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**THE ROLE OF MASS/POPULAR CULTURE AS THE  
REFLECTOR AND CONSTRUCTOR OF AMERICAN  
MAINSTREAM VALUES AND ITS POSSIBLE  
INFLUENCE ON ESTONIA**

**MA thesis**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The present thesis describes value characteristics in terms of which Estonians can be considered more similar to Americans than Europeans (e.g. individualism, work ethic, emphasis on success and achievement, competitiveness, desire to outdo others, consumption to show status). The thesis provides an overview of writings on the topics of American and Estonian values with a focus on the values of the young, tendencies of postmodern popular culture in the globalized world, American influences on popular culture and its spread in Estonia. The findings indicate that historical developments around the time that Estonia regained independence have made Estonians positively-minded towards the United States and more inclined to adopt and adapt precisely American life-styles and ideals. Although with the accession to the European Union, European influences are also visible and talking about Americanization may be an exaggeration, the high rate of usage of the new media among Estonians and the dominance of American popular culture on the media and the new media lead us to think that by everyday exposure to American values Estonians have consciously and unconsciously adopted primarily American ideals. Results of empirical analysis on the origin of movies on Estonian television channels and movie theaters in Tartu conducted as part of the thesis further indicate the prevalence of specifically American popular culture contents in Estonia.

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## INTRODUCTION

The main aim of the present thesis is to combine the disciplines of sociology, media and culture studies in order to find out whether there are value characteristics in terms of which Estonians can be considered more similar to the citizens of the United States (further referred to as Americans) than Europeans. For this purpose the development of American values and their manifestations will be analyzed and contrasted against Estonian ones with a special emphasis on the values of the young. The thesis aims to prove that historical developments during the process of regaining independence when Estonians had a particularly positive attitude towards America as well as the present-day large-scale exposure of Estonians to American values via media (specifically the new media) may be factors behind Estonians' greater inclination to adapt and adopt precisely American ideals and life-styles. In order to find proof for the hypothesis, the works of classic as well as contemporary culture analysts will be used combined with sociological data on values and new media use and empirical findings on the origins and contents of movies shown to Estonian audiences.

During the past centuries Estonia has been occupied by several countries and rules: Estonians acknowledge German legacy in their cultural traditions, are nostalgic for the "good old Swedish times" and still have to come to terms with the changes that Soviet occupation brought along. After regaining independence there has been a lot of talk about Westernization and "catching up" with the West (Lauristin et al. 1997) whereas the West itself cannot be considered a unified entity -- the West across the Atlantic can in many ways be seen as an exceptional continent with inhabitants exhibiting different patterns of actions and values from people in Western Europe. Furthermore, Europe itself should be viewed as at least five different socio-cultural areas: the Scandinavian countries; traditional 'old' Europe consisting of Germany and France, and, with reservations, Great Britain; Central Europe; the Mediterranean countries and the former Soviet bloc countries. For the purpose of the present thesis, comparison with Europe is done having mainly the traditional 'old' European countries in mind (with some admixture of Scandinavia), America here stands for the United States of America and when discussing the values of Americans, those exhibited by the white middle-class Americans as the allegedly largest group of Americans, the mainstream, will be dwelt upon.

Historically, the mainstream values of Americans have evolved due to the separation from the countries of origin in feudal Europe and the negation of many principles that governed traditional 'old' European countries. In addition, geographical peculiarities and Protestant traditions have also shaped the lives of the new settlers. Thus, the mainstream American character is considered to consist of such traits as individualism, effort-optimism (Kluckhohn 1963, Stewart and Bennet 1991), entrepreneurship, self-sufficiency, applauding hard work, cult of success and achievement but as negative consequences of such drives also anxiety, insecurity, violence, loneliness, conspicuous consumption (i.e., consumption to show status), narcissism and hedonism (cf. Lipset 1991, Perry 1949, Potter 1954, Slater 1976, Lasch 1979). As the Americans' pursuit of happiness is interpreted mainly as achieving measurable success and the accumulation of material objects (Potter 1954, Stewart 1986, Lipset 1991), members of the society are in constant struggle to perform up to societal expectations. However, the success of everyone is an utopia. It has, therefore, been pointed out by several authors (see, e.g., Anelauskas 1999, Warren 2007) that the effect of the pursuit is a stark dichotomy between winners and losers in American society.

The manifestations of American influence are frequently regarded as limited to American fast food, soft drinks and jeans, when actually it is the American culture industry that has obtained the magnitude in the world to a point that European countries, for instance, have sensed the need to protect their cultural arena by law from the cultural production emanating from the United States. Although there is a remarkable discourse of Americanization in Western Europe, in the post-socialist countries such discourse is all but lacking. Vogelberg has remarked that if Europe is being Americanized, it happens chiefly through the former Eastern-bloc countries (Vogelberg 1999). It was around the 1990s when Estonians saw the United States as the ultimate symbol of freedom, liberty and other democratic values that were opposed to the Soviet doctrine. Close ties with the United States facilitated by a large Estonian community in America, the legendary radio stations Voice of America and Radio Free Europe, both financed by the US, and the conscious imbibing of only positive info may have created an idealistic picture of the United States. Visual, colorful images, consumer items and cultural production strengthened the vision of America as the 'promised land' of freedom and liberty.

In today's globalized world and after Estonia's accession to the European Union it may be an exaggeration to talk about Americanization, therefore the analysis will confine itself mainly

to the more modest notion of possible American influences. Globalization by means of technological advancements in the form of digitalization has allowed cultural products of developed countries surpass state borders. It is, though, chiefly American cultural production and especially American movie industry which has all but submerged the cultural areas of other countries with its production (Strinati 1995, Kroes 1999). Mintz and Roberts (2010: 2) claim: "Movies are key cultural artifacts that offer a window into American cultural and social history". Similarly, Belton (1996: 1) points out that: "If films and filmmakers produce the culture, they are also produced by it". American movies are the reflectors and constructors of American mainstream values and convey the predominant values also to foreign audiences.

The present Master's thesis builds on the author's Bachelor's thesis where American values were analyzed as one of the possible causes of excessive violence in that society. The question of American influence has also interested other students of the University of Tartu -- for example Taavi Ilp's (2006) Bachelor's thesis focused on the attitudes of students towards the United States, including its cultural production, and Kristiina Kuslapuu's (2009) research Master's thesis concentrated on the impact of American *versus* European values on time-use. The present thesis can be differentiated from the aforementioned works by a focus on popular culture and the new media as possible facilitators of the spread of American values. Although the greatest changes in the life-styles and ideals of Estonians took place around the transition period and since the new millennium European influences are also evident, the present topic is worth analysis as, at least on an impressionistic level, American influences are still dominant in Estonia.

The first part of the thesis discusses the characteristic traits most often associated with Americans. The following chapters provide an overview of attitudes towards popular culture and deal with the prevalence of American cultural production with American movie having pride of place. In order to find out in which respects Estonians have been more inclined to adopt (though also adapt) cultural pattern and values prevalent in the United States rather than in Western Europe, the historical developments will be shed light upon and an overview of research done in the field of Estonian values will be provided, with a focus on the values of the young in the postmodern digital age. The empirical part of the thesis sets out to outline the origin of movies on Estonian television and movie theaters and point out American values present in America's best rated movies. The conclusion sums up the findings on Estonian and

American values, the scope of American cultural production in the postmodern digital era, the manifestation of American mainstream values in American popular culture and notes the role of American popular culture as the embodiment of American values as well as its impact on Estonia.



# **1. DEFINING VALUES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE AMERICAN CHARACTER**

Human beings have always been driven by the urge to know and understand how the natural laws of the world operate and how to subject them to human control in order to improve human living conditions. The most complicated among the laws of nature seem to be those that operate on people themselves. Even understanding the basic drives and desires which make humankind exceptional does not allow us to make generalizations about peoples inhabiting different countries, let alone continents. Different sets of values and attitudes formed due to a co-existence of a variety of socio-cultural, geographical and economic factors influence behavior and therefore people historically originating from the same continent, in the present case mainly Europe, having moved across the Atlantic, may exhibit patterns of thinking and action significantly different from those prevalent in their original “habitat”. In order to find out whether the values and cultural traditions of one of the world’s leading countries, the United States, have had any impact on the values and culture of other countries and Estonia in particular, an analysis of the values of Americans should first be provided.

## **1.1 Human Values**

The nature of human beings is unimaginably diverse, yet there has been an ongoing attempt to find common denominators in order to understand the reasons behind the variability in thinking and acting patterns of people from different regions. Human beings are not indifferent to their surroundings and fellow people, they react to the changes in the environment and the actions of other members of the group. Finding out the principles which cause certain reactions and raising awareness about the peculiarities of people living in other countries is relevant for establishing a democratic order in a society where the natural order, at least if one adopts the Hobbesian view (Hobbes 1651/1996: chapter 13), would otherwise be the war of “every man against every man”.

Historically, finding out and cultivating the underlying principles behind behavior, i.e., human values, was a matter for the church and related to morality. Debats and Bartelds (1996: 47) suggest that the scientific study of values could be related especially to the domains of psychology and sociology. Psychologists looked at the preferences of individuals and

considered values to be the 'modality of selective orientation', whereas sociologists concentrated on the social aspect of values and found their research subjects in norms, customs, manners and ideologies (Van Deth & Scarbrough 1998: 22). By now, the concept of 'value' has entered most other fields of study as well.

Providing an all-encompassing definition for the concept of 'value' which would satisfy researchers in different fields is extremely challenging. Van Deth and Scarborough (1998: 23) comment on a research in the course of which around 180 different definitions were found in 4000 publications which is a clear sign of the variety of nuances in this concept. Among the widely cited definitions suitable in the context of sociology and cultural studies, those by Kluckhohn (1951) and Rokeach (1979) could be singled out. Indeed, the formulation by Kluckhohn (1951: 395) is classic: "a value is a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection of available modes, means and ends of action" (qtd in Van Deth & Scarbrough 1998: 27). In this definition the key word is "desire". A similar notion is shared by Rokeach (1979: 48) who goes so far as to quote Kluckhohn's desirability aspect in his definition, adding that "individual values are socially shared /.../ conceptions that are the learned resultants of external and internal forces acting upon a person". Thus, people are influenced by their surroundings and, conversely, react to the environment based on their values, according to the preferences on the top of their abstract list of importance. It should be added that people's ideas about what is desirable may change in different situations.

What is desired establishes people's attitudes or "cognitive and affective orientations toward specific objects or situations" (Connor & Becker 1979: 72). Behavior is seen as a result of the operation of both values and attitudes (ibid.). Humans are expected to act in accordance with the established norms and regulations in a society and form their values based on the generally accepted ideas of the world in a particular society: "our judgments of what *should be* are always related to our judgments of what *is*" (Williams 1979: 16). Societal influence may manifest itself not so much in the existence or non-existence of some values but in changes in their hierarchy (ibid.17). In case a member of a society finds in the course of conscious or sub-conscious self-assessment that there is a discrepancy between the generally desired values and those that the self possesses, he or she is likely to re-order what he or she has personally valued towards what is generally thought highly of.

Americans have been considered an exceptional nation by foreigners (the first and most prominent among them Tocqueville (1835/1969), to whom the very term “American exceptionalism” can be traced back) as well as Americans, or more exactly USeans, themselves, to a degree that countries have taken the United States as a role model and the USeans themselves sometimes seem to believe that it is their values and lifestyles that other nations should adopt. Though every nation has peculiarities that differentiate it to a degree from other nations, in the case of the United States these characteristics have become especially widely known and central. Lipset (1991: 16) suggests that it is the history of a country that is the cultivator of values which in turn influence the future of the nation. In order to understand the American character the historical developments in the United States should be focused on.

## **1.2 The American Dream**

The United States, formed as a separate country only towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, is a relatively new country compared to European monarchies. According to Hartz’s (1964/1991) theory it can be seen as a fragment of Europe which started its own existence in a new land. The wish to rip itself apart from the institutions and traditions of the countries of origin could be seen as the underlying principle behind many of the laws and regulations adopted by the United States as well as reasons behind the actions of its people. Consequently, Americans do not define themselves in terms of historical continuity but by committing to a specifically American ideology and beliefs which oppose the values prevalent in post-feudal societies in Europe. Perry (1949: 36) remarks that “Americanism consists not of what Americans believe to be true, but rather of what they believe *in*”. A Swede or a German cannot be un-Swedish or un-German but a person can be un-American if he or she does not share the American values (Lipset 1991: 19). Most central to the ideology is the American Dream or belief that every person can achieve success by hard work, giving rise to such clichés as “rags to riches” and “self-made man”, to mention but a few. Adhering to the same values and pursuing the American Dream is the basis of the Americans’ identity.

The principles that establish the Americans’ reason of existence or the American creed could be found in four main ideas on the basis of which the American values have formed -- antistatism, populism, egalitarianism and individualism (Lipset 1991: 26). The first concept,

antistatism is closely related to the beginning of the US history and the first settlers. America was viewed as the land of goodness, the land of liberty and the land of plenty (Pierson 1961: 183). Settling the Frontier areas favored especially the courageous, adventurous, entrepreneurial and curious type of people. The Pioneers, who came for the riches that the vast land presumably offered, did not want any strong central control on how they would use what they grew on their lands or how they would manage the exchange of goods. With the United States' second constitution Americans set up a system of checks and balances on the executive and the two Houses of Congress that makes it one of the rare elected national governments that is as limited in its powers. Also, polls indicate that Americans support a divided government and a weak state (Lipset 1991: 21). Americans prefer to cast away any remnant of the central control characteristic of monarchical systems their ancestors experienced in Europe in favor of the power to decide themselves over their well-being.

In addition to opting for as little state or rather, federal, control as possible Americans believe that the will of the people should dominate the elites. Lipset (1991: 30) suggests that populism, being yet another component of the American creed, is exercised by the opportunity of people to participate in the law-making process by voting on referenda. For instance, one American citizen counted a total of 61 questions he had to vote about in one day (ibid. 33).

Egalitarianism was divided by Tocqueville into equality of respect and equality of opportunity (summarized in Lipset 1991: 24). As Americans have always adhered to the myth of their society being a classless one, they insist on everyone deserving equality of respect regardless of their profession or income, i.e. Americans do not have to give overt deference to their betters. Equality of opportunity stands for the belief that every person is capable of managing well in life and being successful as long as he or she is willing to make an effort. When the first settlers arrived on the new continent, they were faced with a vast area of free land available for everybody. Thus, America was seen as a "land of plenty". It was thought that everyone is the creator of their own destiny because hard work would supposedly always guarantee success. In order to find a place in the American society and be respected, one has to work hard. Americans believe in human ability to be progressive and consider it their duty to be successful (Stewart & Bennet 1991: 114). Inherited wealth in America does not grant respect and social status that one would probably get more easily in a traditional European post-feudal country such as Great Britain. As wealth obtained through inheritance does not

count, an American has to work constantly to achieve something, which leads to valorizing *doing*:

Its [the American life's] most distinctive feature is a demand for the kind of *activity* which results in accomplishments that are measurable by standards conceived to be external to the acting individual. The aspect of self-judgement or judgement of others, which relates to the nature of *activity*, is based mainly on measurable accomplishments achieved by acting upon persons, things or situations. What does the individual do? What can he or will he accomplish? These are almost always the primary questions in the American scale of appraisal of person. (Kluckhohn 1963:17)

The Protestant belief in hard work entails reward in this and the afterlife. The American ethos with its center on equality of opportunities for everyone to rise on the social ladder via hard work and the ideal of a “self-made man” could be seen as the embodiment of the American Dream. This myth is ingrained in the minds of Americans even though everyday life often disproves it.

The last component of the American creed, according to Lipset, is individualism, often considered the most distinctively American feature. Perry claims that if one had to describe America in one word, it would have to be individualism (1949/1992: 39). For Americans, individualism does not mean “the effect of retreat from the world” or “the cult of solitude” (ibid.). In this sense individuality equals with singularity but Perry argues that Americans are very gregarious and sociable and thus their individualism is a collective individualism. A true characterization of American individualism could be found in the following sentences: “We believe in the dignity, indeed the sacredness of the individual. Anything that would violate our right to think for ourselves, judge for ourselves, make our own decisions, live our lives as we see fit, is not only morally wrong, it is sacrilegious” (Bellah et al. 1985: 142). The Americans’ pursuit of individualism is controversial as they desire autonomy but life for them has meaning only in the context of community, their idea of equal rights is combined with inequality of reward, etc. (ibid.: 150). The reason for such ambivalence lies in the fact that although Americans feel the need for other people they prefer not to acknowledge it lest they lose their independence altogether (ibid. 151). They see their private selves inaccessible to others and describe others as depersonalized categories (Stewart & Bennet 1991: 104). Individualism in the social sphere is manifested in loose and superficial relationships. Americans do not often make close relationships in the sense of sharing all the aspects of life and always being there for one another. The “keep smiling” and superficial politeness are often a public mask as one never knows when an acquaintance could be useful in the future (see, e.g. Stivers 1994, 1999).

It can be concluded from this that cooperation and social relationships are employed for achieving one's personal aims.

Retaining relationships mainly on a superficial level and engaging rather in making acquaintances may be a wise survival technique in the American society. Americans seem to be always on the move and tend to view all change in positive terms as a sign of progress. Pierson (1962/1992: 185) claims that much in the American character can be described by the M-factor where M stands for movement, migration and mobility -- all connected to literally moving. Not allowing people or places too much into one's heart makes it easier to leave when there is an opportunity to better one's living conditions in some other location.

The American creed of antistatism, populism, egalitarianism and individualism has enforced the belief of everyone being in charge of their fate and the creator of their own happiness. In the world's leading democracy where there is allegedly no fixed class system everyone is expected to follow the American Dream and be successful. The need to live up to the ideals has raised achievement to the status of a cult in America. After all, being successful and consequently wealthy seems to add also sacredness to a person especially as according to the Puritan (particularly the Calvinist) thinking that wealth is a sign of God's grace and thus a wealthy and successful person is also virtuous.

### **1.3 American Myths *versus* American Reality**

Several authors (cf., e.g., Chomsky 1994, Anelauskas 1999, Rifkin 2004, Warren 2007) have taken up a critical view on the American values, claiming that the success of someone tends to come at the expense of others and thus the American ideals could be called a myth when viewing the conditions of the majority of citizens. Based on official data and everyday experiences in the United States the Lithuanian author Valdas Anelauskas (1999) claims throughout his work "Discovering America As It Is" that the American Dream may be feasible for a small minority of the nation whereas the majority of people live on the verge of poverty due to the unjust capitalist system which favors the rich getting richer and poor getting poorer. Hence the title of his first chapter "The Best System the Moneyed Can Buy". Anelauskas suggests that only a small social class benefits from the economic liberal market system: economic mobility of low-wage workers to higher-paid positions is lower than in other

wealthy economies, lack of health insurance is rising<sup>1</sup>, in terms of the fairness of socio-economic system the United States rank at the bottom compared to other big industrialized countries, stating that: “This American Dream is for the lucky few and is a nightmare for the many” (1999: pp. 36-59). For Anelauskas, the most accurate adjective to describe the capitalist system prevalent in America would be “unjust”.

Comparative data from the 1960s until the time Anelauskas’s book was first published in 1999 seems to support his claims that in the country which excessively declares itself to be middle-class, most people could be classified as “nearly poor”. The official poverty line was established already in 1960s on the basis of an estimation of how much an average person would need to spend on certain items – thirty years later the costs had risen but the government retained the same poverty line (ibid. 62). Even in such circumstances the number of people officially regarded living in poverty was more than thirty-five million and the actual numbers were estimated to be higher (ibid.). Anelauskas (1999: 76) adds: “These days, not only the so-called working poor, but actually a vast majority of all the working people in the United States are only a paycheck or two away from the threat of destitution”. People in the States seem to work hard, in case of families the one working parent model seems largely to have been replaced by a model of two working parents but Americans are still increasingly indebted.

