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# Perversion of the American Dream

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And when I got to America, I say it blew my mind.

Eric Burdon and the Animals (1968), *New York 1963 – America 1968*,

*Every one of Us* (Album)

## Introduction

It seems that neoliberalism<sup>1</sup> perverted the American Dream in a manner, which could be compared to what relatively a bit gentler and kinder consumerism did to the Enlightenment in view of Adorno's and Horkheimer's critique. However, the result – a turn from the idea of freedom to the social reality of domination – is not only a consequence of the impact of some external forces. Throughout the “Dialectic”, the authors are signalling that the turn comes from within, what they clearly point out in the preface from 1944, saying that “the germ of regression” is contained in the enlightenment thinking. “The aporia which faced us in our work thus proved to be the first matter we had to investigate: the self-destruction of enlightenment. We have no doubt – and herein lies our *petitio principii* – that freedom in society is inseparable from enlightenment thinking” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002: p. xvi). The thinking contained in any “formula” of the American Dream works through very similar logic. Finding a way to a new freedom in a society presupposes some re-thinking, or in Derrida's perspective: the deconstruction of the enlightenment itself. Likewise, the American Dream requests a deconstructive reformu-

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1 What is and what is not neoliberalism is not an object of analysis in this paper. I think that after the combined knowledge and analysis of authors like Naomi Klein, Thomas Piketty, Paul Krugman, Michael Peters, and many others, the relevance of the notion for economic system, political order, culture, ideology and domination is clear enough. Therefore, I would agree that it is very important to take a look at neoliberalism in its broader effects. “/.../ in order to more fully grasp the effects of neoliberalism, the debate must take into account culture, understood here as a symbolic system articulated through systems of dispositions” (Hilger, 2013: p. 76).

lation – both in thoughts and in (political) praxis. The American dream and the enlightenment overlap in more than one sense and they certainly both include in their core an idea of the emancipative role of education.

### American Dream is not just a Trope

When the topic of a discussion is a syntagm, which is actually a condensation of multiple meanings, it is difficult to conceive any final definition or clarification of it. The idea – assuming that it is not only an empty signifier – of the American Dream is undoubtedly such a syntagm. In Cyril Ghosh's words, “/.../ the American Dream is an ‘essentially contested concept’ that does not lend itself easily to definitions” (2013: p. 2). At the same time an abundance of “definitions” is extant. These different definitions permeate many discourses, from political rhetoric to literary narratives, and undoubtedly many casual daily conversations. Educational discourses make no exception among them. Therefore, in spite of the difficulties of defining the idea, it looks as if the meaning of the notion of the American Dream is generally known. Ghosh finds out that in spite of many references especially in the American political theory, there is a “scholarly vacuum” as far as the analysis of the concept is concerned. “Perhaps political theorists, like most people in the United States, assume the concept to be self-evident to the point that it requires, or even merits, no further clarification” (ibid.: p. 6). In probably the most exhaustive book on the meanings of the American Dream written so far, Ghosh persuasively demonstrates that the concept of the American Dream is not just a trope and he argues that the notion is an ideological term. “It is important to recognize that the American Dream is a quintessentially twentieth-century iteration of the vision of New England settlers” (ibid., p 7). The author then continues by emphasizing that “imbricated relationship between the ideas of work, virtue, and happiness” has been around since the start and that the American Dream is “an artefact of the twentieth century” (ibid.). Some verified historical facts clearly confirm this claim, considering that it is known who first uttered the word and when.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the book, Ghosh recalls and explains, but he also sometimes disputes, widely known facts and beliefs about the historical roots of the American Dream. Thus, he actually demonstrates that the analysis of the idea finally becomes an analysis of the American political culture. Individualism, equal opportu-

2 Ghosh and, indeed, many other authors as well as encyclopaedias and histories report that the historian and Pulitzer Prize winner, James Truslow Adams, is supposed to be the first, who in 1931 defined the term in a sense that everyone should be given the opportunity for attaining a rich life regardless of social class or circumstances of birth. Before him in the 19th Century, the popular writer Horatio Alger in his extensive fiction produced the myth of “rags-to-riches”, but in fact he did not invent the idea of the American Dream.

