships are experiencing a change that would have taken decades, if not centuries, without the presence of television."[8]

On the other hand the model suggested by Stuart Hall (1973) is based on the idea of ideological inter-subjectivity. Hall's ideas were further developed and abstracted by David Morley who, according to Jukka Torronen (2001), suggests:

That the understanding of preferred reading should be developed in a direction where the text would be seen more as a point of intersection for meaning construction than a conveyor belt for one meaning. (p.174)

J. Bobo (1995) argues that at the time of exposure to media generated message – in her case study, a cinema film – the cultural competencies brought by the observer to the act of observing influence the construction of meanings of the text. The background of the observer is thus crucial in the way he or she interprets the text.

In other words, the modernisation undergone by rural Indian under the influence of television is subject to text-interpretation, shaped by the communication and cultural history of the individuals living in the particular villages. That is, common cultural background enables interpretation of the same nature while different cultural background would tend to produce varied interpretation. It stands to reason that unconsciousness cultural components play a role also in interpretation variations. It is also likely that interpretation crystallised by individuals would stem from both their instinctive needs to defend central and important cultural values. Offending such values constitutes a threat to their culture. As already has been indicated above, this might be very frightening, consciously and unconsciously alike, to individuals, as this means chaos.

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Ethnographic definition of culture may include all the possible components. Defining culture in this way is wide, maybe to the point of totality. According to Berger (1969) culture is defined to "the totality of man's products" – both material and non-material. This is based on Taylor (1958) who in 1871 merged the definition of culture with that of civilisation:

Culture or Civilisation, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. (p. 1)

Geertz (1973) incorporated into the definition of culture also such dimensions as the historical depth and the inert intensity. He suggested culture to be:
An historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life. (p. 89)

The importance of Geertz's definition, for the current discussion, stems from its reference to the historical depth and to the inter-generation inertia of culture, as well as its concentration

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[8] Johnson, K. (2001). Media and social change: The modernizing influences of television in rural India. *Media culture & Society*, 23(2): p. 151

on symbols and behaviours originating from thoughts and feelings expressed through symbols.

This complex of definitions suggests that culture is total in as much as it contains everything that is human. Thus, it also deals with all the expressions of human production. But it seems that the process that shapes culture, the way in which generations ensure cultural continuation between one another and within each one is of loop-structured. Berger (1969) thinks that humans reflect their experiences out, from within themselves and onto society. They later refer to this reflection as an independent phenomenon in its own merit, which they then re-reflect into their consciousness. He uses three terms in this context: Externalisation, Objectification and Internalisation. This may suggest that cultural experience creates, and is created by, a closed circuit process, like a loop, within which society is trapped along with all the individuals composing it.

A synthesis between the attitudes of Geertz and Berger might clarify the way in which this cultural magic cycle is created. For Geertz, culture, or in other words human production, is born of thoughts and feelings that are, in turn, expressed or reflected outwards, through symbols which constitute the basis for communications between the individuals that compose this society. But to Berger, these symbols receive independent identity to the extent that they exist in themselves. These values and symbols are assimilated and internalised by the individuals and are recycled in form of thoughts and feelings that are, again, reflected through symbols and so on and so forth. It is the power of this cycle that can possibly explain culture's historical perpetuation, both between generations and within each generation as suggested by Geertz who mentions 'an historically transmitted pattern of meaning' and 'a system of inherited conception' when dealing with this concept. Had it not been for this magic cycle, culture would have hardly been able to "recharge" itself with this inertia that has allowed its transformation from generation to generation for hundreds, maybe thousands of years.