While Anelauskas can be regarded as one of the harshest critics of America – and considered unfair by many Americans, including those liberally inclined, many of his claims are supported also by Elizabeth Warren<sup>2</sup>, who has presented charts on US government data on the budget of an average American family consisting of two parents and two children. The comparative data from 1970 until 2005 reveal that instead of saving as they used to do in the 70s, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans are living on credit (Warren 2007). The especially remarkable aspect, though, is that according to the data, money spent on clothes, car, food and appliances had dropped significantly, which led Warren to ask how in the light of such figures Americans can still afford massive shopping. The answer lies mainly in the fact that Americans no longer buy clothing for its original price and shop for cheap items during

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<sup>1</sup> According to a sarcastic remark by Warren (2007), for the lucky who can afford hospital services the policy of the hospitals at present consists in the principle ‘send them home quicker and sicker’.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Warren is the chair of the Congressional Oversight Panel since 2008 providing a critical check on the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

discount periods, the maintenance and repairing of a car has become cheaper, people keep the same car for a longer period than they used to and seem to spend less on food – these aspects influence the decrease in the total expenditure in dollars (Warren 2007). Considering the reduction in expenditure one would expect American families with two working parents to be extremely well-off and not massively indebted. However, Warren's (2007) research in this matter reveals that since the 1970s five categories of costs have emerged: rise in the mortgage payment, health insurance cost, expenditure on cars as a family with two people working needs usually two cars, childcare (a new expenditure since the 70s when a stay-home-mom could take care of children) and higher taxes. These extra costs cause the salary of two working parents to be insufficient for covering all the expenditures.

In the light of the above mentioned findings it is more than surprising that Americans are willing to acknowledge the existences of social classes in their country only when it comes to discussing the middle-class or a comfortably well-off majority between the allegedly small segments of the ultimately rich and completely poor. The idealization is best portrayed in the results of polls as eighty to ninety per cent of the respondents claim to belong to the middle-class which means that also families near the poverty line constantly overestimate their condition (Anelauskas 1999: 76). With the reality of a decreasing middle-class in favor of the nearly poor Anelauskas proposes that the ideal of a middle-class has even exceeded the limit to which it could be called a myth – so starkly clashing is the reality (ibid.). Valorization of equality, the land of all opportunities and a classless society seem to be inherent in the American society even if everyday life clashes significantly with the self-picture.

Although the cult of achievement is ingrained in the minds of Americans, it is obvious that the success of everybody is impossible. The ideal that everyone is supposed to follow, coupled with the reality of hard work for those who are lucky enough to have a job and with a fear of illnesses and accidents as the numbers of uninsured people in the States are significant<sup>3</sup>, is rather stressful.

Achievement-orientation creates stress, often negative stress. It therefore comes as no surprise that several authors, Lipset (1991) and Riesman (1950/1992), to name but a few, have characterized Americans as essentially anxious people. Individualism, competitiveness and

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted, though, that health care reforms proposed during the US President Barack Obama's administration are visioned to provide health care to 95% of citizens.



superficial relationships have led Riesman et al. (1950) to title their analysis on Americans “The Lonely Crowd” and Slater (1970/1992) to name his book “The Pursuit of Loneliness”. Ultimately, the clash of the ideal of success and the consequences of the pursuit of success on the minds of Americans creates a society where people tend to be labeled winners and losers<sup>4</sup>. Winners in this case are people who are successful career-wise, make money and are popular, losers seem to be the unemployed or those working in low-paid jobs without a prospect of advancing in one’s career, living a solitary life and not having a large network of friends. Vogelberg (2001:1607) remarks that real life cases show how losers do not only live a poorer life but, through suffering from unconscious guilt for their failure, become immoral and violent. American values may turn out to be a positive incentive for self-realization for some people and for others the source of guilt, misery, and depression.

Already the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius stated poverty to be the mother of crime. The American Dream of everyone being able to work themselves from “rags to riches” and the belief in poverty deriving from unwillingness to work (if not from lack of grace of God) is an incentive for some to pursue the ultimate goal of success, while for many others the inability to perform as expected by society may lead to a greater inclination for opting for violence in order to achieve one’s goals. Over 400 000 Americans have been murdered from 1977 to 1999 which is seven times more than the number of American casualties in the Vietnam War; in 1993 forty-two per cent of New Yorkers claimed to have been victims of a crime; more and more crimes have been committed by a “nameless, faceless stranger” instead of a family member which was the tendency in the past and Americans themselves admit crime being the ultimate problem in the States (Anelauskas 1999: pp. 229-234). Ultimately, owning a firearm at home is a reality for Americans and the debate whether the right to carry firearms is an incentive for committing a crime or a means of self-defense is ongoing.

The most powerful means of propagating the largely utopian American Dream is the mass media in the States. Anelauskas (1999: 374) brings out that 90% of American radio and TV stations, newspapers, magazines, book publishers and major movie studios is controlled by only 20 corporations. Consequently, the power over the provision of information is in the

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<sup>4</sup> While in Europe the emphasis has been on effort rather than victory (cf. founder of the International Olympic Committee, Pierre de Coubertin, stating at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that it is participation that is most important rather than victory), Americans concentrate on a successful end-result (cf. American football coach Vince Lombardi arguing on the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: “Winning is not everything. Winning is the only thing”) (Vogelberg 2010).

hands of a tiny elite. The capitalist socio-economic system and the media corporations working in favor of the minority have led Anelauskas to conclude the following:

By perpetuating the myth of affluence, the media encourage Americans to feel that they, as individuals, have failed, rather than that this society has failed them. This in turn, paradoxically, serves to bolster patriotism, as individuals are soothed by the notion that, despite their individual failure, at least they are Americans, citizens of the country which is “Number One” – bigger, better, richer, more democratic and even more just – than other countries the world over. /.../ Americans lead the world in positive expressions about their country. (Anelauskas 1999: 376)

The strong sense of patriotism and pride over being a member of the exceptional nation is also noted by Rifkin (2004). Americans’ extremely high self-esteem compared to that of people from European countries has led culture critics such as Lasch (1979/1992) and Postman (1985/2006) to conclude that Americans as a nation exhibit traits characteristic of a narcissistic personality. Being told from the early age on that a person can achieve anything he or she wants, deserves to be happy and should value himself or herself with parents more than often affording their progeny a variety of material goods has left American younger generations increasingly with a very flattering self-portrait. Rifkin (2004: 37, 43) summarizes several surveys according to which 55% of the American youth believed they will be rich in the future, 76% between the ages of 18 and 29 were of the opinion that nowadays Americans are not likely to toil as hard as they used to in order to achieve success, and in the year 2000 a quarter of respondents stated violence to be an acceptable means for achieving one’s goals. The 330 billion dollar American advertizing industry declares via different media and in a variety of forms that everyone has the right to be happy, enjoy life, get what he or she wants fast and with little effort. Hence perhaps the extreme numbers of indebted people in America who live beyond their means but crave even further for the lifestyle that is advertised.

American values seem to be largely defined through a negation of the values which were eminent in Europe at the time the first settlers headed for the American continent. All components of the American creed are in the service of individual achievement as the main aim of every American – antistatism rejects strong central control, populism denies the rule of an elite, individualism propagates everyone’s right to make their own decisions and egalitarianism stands for everyone’s opportunity to rise socially and economically making the individual the sole determiner of his/her success or, for that matter, failure. By holding on to these values everybody should be viewed equal and independent, irrespective of their background and other ascriptive considerations, but every individual is also bound to achieve

and bears sole responsibility for his or her failure. It has been widely stated that the American Dream describes the conditions of a tiny segment of Americans and the capitalist system seems to favor the rich getting richer and the poor never being able to upgrade their status – hard work barely holds them on the verge of poverty line. The myth is though helped to be kept alive through constant media coverage of the ones who have achieved the American Dream and through portrayal of the American values as the desirable.

## **2. MASS VERSUS POPULAR CULTURE – HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE CONCEPTS**

The concepts of 'mass culture' and 'popular culture' have often been used to denote the same phenomenon – the production of cultural artifacts for wide national or even global audiences and at the end of the 20th century especially related to cultural production in the United States. Historically, the concepts have evolved from slightly different phenomena and carry different connotations. The present chapter attempts to describe the reasons behind the appearance of the two notions and explain the nuances of meaning.

### **2.1 Mass Culture**

Accounting for the differences and overlaps in the current use of the concepts of 'mass culture' and 'popular culture' requires returning to their origins. Several Internet dictionaries (TheFreeDictionary, Dictionary.com, etc.) explain the term 'mass culture' as "the culture that is widely disseminated via the mass media". This definition, though, seems to be rather superficial, leaving the notions of 'mass' and 'culture' unexplained. Zassourski (1991), quoting the Dictionary of Aesthetics, refers to the Latin origins whereby 'mass' comes from the Latin word *massa* denoting a lump or a piece and 'culture' from Latin *cultura* meaning 'tillage', 'cultivation', 'upbringing' and 'development'. The Latin-English dictionary, however, provides 'mass' and 'bulk' as equivalents of the Latin *massa* (LATdict). Blumer (1939, qtd by McQuail 2000: 361) was the first to view mass as different from the crowd or the public as "a new form of collectivity made possible by the condition of modern societies".

During different eras and regimes the socio-political concept of 'mass' has carried mainly negative connotations, referring to totalitarian systems such as fascism and communism according to the ideologies of which the mass of individuals was viewed as an impersonal, easily-manipulated crowd. McQuail (2000: 498) offers a definition that coincides with the pejorative connotation: "a very large but amorphous set of individuals that engage in similar behavior, under external influence, and are viewed by their would-be manipulators as having little or no separate identity, forms of organization or power, autonomy, integrity or self-determination". The pejorative connotation of the phrase 'mass culture' derives from Marxist standpoints whereby the working classes should struggle to seize power over the ruling

bourgeois minority, collectivism was applauded and private ownership scrutinized. McQuail (2000: 498) explains Marxist thoughts to be relevant to media theory as media was seen a means for overthrowing the ruling classes because the 19<sup>th</sup> century mass media was controlled by the dominant class.

Providing an all-encompassing definition of the concept of culture, however, has puzzled theorists for ages since it has entered the field of anthropology and from then on, other branches of the Humanities. Hall (1996: 154), who has looked at the historical development of the concept and brought out several definitions of culture since the word was first coined in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, suggests that culture encompasses “a set of practices by which meanings are produced and exchanged within a group”. Fiske (1989/2005: 1) expresses a similar view by stating that culture is “the constant process of producing meanings of and from our social experience”. In the context of media theories and for the purpose of the present thesis a somewhat narrower definition of the term could be borrowed from McQuail (2000: 494), according to whom “it [culture] has a primary reference to the symbolic artefacts produced by media industries, but it also has a wider reference to customs, practices and meanings associated with the mass communication process (production and reception)”. In contemporary times culture produced by media industries for wide audiences is generally referred to as ‘popular culture’.

## **2.2 Popular Culture**

The use of the phrase ‘mass culture’ which is most often associated with the negative image of ‘mass’ as an easily controllable audience has given place to its more modern counterpart ‘popular culture’. McQuail (2000: 43) observes that the term ‘mass culture’ is rather dated as it carries the connotation of the preferences of the uneducated ‘lower classes’ in the society who are incapable of appreciating the so called ‘high culture’. The alternative phrase ‘popular culture’ simply suggests the preferred cultural experience of many or most people (ibid.). Using the earlier term imposes a hierarchy of ‘cultural taste’.

In order to understand today’s popular culture the history of its formation and sources of origin should be dwelt upon. The interest in the study of people as a group first started with J.G. Herder, who, at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, opposed the interests of common people as a group to those of the learned men (Waine 2007: 50). The 19<sup>th</sup> century could be characterized

in terms of heightened interest in folklore to save the oral traditions in the rural areas (ibid.). The term 'popular culture' itself appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a concept related to the lack of education of the common people. The phrase 'popular culture', taken to refer to culture for mass consumption, particularly produced by the US, gained ground after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War (with the abbreviation 'pop culture' arising to widespread use in the 1960s). Several authors (Browne 1972/1994, Strinati 1992/2003) avoid giving any specific definition of 'popular culture', with Hebdige (1988: 47) stating that a neutral explanation as "a set of generally available artefacts: movies, records, clothes, TV programs, modes of transport, etc'" will have to do.

Much of the discussion over popular culture has been accompanied by the juxtaposition of high *versus* low culture, viewing people either as victims in the communication process or as knowledgeable consumers. The representatives of the Frankfurt School saw people as easily manipulated. Shils (1957) suggests, somewhat dismissively, that "the very jaundiced Frankfurt School view was not only anti-capitalist but also anti-American and mainly reflected the first impact of modern mass media on a group of displaced European intellectuals" (Shils summarized in McQuail 2000: 96). In the recent decades more and more authors have been stepping up for the defense of popular culture by revealing its positive effects. However, today, the echos of the earlier fears are still present.

Storey (1997/2006: 4) in his introduction to the comprehensive reader *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* proposes several definitions of popular culture. The quantitative definition is based on the assumption that to be popular means to be liked by many, which without further specification seems to remain too superficial. The second definition is based on the dichotomy between high and low culture -- as soon as it is decided what constitutes high culture, the rest could be considered popular culture. According to Gramsci's (2006) concept of hegemony (Gramsci summarized by Storey 1997/2006: 8) popular culture, here with a positive connotation, could in a way be seen as an "exchange and negotiation" or "ideological struggle" between the resistance group and dominant group in society. Finally, mass production could be viewed as the main criterion when considering certain phenomena popular culture (ibid. 5). John Fiske (1989/2005) remarks that a handling of the concept 'popular culture' that concentrates solely on the mass production side of items potentially categorized as popular culture is inadequate. Fiske (1989/2005: 21) has combined the notion

of interaction to Storey's (1997/2006) first definition of popular culture to add the production aspect: "Popular culture is not consumption, it is culture – the active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures within a social system: culture, however industrialized, can never be adequately described in terms of the buying and selling of commodities". Being a strong opponent of a theory whereby culture could be imposed on people from outside or the consumers of popular culture considered as a homogenous and undemanding mass he declares that the audience of popular culture should be considered as a heterogeneous group with everyone having their own characteristics that affect the reception and production of culture.

The idea of culture consumers as, on the one hand, victims who, on the other, are nevertheless able to derive their own meanings out of texts was advocated somewhat earlier by John Stuart Hall (1980/2005), who found reception of cultural products to be highly dependent on the social background of people and the sole factor of being mediated to make reception of content different from the way intended by the producers. The influential ideas of Stuart Hall about the transmission process have evolved from Antonio Gramsci's further development of the Marxist concept of hegemony. According to Gramsci's (1971) principles, hegemony constitutes a collection of ideas and beliefs according to which the ideas of the dominant group instead of those of the sub-groups are prevalent "by virtue of an unquestioned consensus" (Gramsci qtd in McQuail 2000: 97). The contribution of Stuart Hall and other theorists forming the Birmingham School of Cultural Theory stands in the suggestion that one should go beyond the supposition that texts are pregnant with ideology and explain "how this ideology might be 'read' by its audience" (McQuail 2000: 98). Asserting that the receivers of messages have specific socio-cultural backgrounds due to which the one-on-one absorption of intended ideas may be altered led to the hope that ideologies cannot simply be implanted in people.

In the present day the term 'mass culture' with the negative connotation is usually avoided in favor of the phrase 'popular culture' with its abbreviation 'pop culture' denoting to the versatile cultural artifacts produced in enormous quantities and distributed via a variety of media. Popular culture is not something fixed but changes over time and place (McQuail 2000: 114). It is an interaction between the folkloric element (as before industrialization folklore was the only culture) and the commercial element which enables the folkloric element

to spread via numerous media. However, whether the consumers of popular culture should be viewed as victims of production companies or as conscious individuals adopting and adapting aspects of transmitted culture that they find most suitable for their needs has been the subject of an ongoing debate ever since mass production became possible and accessible. In the following, both terms will be used, with 'mass culture' carrying a more negative connotation.



### **3. TENDENCIES OF POPULAR CULTURE IN THE POSTMODERN PERIOD**

The wide spread of the latest technological developments and changes concurrent with the rise of information and network society have led scholars to consider the trends prevalent since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century on to be postmodernism, i.e. something following the modern period. Postmodernism can be viewed as a negation of the traditions in art and culture dominant during the modern period. The third chapter concentrates on the characteristics of popular culture in the postmodern era.

#### **3.1 Postmodernism**

Although the naming of eras is often problematic as the adjectives ‘modern’ and ‘new’ have been used throughout the centuries to denote anything innovative, the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is viewed as moving towards postmodernism. According to Terry Eagleton (1995: para 12) “postmodernism has many sources -- modernism proper, so-called postindustrialism /.../ the recrudescence of the cultural avant garde, the penetration of cultural life by the commodity form /.../ the exhaustion of certain classical bourgeois ideologies, and so on”. McQuail (2000: 114-115, 501) claims that culture in the postmodern period is volatile, illogical, hedonistic, individualistic, playful, nostalgic, searching for novelty, invention, momentary enjoyment, inconsistency and involving more than one sense. Another distinctive feature of popular culture in the postmodern period is distortion of reality as prevalence of advertizing and computer-generated simulations cause fiction, images and fashion to become what Baudrillard called “hyperreal” (Walters and Kop 2009: 282). The real world cannot measure up to its portrayal by the media and remains a pale shadow next to the overpowering images. The main means that help to facilitate postmodern values are television and the new media due to their technological possibilities and the capacity to involve the visual, aural and with the rise of 4D movies also tactile senses.

McQuail summarizes the concept of postmodernism as follows:

The appeal of the postmodern concept is based on its helping to link many convincing perceptions of tendencies in the media (including new media) /.../. It also seems useful as a word to connect diverse social changes (for instance the fragmentation of the class structure, decline in the political ideology and globalization). But apart from that it has little substance on its own, no analytic

purchase to speak of and no intrinsic fixed meaning. Put like this it sound like a caricature itself".  
(McQuail 2000: 115-116)

Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century cultural productions are viewed and analyzed frequently in terms of their accordance or non-accordance with the postmodern character. The following is an overview of the tendencies characteristic of media messages in postmodern societies.

### **3.1.1 Intertextuality of Media Messages**

Postmodern culture could be viewed as pregnant with intertextuality and hypertextuality, to use a more contemporary term. The first to use the concept of 'intertextuality' was Julia Kristeva in the 1960s. Kristeva supplemented Bakhtin's theories and defined intertextuality as designating several texts within a text: "Intertextuality accesses the semiotic, that trans-verbal reality of the psyche from which all meanings emerge" (2002: 9). In this sense intertextuality can be seen as the multiple possibilities of reading a text differently from the intended meaning and expected impact of the producers. Nowadays the meaning of intertextuality has been extended to mark a variety of phenomena, among them a tendency of cross-referencing between different forms of media e.g. the same content being transmitted via television and radio. When writing about television Fiske (1987: 124) has brought out what he calls 'third level of intertextuality' consisting of the viewers' responses, written or oral, to what has been seen on television and thus providing valuable data for studying the audience.

The concept of 'hypertextuality' was introduced by the French literary theorist Gérard Genette denoting "any relationship uniting a text B /.../ to an earlier text A" (1982/1997: 5). The movie industry has exploited the possibility of referring to other movies to the fullest especially in the comedy genre. An example of hypertextuality in movies could be the four American box office movies in the "Scary Movie" sequel with the first one having been released in the year 2000 and the fifth being released in the nearest future. The sequel is built up on parodizing other popular movies. Many other similar attempts during the past five years to base the "youth comedy" plot mainly on other popular movies have received very negative reviews by the critics as is the case with "Disaster Movie" (a movie with a prophetic title), "Meet the Spartans", "Date Movie", "Epic Movie", etc.