nity, and success as “the constitutive elements of the Dream” (ibid.: p. 131) are basic concepts, which form an “elastic” ideology supporting different political ideals. Although it is difficult to add much to the Ghosh’s work in its own framework, I think that the mythology of American Dream could be viewed through the concept of “invented tradition”, which was itself invented in a seminal volume, edited by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). In view of the logic of invention of a tradition, Ghosh’s “iteration” appears additionally structured as each instance of the iteration contains at least a nuance of a projection from the present to the past. Hence, “the vision of New England settlers” is always re-contextualised and re-constructed in some new modifications of the American Dream; in a final analysis, it is almost impossible to determine exactly what the settlers actually had in their minds. The re-inventions of the American Dream represent a work of ideology in its “standard” connotation as a daily production of a set of beliefs, ideas, etc., which make part of the dominating (false) perceptions of reality. Still, I think that one seemingly not so important distinction has to be made, concerning the notion of ideology. The distinction is not about Ghosh’s “not comprehending” the concept of ideology, since he actually refers to the history of the word ideology and he recalls Terry Eagleton’s (1991) six “bundles of meaning of the word” (Ghosh, 2013: pp. 13 and 26). Although I do not have any problem with understanding what the author wants to say, I still find his taking of the American Dream as an ideology somewhat superficial. Throughout the text, Ghosh speaks about “the ideology of American Dream”, which in my view exaggerates the magnitude of different compositions of meanings, which travel from one discourse to the other. Hence, the American Dream cannot be itself a full-blown ideology. Of course, I do not dispute its relevance and applications in a vast number of ideological discourses. Nonetheless, it is important to insist that the concept or some metaphoric uses of it constitute many reflexive and intellectually mature texts, which not necessarily ascribe ideological meanings to it. The American dream, for instance, can play a hegemonic role in some emancipative discourses and doctrines, which is especially the case in the area of education.

Almost independently from the many differences between various concepts of ideology, the notion of it is linked to the idea of community as a form of “togetherness”. In a different indirect sense it is connected to the construction of identity. Each ideology, which succeeds to compose itself into a system of “self-evident” beliefs, which underpin a community, cannot rid itself of the individual. The concept of *idiorrhythm*, due to a discovery of Roland Barthes’ lectures from the 1970s, is opening a whole new field of thinking about the relationships between a society and indi-

viduals. “/.../ idiorrhym is almost a pleonasm: the interstices, the fugitivity of the code, of the manner in which the individual inserts himself into the social (for natural) code” (Barthes, 2013: pp. 7–8). Barthes brings to light a specific interaction between seclusion and community, and thus on the basis of his analysis of literary texts, suggests the idea of idiorrhymic movement as constitutive for a formation of togetherness. The imaginary, which is essentially contained in the language form of references to the American Dream, is one version of addressing the problem of dealing with idiorrhym. The individual is in a paradoxical way summoned into individualism by subjecting himself to hard work, which – even if it’s done in solitude – involves other individuals or a society. All these – and many other – conceptual “elements” amount to the idea of culture. The American Dream thus makes a significant part of a specificity of American culture. However, we may ask whether this means that the American Dream constitutes the imaginary world of Americans only or it (also) enters through cultural exchanges into phantasmatic universes of other cultures? Since the first migrants to an unknown world, which has been known under the name of America, were Europeans, who escaped poverty, religious persecutions, late feudal oppressions, ethnic violence, anti-Semitism etc., it might well be said that the American Dream has its roots in an essentially “European Dream”. Therefore, the American Dream could be interpreted as a continuation of ideas, which had their roots in those European peoples, whose emigrants built the foundations of American society. Whatever we can imagine about the processes of the formation of American culture – of course, including all the dark sides like the extermination of Indians and the slave trade with Africa – the idea of the American dream has been generated through multicultural interactions.