Both Berger and Geertz had looked at yet another aspect that enhances the strength of the inert power of culture. Geertz suggests that culture is not merely a garnish for human existence but rather an important condition to it. Unlike inferior animals that are born with a guidance system required for their individual and social existence, humans are born with a limited ability to respond. Without the guidance of cultural pattern, that is, an organised system of meaningful symbols, human behaviour would be uncontrollable, "a mere chaos of pointless acts and exploding emotions, his experience virtually shapeless" (Geertz, 1973, pp. 45-46). Berger indicates, in this context, that the ultimate fear of humans is not of evil but rather, of chaos. It might be suggested, therefore, that the strength of what has been referred to as the cultural magic cycle, is fed also by the most basic instinctive need of human in culture, whatever the shape and form it might take. (Griswold, 1994, p. 21)

The closed circle may also account for differences between societies' ability to adapt to changes, even such that are essential for their very perpetuation. Victor Turner (1977) deals with it when he looks at culture's adaptability to changes. He asserts that sometimes it would be the homogeneous and crystallised societies that would be rather deficient in their capability to adapt to changes. In fact, he argues that they might be even more prone to it if their crystallisation coincides with continuous stay on the same territory. Turner maintains that individuals in a liminal stage discover the building bricks that make up their hitherto obvious world through play and ritual. Symbols and myths reflecting axioms or principles that would not question or challenge daily order are normally the products of deficient cultures at their liminal stages. Turner (1969) is quite decisive in his assessment:

In such cases, rituals are more work than play and a liminal culture of this type of tends to avoid introspection and become unable to adapt. (p. 111)

To enable individuals to discover building bricks of their own society that might be obvious, instruments of special character must be employed to defy daily routines. It accentuates the difficulty in discovering these units of culture, Particular as these units are likely to constitute at least some of the symbols and products that eventually turn into thoughts and feelings featuring in that closed circle referred to above.

The need to change cultural patterns may be of vital importance since the capacity to adapt and to recover must be wide enough in scope so as "to absorb the result of a change" as indicated by Turner. But the ability to alter cultural patterns of which members of a given culture are unaware is much more demanding a task that requires special processes and conditions. For Turner, these must be ritual processes of the liminal stage, inclined to be amusingly novel, play rather than work. They could be myths and symbols that shake the routine daily experience and criticise it. And they could be also a reservoir of liminal approvals of behaviour which might look dysfunctional or even ridiculous etc. When societies fail to go through this process according to these rules, they lose a great deal of their power to adapt and recover. According to Hazan (1997) who follows Turner (1969) in this, the initiation ritual enables, indeed forces, the apprentice to smash and to desecrate the image of the saint, totem icon, sacred animal, holy place or text.

In the process suggested by Turner, such components that constitute the hidden elements of culture are exposed and treated. But they can only be exposed through play ritual and amusement in the liminal stage. This is not a complete and thorough process whereby subconscious materials become conscious and then bring about a required change through rational analysis. Rather, it is a process that allows the treating of the hidden values only while at the stage of imagination and amusement. The process does not expose individuals to those hidden components through rational consciousness. It allows, however, that they are treated in a manner best described as childish, or instinctive. Once ritual exceeds the boundaries of play and amusement and becomes conscious and routine, the observation process is damaged. This is so because exposure of the hidden components would be impossible under conditions of full awareness.

Looking again at the sentence Jerome wrote of the Germans in 1900: "The worst that can be said against them is that they have their failings. They themselves do not know this." (p.173), we can see how literature or other arts could be relevant to the discussion. Turner's following statement supports this assertion:

If ritual were a mirror reflecting mankind, converting ritual into a variety of arts would make a hall full of magic mirrors. Each of these would then reflect the reflections of the other and each representing not just a simple reverse of daily reality but its systematic magnification and distortion. (pp. 114-115)

Thus, literature, performing arts and their like, are all produced when dismantling the ritual system that, according to Turner, brought about the creation and perfecting of aesthetic media. These aesthetic media really substitute ritual in complex societies and civilisations. In fact, they are supposed to serve the liminal stage which is so essential for the exposure of "the brick stones and what is obvious of society."

In Turner's terms, components of a successful process of adaptation within complex societies that had dismantled their ritual systems should be characterised by elements compatible with amusing and humorous stage or literary genres. He uses such terms as "amusing innovation; reality reversed; play, not work; reservoir of supposedly non-functional or even ridiculous liminal agreements of behaviour" and so on. All these parameters belong in the humorous, amusing or satire genres of literature or performing arts, whose derivatives might be also entertaining or humorous television programmes. Only a crooked mirror - as opposed to the daily and the routine - can cause laughter, as it expresses the ridiculous, the surprise in the amusing news and those sharp observations which pick phenomena from the daily experience. The very fact that they are isolated, taken out of their natural environment and context and embossed, is really enough to cause laughter.