The same technique has widely been used in the American animated movies. The animated comedy sequel "Shrek" (the first of the four movies won an Academy Award in the category

of the Best Animated Feature in 2001) is full of references to other animated fairy-tales as well as folk traditions, and has the most popular performers appearing on the soundtrack. Another box-office animated comedy sequel of three movies (so far), “The Ice Age”, successfully employs the same technique of constant cross-referencing to other popular culture items. Both animated movies have several thematic video games and short movies to complement the sequels, with “Shrek” even having been transformed into a musical. In general, the first movies in a sequel are remembered as the most interesting due to the original plot and the novelty of characters, while with the use of the same main lines *ad nauseam* in the sequel the following movies tend to remain pale in comparison with the first movie.

Thus, while both inter- and hypertextuality, as well as their efflorescence in the postmodern period, have often been seen as positive phenomena, they contain the potential of being abused and fostering mental laziness both in text creators and receivers.

### **3.1.2 Polysemy**

Next to the phenomenon of intertextuality, media messages in the postmodern period are also polysemantic, to use the term coined by Voloshinov (1973). According to Voloshinov it is possible to understand messages in different ways and the audience has several possibilities of interpretation depending on their socio-cultural background. The producers may intend to convey certain views and ideas but the final absorbing and making of meanings depends on the characteristics of the audience (summarized by Siibak 2005: 11). Nowadays, his ideas are shared by many, among them, Hall (1980/2005) and Fiske (1987) who came to the same conclusions when discussing the overall reception of popular culture.

Siibak (2005) has brought out the views of several recognized scholars on the production and reception of text with a special focus on the role of the audience in this process. In her Master’s thesis she states that the idea of media content being decided by the producers but interpreted in their own manner by the receivers is supported by Fiske (1987/1998) Barthes (2002) and Lotman (1999), the latter claiming that the prerequisite for a text to start talking is a co-speaker (2005: 12). Siibak, however, emphasizes that Umberto Eco’s (1984) views are also appropriate when remarking that the producers of messages still have to bear in mind what Eco calls a “model reader” (ibid.). Eco writes:

to make his text communicative, the author has to assume that the ensemble of codes he relies upon is the same as that shared by his possible reader. The author has thus to foresee a model of the

possible reader /.../ supposedly able to deal interpretatively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them. (Eco 1984: 7)

Umberto Eco, however, remains strongly supportive of the claim that despite the aims of the producers of texts, even if they project a model reader, the possibility of a variety of readings still remains, depending on the members of the audience. The polysemantic nature of texts could be one of the reasons of the wide spread of contents, formerly considered ‘low’ culture, among large audiences as people can interpret and adapt every production according to their own needs.

### **3.2 Commodification of American Culture in the Postmodern Period**

Gitlin (1989) believes postmodernism to be a phenomenon characteristic precisely of North America, conveying best the features of American culture (summarized in McQuail 2000: 115). The postmodern definition of popular culture rejects the difference between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, which could be applauded by many due to the end of the elitist attitudes towards some types of cultural products, but may also be viewed as negative, with cultural products doomed to commercialization (Storey 2006: 9). The term ‘commodification’ itself originates in Marxist thought and in terms of media studies could be characterized by applied to all media messages and also to the audience as a commodity or product that can be sold (McQuail 2000: 492). Cultural products therefore face a threat of losing their uniqueness and complexity as there is a temptation to be most appealing to as wide audiences as possible in the media market and therefore produce contents which would be easily understood by the majority.

The process of commercialization often carries a negative connotation. Already in 1926 the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga observed after his trip to America the American Dream being commercialized, “linking a fictitious world /.../ where every dream would come true -- to goods sold in the market” (qtd by Kroes 1999: para. 8). Kroes is nostalgic when describing that all Europeans had a vision of America on the basis of images transmitted through the media but admits that currently these ‘imagined Americas’ have been commodified (ibid.). Such brands as Coca-Cola and McDonald’s are often considered the utmost symbols of this envisioned country and through consuming the products people can supposedly engulf or devour a piece of the American Dream. Ritzer (1998: 15) derives from Baudrillard’s train of thought in *The Consumer Society* that commodification of culture enabled art to be produced

and sold similarly to a pair of jeans or a McDonald's hamburger. This way the distinction between high and low culture gets blurred which in essence is a postmodern phenomenon (ibid.).

Kroes (1999), though, voices a positive standpoint according to which it is simplistic to talk about the one-on-one transmission of American values and its simple imbibing by the audience. He explains:

First, international repertoires become national, in the sense that they are given a particular twist in conversations, acquiring their new meanings only in particular national and linguistic settings. Second, commercial messages stop being commercial. A **decommodification** takes place in the sense that the point of the conversation is no longer a piece of merchandise or a specific economic transaction. In this ironic recycling of our commercial *culture* we become its masters rather than its slaves. (Kroes 1999: para. 27)

Examples from Estonian society to support his claims are not too complicated to draw which would express how something American is adopted through adaption, for instance adapting loanwords (calling a laptop 'läpakas'); the rhythm and blues music style has been adopted and adapted by Estonian performers with lyrics portraying issues important for Estonian youth and jeans are worn because they are comfortable or by choosing a particular style to express belonging to some group in society. Hence Kroes's observation: "In this allegedly "American Century", then, Americanization should be seen as the story of an American cultural language traveling and of other people acquiring that language. What they actually said with it is a different story altogether (1999: para. 33)". American cultural production is easily available and obtainable but, again, the question whether people act according to the messages they receive as "cultural dopes" (a term coined by Garfinkel 1967/2003) or are capable of critical analysis remains a topic of discussions with most probably no unanimous answer which could be generalized to describe all audiences.

Due to technological developments which facilitate the creation of numerous new cultural objects, such phenomena as intertextuality and polysemy of media messages, lack of distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture and commodification of cultural products could be considered characteristic features of postmodernism.

## **4. SPREADING POPULAR CULTURE IN THE GLOBALIZED WORLD**

The availability of innumerable cultural products, either for a symbolic fee or for completely free, in which the development of the computer and the Internet has a significant role, has made it possible to form a globally connected society. The present chapter will concentrate on the characteristics of the new media compared to those of the traditional media, the role of the new media in the wide spread of popular culture and will attempt to explain why the term ‘information age’ has come to characterize the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **4.1. The New Media**

When it comes to cultural production, technological advancements especially in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have changed the limitations of time and place. The national traditions and culture of one country can be transmitted internationally to wide audiences around the world, a phenomenon that Morley and Robins (1995: 1) have called “‘deterritorialization’ of audiovisual production”. The content could be stored for consumption at any given moment by means of easily accessible and obtainable gadgets making us all “armchair anthropologists”, as Morley and Robins remark (ibid.: 7). In search for larger market shares production companies are aiming for international audiences to be able to transmit their contents globally.

Developments related to computers have a particular role in the interconnected world people face today. McCann (2006) notes that the decades between the 1950s and 1980s could be viewed as “the era of mass computing”. McQuail (2000: 118) explains the new technology of digitalization to be a “process by which all texts (symbolic meaning in all encoded and recorded forms) can be reduced to a binary code and can share the same process of production, distribution and storage”. Among other developments originating in the US, the Internet or a network of networks allowing computer connections all over the world, emerged in the 1960s creating unimaginable possibilities of transmitting and receiving data and thus undermining the reason of existence of the media prevalent during the past decades.

With the dawn of computing and invention of innovative possibilities of communication, concepts such as ‘the Internet Age’, ‘Information Society’, ‘Information Age’ and ‘Information Culture’ emerged. Understanding what is meant by the phrase ‘the new media’ enables a further insight into these notions. It could be assumed that the new media constitutes

the media related to digitalization and computing like the Internet, World Wide Web, DVD, CD-ROM and computer games. Manovich (2002: 5), however, suggests that by such a limited handling of the topic we are neglecting the production aspect of the new media considering only the functions of distribution and exhibition. He considers the question where to draw the line: whether data compiled in computer but then printed on paper qualifies as the new media, whether photos saved on CD-ROM and later viewed on the computer can be regarded as the new media, while the same does not apply to the same photos printed out (ibid.) Whatever the solution, it cannot be denied that the innumerable technological possibilities in the field of the new media have transformed previous understandings of the functions of different mediums and created possibilities of engagement and participation.

## **4.2 Characteristics of Traditional Media and the New Media**

In order to compare the ‘traditional media’ and the ‘new media’, McQuail’s (2000) characteristics of the mass media institution are appropriate. The mass media institution is concerned with producing and distributing contents, operates in the public sphere, it is relatively free economically, politically and culturally but formally powerless and participation in it is voluntary (McQuail 2000: 15). The new media, however, seems not to share most of the above-mentioned characteristics as in addition to production and distribution it has enormous relevance as a processor, exchanger and storer. Furthermore, it is also used for private communication and there is difference in the degree of professional or bureaucratic organization of operations (McQuail 2000: 118).

McQuail proposes four broader traits to characterize different functional forms of the new media: interpersonal communication media (mobile phones, e-mails), interactive play media (video games), information search media (Internet/WWW as data source) and collective participatory media (Internet for computer-mediated relationships) (2000: 127). The central features of all the aforementioned categories are interactivity, social presence, autonomy, playfulness and privacy (127-128). In other words, “they [the new media] are media which are both integrated and interactive and also use digital code at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries” (Van Dijk 1991/2006: 9).

While the earlier forms of media allowed largely only one-way transmission of information – from the sender to the receiver – the computer era could be most of all characterized by

changing of earlier communication directions as they enable two-way communication (cf. the title of McCann's essay "Dawn of the Participation Age"). McCann (2006: para. 14) observes today's youth to be less interested in what could be considered traditional mass culture media such as newspapers and television and to turn towards products that enable participation. Van Dijk (1991/2006: 39) predicts that "It is the growth of interactive relations that has the greatest consequences for the structures of present and future society". The widespread popularity of blogging, the possibility for everyone to comment on articles or posts in different forms of social media on the Internet and in numerous forums enables self-expression for anyone with an Internet connection and, according to a general belief, has a potential for changing the value systems prevalent in the society<sup>5</sup>.

Thus, the attractive assumptions of only one medium bringing about significant social and cultural changes should still be handled cautiously as Cook (1997: 18) puts it in his essay titled "The Gutenberg Myth":

Such changes are not *caused* by the appearance of a single gadget; they are *constituted* in multiple, mutually influencing technological and social innovations /.../ A new model of the structure of technological revolution must /.../ be able to embrace the deeply held values that inform our cultures and underlie the choices we make about the direction our technologies ought to take.

Kalmus (2010-2) also warned the audience from technological determinism, from suggesting that it is the development of technology that will lead to the progress of the society. The editors of the collection *New Media: a Critical Introduction* observe a number of tendencies in society such as the shift to post-modernity, globalization and post-industrial information age in the case of which the new media are seen both "as the cause and effect" (Dovey et al. 2003/2008: 10-11). The invention of the computer and the possibility of connecting computers all over the world cannot be considered as the one and only aspect that will revolutionize the society but has to be viewed in the light of possible other developments and shifts concurrent with but independent from this technological novelty.

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<sup>5</sup> This kind of optimism about the power of new technologies to change society through the opportunity for self-expression, has, however, been contested already by Fromm, who pointed out that mere voicing of one's opinions, even among like-minded people, does not actually empower anybody or automatically lead to profound changes in society.



### **4.3 Dawn of the Information Age**

The notions on ‘information society’ and ‘network society’ have come into use due to the changes in society during the past five decades. The former originates in Japan but in relation to sociology it was first used by Bell in 1973 and referred to the shift from an agricultural and manufacturing society to information-based society (McQuail 2000: 121). Still, there is no single definition or agreement on the definition of ‘information society’. Usually it is explained in terms of the changes in economic and social life that technological achievements in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have brought about (ibid. 410).

Looking at the society consisting of roads, electricity cables, water pipes, gas lines, telephone wires, cable TV and the World Wide Web, Van Dijk (1991/2006: 20) came up with the concept of ‘network society’. Mass society is differentiated from network society as the former could be characterized by the preference of face-to-face interaction rather than mediated communication and a limited number of media for transmitting information compared to the numerous media networks that are used in network society. People as units forming the network society can opt for horizontal communication with other people outside their traditional groups like family, friends, community, etc. (van Dijk 1991/2006: 34-36). Another advocate of the concept of ‘network society’, Castells (2001: para 2), defines it as “a society where the key social structures and activities are organized around electronically processed information networks /.../ It's about social networks which process and manage information and are using micro-electronic based technologies.” Both the social aspect and the technological one are key factors of the computer-centered era in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **4.4 Spreading Popular Culture via the New Media**

As different forms of the new media devices are available and obtainable for enormous audiences, culture industries have taken full use of the latest technological developments to cover even larger markets. Morley and Robins (1995: 11) suggest that the primary aim of audiovisual corporations being profit, every possibility is used for turning from national cultural spaces to the global ones and abiding by the international consumer culture principles as: “[T]he new media order is set to become a global order”. The production of media corporations can now reach the largest audiences ever but being appealing to as many as

possible often requires the content to be standardized and homogenized. It is especially the American movie industry that has successfully forced its way to the world market including on a large scale the European one receiving a lot of criticism for the simplistic content and promotion of questionable values to which the most common explanation from the producers' side is that they produce what the audiences ask for. Regarding the revenues and viewer numbers, the production of the movies in different new media forms and the sale of movie-related toys, clothes and other consumer items, American movies can be considered literally popular culture.

On the one hand, production companies have as different mediums as ever available for marketing their contents and thereby also their values. On the other, the audience can also use the new media for reacting to cultural production and the concurrent transmission of values coming from abroad and from local producers. The variety of new mediums for transmitting ideas has in the recent decades somewhat reversed earlier suggestions of media corporations controlling vast audiences. The possibility of participation of almost every individual in creating new media contents and modifying the existing ones is one of the most significant aspects of the computer age and network society. The increasing popularity of the participatory forms of media shows the potential for the new media becoming influential as a reflector and constructor of societal thinking and values.

## 5. AMERICAN INFLUENCES ON POPULAR CULTURE

The possibility to produce and broadcast via the new media, without being bound by a particular place or time, enables faster, more effective and varied transmission of media texts. As the emergence of popular culture has been related precisely to America, there seems to be adequate cause to talk about a possible American influence on popular culture - a topic which has caused fears on behalf of other countries as to the preservation of their national, indigenous culture and values. The fifth chapter will consider briefly the products which have traditionally been viewed as signs of American influence, – dwelling more thoroughly on aspects which have enabled American cultural production to cross international borders – the connotations of the term ‘Americanization’ and whether there is any reason to talk about the Americanization of popular culture.

### 5.1 What is Americanization?

In 2004 one of the most famous German bands, Rammstein, released their hit single *Amerika* which sky-rocketed to the top positions of music charts. The lyrics of the song portray an ironic picture of the world domination of the United States and American culture: *Wenn getanzt wird, will ich führen /.../ Die Freiheit spielt auf allen Geigen, Musik kommt aus dem Weissen Haus, Und vor Paris steht Mickey Mouse. We're all living in Amerika....(When there's dancing I want to lead /.../ Freedom is playing on all violins, Music is coming from the White House, and Mickey Mouse is standing in front of Paris, We're all living in America....).* The lyrics are supported by a video where African tribal members are portrayed happily eating pizza made in the US, a representative of Islamic culture is taking off his Nike trainers before starting to pray, Asian monks are joyfully eating burger and drinking Coke, which all symbolize the wide scope of American cultural products in the world. The tendency of specifically American icons conquering global markets has been also noted by increasingly more scholars since the end of the two World Wars.

When talking about possible American influences on other countries and their cultures, the wide spread of the chain diner McDonald's, the beverage brand Coca-Cola and denim jeans brands such as Levi's, Lee and Wrangler are often mentioned as the most notable signs of USean products abroad. McDonald's is one of the biggest global fast food restaurants, the Coca-Cola Company and Pepsico are the largest carbonated soft drink producers and jeans are

considered the very embodiment of the American character. Taavi Ilp (2006) in his Bachelor's thesis found that nearly every fourth university student mentioned McDonald's when asked about three things they associate with the US. Surprisingly, only 4% mentioned the US leading soft drink Coca-Cola. The last tendency could be related to the fact that Coca-Cola has never gained significant popularity with Estonian consumers and the company decided to buy an Estonian soft drink brand popular in the Baltics 'Linnuse kali' in 2001, to save itself from bankruptcy here. In 2009, the Coca-Cola Company decided to close their factory in Estonia and move it to Latvia (Teeveere 2009).

In other countries the wide spread and domination of American products mentioned above has resulted in such terms as *Cocacolonization* and *McDonaldization* which, particularly in the light of the news on a McDonald's chain restaurant to be opened right below the French source of national pride – the Louvre Museum – seems an appropriate coinage ("Displeasure..." 2009). An art historian working in the Louvre has called it "the pinnacle of exhaustive consumerism" (ibid), which corresponds to the official data according to which France is the biggest market for McDonalds' outside the US (Steinberger 2009). Kroes (1999) remarks that for the French, Coca-Cola embodies American cultural imperialism. It is especially the French who have taken steps in order to protect their indigenous heritage, ranging from coining their own words to avoid Americanisms to trying to ban the Hollywood movie *Jurassic Park* (1993) from being released in France. Drawing parallels between American influence and a few consumer items, though, remains too superficial – a more thorough analysis on the impact of the culture of the US on other nations is needed.

The influence of one country on another may be the consequence of physical proximity or invasion as well as cultural intrusion. McQuail (2000: 493) has suggested the term 'cultural imperialism' to be related specifically to the USA and to denote to the predominance of one country's media industry over that of another, usually in a less developed country, which may lead to the indigenous culture to adopt aspects of the dominant culture and itself gradually fade away. He admits that due to the flourishing of audiovisual production in the United States, "transnational content is sometimes considered as culturally North American" (ibid. 112).

Indeed, for many authors, the concept of cultural imperialism has given way to another notion, namely globalization, to mark the tendency of media production, transmission and

reception not being bound by one country only (McQuail 2000: 223,496). This new and more positive attitude towards the influence of the media of specific countries emphasizes, as was the case with the substitution of the term 'popular culture' for 'mass culture', again the role of the receivers in making meaning of the transmitted content (ibid.). People in the developed as well as developing countries are part of a 'global village', a term originally coined by McLuhan (1962/2002: 31), and live in a society no longer limited by state borders when it comes to media messages.

The three main conditions facilitating the international flow of media contents originating in a specific country are according to McQuail (2000: 239) "the free market in media products; /.../ political freedom and freedom of speech; the technologies that can offer fast, capacious and low-cost channels of transmission across borders and large distances". All of these conditions are fulfilled by the US. As early as 1977, Tunstall wrote a study with a characteristic title *The Media Are American* (McQuail 2000: 232). The term 'Americanization' has been used by scholars to mark the resultant extensive influence of the United States on other countries. Kroes (1999: para 7) is writing about Americanization in a relatively neutral manner as of a "configuration of ways and means that Americans use for expressing their collective sense of themselves - their Americanness". Strinati (1995: 46) goes on to describe this phenomenon as 'pervasive and elusive' at the same time. Blair (1997: 53) starts his essay with an observation of "an inexorable intrusion of American cultural artefacts into domains formerly reserved for indigenous products and styles" in which the attitude-revealing word is 'intrusion'.