### **American Transcendentalism**

The concept of culture by and large evokes the opuses of intellect in philosophy, arts and sciences. Culture in a broader sense is ultimately unimaginable without such components. What does this imply for the notion of American Dream? In view of this question the importance of the distinction – which I proposed through my reading of Ghosh’s book – concerning the role of ideology in regard to American Dream, becomes more visible. Sophisticated contributions in humanities and art are rarely identifiable with ideology in any sense, which is accepted by relevant scholars. Far from being just an object of illusions of everyday consciousness, the American Dream possess a body of highly articulate ideas and it is represented by many works of literature and art – emphatically including the

art of cinema. As all this is a too huge subject to be seriously tackled in the frame of this article, I shall only give a few hints in order to suggest to the reader the complexity of the American Dream as a historical agency and as an idea.

In terms of thinking about mobilising any imaginable emancipative potential in any given configuration of the American Dream, the recalling of the dimension of “high culture” is indispensable. Stanley Cavell pointed out that the intellectual link between European philosophy and the American thought exists, which he showed in his interpretation of Emerson and Thoreau and in quite a few of his books and lectures throughout his life’s work. For instance, in his philosophical autobiographical exercises, Cavell reminisces about his reading of Emerson by stating how correct he was to see that Descartes’s “I think therefore I am” has been incorporated in Emerson’s “Self-Reliance”. In Cavell’s view this was “the philosophical discovery of self-consciousness which is to give us our last chance to prove our existence” (1994: p. 32). Cavell clearly emphasised Emerson’s democratic thinking exactly in what is generally perceived as his perfectionism.

*/.../ ‘the main enterprise of the world for splendor, for extent, is the up-building of a man’ – [and this] is not an elitist call to subject oneself to great individuals (to the ‘one or two men’ in a century, in a millennium’) but to the greatness, the thing Emerson calls by the ancient name of the genius, in each of us; it is the quest he calls ‘becoming what one is’ and, I think, ‘standing for humanity’ (2003: p. 184).*

Cavell also founded the philosophy of film, which, arguably, became only in 21<sup>st</sup> century a fully developed scholarly field. One of his books on the subject of film is highly motivated by some elements of the American Dream, although he does not explicitly say so. However, the main motive in his identifying the Hollywood film genre of the “comedy of remarriage” is the pursuit of happiness, which is along with life and liberty the most emphasised notion, taken from the American Declaration of Independence. “It is not news for men to try, as Thoreau puts it, to walk in the direction of their dreams, to join the thoughts of day and night, of the public and the private, to pursue happiness” (Cavell, 1981: p. 65).

Hollywood mainstream cinema has not been recognised by the Critical Theory – including the above-cited Dialectics of Enlightenment – for its implicit social criticism. This happened thanks to Cavell’s work and to a new perspective, which was provided by Young German Cinema and especially Werner Fassbinder, who found inspiration for his own melodramatic films above all in Douglas Sirk’s films. In this particular

instance in a number of Fassbinder's films the American Dream was appropriated in "un-American" contexts, but it demonstrated many existential and emotional traits in any individual's pursuit of happiness. Another contributing factor in deciphering the social relevance of Hollywood melodrama was the feminist movement after the 1960s and the scholarship that went with it. Many films in the genre of melodrama exposed the obstacles for an individual on her way to happiness. In these films, it was very notable that the female characters were vigorously put into the centre of highly emotional narratives. Some of the most visible melodrama directors in the different periods of Hollywood cinema were "imported" from Europe (Josef von Sternberg, Fritz Lang, and especially Douglas Sirk) and they shed a distinct light on the features of the American Dream by confronting it with the social, economic and moral parameters of American realities in different periods. Hollywood also created a sub-genre of the drama of adolescents in the 1950s. The "paradigmatic" film in this sub-genre, Nicholas Ray's *Rebel without a Cause* (1955), revealed critically how American conservatism and patriarchy in conjunction with class distinctions create insurmountable impediments for a realisation of an individual's (American) Dream. Other films from the same period entered the world of education as, for a good example, Richard Brooks' *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), in which desperate social circumstances undermine the mission of education.