The conclusion from Turner's assertions is that hidden components of culture can be traced through content analysis of that variety of arts, mainly in their amusing and humorous forms or such that might also be expressed in the mass media. Turner, like others, considers this type of analysis is a good and valid instrument. The following qualitative content analysis of the selected four sources endeavours to discover those hidden components or culture units. At the same time, it is an attempt to identify the level of inertia in their existence through time. Jerome wrote:

The German has so long been the soldier of Europe that the military instinct has entered into his blood. (p.168)

True as this statement might be, it is, at the same time, somewhat misleading. The German had become Europe's soldier as early as the Roman era. But the German was selected to this role because he had been a soldier long before that, in the tribe within which he lived and acted.

Jerome thought that the wild spirit of the German subsided and declined to discipline and obedience that did not characterised their ancestral forefathers:

In the placid, docile German to-day, whose only ambition appears to be to pay his taxes, and do what he is told to do by those whom it has pleased Providence to place in authority over him, it is difficult, one must confess, to detect any trace of his wild ancestor, to whom individual liberty was as the breath of his nostrils. (p.165)

Jerome may have missed the contradiction between the image of the "placid, docile German" and the horror that arises from the description of the scale (*Mensur*) duels of the German students of which he wrote just a few pages above. As if there had been in Germany "placid, docile" citizens next to whom there are – totally unrelated to them – bloodthirsty and scar-loving students. He puts his conclusions from the obedience of the Germans in the words of George, his journey companion:

I should write down all I wanted the people to do on a piece of paper, continued George; get a good firm to print off so many copies, have them posted about the towns and villages; and the thing would be done. (p.165)

Chapter 14 of Jerome's book is devoted to the blind German obedience. He suggests that it is the result of the German education that instils within the German people that duty is their

ultimate obligation. However, while other nations would pause to check what might be that duty before binding themselves to it:

The German idea of it would appear to be: blind obedience to everything in buttons. (p.169)

Sixty-one years later, Eichmann, in his notes (Segev, 2000), had written what might seem to support Jerome's analysis.

Was the lack of civil courage, one of the reasons that allowed the participation in all of these things? I was asked this by one of the judges during my trial. It is true indeed. I told him that civil courage was a concept unknown to the German officers. Duty, execution of orders, obedience and loyalty – all of these were part and parcel of the service code, but not civil courage. It is regrettable, I must say

Bertrand Russell's definition of duty (1967) might shed some light on the difference between the ways in which the English culture views this value:

'The concept of duty, from historical point of view, has been a means used by those in power to make others live up to the interests of their masters rather than that of themselves. (pp. 205-206)

Jerome argues that the German ideal of 'blind obedience to everything in buttons' is diametrically opposed to the Anglo-Saxon system. However, he also suggests that:

Both the Anglo-Saxon and the Teutonic are prospering, [therefore] there must be good in both methods. (p.169)

At this point, Jerome brings forward what would turn to be a most important prophecy:

Hitherto, the German has had the blessed fortune to be exceptionally well governed; if this continue, it will go well with him. When his troubles will begin will be when by any chance something goes wrong with the governing machine. But maybe his method has the advantage of producing a continuous supply of good governors; it would certainly seem so. (p.169)

Jerome's concern as to the future of the Germans stems from their total obedience. If they are lucky enough to be led by good leaders, they receive good orders, which they obey, of course. As a result, the German society flourishes. But if things go astray and those who rise to power were to be bad, they would give bad orders. The Germans would still obey to and follow these orders, even if these orders led to disaster.