There is a consensus on the US having influenced the political, economic and cultural aspects of countries across the Atlantic but as to the extent of the impact and attitude towards the influence there remain opposing standpoints. Marling (2007: para 3) discusses the question precisely *what* is American about globalization as the parallel between the two notions is drawn instantly by Europeans and Americans themselves. He suggests that in fact "the English language is not spoken more than it used to be and people do not eat every day in American fast food diners" (ibid. para 5). Marling (2007: para 4) looks at the features that could be considered culturally American and suggests that some aspects related to globalization such as urbanization, faster pace of life, improved sanitary conditions and communication revolution may not have solely American origins. According to him American impact could be searched

from the logistics behind globalization, namely the way life is organized due to the use of container carriages, franchise principles, ATM-s, magnetic cards and bar codes – all USean in origin (ibid). He concludes that “the American cast of mind is logistical in essence” (ibid). Such aspects of life may often remain without attention by a wider public as people as a rule do not question the underlying principles behind the everyday, “normal” functioning of society. Having this in mind it would be too strong a statement that the world is still increasingly being Americanized. However, Schiller proposes that even if in other fields the US is losing its position as a superpower, the impact it has on the ‘media-cultural arena’ is relatively intact (2001/2006: 304). In terms of media culture the trends of producing and transmitting media contents will still be influenced by principles established by the American companies.

## **5.2 Why Was American Popular Culture Able to Flourish?**

Strinati (1995: 76) insists that American media and popular culture have obtained a significant importance in the world, with Kroes (1999: para 4) supporting the claim by listing American movies, photography, the press, radio and television to convey precisely American messages: “Especially in our century America has become ever more present in the minds of non-Americans, as a point of reference, a yardstick, a counterpoint”. McKay (1997: 14) believes that “Europeans understand and consume America as a grand narrative – of freedom, of Dream, of violence, even of obesity – yet they construct that grand narrative from fragments, mis-moments”. Kroes (1999) suggests that every person who has experienced some aspects of the American culture, regardless of having visited the country, could be seen as Americanized: “[w]e have acquired a set of cultural codes that allow us to understand American cultural products, to appreciate them, to consume them *as if we were Americans*” (McKay 1997:14). Often the consumers of American popular culture have not been to the United States themselves and draw their ideas about the country and its people on the basis of the cultural images disseminated.

It could be argued that technological developments originating in the United States were an important factor behind its cultural products reaching the opposite coast of the Atlantic. The United States has often been equated to modernity and newness. According to McKay (1997:16): “[T]echnology and the cultural imagery of technology have largely come to

dominate our iconography of (American) modernity”. He exemplifies his thesis, pointing out that already at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the trip to America was advertised to new possible immigrants by images of ultramodern ships, the new settlers were lured by advertisements of the latest technological developments concerning household equipment, etc. (ibid). Kroes (1999: para 3) observes that “the process of modernization, ranging from the impact of capitalism to processes of democratization of the political arena, was essentially a process of *Americanization*.” McQuail (2000:18) relates the technological developments and media industry with the Western world: “Both the technology and the institutional framework of mass media were initially mainly Western (European or North American) /.../ most other parts have taken up and applied the same developments in a similar way”. The progress in the field of technology, with the US being one of the leading countries, may have had its impact on precisely this country’s culture massively crossing the borders.

Since the 1940s it was the American television content that predominated the European television landscape. McQuail (2000: 112) explains that the culture specific traits of a program to be transmitted were reduced and in this way a content made for internal market could be used with adaptations also for transmitting abroad. After the invention of satellite television in the 1970s and the extensive spread of television from the 1980s on, it was the United States who benefited the most from the arising new television production industries as there was a demand for low-cost time-fillers and the States were able to produce sufficient amounts of entertainment to the markets which were already familiar with the US production (McQuail 2000: 217-218). Nevertheless, McQuail (2000: 234) remarks that in the case of Western European countries the most popular television contents are now produced locally and the imported content from America has been relegated to the second position.

With the formation of the European Union, quotas were set on the amount of imported television contents in the hope of creating a larger European television landscape which would allow more European production companies to market their programs (McQuail 2000: 234). The European Union Broadcast Directive titled *Television Without Frontiers* was established in 1989 in order to guarantee the majority of air time to television programs of European origin (in 2004 the percentage was approximately 63) (“Television...”). De Smaele and De Bens carried out a research in 2001 looking at the origin of movies and series on 36 channels in 6 European countries. The results showed, however, that American products still dominated

the European public and commercial channels whereas European products had limited distribution on the European television landscape (De Bens & De Smaele 2001). The findings also indicate that whilst domestic series are more popular than the American ones, American movies have no competitor (ibid.). McQuail (2000:221) has stated that the autonomy of the national broadcasting companies to produce and market their programs is dependent on their financial situation. Production is costly and the driving force behind the purchase of American programs is, among other aspects, affordability.

Television is an important means of marketing American culture and values both internally and abroad. According to the regular analysis from Nielsen's Anytime Anywhere Media Measurement initiative, at the end of 2009 Americans watched television approximately 5 hours per day ("Nielsen..."). In addition to the 5 hours daily in front of the TV set, the report states an extra 2 hours daily of "timeshifted TV", denoting following programs by means of other new media devices such as digital recorders, DVR and TiVo devices (ibid). The same figure for the Brits at the end of 2009 is 3.8 hours which is slightly higher than the European average of 3.5 hours (sky.news.com). According to the survey conducted in February 2010, Estonia scores highly above the European average, with people spending about 4 hours and 38 minutes watching television daily (however, there is a correlation – as the weather gets warmer, Estonians watch less television, amounting to 3 hours and 9 minutes “only” of TV watching in July 2009) (“Teleauditooriumi...” 2010). If one takes into account that a human being is awake approximately 16 hours during a day, then television is the companion for Americans approximately one third of the waking period. By the age of 50 Americans have spent 9 years on television watching (considering that up to at least the age of 6 the number of TV watching hours each day is probably lower). Taking such relatively approximate calculations into account leaves no doubt of the significant role of television in people's life. As American movies have obtained a large share of the European television market, not to mention that of the American domestic market, it could also be suggested that people are daily exposed to images of the American way of life, culture and values. McQuail (1996: 18) has also stated that “film is as much as ever a mass culture creator”.

With the new media devices for culture consumption available for many, people are daily exposed to American popular culture, especially in the form of American movies. The new media offers the possibility to stop a movie at any time and watch again those episodes which



remained unclear or were most likable thus allowing greater exposure to and impact of American values as well. The empirical part of the thesis (see chapter 7) aims to prove that it is the American movie that predominates in Estonian television programs and movie theaters. One can either purchase a movie theater ticket to be part of another American movie industry release, watch it in the cozy home environment on commercial channels or choose the movie one likes and engage in the relatively popular illegal means of downloading the desired product via the Internet. Even if the superpower status of the States in political and economic affairs may be slightly decreasing, the technological inventions and the principles of media institutions originating from the United States, together with the massive movie industries have enabled the American movie as the most widespread form of American popular culture to overflow the television programs and movie theaters in other more receptive countries.

### **5.3 Selling the American Dream Through Visual Images**

America has historically been related to the possibility of obtaining prosperity and images of desirable lifestyles are actively advertised. A human being memorizes a message better when it is transmitted by using methods that captivate more than one sense and is conveyed repeatedly via different forms of media. Americans have made full use of such observations while promoting their goods, cultural artefacts and values. For instance, a movie is usually accompanied by a release of its soundtrack CD, music videos made for airing songs on TV and advertisements transmitted through the radio, television, printed media and placed in cityscape. Mintz and Roberts (2010: x) describe the development in the following way: “In a society in which visual images have become a dominant mode of entertainment and persuasion, used to promote presidential candidates as well as sell toothpaste and deodorant, visual literacy may well be as important as facility with written words and numbers.”

American images in TV shows, movies and advertisements that have reached the opposite coast of the Atlantic portray a society where the ultimate goal is success business-wise and in personal life that every individual can achieve. Success in its own turn had to be seen and measurable, hence the drive towards accumulating items which could be considered as signs of affluence. If the expensive items still remain out of reach, there are a great deal of companies who target the less well-off members of society by selling items through the

possession of which people can experience at least a short moment of the “ideal life” that the consumption of the product supposedly provides.

It could be said that an important aspect of the American Dream advertised actively both in the US and abroad is the possibility to escape the daily reality and enter an imaginary world which in the form of consumer items allows people to experience and express a higher status, in the form of TV series, “soap operas” and Hollywood movies. These enable a glimpse into the life of the truly rich and famous -- the lifestyle which is the aspiration of supposedly everyone. The advertisements of consumer items are larger than life, colorful, shown frequently or placed in numerous sites and remind the audience constantly to purchase or consume the items. The most widely advertised American products have come to represent the American values, the democratic society with equal opportunities for everyone – the American Dream.

Many authors have commented on the character of cultural images that the United States disseminate. Kroes (1997: para 17) remarks on the dissemination of American culture: “America's national symbols and myths have been translated into an international iconographic language, a visual lingua franca. They have been turned into free-floating signifiers, internationally understood, free for everyone to use.” He explains that the reasons behind the attractiveness of the American popular culture reside in the possibility of escapism from the real world to the imaginary or a fantasy world as American popular culture “offered reality and illusion at the same time” (ibid. para 14). Squire (1983) shares the same view when contemplating the role of the movie industry: “In no other business does the public “use” the product and then take away with them /.../ merely the memory of it. In the truest sense, it’s an industry based on dreams” (qtd in Biagi 1988: 147). Strinati (1995: 58) points to the central role of television and the media in the transmission of American popular culture: “America is a TV and media saturated society, and more and more advanced capitalist societies are starting to take on similar characteristics; it is equally a world leader in the use of TV, and key disseminator of TV images.” As the French president Mitterrand has put it: “A nation that stops representing itself in images stops being a nation” (Mitterrand quoted by Kroes 1999: para 10). Indeed, the United States are a Nation with a capital N in that sense.

## 5.4 Advertizing

In order to get the target group to purchase the marketed goods or consume the intended contents, whole corporations are put to work in order to make the product and messages about the product most appealing. In his overview of the development of mass media Biagi (1988: 9-10) insists that the primary aim of the American media is profit and advertizing is one means of achieving the goal. Potter stated already in 1954 that America is a consumer society due to economic abundance and advertizing is the underlying principle facilitating consumerism. Strinati (1992: 59) describes advertizing as “an ‘all-American’ quality and ability”.

Schudson (1984) describes the standpoints of both sides: the critics of advertizing believe it to be a means of ‘brainwashing’ the consumers into purchasing the items they most often do not even need. Advertisers and marketers in their turn suggest that their aim is not to make people buy more and more items but to introduce different brands of the items people would buy anyway, thus facilitating choice (summarized by Biagi 1988: 236-237). In conclusion Shudson states that a clear-cut impact of advertizing on consumers remains difficult to measure and simplistic judgments of apology or critique should be avoided (ibid.). Thus, the topic of advertizing has given rise to heated discussions over its positive and negative aspects and the possible effects on the audience. McQuail (2000: 492) remarks that in general the audience is negative towards advertizing as the content sometimes manipulates and distorts reality, however, he agrees with Biagi that the direct effect of advertizing remains in most cases complicated to measure. McQuail (2000: 218) claims that advertizing is essential to marketing goods and contents internationally, wherefore the central message appears in the same form all over the world, thus reinforcing stereotypes. The most far-reaching images of American goods advertisements on television as well as in cityscape contain probably those of their top-selling items and such as Coca-Cola soft drink, Marlboro cigarettes and McDonald’s fast food restaurant. The Coca-Cola commercials are bright and shiny, appealing to family values, being accompanied by the jingle “Always, Coca-Cola” that has most probably fixed itself in the minds of significant numbers of the audience. The looming figures of Marlboro men, larger than life, embody American values such as independence, self-sufficiency and freedom. The golden arches of the McDonald’s diner are one of the best known symbols in the world. Kilbourne (2000) provides statistics according to which the number of advertisements a person encounters daily is as high as 3000 which amounts to 3 years of exposure to television

advertisements during the whole life. Considering that, according to 2008 data, 2 out of the 4 largest advertising groups in the world originate in the US one can suggest that the advertisements are more likely to convey precisely American values (Trosclair 2008).

## **5.5 Possible Media Effects on Behavior**

The discussions over the possible effect of media on thinking and behavior have been circling around since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The earlier researchers on media effects proposed a direct correlation between the media message and behavior of the audience. Lim and Kim (2007: 315) bring out their hypodermic needle theory and magic bullet theory -- metaphors denoting the acts of injection or shooting of ideas on behalf of media corporations that the audience is forced to receive. According to Perse (2007: 471) the correlation between exposure and impact is linear and may not be adequate to describe the transmission and reception process. In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century researchers concentrating on the functions of media, though, found media to have only limited or minimal effects and in the present century there is no consensus on the topic either (Lim and Kim 2006: 316).

Perse (2007: 471) explains the complicated nature of effects research by referring to the findings of McGuire 1986 and Greenberg 1988 whereby media content may not have an immediate effect but will have a result only if the audience is being exposed to the content to a certain limit. Desmond and Carveth (2007: 170) assert there to be a tendency for the community members, academics, politicians and the press to over-emphasize the effects while those who conduct research remain more reserved. In the face of the growing variety of the new media and the relatively private nature of media use the possible impact remains difficult to measure scientifically. People are exposed to innumerable media messages available through different forms of media and extracting the effect of a particular content is challenging.

There are, though, some rare “natural experiments” which prove a causal link between television contents and viewer behavior. Levitt and Dubner (2009: 6) refer to a survey which revealed that rural Indian families who owned a cable television and saw the lifestyle of independent women in democratic countries, especially in the role model America, had a lower birth rate (a problem that the Indian government had been trying to solve unsuccessfully with numerous measures) than those families without cable television. The other hypothesis of

Levitt and Dubner (2009:102) concerns a correlation between violent television contents and aggressive behavior. Namely, the cities which used to have a similar crime rate before the mid 1940s differed in the same data after one region had been introduced television – in the 1970s violent crime rate in the cities which started to receive television signals a decade earlier had doubled compared to the rate in those which had television later (ibid.). Anelauskas (1999: 260) also brings out several surveys the results of which suggest a similar correlation and blames primarily American popular culture when it comes to young criminals. Especially when both parents work and are usually away long hours, television becomes a babysitter for children, the content of which children may take for reality. Research has proven that infants 14 months old can imitate what they see on television and up to five-year-old children cannot distinguish fact from reality (ibid. 261). American television and movies are extremely violent. A study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* published in 1992 reveals that by the age of 18, an average American teen has witnessed 40 000 murders and 200 000 other violent acts on television, another study reported in 1992 on the content of 3000 researches conducted over two decades proves that the behavior and attitudes of children who have watched violent television contents have been influenced by it (ibid.). Yet another source proposes that 75% of all the research on possible media effects by the year 2003 have proven a causal link between violence on television and higher real-life crime rates (Barker 2003: 84). Whether the methods of analysis in all of such studies have been completely exclusive of other simultaneous influences next to television remains dubious.

The USA may slightly be losing its dominant role in the economic and political sphere but in the media-cultural context its influence has been eminent. Especially with the latest developments in the field of the new media, American popular culture products are easily available and massively advertized so that anyone with the basic devices is able to consume a piece of the often idealized America. Whether or not the actual behavior and value judgments of potential consumers will be significantly altered, there are characteristics of precisely American cultural production that make it easily “edible” for audiences from other countries in the globalized world and make people yearn for more of similar contents.

## **6. ESTONIAN VALUES**

Estonia has been occupied by a variety of foreign countries throughout the past 800 years. Vihalemm (1997: 132) brings out a rough periodization whereby the German rule in Estonia lasted from 1227 to 1561 followed by the Swedish rule until 1710, the next period, the Russian rule, lasted slightly more than a hundred years and after a short time of independence from 1918 to 1940, Soviet occupation ended in 1991. In the aforementioned times of foreign rule political, economic and social interaction with different countries were established, which influenced the traditions, practices and values of Estonians. The impact of the most recent of these, the Soviet regime, is still felt in the life of Estonians nearly two decades after its end. The aim of the present chapter is to summarize the results of different research on values since the restoration of independence, view the characteristics of the Estonian young generation in comparison to the main trends and habits the youth in the United States exhibit and find out the main similarities and differences when it comes to the values of Estonians and citizens of the United States. While talking about possible American influences on Estonia, two aspects have to be taken into account – America is not homogeneous and America presented in media does not necessarily equal with “real” America.

### **6.1 Historical Background – Values During the Soviet Time**

The Soviet regime could be described as a totalitarian one repressing the indigenous populations by forcing on the world the vision of the ruling group i.e. the Communist Party. The official ideology was derived from the ideas of Karl Marx who saw communism as the desired end-state of a classless society with an abundance of goods and services which could be achieved by giving power to the working class. In this sense the Marxist-Leninist ideology being about freedom and democracy was similar to the Western world view but according to Vihalemm (1997: 31, 38), in reality the concepts were applied “in a reversed and absurd way”, promoting rather “equality in poverty”. For achieving communism, property was collectivized and society was industrialized. At the highest stage of development in this utopian society everyone was expected to give away a proportion of their goods so that the ones who were lacking could receive as much as they needed. Due to abundance no quarrels on economic grounds were supposed to emerge. In real life, profit was divided among the dominant party representatives and the needy never experienced the long promised affluence.

Hence the popular saying that the world's shortest anecdote consists of only one word: communism.

During this period a distinct set of values was introduced and forced upon the people. Instead of individual efforts, collectivist work ethic was introduced which in its own turn facilitated the emphasis on such emotions as 'shame' instead of 'guilt' (Vihalemm1999: 38). Responsibility was diffused and in case of false guidelines or conduct especially on behalf of the dominant group no one particular was to take the blame. As the communist order did not allow any remarkable social mobility and owning private property was discouraged, there was no need to work more than was asked which inhibited creative thinking outside the dominant ideological strain of thought. Contacts with the rest of the world were cut off, which enabled the repeatedly introduced official ideas to be inculcated into the minds of people living in the Soviet Union, including Estonia.

Communist world order was forced on local nations by fear as consequences for dissidents were severe. Although people were forced to abide by communist ideas, nevertheless nationalist thoughts, indigenous traditions and values were held dear in people's private spaces, gatherings and sometimes also publicly. Vihalemm (1997: 37) writes about a 'clash of civilizations' within the oppressed people between the aspirations towards a more Western and democratic mind-set and the reality of totalitarianism and fear of being exposed as a dissident. He goes on to describe a 'double-thinking' as people could not express their real selves due to the fear of consequences and had to conform publicly with the ruling ideology and had to suppress their anger and disappointment with the totalitarian system (ibid 38).

Culture in the Soviet period was subject to the same totalitarian control as other spheres of life. Authors whose ideas did coincide with the official doctrines were allowed to produce their works whereas access to culture outside the borders of the Soviet Union was limited. Estonia, though, being the most western part of the Soviet Union was slightly less under scrutiny from Moscow compared to other Soviet republics, which enabled cultural resistance among artists, writers, journalists and academics. Lauristin and Vihalemm (1997: 75) suggest that the difference in the language of the rulers and Estonians facilitated the preservation of nationalist ideals through folk traditions, enabling Estonians to produce culture that at first sight was not oppositional but which conveyed nationalist ideas through a subtle use of irony and other literary figures of speech.