American cinema is undoubtedly strongly associated with the American Dream in many ways. It popularizes the notion, many films show a critical or even subversive attitude towards it, and some try to deconstruct the various phases of American history, in which "something went wrong". Hence, American cinema keeps the American Dream alive by mostly suggesting that its "original" purpose is threatened or perverted. In some of the sophisticated, but still surprisingly quite popular, films of David Lynch, the American Dream seems irretrievably lost and totally falsified by the (post)modern outcomes. One of his later films, *INLAND EMPIRE* (2006), exposes the wrecks of the American Dream in his visual poetics of loss and elusive meanings as well as in the characters of destructive and destructed individuals. Bert Cardullo sees in the bulk of Lynch's work a deconstruction of the aesthetic codes of American transcendentalism. Yet, it seems that Lynch does not attempt to totally renounce this distinctive tradition, since in his film *The Straight Story* (1999), the formula of American transcendentalism is fully employed.

For American transcendentalism, as sponsored by Ralph Waldo Emerson, emphasized the practice of self-trust and self-reliance at all times, at

the same time as it preached the importance of spiritual, or spiritually expansive living, by which it meant living close to nature – a nature where God’s moral law could be intuited by divinely receptive man – rather than submitting to religious dogma (Cardullo, 2004: pp. 153–154).

Only a few hints about the more or less sophisticated part of American culture do not suffice for a claim that due to such foundation the American Dream still contains some emancipative potential. Beside one, indeed very important, current of philosophy and mainstream cinema, which I mentioned as good examples, many reflections of the American Dream in literature, painting, theatre and especially in the radical art of the 1960s etc., should be taken into account, which was actually done by several scholars and journalists many times over. I only tried to sketch some points, which should not be forgotten, especially when we are facing new political and cultural realities in the context of the transformations of American society, in which the neoliberal ideology keeps prevailing.

### Social Criticism

A figure of public intellectual, comparable to the European and notably French culture and politics, never really took root in the USA. With some exceptions in a brief period of the 1960s students’ rebellions, the American social criticism was mostly confined to academia. However, American social sciences did not ignore social realities in spite of the fact that many scientists (in the fields of economy, empirical sociology, behaviourist psychology and some applied studies) served the dominant ideology quite well. Many authors from the period after the 1960s until the present manifestly build their critical argument around various versions of the “equal opportunities” premise, according to which “/.../ the American Dream is a vision of a life in which one’s status at birth does not determine one’s station in the rest of one’s life. Instead, one’s own ability, god-given talent, and hard work determine what kind of life one gets to live” (Ghosh, 2013: p. 28). Nevertheless, the criticism within many scholarly observations – from distinctly sociological to interdisciplinary ones – deepened the view upon American society by analysing a range of phenomena, which become visible only through a complex analysis based on psychoanalysis, or on anthropological insights, or on the feminist versions of the “gaze of the other”.

The cultural criticism of Christopher Lasch, especially his seminal book *The Culture of Narcissism*, first published in 1979, decisively determined the learned social perceptions of American society in the aftermath of the 1960s revolution for the decades to come. A time of neoliber-

al theory (indeed ideology from its inception), which in 1973 already did its blood stained job in Chile after the coup against the Allende government, still lingered in the USA in a state of mainly just voicing the criticism against the “nanny state”. Of course, in the area of economic and financial realities, structural moves were already on the go, along with the diverse promises of technological developments. Therefore, Lasch’s depiction of the American society and culture could be defined in retrospect as a secular prophecy, based on a diagnosis of a change of the very form of society and of the social mechanism, which accommodate singular agencies including the category of individual. Lasch indicates a demise of the Protestant virtues, what can be interpreted as an inner transformation of the basic notions of the American Dream. “As the future becomes menacing and uncertain, only fools put off until tomorrow the fun they can have today. A profound shift in our sense of time has transformed work habits, values, and the definition of success. Self-preservation has replaced self-improvement as the goal of earthly existence” (Lasch, 1991: p. 53). The book reflects changes in the American form of subjectivity that becomes determined by the concept of “borderline personality”. Lasch comes close to what appears some seven years earlier to Deleuze and Guattari (1983) as a dynamic between capitalism and schizophrenia, since in their words “.../ schizophrenia is the product of the capitalist machine” (p. 33). Lasch’s intention is more descriptive, nevertheless, he gives a concurring diagnosis. “In our time, the preschizophrenic, borderline, or personality disorders have attracted increasing attention, along with schizophrenia itself” (p. 41). Lasch’s finding that the old ideal of a self-made man transformed into a narcissistic appearance and an empty performance, signals what became a perverted form of “success” under the rule of neoliberalism. American consumerism prepared the terrain for the advent of it. “The happy hooker stands in place of Horatio Alger as the prototype of personal success” (p. 53). Lasch’s work, especially in view of later developments, marked quite a few turning points as far as the very sense of the American Dream is concerned. On the fundamental level, his diagnosis of the state of affairs, is crucial for understanding the operating of “desiring-machine”. Lasch actually proved that the cult of celebrity massively structures and configures the concept and the idea of success.