Years later, Eichmann's assertions in his notes seem to ratify this very notion. Eichmann uses the same type of language when in 1961 he relates his "bad luck":

To achieve supreme security the state leadership utilises obligatory means. But responsibility, including the moral responsibility must be of the leadership. We have been told time and again, orally and in writing: 'Faith in the Fuehrer'. When the country has good leadership those who receive order are lucky.' And equally: 'When the state leadership is bad, one is unlucky. I was unlucky because the then State Supreme Commander had issued the order: exterminate the Jews. (Segev, 2000)

What Jerome wrote in 1900 as a member of one culture who examines another culture, seems to be reaffirmed by Eichmann, a member of that observed second culture. Eichmann, interestingly enough, assume naturally and self-evidently that what has been valid and true for the Germans is equally true for any other nation. The question of whether or not one should obey at all to such horrendous orders escapes him altogether. It is just a matter of luck, to him. If you are lucky, you live in such times that your leaders give good orders for you to follow. If you are unlucky, you live in times of bad leadership and obey, in the same blind manner, bad orders.

Jerome looks at yet another phenomenon, which is also reflected in Eichmann's memoirs, namely, the transferring of the entire responsibility, including its moral aspects to the State leadership alone. That Eichmann wrote his memoirs while in the Israeli prison, waiting to what he could have well estimated his imminent execution might have biased him to an extent. Surely he wanted his book to also be a statement in his defence. Under such circumstances it would only be natural that he had tried to shift responsibility to his superiors. But viewed from Jerome's analysis, Eichmann seems to have expressed cultural contents that were totally immersed within his very being, not as if it had been a mere attempt to escape and evade responsibility. Indeed, according to Jerome, Germans do not have, from birth to death, any responsibility for either themselves or their actions. All the responsibility lies with those who give Germans orders. Jerome observes:

In Germany you take no responsibility upon yourself whatever. Everything is done for you, and done well. You are not supposed to look after yourself; you are not blamed for being incapable of looking after yourself; it is the duty of the German policeman to look after you. That you may be a helpless idiot does not excuse him should anything happen to you. Wherever you are and whatever you are doing you are in his charge, and he takes care of you--good care of you; there is no denying this.

"You get yourself born," says the German Government to the German citizen, "we do the rest. Indoors and out of doors, in sickness and in health, in pleasure and in work, we will tell you what to do, and we will see to it that you do it. Don't you worry yourself about anything". (p.166)

In what can be seen as a prophecy about the rise of National Socialism, albeit most likely he never envisioned or imagined such a phenomenon, Jerom wrote:

In Germany to-day one hears a good deal concerning Socialism, but it is a Socialism that would only be despotism under another name. Individualism makes no appeal to the German voter. (p.165)

99 years later, in an Israeli "candid camera" television programme, recorded in Venice on 6.7.1999, Eli Yatzpan, an Israeli entertainer, assumed the role of a Gondolier. He then invited customers onto the Gondola he stood on, which was tied to the wharf. He tried to make his "customers" wear life vests and diving masks, claiming that the cruise was dangerous. The first couple to board the Gondola was French. The lady refused outright and immediately to put on the life jacket and asked the supposed Gondolier why passengers on other Gondolas did not wear it. He offered the couple diving masks but they said that they did not come there to dive. When he offered them sick bags they refused to stay in the Gondola and the lady told the entertainer that he had frightened them. They then disembarked the Gondola.

The next couple was from Brazil. The lady agreed to put on the life vest offered to her while the man declined. A moment later, however, when the impostor Gondolier moved to the back of the Gondola, the lady removed the life jacket and both she and her companion had put it aside. They both seemed suspicious when the gondolier began to sing and row while the gondola is still tied.

Then came along four girls, from the US and Mexico. The "gondolier" gave them life jackets, diving masks and sick-bags. None of them bothered to wear the vest and once he began to row they indicated to him that the gondola was tied.

The last to embark the gondola was a middle-aged Germans couple. When they handed the life jackets they immediately put them on and strapped them properly. When the entertainer asked them to put the diving devices they did it at once. He demonstrated to them swimming movements and they repeated them after him. He then began to row and sing while the gondola is still tied. Neither made any comment at all.

As it were, only the German couple had obeyed in full to every instruction, regardless of how ridiculous it had been, as opposed to all the others that either argued back or simply ignored the instructions they were given.

It must be noted that the examination of this source was not confined to what was eventually shown to the public but it also included the raw material that was actually taken at the site. No significant change due to editing had been detected.