## **6.2 Values During the Transition Period 1988-2008**

After regaining independence in 1991 and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Estonian political, economic and social life started to be developed rapidly on the models applied in the West, especially the United States. This period starting two decades ago is viewed as one of transition, i.e. moving from a communist to a capitalist or from a materialist towards a post-materialist society (Lauristin et al. 1997). However, since the theory opposing materialist to post-materialist values (Inglehart 1990) was created without taking into account the Soviet system, views have also been expressed that in the later years of the Soviet Union (as a representative of the Second World), values were pre-materialist rather than materialist or post-materialist (Vogelberg 2000) – e.g., high culture (poetry, theatre, etc) was valued far more than in the West.

### **6.2.1 The US as a Model**

Estonia was open to the cultural influences coming from the other side of the Iron Curtain, as Schiller (2001/2006: 305) postulates: “U.S. media incursions into Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union are assuming the dimensions of a full-scale take-over, albeit shared with German and British media conglomerates”. It is in a large scale precisely the United States that was taken as a model of aspirations by Estonians. Vogelberg (2004: 149) notes that whether the phenomenon of Americanization is seen as positive or negative and the consumers as an easily manipulated crowd or an audience benefiting from the production pouring from this “locus of pleasure”, it would be most interesting to explore why the recipients from one culture respond to American culture in a particular manner. A similar idea is shared by Storey while contemplating on the possible influence of the culture of one country to that of another and the role of the audience:

This [hegemony being a complex process] is not to deny that capitalism is working – selling goods, making profits – but it is to deny that its success is the result of people being too stupid to realize that if they drink Coca-Cola or wear Levi jeans their indigenous culture will be destroyed and they will become Americanized. A better way to understand the processes of globalization is one which takes seriously not just the power of global forces but also those of the local. (Storey 2003:111)

The States rising to be a political, economic and cultural superpower has had its effect on many nations but there are characteristics which make some cultures more inclined to adopt and adapt new trends. Vogelberg (1999: 186) suggests that Western European countries did not



lose their cultural filters after the Second World War when America's influence grew on the global arena and they could adapt suitable aspects to their own needs – it is but the former Soviet countries which were more apt to opt for a new set of ideals. In the case of Estonia, two different cultures with their separate values coexisted during the Soviet era. Vogelberg explains the complex nature of the processes bringing about a shift in values whereby the two existing cultures could be called official and resistance culture:

Resistance culture operated in the framework of what might be termed warrior mentality whose values (solidarity, strong emotional bonds, glory) centered round a heroic struggle for freedom. The struggle followed the typical scheme of fighting the Other – viz., official culture – through a significant Third –viz., the democratic West. (Vogelberg 2004: 151)

During the five decades of occupation the official ideology had deemed nearly everything coming from the West as corrupt and second-rate. As a result, Western phenomena were automatically idealized by the resistance culture: "information that official culture attempts to filter out paradoxically increases manifold in significance while information officially admitted is rejected by resistance culture irrespective of its truth value." (ibid.). The USA was seen as an ally in the fight against the Other and therefore "the Third was not subject to critique much less criticism" (Vogelberg 2003: 216). Furthermore, it can be argued that, at least in Estonia, the values of the resistance culture – as opposed to American values – were itself imported, dating back to the German rule and therefore it may have been easier to give up such values which were not specifically Estonian to begin with (ibid. 155).

Vogelberg suggests that despite the scholarly debate over Americanization being handled in the context of globalization, it is still the United States the influence of which has been most significant (1999: 185). As globalization is equalled with technological developments, America could be considered its flagship because "the United States has more than any other country defined itself in terms of technology." (Stivers 1994: 9). Estonians' "unlimited faith in technology" (the glorification of technology was the common denominator of both capitalism and socialism) seems to have made us more apt to adopting American influences.

Visual images of abundance emanating from the States not to mention the aura of having been a so called forbidden fruit for decades were seductive and accelerated the process of imitating the transmitted ideals and values. The notions of a long sought for freedom and that of abundance were mentally merged -- "a link endorsed by the reality of the American frontier and reinforced by the construct of America spread by mass media and advertising" (Vogelberg

2000: 254). After achieving freedom the aspiration towards affluence became a goal in itself and brought about a shift from warrior mentality to that of merchant mentality (ibid.). The first years of independence proved that it was the daring, bold and curious type of people able to adjust to the capitalist society the fastest who got their hands on unimaginable riches at that time and gained materially the most after the switch of political powers and ideologies. Jaan Männik, Bank of Estonia's Chairman of Supervisory Board who moved from Sweden to Estonia in 1992, having also lived in the States for two years, clearly recalls the feeling that he was arriving to America rather than a post-socialist country because Estonia seemed to be full of people with initiative, positivity, will to work and materialist value judgments characteristic of America (Männik 2008: 141).

To suggest that Estonia was especially prone to American influences is not to exclude the trends that bring Estonians closer to Scandinavian countries, continental Europe or Great Britain. The historic trade and cultural ties with Europe during the past centuries have left its imprint in the form of national cuisines and prevalent media traditions, to mention but a few aspects. In addition, talking about something supposedly American in character does not deny the fact that the people constituting the 'new' nation originate largely from Europe (though it has been noted that the Europeans having moved to America more often than not exhibit traits which are more similar to other Americans than to people in their country of origin in Europe – selective migration, noted long ago (see, e.g., Pierson 1992), still seems to continue).

Thus, under the circumstances of the extreme pace of socio-political change in Estonia in the 1990s, which manifested itself in changed behavioral patterns as well as values behind them, with America being the only existing superpower, the suggestion that American influences were uppermost seems warranted. Here, one also has to keep in mind that present-day Western Europe itself is exposed to extensive American influences. While viewing the trends during the first decade of Estonia's re-independence, Langemets (2000: para. 2) has aptly pointed out a linguistic nuance of the term Americanization. Namely, in Estonian, Americanization – 'amerikaniseerumine'—comes from a reflexive not a transitive verb, which refers to Estonians' own will to Americanize their culture rather than being "victims of American cultural imperialism".

### 6.2.2 Westernization or Americanization of Estonia?

With the developments at the beginning of the new millennium which brought Estonia closer to Europe, the use of the very term 'Americanization' may have become an exaggeration. In fact, a number of authors dealing with the transition period after Estonia's regaining independence have from the very start preferred the more general term '(re)-Westernisation'. The same term has been proposed for the whole of the former Soviet bloc area encompassing the Baltic as well as the Central European countries (e.g., Vihalemm 1997)<sup>6</sup>. In this case it is mainly the Western European, specifically the Scandinavian countries, that are thought of as model societies, with less emphasis on American influences. Re-establishing contacts with Europe was facilitated by proximity and historical ties: "especially for Estonia /.../, direct contacts with Sweden, Finland and Denmark have been a major source of cultural influence (along with the American television culture), shaping new patterns of everyday life and new post-modern values" (Vihalemm 1997: 31, 36). Also important in renewing contacts was the existence of remarkable Estonian communities stretching from Scandinavia to the USA and Canada where Estonians had fled in fear of deportation. Hence, Vihalemm proposes the term 're-Westernization' to be appropriate for Central-European and Baltic countries (ibid.). After regaining independence these countries tried their best to 'catch up' with the new technological, institutional as well as value trends that other Western European countries on the other side of the Iron Curtain had adopted.

In the process of transition major shifts in society took place requiring the reorientation of value judgments to cope in a society with new demands. Vihalemm (1997: 30) has brought out the main societal changes: Western countries prevailing in economic and cultural relations, Western media agencies becoming the primary sources of information, entertainment and advertizing, opting for Western educational programs, English becoming the *lingua franca*, arrival of symbols of mass culture, consumerism, postmodern culture, interactive media culture, etc. The aforementioned trends in Estonia forced people to adapt to the new demands

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<sup>66</sup> In this connection a completely opposing viewpoint should also be brought out: for example, the American sociologist Ain Haas, who has visited Estonia regularly starting with the last decades of the Soviet rule to the present day, has described the very terms "Westernization", "re-Westernization" or "return to the West" as not only misleading but also outright insulting to Estonians, since in his view Estonians have, in the core sense, never left the West (personal communication with Vogelberg). This tallies with Lagerspetz's views quoted above about the Soviet power never having obtained a hegemonic status in the Baltics or the Central Europe. However, remaining in the West in a core sense of the word does not mean that the Iron Curtain did not have its effect, if only in the sense of distorting the idea of processes going on there, specifically towards idealization of the West and America as its pinnacle in particular.

in labor market where self-presentation and individual effort became increasingly important (cf. Vogelberg 1999: 187 on job interviews and 2004: 152 on merchant mentality). International exchange programs allowed numbers of students and staff to live abroad and thereby get accustomed to the Western trends and values. The ones to adapt the quickest were the ones to benefit the most.

However, it should be emphasized once again that the West is not a homogeneous cultural space. To cite a case in point, media traditions, which were originally built on German models, changed into more American ones with more emphasis on “yellow” content cultivating conspicuous lifestyle, consumerism and hedonism.

### **6.2.3. Research on Values**

The two decades of transition roughly from regaining independence until experiencing the first years as European Union and NATO member denotes also a shift towards different values. Over the chapters in the collection *Return to the Western World* (1997), Peeter and Triin Vihalemm together with Marju Lauristin provide an overview and analysis of research carried out to investigate the values of Estonians before and during the transition period related to Westernization. For this purpose they modified Schwartz’s (1990) theory of motivational types of values based on the 56 indicators that Rokeach (1973) developed which enables to position values on 2 axes. The following is an observation of possible changes in value judgments on the basis of their findings.

One of the most controversial issues has been the classification of societies on the scale of individualism / collectivism. Hofstede’s (1991: 51) differentiation between the two types is the following:

Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive ingroups, which throughout people’s lifetime continue to perfect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. (Hofstede qtd in Lauristin and Vihalemm 1997:245).

Typically, collectivism has been related to the former Soviet countries and individualism associated rather with Western countries. However, Vihalemm and Lauristin (1997: 246) point out the more complicated nature of this division suggested by Singelis et al. (1995) according to which collectivism and individualism are seen as cultural syndromes, where one can differentiate between vertical and horizontal subdivisions. Vertical collectivism is said to be

characteristic to totalitarian systems whereas horizontal collectivism denotes equal relationships within a group; vertical individualism, on the other hand, establishes class differences between individuals with horizontal individualists being more open to socialization with others (Lauristin and Vihalemm 1997: 246). According to Schwartz, Estonia positioned among the highly collectivist countries at the beginning of the 1990s which could be further characterized by setting the interests of the collective before those of each individual constituting thus vertical collectivism (ibid.)

Lauristin and Vihalemm (1997), though, hypothesize that the societal changes during the transition period may cause growing individualism. Furthermore, individualism and collectivism cannot be considered mutually exclusive as some values may prevail in both societal types (Schwartz quoted in ibid.). This suggestion enables us to view possible trends towards individualism irrespective of minor characteristics which may still point towards collectivism. The aspects that foster collectivist orientations could be first of all searched in the Communist regime such as setting the needs of the group above those of an individual, having a connections-based supply network, also the scarcity of living space to mention but a few<sup>7</sup>. However, moving towards free-market economy and the concurrent phenomenon of competition, democratization, low birth rate and Protestant traditions brought out by Lauristin and Vihalemm (ibid. 247) tilt the Estonian society strongly towards the individualism pole of the axis.

The findings of the three BALTCOM studies from 1991 to 1995 that Lauristin and Vihalemm (1997) summarize clearly demonstrate growing individualist inclination, openness and the rise of post-materialist values -- people seem to value pleasant life and leisure time against the looming reminiscence of the decades of depression. There are stable values the importance of which has remained relatively the same for different generations across time, such as exciting life, honesty, family security, national security, world of beauty, happiness, health and wealth although there is a correlation between changes in society and shifts in value systems (Lauristin & Vihalemm 1997: 254, 257)

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<sup>7</sup> One might contest the power of at least some of the factors mentioned in the list and remind the reader that Schwartz's first study of Estonia was carried out right in the wake of the 'Singing Revolution', in which Estonians, united in their struggle for independence, were at the pinnacle of their potential collectivism (however small the potential itself). It is again worth mentioning Lagerspetz's view here that the Communist regime was not hegemonic – hence the serious doubts about the applicability of the regime as a determinant of values.

However, according to the studies, especially among the older generation of Estonians the importance of such values as pleasant and comfortable life have risen whereas those of technological development, freedom, wisdom and clean environment have decreased (ibid. 263). The explanation for such changes during the beginning of the transition period can be found from the works of Inglehart (1990). His theory relies largely on two hypotheses – first, of scarcity and second, of generational replacement (Inglehart 1990). Materialist societies can be characterized by the scarcity of goods and when societies become more affluent the trend is towards the development into a post-materialist society with less concern with material matters, members in the latter being more educated, articulate and politically active (Inglehart 1990: 82, 103). The theory on the change of values with generation shift found affirmation in his surveys conducted from 1970 to 1988 among Western-Europeans, in the first survey the ration of materialists and post-materialists being 4:1 in favor of the former with the figures changing to a ratio of 4:3 in the year 1988. He estimated that by the year 2000 there may be as many materialists as post-materialists (ibid.). In his latter work Inglehart has paralleled materialist values to modernity and post-materialist values to post-modernity.

Inglehart's ideas are in line with the visible developments in the Estonian society moving from a society of scarcity to that of growing abundance and affluence by the end of the transition period. Furthermore, the years of independence have shown a tendency towards a younger generation occupying posts in the political and economic sector as well as the media industry which according to Inglehart (1990) is a prerequisite for a change in values as well. Lauristin and Vihalemm (1997: 250) suggest that the transition period will reveal the 'winners' and 'losers' in the democratization process, their status determined by the capability to adapt to the new demands of a post-materialist society and values advocated by the media, in advertisements, life-style and consumption models that are adopted from the West. Although the majority of the population may be in the constant pursuit of the Western life-style, there are still numbers of people, especially among the older generations, who cannot or will not adapt to the post-materialist and post-modern changes so that Lauristin and Vihalemm (1997) suggest referring to the beginning of the independence period as a period of 'cultural contradictions of transitions'.

The changes in the value systems of Estonian in the latter part of the transition period have been analysed by Realo. According to Realo (2005) some of the values Estonians share are in

common with the ones in Scandinavian countries whereas others still remind one of the Communist past. Similarly to what is valued in Scandinavia, religion is not considered very important in Estonia, individual efforts overshadow social conformity, the existence of something inherently good or bad is disregarded, obedience to authority is not a primary concern, national pride is lower and family does not have a central role in everyday life in the sense that the sole aim of everyday toil is not the approval and satisfaction of one's parents (Realo 2005). The tendencies which coincide with the former Soviet bloc countries are the following: a relatively low level of subjective welfare, mistrust and intolerance towards others, gender inequality, lack of interest towards environmental issues and politics, to mention a few (ibid.). Her study results show that most significant changes in values took place during the first four years of independence and during the eight following years the values have remained rather stable, however with a slight hope for a shift towards tolerance, trust, welfare and other post-materialist values (ibid.).

### **6.3 Recent Tendencies in Estonian Value Research**

By 2010 it seems that in spite of the hopes about Estonians becoming more tolerant and open-minded, the processes, even if moving slightly towards greater post-materialism, require a longer period than two decades to have a significant effect on the value judgments of Estonians, at least one that is visible in research data. Based on the Estonian Human Development Report 2009 (EHDR 2010) it could be claimed that although Estonia has undergone a rapid economic development (reaching its peak in 2008) and is ranking relatively high among the list of countries considered to be of high human development (the 40<sup>th</sup> among 182 countries), a more detailed analysis of different research and comparing it with trends in the society on a general impressionistic reveals controversies in the value judgments of Estonians.

Being part of exhaustive research projects like World Values Survey and European Values Survey enable social scientists to draw conclusions about the changes in societal value system from 1995 to 2008. The Inglehart-Weltzel Map (2005) of values places groups of countries on two axes – one exposing traditional *versus* rational/secular orientations and the other the prevalence of survival *versus* self-expression values. Similarly to other post-Communist countries, Estonia is positioned as a rather rational/secular country where survival values

dominate over self-expression. The Protestant Europe group is in the forefront in terms of self-expression values while being rational/secular and the English speaking group, while advanced in terms of self expression, is more traditional than Protestant Europe (EHDR 2009: 108). The Inglehart-Welzel Map indicates that although the data from 1990, 1999 and 2008 show that self-expression is gaining importance amongst Estonians, we still do not belong to the same group with Protestant Europe, nor with the US. Estonia is roughly as secular as Protestant Europe, while the differences with the US in this realm are incomparable.

A more detailed overview of value change – measured three times over an interval of nine years – reveals trends that do not coincide with the data Realo (2005) brought out. Saar (2010: 110) concludes in the EHDR that in 1990, 1999 and 2008 Estonians consider family the most important, shortly followed by work and friends which in 2008 are rated almost equally high. It is suspected, though, that in the present year the importance of work may have risen as it is generally valued more during economic recess periods (ibid.). Based on the 2004 data Realo (2005) suggests the top three most important things in the lives of Estonians to be work, leisure and education, in the aforementioned order. According to the data in the EHDR, leisure occupies the fourth position with a rather similar importance as the concepts of friends and work (Saar 2010). It can be concluded that the research methodology used in the analyses has been different.

Realo's (2005) hope about Estonians becoming more tolerant, however, does not seem to have been realized. The comparison of answers to questions related to tolerance show increasing intolerance, especially to people of other races and ethnicities (although on the top of the least desired neighbors are still drug addicts, alcohol abusers and criminals) (Saar 2010: 112). Saar (2010: 112) proposes that the high levels of intolerance could be explained by Estonian cultural homogeneity and also by the Soviet past as the Communist propaganda presented a negative image of countries and people with differing ideologies. It could have been assumed, though, that with more international contacts, no restrictions on travel destinations and various exchange programs successfully implemented, Estonians would gradually get accustomed to people who have a different appearance and perhaps also a different mindset.

In conclusion, Kalmus (2010: 130) suggests that while Estonians are moving from survival to self-expression values – which Inglehart sees as a typical direction of development –



controversial trends remain largely due to the influence by the Soviet collectivist past which inhibits the rapid ‘catching up’ with other Western and Northern European countries. Although Kalmus (ibid.) pointed out several positive aspects related to the value change, namely that family is still considered very important during the past few decades, that the concept of work is continuously significant in the lives of Estonians with an emphasis on self-realization and leisure time, that people are more satisfied with their lives not to mention the fact that the society is moving towards gender equality and that involvement in non-profit organisations is growing; some negative aspects have reached quite an alarming level. In this regard Kalmus (ibid.) emphasizes the growing intolerance and mistrust towards others and a lack of involvement in politics. Hence, even though some trends towards moving from a materialist to that of post-materialist society are visible, there are still characteristics that keep Estonia close to the post-Communist group on Inglehart’s map of cultures.

## **6.4 Values of Youth in the Digital Age**

In order to predict the prevalent value judgments of Estonians in the coming decades, the current value preferences of the young should be observed, especially as Inglehart (1990: 68) has suggested that it is precisely generation replacement that enables a shift in values. The following is an overview of the main values of Estonian youth as revealed in research over the past two decades compared to those of the American youth, both groups growing up in the world that is being increasingly digitalized.

### **6.4.1 The Digital Generation**

Young people have been gathered under such umbrella terms as ‘Generation X’ to denote children born in the 1960s and 70s, ‘Generation Y’ or ‘the Millennials’ born in the 80s and 90s and ‘Generation Z’, born around the year 2000 with each generation exhibiting certain common characteristics. Perhaps the most expressive term to refer to the children born around the millennium is the ‘digital generation’ (Papert 1996) which covers the specificity of the environment in which they had to grow up. Although computers and the Internet started to be developed in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is precisely around the millennium and from then on that all possible technological developments have entered the everyday lives of the young to an extent that the use of technology starts to replace human contact.