In the whole chapter on education, Lasch finds it appropriate to ascertain that schools actually produce “new illiteracy”. Contrary to the liberal ideal and expectations, the democratization of education “.../ has contributed to the decline of critical thought and the erosion of intellectual standards, forcing us to consider the possibility that mass education, as conservatives have argued all along, is intrinsically incompatible with



the maintenance of educational quality” (p. 125). In his later work Lasch himself became aware of the gist of his discoveries. In 1991 he deals with the contexts of transformations, which he exposed in his most influential book two decades earlier. “The condescension and contempt with which so many historians look back on nineteenth-century populism imply that the twentieth century has somehow learned how to reconcile freedom and equality with the wage system, modern finance, and the corporate organization of economic life. Nothing in the history of our times, however, justifies such complacency” (Lasch, 1991a: p. 225).

The key contradiction “hidden” within the American Dream is rooted in many diverse visions of individualism as a foundation of freedom. Michael Peters in retrospect confirms Lasch’s critical observations another two decades later at the time of financial crisis. Referring to James O’Connor and his analysis of corporate capitalism, Peters affirms that,

*.../ while capitalist accumulation created the basis for the development of modern ideologies of individualism – anti-statism, privatisation, autonomy, self-development, and laissez-faire – American individualism became self-contradictory and illusory as corporate capitalism developed. Centralised state activity and corporate capitalism replaced privacy and freedom from interference with passivity, dependence, the colonisation of individual wills (2011: p. 36).*

Where is the American Dream in such circumstances? While it is clear that the spread of neoliberal ideology and the according organisation of economy in global dimensions blurs differences between the American and other collective dreams elsewhere, it is also evident that in its perverted meaning this dream, this point of identification, misperceived as an metaphoric construct, helps through media, advertising, political propaganda – most recently in the form of “fake news” – operating the “desiring-machine” in Deleuze’s and Guattari’s sense. It would take much more than this article to explain and understand the “dialectics” between the individual’s and the collective’s dreams. How much the dreams of an individual are inscribed in the shared dreaming and vice versa? Therefore, we can guess that the American Dream at its present state demonstrates that illusions and imaginary self-fulfilment produce the encoded “realities”, which make an individual a part of a collective. An individual then “feels” as an individual in the context, in which his individuality and freedom are absorbed. The Emersonian spirit of self-accomplishment is long ago gone from this metaphorical dreaming, which became “external” for individuals subsisting on imaginary reality. The latter has its roots in consumer society, which is by far the greatest contribution to the world history by the

USA. Chocolates, cigarettes, canned food and Coca-Cola, which American liberators benevolently distributed to the exhausted European population at the end of WW 2 – sometimes they even traded such goods for the emotional comfort from local girls – opened the epoch of the apprehending of the ‘American way of life’ elsewhere. The logic of the American Dream gradually penetrated the whole ‘free world’ and, likewise, it had its effects behind the Iron Curtain too.