The blind obedience of the German couple matches what Jerome described 99 years earlier. It is further accentuated in view of how other nationals who entered the Gondola tended to either refuse or ignore the instructions when they considered these instructions unreasonable.

Another text provides further evidence to the same phenomenon. Roger Cohen, in an article published in *The New York Times* and reprinted in *Ha'Aretz* in 2000, wrote about Germany:

Germany is a country of regulations that regulate everything, from the time in which children should be quite to the lace curtains that must be put on certain windows. While many Germans see it as their duty not only to obey the endless rules and regulations but also to enforce them.

Again, resembles to Jerome's observation is striking:

There are many things in Germany that you must not do that are quite easy to do. To any young Englishman yearning to get himself into a scrape, and finding himself hampered in his own country, I would advise a single ticket to Germany; a return, lasting as it does only a month, might prove a waste.

In the Police Guide of the Fatherland he will find set forth a list of the things the doing of which will bring to him interest and excitement. In Germany you must not hang your bed out of window. He might begin with that. By waving his bed out of window he could get into trouble before he had his breakfast. (p.112)

Roger Cohen (2000) looks here at yet another aspect of the German culture. He supports his assertion by what was written, in 1990, by the German author Peter Schneider. According to Schneider, the German ability to feel empathy to the suffering of a dog is infinite.

Cohen also quotes from Stacy Widenman, an American lady who has lived in Germany for 13 years with her German husband and three children. She says about the Germans:

People here are crazy. They will do everything for a dog….

Hundred years earlier Gerome wrote somewhat similar things about the Germans' attitude towards work dogs:

That he is harnessed to the cart for anybody's pleasure but his own it is impossible to believe; and I am confident that the German peasant plans the tiny harness and fashions the little cart purely with the hope of gratifying his dog. In other countries—in Belgium, Holland and France - I have seen these draught dogs ill-treated and over-worked; but in Germany, never. (p.129)

Concluding Remarks

The literary and visual sources that have been studied and analysed here seem to reflect both cultural characteristics and also their level of inertia. Particularly evident are such characteristics that the Germans themselves seem to have been unaware of. This substantiates some of the propositions and arguments brought here. The analysis offered supports the Geertz's definition of culture, mainly the argument pertaining to inert aspect of it. Berger's proposition regarding the three-stage loop-like process of culture seems also to be corroborated. The entertaining - supposed smiling - material, shows that societies reflect, through rituals performed within them, their hidden cultural characteristics. Satirically and humorously these are exposed to the individuals as parts in rituals. Indeed, according to Turner, ritual is transformed, in complex society, into art. Moreover, with the formation of modern mass society, particles of the arts are transformed further, once transmitted through mass media.

The analysis of the German culture and society presumably support Turner's argument that when ritual, in a given society, is more "work" than "play" – such a society would be inclined to avoid looking at itself hence to be more rigid in its habits as well as its other cultural products. (1977, p. 111) Jerome's reference to what he suggests to be lack of sense of humour of the Germans seems to complement Turner. Consider, for example Jerome's remark about the *Mensur*:

The *Mensur* is, in fact, the *reductio ad absurdum* of the duel; and if the Germans themselves cannot see that it is funny, one can only regret their lack of humour. (p.158)

Humour might be one of what Turner referred to as means used, when he attempted a definition of the measures to be employed in the stage of the liminal ritual. These rituals are inclined towards amusing innovation, play rather than work. They question and criticise the daily order, being characterised by play and humour thus also able to express better flexibility, which means also better adaptability to new reality. Applying this to a people devoid of sense of humour, such as described by Jerome, it would be likely to have an inherent tendency to avoid challenging or questioning the daily order, even at its liminal stage. Being so, its behavioural patterns would remain rigid and frozen for a longer time. This

proposition is particularly valid when patterns of rituals have changed, which in the age of mass communication can happen afresh every night on the television screen.

Using mass communication items and literature, mainly humoristic items, covers a long period of time, and deals with one issue, might help to analyze and monitor cultures in a better time perspective. Using humoristic texts might also help to identify concealed and obvious aspects of cultures.

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