Today's youth are not silent consumers of what the corporations advertise by means of the new media but participate in many of the possibilities offered by the new technologies. For instance, creating profiles in social media environments allows one to keep in touch in a virtual manner with friends, blogging enables a display of one's world view and activities at any given point one chooses, YouTube can be successfully used for providing a visual testimony of one's skills and through online commenting everyone, including young people, can express their opinions on the topical issues in society. Engaging in the aforementioned possibilities is available for everyone but it is precisely the younger people who are the most active users and producers of new contents, or, according to Bruns' (2007) coinage -- 'producers', denoting the blurring distinction between producers and users.

#### **6.4.2 Comparison of the Estonian and American Youth as Members of the Digital Generation**

Based on the Estonian data collected by the Youth and the Internet 2007 survey among 11–18-year-olds, 99.9% of the sample use the Internet daily with most of them spending at least 3 hours in this virtually connected environment (Siibak 2010: 127). According to Pew Research Centre's year 2010 research, a similar percentage for the Millennials (young people born from the 80s on) in the US is 90 (to be more precise, 90 is the percentage of those who replied in the affirmative to the question whether they use the Internet at least occasionally) (Millennials 2010: 27). Estonia is considered a high-use country among 21 European countries (Hasebrink et al. 2008 qtd in Siibak 2010: 127). Besides being among the most eager Internet users compared to European teens, the Estonian youth are also quite heavy TV viewers as research shows that the average time of TV watching per day is more than 4 hours. Hence, it could be said that the Estonian youth want the different technological devices to be constantly at hand. It is estimated that seven per cent of web-users are addicted to the Internet and computers, there are supposedly 200 000 addicts in the United States alone (Tigasson 2002). The Pew survey on the values of the American youth between the ages 18 and 29 provides the following description:

They are history's first "always connected" generation. Steeped in digital technology and social media, they treat their multi-tasking hand-held gadgets almost like a body part – for better and worse. More than eight-in-ten say they sleep with a cell phone glowing by the bed, poised to disgorge texts, phone calls, emails, songs, news, videos, games and wake-up jingles. But sometimes convenience yields to temptation. Nearly two-thirds admit to texting while driving. (Millennials 2010: 8)

It is interesting to observe that although the young have grown up amongst technological developments enabling ever greater possibilities of being creative and one could assume an active use of technology that allows resourceful input by the youth, it is not the case in the light of the most recent research carried out among Estonian and also European youth. Siibak (2010) brings out the most significant findings from the Youth and the Internet 2007 survey whereby Estonian young people are rather limited in their Internet use compared to the possibilities this virtual environment offers. Young people tend to use the more structured Internet environments (e.g. social networking sites, forums, news portals) and are rather modest in producing new creative content themselves as only 18% update their personal homepages and 16% blog (Kalmus et al. 2009: 14). The main purposes for using the computer were related to entertainment (uploading and downloading audio-visual materials), information (searching information for school tasks) and communication (mainly via MSN Messenger) (ibid.).

The similar tendency of abiding by the established standards can be brought out about creating a profile in the virtual world. It could be assumed that the new media's specific characteristics would offer an increasing possibility of differentiating oneself from the rest and creating new contents, which would ultimately lead to a shift in values. Siibak and Ugur (2009) carried out a study of the self-presentation tactics of 11-12-year-olds in the Estonian social networking site Rate.ee in 2008. They found that despite the innumerable possibilities the new media offers for expressing one's character, the youth were imitating the posture and facial expressions of an "ideal man" or an "ideal woman" created by the media and advertising industry and applied by the slightly older users of the same community. Therefore, according to Siibak (2009: 69), the application of the term 'digital generation' may be a slight overestimation. Taking these aspects of the media use of Estonian youth into account, Siibak (2010) proposes a more suitable term for the Millennials in Estonia – a 'comfortable generation', who are sincerely happy about the services provided by online commerce, e-banking and e-tickets, and think back almost in surprise to the times when one had to visit the library in order to solve homework assignments (ibid.). The same tendency of not using the interactive and creative opportunities of the Internet and user-generated content creation has been described characteristic of the youth in other European countries as well (cf. Hasebrink et al. 2008). The title 'digital generation' is yet to be reserved for the truly ingenious when using and producing the new media contents.

### 6.4.3 Comparison of the Values of Estonian and American Youth

When asked about the factors that influence the formation of their values, the list of importance of the Estonian young people in descending order started with parents, then friends, and after teachers the media occupied only the fourth place (Sutrop, Kraav 2010: 124). By 2007 the Internet has risen to the sixth position in the hierarchy of the most trustworthy sources preceded by, again, family, then encyclopedias, school books, teachers and friends, all of these passing television, radio, newspapers and journals (Kalmus 2008: 42). The growing importance of the Internet in terms of time allocation allows to speak about what Bolter and Grusin (1999) have called 'remediation' whereby the rise of the importance of one medium causes the change in the use and importance of other previously dominating media. The data on family being the most valued concept may, however, be something desired by the students or a remnant of their parents' values whereby one's elders should be the ones to turn to. As the media is always present in the everyday lives of the young, it could be suggested that the role of the media has become "invisible through its visibility" Hall (1977), or as Sutrop and Kraav (2010: 123) have put it, that of a "hidden co-educator".

Parallels can be drawn between the American and Estonian youth in their attitudes towards the concept of family. For the Millennials across the Atlantic family matters the most (Millennials 2010: 17) and according to the Estonian Youth 2003 survey such value directions as work and family are the most important for Estonians aged 15-24 (Meos 2009: 13). While comparing the research of Estonia 85, Estonia 93, Estonia 98 and Estonia 2003, Meos (2009) suggests that the increase in importance of such values as children and family brings the youth closer to materialist values whereas the post-materialist values such as mental self-improvement, satisfying cultural needs and interesting life have remained relatively stable (Heinla 2004 summarized in Meos 2009: 12). According to the more recent comparative research *Value Judgments of the New Generation in Estonia, Finland and Russia* (Kraav 2008) such individual values as friendship and cleanliness have proven to be the top two most valued concepts leaving the concept of family on the third place. The comparison of the three surveys of *Me. The World. The Media* conducted in 2002, 2005 and 2008 among the youth between the ages 15-29 reveals that the concept of a strong family occupies the second position after health and before happiness (Meos 2009: 24). Meos notes that value types related to safety (health, family), benevolence (honesty, love, friendship), universalism (clean

environment, wisdom, world peace) and self-direction (freedom, self-respect) have throughout the years been rated higher among Estonian youth whereas tradition (religion, pietism, respect for traditions, accepting one's place in life) and power (social power and technological development) have been valued less (2009: 14). It is interesting to note that religion is less valued among American Millennials as well, although according to the Inglehart-Welzel Map of Cultures (2005) the USA ranks as one of the most traditional countries as compared to the English-speaking and European countries. The youth in the States are considered to be "the least overtly religious American generation in modern times" as one-in-four of those questioned was not affiliated with any religion (which still does not mean that the Millennials do not believe in God) (Millennials 2010: 2).

Although the comparison of the data from 1991 and 1995 (Lauristin, Vihalemm 1997: 257) show that individualistic values (self-direction and hedonism) are rated more highly by younger age groups, Meos (2009: 59) proposes while summarizing the surveys from 2002 to 2008 that individualistic values and hedonism among the youth are dropping and in the Schwartz value system Estonians remain on the Collectivism, Openness to Change and Self Transcendence area. In comparison with our Northern neighbors, Sutrop and Kraav (2010: 123) confirm Meos's conclusion that Estonian youth are less inclined to hedonistic values (19<sup>th</sup> place in the value hierarchy), compared to the Finns who have the same value on the 11<sup>th</sup> place. The most recent data show that from five Schwartz's motivational value types Estonian high school graduates set self-direction (independent thinking and actions, creation and discovery) as most important which, however, brings us closer to the value judgments in other Western countries (Himma 2010). Twenge and Campbell postulate in the 2009 article that the American youth or Generation Me as they call today's young Americans exhibit increasingly individualistic and narcissistic traits (2009: 2).

It is, though, worth mentioning that the differing results of research conducted in Estonia and cited as example in the present thesis may also be caused by what has been called "self-flattery effect", meaning that the respondents provide answers to the posed questions which they see as desired in the society (the difference between *declared preferences* and *revealed preferences* (Levitt and Dubner 2009: 7) is worth mentioning again here). The choice of such concepts as family and work on top of the hierarchy may be a reflection of what the parents have taught. In order to get more objective data, Kuslapuu (2009) posed the questions in her

survey as follows: “What do you think an average Estonian...?” Such an approach leads to consider the answers more realistic compared to the answers about one’s self. For instance, it is hardly imaginable that when asked: “How do you relax?” the respondent would answer “By drinking alcohol” whereas the question “How does the average Estonian relax?” received a telling 40 answers out of 76 referring to alcohol consumption as the most popular pastime (Kuslapuu 2009: 88). When questions are asked about their own specific behavioral traits, it can be assumed that many people would show themselves, for instance, as active consumers of “high” culture.

The constantly changing environment requires particular characteristic traits to be successful and the environment in its turn is the cultivator of such traits. Based on the theoretical literature available about the digital generation Siibak (2010: 127) summarizes the opinions of many authors who suppose that members of the digital generation are more open, creative, independent, innovative and cooperation-oriented than any generation before them. The “new” generation (although there is already talk about naming children born in 2010 to be the Alpha generation) is predicted to be ever more educated and smart which, of course, is partly thought to be true for every following generation. The importance of education for American parents is manifested in the following survey result – considering the educational possibilities of their children, parents would rather live in a place next to a pile of toxic waste than in a neighborhood with a public school the students of which are not performing well (Warren, 2007). It is precisely now that an increasing population has access to higher educational institutions. The Pew research (Millennials 2010: 2) proposes that it is in part due to the global economic recession that the youth, who cannot find jobs as easily, enrol in graduate schools, colleges or community colleges, thus providing a work force that the knowledge-based society requires. There is, though, data showing that despite their high education level the Millennials are unable to perform as expected in the workplace due to their cynicism, egocentrism, narcissism and lack of interest in working hard as they have been used to getting everything they want fast and without much effort (Trzesniewski & Donnellan 2009).

There has been a similar tradition in Estonia of an increasing interest among secondary school graduates applying for higher educational institutions. Almost two thirds of secondary school graduates continue their studies in an higher educationa institution and by the

percentage of university graduates Estonia ranks among the top countries in Europe (Laks 2010). Estonian parents often start to worry already when their children are in kindergarten whether they will be accepted to the best schools as the graduation of the Estonian so called elite gymnasiums would provide their students with better chances to enter a university. Poll illustrates: “Estonians have always valued education and every self-respecting parent wants their child to obtain higher education. A decent Estonian family is hit by a shock when the child who has just graduated from secondary school announces that he/she wants to become a cook or a beautician instead” /My translation – R.G./ (Poll 2008). Obtaining a university degree seems to be rather a norm whereas going to study in a vocational education institution and actually learning a profession is unfairly considered to be for those with a lesser mental capacity. As can be seen, a good education, in Estonia equated with university education, has as a rule been valued very highly among Estonians.

All in all, there seem to be a variety of value judgments among the Estonian youth. Scholarly research has mostly not noticed any significant trend in the shift of the values of the youth since regaining independence – the top and the bottom values in the hierarchy seem not to have changed much. The findings exhibit differences when observing either the increase or decrease of trends towards hedonism and self-direction. This may be due to differences in research methodology as in two cases Schwartz’ value types have been modified which makes it difficult to compare the results, or due to the transition period with a variety of opinions of the course the country should take and by which values it should abide by. Nevertheless, what is globally characteristic of the Millennials (be it in Estonia or abroad) is a drastic increase in the use of technological devices and their being available and desired, occupying all spheres of life. It is these gadgets that the young use actively for producing and receiving information and entertainment and for satisfying their communication needs. The youth create as well as are the audience of a virtual culture which makes it ever more important to analyze which contents the youth are exposed to, who/which countries are the main disseminators, which values these contents create and whether the use of the new media facilitates any shifts in the prevalent value judgments.

## 6.5 The National Value Development Program

The values of the youth today influence the predominant value judgments in Estonian society in the future. Research on the values of the Estonian youth have shown that although students score highly in international competitions, they do not particularly enjoy the school environment, where they spend a third of their day and receive knowledge important for starting an independent life and career. Estonia is in the forefront among 25 European countries in terms of lack of school attractiveness and the level of school bullying (Sutrop, Kraav 2010: 122). The aim of teachers in Estonia is the delivery of knowledge rather than encouraging students to be creative and innovative and to show initiative. The Director of Nordic and Baltic Affairs office at the US Department of State, Robert Silberstein, together with his colleague remarked during their visit to the University of Tartu in 2010, perhaps as a slight exaggeration compared to the somewhat changed situation today, that one of the most striking differences between Estonian and American youth behavior in classroom environment lies in the fact that the latter are more than eager to participate in discussions and always have an opinion whereas the former tend to scribble down notes and avoid eye contact with the teacher lest he/she might ask a question. In Estonia, the obtained knowledge is mostly evaluated by tests or oral answers, more often than not requiring a near-verbatim reproduction of the lesson's materials. Students who were born in the last years of the Soviet era have still been taught that a polite child does not interrupt or even talk to an adult unless asked to and the fear of providing an incorrect answer makes the option of avoiding questions more attractive.

The role of teachers as value educators facilitating also the development of personalities has been an important issue in discussions about the trends in the Estonian educational system, especially as the media tends to assert that success will be achieved through individualistic and sometimes egoistic efforts. Hulkki (2007) suggests that, similarly with the Finnish youth, young Estonians are increasingly obtaining information and knowledge on how to behave, talk and act – together with an understanding about the opposite sex and sexuality – from the media and popular culture. It is on the basis of these messages that they create their world view and identity. Hulkki stresses the need for a conscious explanation of popular culture and contents to the young as the media seems to concentrate on a message that emphasizes everyone's right to imitate the lifestyles of the rich and famous as portrayed via the media, i.e., "to be beautiful, slim and sexy". The prerequisite of a sensible mediation is an understanding by the teachers



themselves about what constitutes a happy individual and how to achieve a pleasant life (Hulkki 2008: 164-167). The archbishop of Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, Andres Põder, has also expressed concern that especially considering Estonian's secularity, attention should be paid to value and morals teaching at schools – a person who considers nothing sacred is unreliable and does not have ethical boundaries (Põder 2008:156). For a relatively small nation it is extremely necessary to lay a strong foundation of jointly held principles and one means for establishing it could be the incorporation of value teaching in school curricula so that the ethical principles would become intrinsic by the time one graduates.

The United States has successfully employed a strategy in schools called character education, once based on the teachings of the Bible, nowadays viewing its main aim in the support for children in developing into responsible and caring individuals. In order for a moral character to evolve, schools should aim at providing a supportive study environment, emphasize the importance of effort, develop intellectual abilities, give interesting tasks, be a role model, instigate feedback, provide possibilities for reports in public, use different methods of assessment and encourage mastery learning (Schwartz 2008: 199-205). Similar principles lie behind the national program "Value Development in Estonian Society (2009-2013)", the center of which will be value education for children and youth. Through trainings for teachers and parents, support for civic associations, private sector enterprises and media, also the new media, positive moral and social values will be spread to children in kindergartens and youth in schools and universities. Consequently, in classroom environment, issues related to values and morality should be dwelt upon and during extracurricular activities the same principles would be confirmed ("Riikliku programmi..."). The initiators do not propose an additional subject called value education but rather inscribing value related discussions into the teaching of different subjects.

Research data and behavior observations have shown that the Estonian youth tend to believe that success can and should be achieved fast, that shortly after the graduation from a higher education institution they are openly welcome in companies that offer high-paid jobs, that the main aim of working stands in the possibility to wear designer clothes and purchase a house and a car, the bigger the better, rather than engaging in something that provides the means for self-development. Many also tend to opt for alcohol consumption as the favorite pastime. Hulkki (2008: 166) admits that today's youth have received a completely different upbringing

from that of their parents and the constant exposure to media messages and advertisements may have resulted in an unrealistic world view. Kalmus (2010) drew attention to the fact that the generation gap may be growing – when generation X may remember a saying about an 'egg' teaching the 'hen' denoting the inappropriateness of a young person to be a wiseacre and tell an adult what to do, then today's 'eggs' are definitely teaching the 'hen' when it comes to managing in the new media world. It could even be said that nowadays an 'egg' teaches an 'egg' how to be a 'hen', referring to the tendency of young media users copying the clothing, postures and life-style of media created role models and their peers in their own turn modeling themselves on the local youth who have been successful in achieving the desired characteristics (ibid.). Emphasizing on a national level the necessity of providing value education in schools where students spend a remarkable amount of their waking hours is an interesting initiative for helping the young to comprehend the largely mediated world they are exposed to but the effects of such action especially on value judgments will be clearer in the coming decades.

## **6.6 American Influences on Estonian Values**

According to surveys, Estonian values do not seem to have changed much since the middle of the 1990s neither have they remarkably changed towards individualism or hedonism from then on. But those results may be only mirroring of what is desirable in the society. In actual fact, it is rather the wide spread of computer-mediated culture and the use of the new media enabling access to the Western and especially American cultural productions more easily, that seem to have had a remarkable effect on Estonians when we look at the consumer and conspicuous consumption trends in Estonia and the desire to imitate the rich and famous whose life-styles people are increasingly exposed to.

### **6.6.1 Estonian Values Similar to Those in the States**

Since the Soviet occupation ended there has been much talk about Westernization of the former Soviet bloc countries with the United States often included under the notion of 'the West'. Vogelberg (2004: 150) notes that despite there being heated discussions over the supposed Americanization of Europe in the discourse of Western Europe, similar trends lack in Eastern Europe, though, in her view, "if Europe is currently being Americanized, this happens chiefly, indeed massively, through former East and Central European countries". To

explain the lack of Americanization discourse or at least possible American influence discourse in the former Soviet bloc countries Vogelberg proposes that American values, altering the underlying value systems, have become so natural that they are considered inherent in the indigenous country:

Having overwhelmed the countries in a short space of time, and, furthermore, having at times been mediated by Western Europe that is itself being Americanized, the influences have become, to paraphrase Stuart Hall, invisible through their visibility. Despite their very recent arrival, many social phenomena of distinctly American origin have become part of the 'natural order of things' and thus no longer easily accessible to analysis. (Vogelberg 2003: 217)

Specific values of Estonians which are extremely similar precisely with those of Americans have been described by Vogelberg (cf. 1999, 2000, 2004), Sutrop (2005) and Kuslapuu (2009). The opening up of borders favored the hustling type people who had the courage and will to engage in trade and accumulated thereby their first million. Vogelberg (2004: 255) has drawn parallels between the Estonian situation in 1990s and the American Frontier, both favoring individualistic traits, effort-optimism and economic and social mobility due to exploiting the new limitless spaces. For Estonians, owing to their Protestant past, and Americans as part of their national character, individual success has been a sought-for goal. When a person succeeds, it is believed to be because of working hard and giving one's maximum, in case of failure the blame is not to be put on any external conditions or influences as is the case in most of Western Europe but on the person itself who supposedly did not toil enough and thereby also was not worthy of any gain. The fear of being called a loser (very widely used in Estonian as well as an adaption - 'luuser') easily gained ground and the only solution to the vicious circle seemed to be working harder.