### Entanglement of Education in the Operating of the American Dream

Joel Spring (2003) contributed an excellent critical analysis as well as detailed history of the relationship between education and consumerism. In his analysis, he turns attention from pleasure to hard work as the core of consumerist ideology. I think that this shift in the criticism of consumerism, namely, the shift from attacking the mass hunt of “pleasure” to the exposing of enticement to hard work and restraint from pleasure, determines the logic of misperception included within the ideology of consumerism. Actually, the renouncing of profane enjoyment, which is offered by shopping and leisure in the consumerist model, succumbs to the very ideology that it condemns. Such a renouncement behaves as if a subject like a consumer not dependant on his own labour – or in a range of cases on the labour of others – exists. The celebrity cult and its structuring effects in social-psychological significance, indicated by Lasch, do not do away with the “need for hard labour”, as a primary imperative within the American Dream in order to reach success. American schools as seen through Spring’s lens were involved in co-creating consumerism in their curriculum – as, for instance, with the syllabus of home economics – as well as in their functioning within the consumerist context. “The emergence of the high school as a mass institution created a common experience for youth across the nation. This common experience inevitably created a common culture related to the high school experience” (Spring, 2003: p. 79). But in a final analysis “The American dream became a nightmare about working hard to attain the unattainable goal of consumer satisfaction” (ibid.: p. 61). However, in its perverted state under neoliberalism, the American Dream obviously still exerts and even amplifies its power over fantasies and expectations of ordinary Americans. In the era of globalisation the same pattern of “subtle” domination is spreading all over the world. The large sections of the diminishing middle and especially lower classes succumbed to the politics of rude spectacle and obvious fraud. This phenomenon is difficult to understand and/or interpret exactly due to its simplicity and transparency. After the presidential elections of 2016 in the USA,

it seems that for a wide range of American electorate the incorporation of the illusion of proof that the category of ultimate success exists, makes a great deal of citizens cling to the American Dream in spite of the obviousness that it became empty of all such content as equal opportunity, the pursuit of happiness and a substantial individual freedom.

The growth of the social inequality has gathered pace all the time from the incorporation of the neoliberal ideology in the polity. Education always happens to be an arena of social conflicts and/or consensus. The terms of the accessibility of quality education on all levels and especially on the level of higher education reflect the proportions and relations in other societal fields. As much as the analysis of discourses, imaginary realities, misperceptions etc. in the world of simulacra, as Gilles Deleuze described it already in 1968, is important, the problem of accessibility of knowledge and, consequently, social status, boils down to simple facts, data and numbers. Trends were quite readable already in 1994, when Russell Jacoby published his analysis of changes in higher education. The growing gap between generally rising tuition fees at different institutions of higher education pointed to a “restratification” across higher education. “The striking range of tuition – from \$20,000 at the elite private schools to several hundred dollars at community colleges – spells economic stratification” (Jacoby, 1994: p. 21). After two decades Jacoby’s totals seem quite low compared to the prices of tuitions nowadays. These facts and data represent thoroughly changed styles, aims and senses of education. “Like the other simplicities, however, the leisure and cultural room necessary to listen is increasingly rare, if not obsolete; the space crumples under the barrage of money, pressing needs, and even violence and arms. We are all too busy, preoccupied, worried, and afraid” (ibid.: p. 196). Such observations by a long time university teacher with a sharp sense of reality can be taken as symptoms, which later on only became worse. The ruining of the old fashioned academic tranquillity comes together with the whole package of the neoliberal transformation, which means that “.../ neoliberal policies have overridden the idea that knowledge is a public good to promote the wholesale commercialisation of the production of knowledge”. Such successes of the neoliberal permeation of education have consequences in other respects as well, since “.../ managerialist ideologies have impacted the administration of education” (Peters, 2012: p. 35). Anyway, the notion of education within the discourse of the American Dream loses exactly what was its democratic promise of the equal chances for the willing individuals. Although the above mentioned stratification of the educational opportunities within the bourgeois order always took place, there were periods, when the achievements of policies that stimulated so-called so-

cial mobility through education were significant. Of course, such achievements belong to the times of the welfare state, when the dream and reality seemed to approach each other. In retrospect, the social accomplishments of the USA in the first two decades after WW 2 seem even bigger than they did at the time when they took place.

Most of the presentations of the trajectories of developments since then give a striking picture of ever bigger inequalities, which, even after the demonstrable absurdities especially in the context of the so-called financial crisis, do not show any signs of culminating. The trajectories, presented as diagrams, charts, and graphs visualize what I tried to call the perversion of the American Dream through the influence of neoliberalism. Evoking and comparing different ages instigates poetic impressions and stimulates hybrid narratives even in the frame of social sciences. David Putnam's book *Our Kids* is a perfect case of this as a kind of sociological novel, which includes elements of autobiography and of a possible script for a documentary film. Starting from the description of his hometown Port Clinton in the 1950's Putnam offers an idea of the times when ".../ social class was not a major constraint on opportunity" (2015, Introduction<sup>3</sup>). Although there were differences between different regions of USA, Putnam authenticates by the authority of his scholarship and his good memory the claim that, "In fact, during this period the dinghies actually rose slightly faster than the yachts, as income for the top fifth grew about 2.5 percent annually, while for the bottom fifth the rise was about 3percent a year" (*ibid.*, Chapter 1). Putnam's confirmation of his claim in the form of narrating about life stories of his school friends sounds almost like a fairy tale about the old times, when dreams came true. However, the "fairy tale" rings much more true, when Putnam applies the same "method" to later periods as he writes about individuals, who happened to be borne after the deepened class differences changed prospects for individuals from different social backgrounds. These changes are reflected also by the changes in the appearance, positioning and the social composition of town quarters. Data and diagrams further confirm the loss of what was a culture of a social harmony. Putnam's "novel" should be praised for its clear depiction of the fate of the American Dream. The end of the American Dream is not the end of education, but it is the end of its role within it.

## Conclusion

Putnam does not give any Leninist answer to the Leninist question, which he uses as the title of the last chapter of his book: "What is to be

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3 Since the Putnam's book was available for me in the Kindle edition, which lacks pagination, I am indicating only chapters, from which the citations are taken.

Done?” As the American counterpart of Pierre Bourdieu, regarding the theory of social capital, Putnam envisions mostly long-term policies, which should produce a restructuring of the complex schemes of economic, educational and cultural contexts on micro-level. “As our cases illustrate, it took several decades for economic malaise to undermine family structures and community support; it took several decades for gaps in parenting and schooling to develop; and it will take decades more for the full impact of those divergent childhood influences to manifest themselves in adult lives” (ibid., Chapter 6). Politics is one among the dimensions in which Putnam’s discourse is visibly invested. He joined the ranks of those American social scientists who uttered loud warnings against possible dire consequences of the deepening economic gap and the consequences of politics, which ignore the environmental crisis and other challenges. “Inherited political inequality brings us uncomfortably close to the political regime against which the American Revolution was fought” (ibid.). Considering that his book was published before the unexpected political turn in the USA in 2016, the implementation of policies, which could help to reduce the effects of the erosion of equal opportunity, seems unlikely in any near future. Among many reasonable suggestions and some debatable ones, Putnam puts stress on two interconnected areas, which require a long-term change. One is democratic participation and the other is education. His projection resembles somewhat the British Labour’s Third Way programme, which contained a rather difficult-to-implement combination of policies. Contrary to the British gradual conservative repudiation of Blair’s government improvements inside the framework of the neoliberal system, the American conservative answer to the ideas of a reform to counter growing inequalities was quick and – as it seems in the first half year of Trump’s presidency – harsher than anybody could imagine. Therefore, Putnam’s suggestion of an improvement of schools sounds grimly utopian although it is totally non-confrontational against the system. “Many teachers in poor schools today are doing a heroic job, driven by idealism, but in a market economy the most obvious way to attract more and better teachers to such demanding work is to improve the conditions of their employment” (ibid.).

Still, many dispersed movements in the American education, which include “many teachers, who are doing a heroic job”, and who are allied to the theories of critical pedagogy, represent some hope for a re-interpretation, re-formulation and maybe even a re-invention of the American Dream. Eventually, these movements point towards resistance against neoliberalism.

Two subnarratives in the neoliberal citizenship story are that there is not enough public money to pay for social programs and that taxation to fund social programs is unacceptable. /.../ This narrative creates the economic citizen, obedient to the market and policies that create market-friendly environments where there were once spheres of publicness in the full sociocultural sense” (Schultz, 2013: p. 99).

Lynette Schultz further on calls for a new citizenship, which requires “/.../ the individual to be both the creator and the subject of the publicness of society” (ibid.: p. 106). As far as the American Dream is concerned, this means that we are back to the square one: the individual pursuing happiness! However, in the meantime there was women’s liberation movement.

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