Kristiina Kuslapuu (2009) has compiled an in-depth analysis on the relationship of work and leisure in Estonia, Western Europe and the United States concluding that in this respect Estonians are clearly more similar to Americans than Europeans. In the survey she carried out among mainly university students, most of them considered the trait 'hard-working' to be especially characteristic to Estonians, saw life as centered on work and had at least someone among their acquaintances who could be called a 'workaholic'. The answers further show that the respondents were aware of the existing achievement orientation, prevailing materialism and the cult of success (Kuslapuu 2009: 84). The above mentioned tendencies in the Estonian society similar to those in the States seem to have had an exhausting effect on people creating a longing for more concern for fellow people, nevertheless, the need for securing a nice income

in the unstable economic situation and uncertainty prevails and money is valued over health (ibid. 71, 91). Time-poverty deriving from the constant need to toil leaves little time for leisure and relaxing. Family and work related problems have been mentioned by Estonians as the primary factors leading to suicide. (“Eesti enesetapjad...”).

The phenomenon coexisting with the desire for abundance is consumption and showing off one’s purchasing power especially by conspicuous consumption to borrow the term coined by Veblen (1899). The description provided by Kuslapuu illustrates this trend in Estonia, American in character:

consumerism with its exhortations to spend calls for work as people want to compensate past scarcity and gain the material means to fulfill their dreams despite the relatively high cost of living. A number of Estonians need to consistently work to repay loans. The cult of success with its endless comparisons to others fosters conspicuous consumption and demands one to demonstrate one’s achievement or to follow the perceived standards set by peers and examples in the media. Additionally, people have been sensing a need to work hard and postpone personal gratification for the country to be able to recover and catch up with “the West”. (Kuslapuu 2009: 93)

While summarizing the trends of consumerism in Estonia, Keller and Kiisel conclude that by 2008 Estonia is in a stage of mature and growing consumerism (2009: 103). Jaan Kaplinski brings out an interesting comparison between the ideology that Estonians were subject to during five decades and another trend which, with some reservations, could also be seen as taking the dimensions of an ideology: “Communism and consumerism are two secular sects, having evolved from Christianity. When the first one seems now on the wane, the other is unprecedentedly triumphant in the world, conquering all countries and continents one by one“ (“Tagauksest...” para 4). Even though the answers to questionnaires may exhibit a rather slow movement of Estonian values towards post-materialism, a glance at the actual behavioral patterns of Estonians lead to think that there is a long way to post-materialism. Observing the processes in the Estonian society Vogelberg has suggested the term “pre-materialism” to be used as a Second-World correlate to Inglehart’s “materialism” and “post-materialism” (Kuslapuu 2009: 60). Kaplinski has divided societies into four types:

People can have: a. plenty of time, little money, b. plenty of money, little time. c. plenty of time, plenty of money. d. little time, little money. Now the ex-Jurassic, ex-Communist world is moving from a. to b., at least it hopes it is doing just that. But in any case the way to b. goes through d., it's our present state of affairs. As to c., it is probably what they have in Saudi Arabia. (Kaplinski “The Brave...” para 3)

Especially in the current situation when Estonia has just experienced the worldwide economic recess, although politicians claim the country is already recovering, reaching Kaplinski's stage b. seems to be postponed to an indefinite future for the majority.

The emphasis on consumption, constant comparison of oneself with others in terms of the possession of supposed symbols of status such as a private house, big car and brand clothes, spending a vacation in an exotic country, having one's children in the elite schools is widespread in Estonia. While looking at Estonian popular life-style magazines, success stories of relatively young businessmen or especially businesswomen prevail, with numbers of staged photographs accompanying the text, most of which are "tuned" to an extent that photographers themselves are worried of producing innumerable "wax-faced" celebrities. The photographer Herkki-Erich Merila remarks with regret that 50 years from now the future generations will see a distorted reality when trying to make conclusions on this era based on photos (Tooming & Allikivi 2010). The cult of youth, growing emphasis on self-presentation, imitation of the life-style of celebrities and a desire to possess as many goods as possible is rather similar to the mainstream American values. Having concentrated on the comparative analysis of values in Estonia for decades, Sutrop (2005) points out that several values could be related precisely with those prevalent in America – Estonians believe individual effort to be behind success which makes our work ethic American, economic growth and wealth are considered more valuable than the quality of life although Estonians tend to claim the opposite (which is also revealed in value research as compared to actual behavior), people work in order to consume more, and the politics favor the more well-off classes leaving the weaker with little state support.

### **6.6.2 Main Differences in the Values of Estonians and Americans**

Unfortunately, it seems to be the case that although we have adopted several aspects of life from America which, especially nowadays, are under severe scrutiny in Western Europe and have started to wear out Estonians as well, there are soft values in the States which have not become inherent for Estonians. The answers to several surveys as mentioned above have shown that Estonians are increasingly intolerant although the opening up of borders, cultural contacts and global media channels supposedly foster the understanding of a world consisting of different nations living side by side. Vogelberg (1999: 193) observes that in addition to tolerance, equal opportunities is another concept that has not fallen on fruitful ground in

Estonia. While Western cultures generally consider all people equal despite of their differences and act accordingly, Estonians exhibit little signs of solidarity and caring which is best manifested in the attitudes towards children, people with disabilities and elderly people (Sutrop 2005). Roughly one third of the respondents questioned by Kuslapuu described Estonians as being 'closed' which was the second popular adjective after the characteristic 'hard-working' (2009: 81). The same characteristic feature has been observed by numbers of foreigners as well (e.g., Robert Silberstein, Director of Nordic and Baltic Affairs office at the US Department of State during his visit to Tartu in June 2010, suggested Estonians to be the opposite of Americans in this aspect). On the one hand, the history of being conquered by different countries and the small size of the population has made Estonians skeptical towards others, on the other hand, the reserved and closed nature may be the biggest obstacle in carving the path to better relations with other nations inevitable in today's globalized world.

Religion could be considered another important balancing value for Americans in their society which otherwise cultivates rather materialist values. The pursuit to follow the teachings of the church may provide principles to abide by in times of economic recess or personal setbacks. Religion affects how the concepts of family, marriage, charity and protection of their country are encompassed in the world view of Americans (Sutrop 2005). Estonians, though, differ in this aspect immensely from the Americans, being one of the most secular nations in Europe. Jaan Kaplinski suggests that religions have been the balancing force against the urges of excessive consumption and growth. ("Pessimisti..." para 7). Estonians, having adopted several values and behavioral patterns characteristic to the New World, seem to be lacking in the soft values which might provide emotional support in times of difficulty. As it is evident that economic development has its peaks and downfalls and the never-ending success of everybody is unrealistic, Estonians with their reserved and pessimistic national character may experience any setbacks extremely severely. In addition to other factors, Protestant work ethic together with the desire to consume against the high rates of unemployment and the reserved character it may be also the lack of soft values contributing to the fact that at the end of the 1990s Estonia was one of the leading countries in the world considering the ratio of suicides (500-600 per year) ("Eesti Haigekassa..."). The total number of suicides in 2009 has decreased to 280 incidents ("Enesetappude ..."). Considering the individualistic cast of mind, the trend towards consumption, a lack of care for the less advantaged and growing intolerance, Sutrop

(2005), shortly after Estonia's accession to the European Union, doubted whether Estonians would at all fit together with other European.

The past five years have still provided some hope for the rise of softer values as compared to those which could be observed in the 1990s. With entering the European Union, influences from precisely this nearest part of world have increased in the political, social and also cultural spheres. Several other trends and initiatives have supported the growth of the much needed traits of solidarity and caring. The emergence of spiritual groups and their growing number of members (for instance the NGO Lektorium active in 11 cities) provides an alternative for those in the community who are exhausted by the materialist trends. The increasing interest in re-use, especially in fashion and clothing, sends signals of the reversing of excessive consumption. Sustainable development and ecological design have become buzzwords in different industries, for instance, courses with such content have been added to the curriculum of Tartu Art College. A greater concern for the environment is manifested, inter alia, in the overwhelming number of 50 000 volunteers in the 2008 campaign "Let's do it!" ("Teeme ära!") in which vast areas of Estonia were cleaned of waste and rubbish, an action successfully repeated in different forms during the next two years as well inspiring similar actions to be taken in Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, India and Brazil ("Teeme Ära!..."). As a reaction to the wide spread of chiefly American mainstream movies, alternative film festivals such as PÖFF (Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival), tARTuFF (Tartu Love Film Festival) and HÖFF (The Haapsalu Horror & Fantasy Film Festival), to name the most popular, have been organized. The above mentioned initiatives give hope for the rise of a civic society, cultivation of soft values and concentration on cultural production of other countries in addition to that of the United States.

## **7. EMPIRICAL STUDIES ABOUT THE ROLE OF AMERICAN VISUAL CULTURE IN ESTONIA**

Whether or to what extent media messages influence people's value judgments and behavior has been a source of heated discussions and scholarly research. In general, it is difficult to prove that a particular behavior is caused by a specific media content although the advertizing industry is based on this assumption. It could, though, be assumed that a long-time exposure to similar content may lead to the audience's familiarity with the underlying principles and transmitted values which in its own turn, together with other supporting societal factors, may lead to people's inclination to opt for the familiar contents in the future. The "natural experiment" in India that seems to prove a direct impact of TV contents coming from a prestigious culture such as the American one on people's core values and behavior should be once again pointed out here (see above, p. 44).

American mainstream movie industry is largely built on the aim to produce entertainment for as large audiences as possible in order to gain maximum profit. Movies produced by US corporations have been created on the basis of often predictable scenarios which have previously resulted in high numbers of movie theater visitors and provide viewers the characteristics they expect – usually fast tempo, a lot of action and special effects, characters speaking English, an easily understood plot and in most cases a happy ending or at least a hope for a happy ending. Such aspects together with an affordable price of American movies to be shown in movie theaters or purchased for television broadcasting make this production internationally attractive so that several countries feel the need to protect their cultural spaces by quotas on US movies. It could be suggested that the arise of new media with its easy downloading opportunities has actually facilitated the spread of movies of the same kind, even though it has also made access to alternatives easier. The present chapter looks at the origins and contents of movies that Estonians are exposed to when watching television and visiting movie theaters.



## 7.1 The Origin of Movies Shown on Estonian Television Channels

In order to find out which movies predominate Estonian television channels and movie theaters, a content analysis was carried out. In content analysis a text is coded into smaller categories and either conceptual or relational analysis is applied in order to draw conclusions about the text, author, audience or the whole culture. In the present case the text encompasses Estonian television programs and movie theaters, the research focus is on finding the proportion of US produced movies of all movies. A period of a month – from May 28 until June 24, 2010 – was studied. The source for extracting movies from the rest of the programs was the television schedules issued by the daily newspaper *Õhtuleht*.

The analysis of Estonian television channels includes the programs of six channels: ETV, ETV2, Kanal 2, Kanal 11, TV 3 and TV 6. It is important to note that ETV and ETV2 belong to Estonian Public Broadcasting, Kanal 2 and Kanal 11 are owned by Kanal 2 Inc. and both TV 3 and TV 6 have the same owner - MTG Broadcasting AB. ETV and ETV2 are national whereas the other four are commercial channels, which largely influences the content that is offered. The aim of Estonian Public Broadcasting is to create multifaceted contents and by mirroring the Estonian identity, promote common values and develop Estonian culture and civic society (*Eesti Rahvusringhääling*). Kanal 2 Inc. and MTG Broadcasting AB, being private corporations, have to abide by viewer numbers which forces them to opt for contents with a wide appeal.

The period of analysis encompasses four weeks. The week starts with Friday and ends with Thursday in order to be comparable with the overview of movies shown in movie theaters as movie theater programs are renewed each week with Friday considered as the first day. Altogether 258 movies were on air (40 of which were re-runs), the two main private channels Kanal 2 and TV 3 leading the transmission of movies to Estonian audiences with 61 movies shown by Kanal 2 and 60 by TV 3. TV 6 followed close with 56 movies and Kanal 11 remained the last in the list of private companies with a total of 40 movies broadcasted during the four weeks. The two Estonian Public Broadcasting channels ETV and ETV2 each aired only about a third of the amount that the leaders Kanal 2 and TV 3 did – 21 and 20 movies respectively. In terms of corporations MTG Broadcasting AB is on top of the three with 116 movies shown on their two Estonian channels followed by Kanal 2 Inc. with 101 and Estonian Public Broadcasting with 41 movies.

It should be taken into account, though, that the period under analysis coincides with the FIFA World Cup football competition that is broadcasted in Estonia by ETV which may have left less time for showing movies. On the other hand, the period also includes Estonian Victory Day, the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June, and St. John's Day, the 24<sup>th</sup> of June which prompted the record of 7 Estonian movies on ETV and ETV2 altogether on both days. The comparison of the amount of movies in one random week before the World Cup from April 26 to May 2, the number of movies being 14 including two re-runs, shows that ETV still airs generally fewer movies than the commercial channels. The need to appeal to a wide audience and provide popular entertainment makes private companies the dominant transmitters of movies.

The most striking data is revealed when looking at the origin of movies. Out of the 258 movies 146 are produced solely by the US companies which amounts to more than a half of all the movies shown on the six Estonian channels. When the 31 movies that the US companies have produced in cooperation with other countries – mainly United Kingdom, Canada and Germany – are added the number of movies amounts to 177. This makes up two thirds of movies broadcasted during the month in question. The origins of the remaining 81 movie producers remain largely in Europe -- 36 movies are produced by solely German companies or with Germany being a partner in the production. The third major producer of movies shown on Estonian channels is the United Kingdom, again, either independently or in cooperation with companies from other European countries with altogether 28 movies available for Estonian audience during the analyzed month. Estonian movies were shown in only 16 cases, most of which being on air around the national holiday and St. John's Day.

The most favorable Estonian channel for American movies is TV 3 with 48 movies of US origin. When added the 6 made in cooperation with other countries the total number of production from the States is 54 movies amounting to approximately a third of all the US movies shown during that month. The other Estonian channel in the MTG Broadcasting AB corporation, TV 6, remains the second in the airing of mainly US production – 49 movies. Kanal 2 Inc. is the second corporation with its channel Kanal 2 showing 43 movies that the US corporations have produced together with companies from other countries and Kanal 11 adding 24 more movies to the transmitted US visual production in consideration. The least enthusiastic in showing American movies or movies in general is the publicly owned organization Estonian Public Broadcasting showing only four US movies on ETV and three on

ETV2. This data further proves that Estonian commercial channels which require a great number of viewers for attracting advertising companies to buy air time consider movies, especially US movies as the most appealing to Estonian audience.

For the analysis of main genres the distinction between 15 categories of movies was made. Most frequently the movies fell into the category of drama with different sub-divisions into romantic-, adventure- and psychological drama, altogether in 80 incidents from the total 258 movies shown. Comedies followed shortly with a total of 70 movies on air during four weeks. The third popular category was thriller, the 28 movies in this division forming only about a third of the most widely shown category of drama. The genres of documentaries and action movies were almost equally represented, 20 and 19 movies respectively.

Upon the results of the content analysis of movies shown on Estonian television channels during the four weeks period it can be stated that Estonian television is almost submerged by movies of US origin. Commercial channels are more inclined to broadcast American movies with MTG Broadcasting AB taking the lead by showing two thirds of the American movies that Estonian audiences were exposed to. The most common genre of movies in roughly half of the cases was drama with its different sub-categories followed by comedy which was the genre of 70 movies. The high number of American movies available for free and shown especially in the evening during the prime time when people are home from work and usually look for entertainment leads one to think that Estonians are mostly exposed to specifically American movies and, consequently, values conveyed in these products.

It may be assumed that the prices of American movies, especially those a decade or two old, may be affordable to Estonian television channels – the relatively low-quality movies can be shown as time-fillers with the newer box-office movies advertised as the ones people should definitely follow on television. Most probably the contracts have supportive clauses about re-running the movies on television which should explain the general feeling that such actors as Stallone, Schwarzenegger, Van Damme and Chuck Norris have been performing their stunts on the Estonian television screens for ages. Furthermore, one can deduce from the eagerness of the commercial channels to transmit these movies that the American production may be attractive for the advertisers who in turn presume that these lure audiences. It would be definitely worth studying in more detail whether the forerunner of establishing quotas on

American films, namely France, has a different ratio of American movies in their national channels.

## **7.2 Overview of the Programs in Movie Theaters**

In order to find out which countries are the main producers of movies that Estonian movie theatre visitors are exposed to in Tartu, again, content analysis was applied. The period correlates with the weeks chosen for the analysis on Estonian television programs, i.e. May 28 until June 24, 2010 starting with Friday as movie theaters renew their programs on every Friday for the coming seven days. The texts to be coded is in this case the programs of two major movie theaters in Tartu – Cinamon and Ekraan with an addition of Genialists' Club and Anne Youth Centre, both of which contributed by showing one movie during the one month period. To a large extent, movie theaters in Tartu have programs similar to the largest movie theaters in the capital Tallinn. For instance, Forum Cinemas provides movies for Ekraan in Tartu and one of the largest movie theaters in Tallinn – Coca Cola Plaza. Cinamon offers movies for the public in Tartu as well as in the allegedly most modern Estonian movie centre in Tallinn's Solaris Centre. Movie theater programs were drawn from the exhaustive Internet website [www.kultuuriaken.ee](http://www.kultuuriaken.ee) that makes it possible to access the timetables and dates of cultural events which have already taken place.

During the four weeks movie theater audiences in Tartu had the possibility to see a total of 25 different movies. The majority – 20 different movies – were shown in the movie theater Cinamon and only nine in Ekraan with an addition of two movies shown in alternative locations. There were altogether six movies that both Ekraan and Cinamon offered, consequently three movies represented in Ekraan were not shown in Cinamon and 14 movies in the Cinamon program were not in that of Ekraan. With such numbers Cinamon is the leading movie theater in Tartu. When taking the countries in focus where the movies originate from it is clear that similarly with the origin of movies seen on television, the United States is the top country when contributing to the movies which are offered in cinemas – 18 out of the 25 movies in movie theaters had been made by American movie industries. Two of the rest of the movies were produced by French companies and the other five originated from other countries, among them only one from Estonia.

The major companies behind the movies were Walt Disney Pictures together with Touchstone Pictures (subsidiized by Walt Disney Pictures), Paramount Pictures with DreamWorks Animation (a company which operates under Paramount), Universal Pictures and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox – all American based, more precisely, Hollywood movie companies. The above mentioned four main companies were also the producers of movies which both Cinamon and Ekraan showed. Consequently, their production was considered most likely to attract Estonian audiences. Among the US companies only Lakeshore Entertainment could be viewed as an independent studio whose subsidies derive from a minor share in a major company.

Among the movies offered eight main genres could be distinguished. The most popular of these was comedy (seven movies), followed by drama, the most widely represented genre on television, with five movies. The categories of horror and adventure followed with an equal representation of three movies. The animated family movie *Shrek Forever After* (2010) distributed by the Hollywood company Paramount Pictures was shown a total of 173 times altogether in Cinamon and Ekraan during the month in question. *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* (2010), produced and distributed by the world's largest media and entertainment conglomerate The Walt Disney Company, was shown 137 times. The third position was occupied by yet another Hollywood major studio 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox with their TV series-based movie *The A-Team* (2010), shown 116 times. The data on the number of times the movies were shown should, though, be considered with caution. Namely, by the four weeks under analysis some movies had been running for months already and were starting to be taken off from the program as was the case with the world's most expensive movie *Avatar* (2009), and some movies such as *Knight and Day* (2010) had just been put into the program.

Thus, the two major movie theatres in Tartu showed movies which were primarily produced and distributed by North American major movie companies – more than two thirds of the movies had been shot by those which could be considered Hollywood ones. Estonian cinema was represented by only one movie. The audiences in Tartu have the possibility to view the production that is mainly made by the greatest conglomerates with huge budgets which in turn enables the producers to encompass the latest technologies, the most popular cast and the most experienced staff in their movies. Although the content analysis covered also the number of times the movies were shown during the four week period, broader conclusions

on this basis cannot be drawn as some movies were on the program for the last days and new movies were provided for the audiences during the period.

Upon the analysis of the two main media whereby Estonians are exposed to movies it is clear that American movie dominates the entertainment arena leaving the production and distribution companies of other countries far behind. Approximately two thirds of all the movies shown on Estonian television programs and Tartu movie theaters originated from the United States. Consequently, Estonians are exposed to the lifestyles and values portrayed by primarily American corporations although occasionally alternative movie festivals are also organized in different Estonian towns. The survey conducted among University of Tartu students by Taavi Ilp (2006: 42) revealed that almost 90% of students prefer domestic television channels to keep in touch with what is happening in the world whereas two thirds have stated entertainment to be most attractive when it comes to the preference of contents.

The American movie has crossed successfully the borders of national cultural arena to the extent that European countries have felt the need to protect their cultural environment from American production by laws. One can only but agree with Kroes' statement that owing to the possibility of mass reproduction people's semiotic spaces are filled with messages originating from America (Kroes 1999: para 22). Furthermore, he suggests that it is the American production that has become even inherent to viewers worldwide:

We have grown accustomed to a specific American mode of cultural production, or rather to the ways in which American *culture* reproduces itself, through endless variation and recombination. Not only have we cracked American cultural codes and can read them flawlessly, we have also appropriated these codes. They have become part of our collective imaginary repertoire. (Kroes 1999: para 19)

The constant exposure to American movies has made this production familiar to Estonian audiences and its consumption natural.

### **7.3 American Values in American Movies**

The United States is a country which has been formed of immigrants by immigrants. The settlers from various other continents have brought their culture with them and therefore the American culture can be seen as an amalgam of world cultures and Protestant Western European cultural traditions. While talking about American popular culture, Browne (2001: 2) proposes a parallel with a fish and its scales where a fish represents the whole of the concept

of American popular culture which has to be seen as consisting of a large number of overlapping sub-cultures: “The only way to talk about a singular popular culture is to realize that it is a mixture of many small and large cultures which are controlled by elements of smaller than and different from the large national picture, the living fish”. American popular culture is diverse across time and place.

Popular culture derives its content from the everyday life and mixes with the prevalent ideals and values in the society, thus providing a yardstick for the audiences to draw parallels with their own lives. American popular culture both reflects the everyday life and in its own turn by portraying what is accepted or not accepted, desired or unwanted also constructs the values of the consumers: “In a democracy like the United States it [popular culture] is the voice of the people /.../. It is the everyday world around us: the mass media, entertainments, diversions; it is our heroes, icons, rituals, everyday actions, psychology and religion – our total life pictures” (Browne 2001: 1-2). American movie can be seen as one of the most successful manifestations of American values in popular culture to surpass state borders and spread globally. Minz and Roberts (2010: x) suggest that the movie provides the most concise overview of the way of life and values of Americans:

“Anyone who wishes to know about the twentieth-century United States would do well to go to the movies. /.../ Movies – even bad movies- are important sociological and cultural documents. Like any other popular commercial art form, movies are highly sensitive barometers that both reflect and influence public attitudes. From the beginning of the last century, films have recorded and even shaped American values, beliefs, and behaviour”.

Belton (1996: 1) draws similar parallels between the American character and American movies: “The American character is formed within the larger context of American culture as a whole. But aspects of it surface in the movies. The movies play a crucial role in its construction, in its representation/pre-presentation and in its transmission”. People may either agree or disagree with the values they see exposed on the screen but still the American movie conveys the mainstream ideas and ideals characteristic of Americans.

In order to analyze whether and to what extent American values are present in American movies, the values which are most often associated with the American character will be searched for in the course of a short discourse analysis of American movies which have won The American Awards in the category of Best Picture since 1991. Almost all the nominees are known to Estonian audiences as they have been shown on Estonian television channels with

the exception of the winners of the current and the last year, which, however, are accessible in the digital format.

While looking at the list of Oscar winning motion pictures since 1991 on the homepage of the Academy at [www.oscars.org](http://www.oscars.org), the most successful genres seem to be the historical movie and the western, both represented in three instances out of the total 20 movies. The topic of war is largely in the centre in the case of 6 movies. The trait which can characterize most of the movies nominated by the Academy is the life-story of an individual, his/her struggle for the place in the world and individual achievement. Belton (1996: 11) writes that character-centeredness is an inherent trait of Hollywood movies, manifested in the attempts of the individual to overcome hardships, either internal conflicts or difficulties caused by other people, which will culminate either with victory or defeat. In the majority of cases, even if the movie ends with the death of the protagonist, there remains hope for possible happy developments in the future due to the individual's actions and life choices.

Individualism and applauding individual achievement is revealed in different forms in the Oscar-winning movies. In the case of westerns or movies in which the activities take place in the historical West, the individual is a loner whose otherwise peaceful and ordinary life is disturbed by some event or invasion by other people and the following events also challenge the individual. In the case of the 1993 Oscar winner *Unforgiven* (1992), the central character William Munny had a criminal record of a notorious gunfighter which seems to be redeemed by having settled down as a farmer, a loving husband and a father. He accepts one last invitation to avenge for the mutilation of a prostitute in their surroundings – killing the villain in this case is justified as the act is seen as just revenge. After completing the mission he is portrayed as continuing his father duties, moving to town and successfully engaging in business. Consequently, the individualism in this movie lies in the characteristically Frontier-type of personality of the protagonist – a bold, arrogant and notorious cowboy who became a loving family man after falling in love. The one final bounty-hunt and revenge was for a just cause which culminated with achieving the aim set, though with more casualties than probably expected.

Another Oscar-winning western *Dances With Wolves* (1990) is set in the Civil War era where the central character Lieutenant John. J. Dunbar becomes a hero among American troops and then asks himself to be assigned to a post in the West. His days go by quietly in the



company of a wolf. After saving the life of a girl from the Native American Sioux tribe, he finally settles to live with the Sioux. Consequently, the US military considers him a traitor. The continuous line of individualism is first manifested in the environment of the West and the Frontier areas which favor only the daring and self-sufficient types of people. Dunbar manages to stay true to moral and ethical principles and loyal to those who abide by the same principles, even though knowing the consequences of becoming a traitor. Making his own decisions and surviving in the harsh and ascetic surroundings give us every reason to consider this character an individualist.

The author and screenwriter Nora Ephron (2006) summarizes the pervading characteristic of American movies as follows: "An appealing character strives against great odds to achieve a worthwhile goal." In the 1995 Best Picture winner *Forrest Gump* (1994) the protagonist is a simple minded character who, despite below average intelligence and having once worn leg braces, turns out to be a phenomenal runner which enables him to graduate from college on a sports scholarship. Furthermore, Forrest goes to the Vietnam War and becomes a hero by saving his fellow men. Later on, while on recovery from a bullet wound, Forrest takes up ping-pong and becomes a top player in that field as well. Furthermore, he becomes famous in America when deciding to run across the States during a period of more than three years in a row. Thus, the film evokes the American dream – despite physical and mental impediments, with a will of mind and effort one can still achieve and become a hero.

Belton (1996: 12) has remarked: "The hero's sense of agency runs, like a thread, through the body of American cinema". A feature of heroism runs through another Oscar-winning movie – *Million Dollar Baby* (2004) as well. The storyline is about two characters – the boxing trainer Frankie Dunn, who is an outcast among his colleagues and family, and a 31-year-old waitress Maggie, also scorned by her family, whose dream is to become a professional boxer. Hesitant at first, Dunn agrees to train her, which culminates with Maggie's participation in the finals of a million dollar championship. Although on the lead, Maggie becomes paralyzed as a consequence of the co-fighter's sneaky punch. The heroism and egalitarianism are also largely present in the movie in question – despite all negative factors, with hard work and dedication a person can fulfill one's dreams. The sad ending is somewhat exceptional in American movies but through hardships the main characters are brought closer

and even the rugged trainer is shown emotional. Regardless of the difficulties the protagonist Maggie retains her moral values.

In addition to the values of individualism, achievement, personal advancement, egalitarianism and heroism, American movies can be characterized by a constant exposition of the struggle between good and evil, morality and injustice. This dichotomy and the protagonists having to choose sides is evident in the movie *Schindler's List* (1993), depicting events during World War II, in the epic dramas *Braveheart* (1995) and *Gladiator* (2000) as well as in the fantasy movie *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003) and *The Departed* (2006), with a setting in contemporary America. In the first case the protagonist Oscar Schindler, a German businessman, works against his countrymen who were trying to kill the Jewish workers in his factory. Having at first enjoyed cheap Jewish labor, he is appalled by the magnitude of torture the Nazi party supporters are about to inflict on all Jews and spends the fortune he made from the exploitation of the workers to buy them out of the Nazi grasp. Schindler had to choose between moral values but with the threat against his own life or helping to commit the Holocaust with the former values prevailing. The following two epic movies also center on heroism and standing up for morality – in case of *Gladiator* the protagonist Maximus stands for ethical principles and defeats the immoral successor to the Roman throne, the main character in *Braveheart*, William Wallace, fights against the torturous rule of King Edward I for the freedom of Scotland, staying true to his convictions until beheaded. The fantasy-adventure movie *The Lord of the Rings* (2003), the third in the trilogy, depicts the ultimate fight between the peace-loving inhabitants of the Middle-Earth against the world dominion attempts of the evil Sauron. In yet another Academy Award winning movie *The Departed*, the fight between good and evil is depicted to take place in the US police forces. Although the first three movies are based on true stories or legends with non-American origin, the facts that these plots were decided to be screened, scripts were modified and innumerable special effects were added allow these movies to be seen as the embodiment of American values.

American movies have also carried a journalistic function, informing the audiences about current situations in the society: "Because motion pictures shape and are shaped by mass culture, they define themselves in terms of these dominant ideologies, sometimes reflecting them and sometimes calling them into question" (Belton 1996: 2). The Best Picture winner in

2000, *American Beauty* (1999), is the portrayal of the somewhat twisted life of the American middle class – on the surface the families seem to lead an ideal life but in fact the middle-aged father is bored with his life, the wife is an unfaithful, cold and materialistic real-estate salesperson, the daughter has low self-esteem, the neighbor is a narrow-minded army colonel, with an overly humble wife they have a son who engages in drug dealing. The families are comfortably well-off but seem to exhibit characteristics which are supposedly the result of a capitalist society with an emphasis on materialism and achievement. In the movie the following all-American principle is repeated twice by the characters: “In order to be successful, one must project an image of success at all times”. Belton (1996: 7) notes: “Within mainstream American thought capitalism works but it just sometimes goes a bit crazy”. The movie *American Beauty* is a perfect example of the negative effects of a society where the ultimate goal is achievement.

The values most often associated with Americans seem to be present in all of the Oscar-winning movies during the two decades under analysis. Actor and moviemaker Sydney Pollack (2006) suggests in an interview that movies have a strong effect on how people see the world. During a conversation one can more easily perceive if one is trying to persuade the other to act in a wanted manner or change their ideas but as images are subtle and do not overtly signal their purpose the messages may be imbibed unconsciously (Pollack 2006). Television writer and producer Norman Lear (2006) suggested that people can often tell when they are manipulated in the course of a conversation but it is images that do not signal their purpose. Though researchers usually try to refrain from any strong and generalized claims about the effect of media on behavior, the above quotes do seem to support the possibility. Also, there is a special theory on the effects of mass media founded by George Gerbner in the 1960s called ‘cultivation theory’ which establishes that television shapes viewer’s social reality and television exposure “has long-term effects which are small, gradual, indirect but cumulative and significant” (Gupta 2006: 27). As can be seen on the basis of the three empirical analyses American values are present in American movies and Estonian audiences have good access especially to movies produced in the States.

When University of Tartu students were asked whether they like American popular culture, more than half of the respondents replied “rather no” (Ilp 2006: 45). Furthermore, the answer to the question whether they like American popular culture more than Estonian culture

received a negative reply by almost 90% of the respondents (ibid.). Students seem to turn to television for entertainment, are active consumers of that production but patriotic while their preferences are questioned in a survey. When looking at the conspicuous consumption trends in Estonia, the achievement-orientation, the desire of the individual to succeed and obtain riches fast, the cult of youth and considering that it is precisely the American audio-visual popular production which has submerged the Estonian cultural space by messages that support such values one is led to think at least about a possible correlation between these phenomena.

## CONCLUSION

The present thesis has attempted to analyse similarities and differences in the value characteristics of Estonians and Americans. For this purpose the historical development of American and Estonian values has been provided. In order to find out about future developments in value trends the values of youth and their media consumption have been in focus. By means of describing the characteristics of today's postmodern, digital age the author suggests that the availability of media, especially the new media, the predominance of American contents in both old and new media and the fact that Estonians are eager new media users may have been significant factors behind Estonians' greater inclination to adopt American lifestyles they see daily on the screen.

Americans have historically been characterized by such adjectives as hard-working, achievement-oriented, daring, entrepreneurial, competitive and individualistic. Belief in the American Dream, in everybody's possibility to achieve success through hard work which ultimately also guarantees salvation is ingrained in the minds of Americans although everyday life often disproves it. Due to specific socio-economic conditions there is an ever-increasing bulk of Americans who live in poverty or near poverty yet Americans believe their society to be a classless one or, at least, consisting of a middle-class majority. The dichotomy between winners and losers has resulted in such traits as nervousness, anxiety, insecurity, violence, instability, hedonism and narcissism.

The comparative data from research on Estonian values does show a change towards individualism, hedonism and post-material values during the first years after regaining independence but in the following years of the transition period, until 2010, research does not report any significant continuation of this trend. When looking at the tendencies in everyday behavior it is, however, likely that in terms of such characteristics as Protestant work ethic, orientation to achievement, success, desire to outdo others and acquisitiveness but also the fear of losing one's job, less time for leisure and increasing debts to purchase items for showing status Estonians bear explicit similarities with Americans.

The beginning of the new millennium and joining the European Union has brought also European influences to Estonia – enhancing joint economic and cultural landscape with the culmination of Estonians adopting the Euro in 2011. Still, the facts that cultural production in

the globalized information age is easily accessible, the United States are the dominant producer of popular culture contents increasingly spread also via the new media and Estonians are eager new media users lead to conclude that Estonians are still exposed to primarily American popular culture.

It would be somewhat risky to state that specific movie contents change values – it is difficult if not impossible to measure scientifically the effect of one movie and extract that effect from other possible influencing factors – although the advertisement industry is built on the assumption that advertizing can change behavior, especially consumer trends. The analyses suggesting that a long-time exposure to the same media contents may influence people are though evident.

The empirical analysis in the present thesis of six Estonian television channels as well as movie theaters in Tartu shows the dominance of movies produced precisely by American companies. Furthermore, upon the analysis of the American Academy Award winning movies it is clear that the values traditionally associated with Americans are reflected in these most highly rated motion pictures as well. With American contents increasingly available via the new media, domestic television and in movie theaters, Estonians are exposed to American popular culture on a daily basis. What people see regularly on screen to be a norm may consciously or unconsciously influence them to make similar choices in real life.

It must be still taken into account that the content analysis of Estonian television channels and Tartu movie theaters cannot be the sole basis of stating that American culture has overwhelmed Estonians as people have access to numerous other channels through satellite television and the period of one month is relatively inadequate for any large-scale statements. The present empirical research refers to a trend of Estonians being exposed to American movies and thus American values which could be brought out more clearly in the course of further analysis of the origin of contents that the youth tend to consume through the new media and of whether and how it influences their value judgements.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Coding instruction for the analysis of movies in Tartu movie theaters:**

1. Name of the movie
2. Movie theater where the movie was shown
  - a) Cinamon
  - b) Ekraan
  - c) both
3. Number of times the movie was shown (Friday to Thursday)
4. Genre
  - a) thriller
  - b) comedy
  - c) drama
  - d) action
  - e) horror
  - f) youth movie
  - g) adventure
  - h) documentary
  - i) family movie
  - j) crime
  - k) children's movie
  - l) science-fiction
  - m) catastrophe
  - n) erotic
  - o) musical
5. Producer/distributor
6. Country of origin

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Coding instruction for the analysis of movies shown on Estonian television channels**

1. Name of the movie

2. Television channel

- a) ETV
- b) ETV2
- c) Kanal 2
- d) Kanal 11
- e) TV 3
- f) TV 6

3. Genre

- a) comedy
- b) action
- c) adventure
- d) drama
- e) horror

4. Producer/distributor

5. Country of origin

TARTU ÜLIKOOL  
INGLISE FILOLOOGIA ÕPPETOOL

Riina Gendrikson

The Role of Mass/Popular Culture as the Reflector and Constructor of American Mainstream Values and its Possible Influence on Estonia.

Massi/popkultuuri roll Ameerika põhihoovuse väärtuste peegeldaja ning loojana ja selle võimalik mõju Eestile.

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## ANNOTATSIOON

Käesolev töö käsitleb valdavaid väärtushinnanguid Eestis ning Ameerika Ühendriikides ja nende sarnasusi ning erinevusi, keskendudes noorte väärtushinnangutele. Võimalikku ameerikalike väärtuste mõju Eesti ühiskonnale vaadeldakse popkultuuri sisu, leviku ning päritolu analüüsi kaudu, eestlaste meedia ning uue meedia kasutuspraktikaid arvestades.

Esiteks antakse ülevaade Ameerika põhihoovuse väärtustest ja nenditakse, et kui ameeriklasi on läbi ajaloo kirjeldatud individualistlike, edukesksete, tööd väärtustavate, konkurentsi pooldavate, optimistlike ja ettevõtlikena, siis saavutusele orienteeritud ühiskond soodustab kodanikes ühtlasi ärevust, närvilisust, ebakindlust, tarbijalikkust ja vägivalda. Järgnevalt uuritakse popkultuuri postmodernsel perioodil ning tõdetakse, et Ameerika Ühendriigid on suurimaid popkultuuri tootjaid ning eksportijaid, edastades seeläbi ameerikalikke väärtusi ja peegeldades ameerikalikku elulaadi.

Eestlaste hulgas domineerivatest väärtushoiakutest antakse ülevaade mitmete autorite väärtusuuringute tulemustele toetuvalt. Uuringute põhjal näitavad eestlaste väärtused alates siirdeajast muutust individualismi ning hedonismi ehk pigem ameerikalike väärtuste suunas, kuid viimase 15 aasta jooksul läbi viidud väärtusuuringud sama trendi jätkumist märkimisväärselt ei kinnita. Igapäevaelu, meedias ilmunud artikleid ning varasemaid teadustöid jälgides võib siiski väita, et töö väärtustamise, edukuse ihaluse, ettevõtlikkuse ning võistluslikkuse poolest sarnanevad eestlased pigem ameeriklastele kui Lääne-Eurooplastele.

Magistritöö keskmes on Eesti ja Ameerika Ühendriikide noorte väärtused ning meediakäitumine. Arvestades, et Ameerika Ühendriigid ekspordivad popkultuuri intensiivselt Euroopasse, uus meedia võimaldab veelgi vabamat popkultuuri levikut ning eestlased, eriti Eesti noored on agarad uue meedia kasutajad, võib oletada, et igapäevaelus meedia kaudu vahendatavad väärtused ja elustiil võivad muutuda ühiskonnas normiks. Ka empiirilised uuringud Tartu kinodes ja Eesti telekanalite näidatud filmide päritolu kohta ning Ameerika Ühendriikide parimate filmide sisuanalüüs lubavad välja tuua trendi, mille kohaselt eestlastel on võimalik kokku puutuda eelkõige Ameerikas toodetud filmidega ning seeläbi ameerikaliku elulaadi ning ameerikalike väärtustega.

Märksõnad: ameeriklased, eestlased, väärtused, popkultuur, ühiskond.