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DEMOCRATIZATION AND CREATIVITY

The present situation in the complex system of Yugoslav culture programming, policy-making and financial organization (this paper will actually concentrate on the state of affairs in one of the Yugoslav republics, the S. R. of Slovenia) could be described as transitional. One of the main traits of this transition is democratization of the system: investment in culture is growing, funds once centralized and later controlled by very few centers and dominated by a more or less aesthetically restrictive and, in fact, elitist ideology, are being drastically decentralized, new „culture communities” in the communes (56 of them only in the Republic of Slovenia) are being organized. According to the principles of the self-management system and of the new Constitution (1974) the working people are supposed freely to choose among cultural projects and themselves to decide what percentage of their income they will give for culture. (The procedure is similar in the case of medical care, education, research...) As culture is constitutionally defined as of „special social interest”, this freedom is, of course, conditional. But I will not go into this (the complex mechanism of the Yugoslav system of culture financing will be discussed by other participants of this gathering.)

It could be argued that the democratization of the financing-system and policy-making is related to the democratization of cultural life in general. The starting point of this paper is an inquiry into the actual contents and depth of the democratization of cultural life which seems to be in progress.

One of the indicators of the democratization of culture is, of course, quantity of cultural products offered and intensity of their consumption. It may be difficult to argue that such quantitative indicators demonstrate *the* culture or true cultural democracy, but it is, on the other hand, impossible to define „the true culture”. As Toffler has it,

„The first problem is definitional. There is no agreement as to what a truly cultured person is. There never has been. It is easier, however, to speak of a culture consumer. Let us arbitrarily say that, for our purposes, a culture consumer is a person who listens to classical music, or attends concerts, plays, operas, dance recitals or art films, or visits museums or galleries, or whose reading affects an interest in the arts. Let us also include by definition all those who participate, as either professional or amateur, in what we loosely call artistic activity — i. e., the painters (...), the actors, dancers, musicians, etc. Let us also include the millions of children who are „consuming” art or music lessons at home or in school. It is obvious that this is a jaggedly crude definition. It is full of unanswered questions. But it is better than none at all. It permits us to begin... (Alvin Toffler, *The Culture Consumers*, Penguin Books, Baltimore, 1965, p. 35)”

I suppose we can accept this hypothesis with certain limitations which will be discussed later. Its principal advantage is that it is operational, and can be adopted for further research. Toffler is clearly an advocate of culture-democratization, and herewith, of mass culture which is — as far as the Slovene culture establishment is concerned — a matter of appraisal and damnation! He points out that democratization (or culture explosion) has nonetheless occurred: by way of a computing operation which, perhaps, is not beyond criticism, he came to the conclusion „that within the total 185 million population in the United States there is a sub-group of between 30 million and 45 million individuals who fit the rough definition given above.”

Who are the millions reported to consume culture in the USA? Before World War II culture had an elitist audience, the core of cultural life „was the wealthy, old-stock, conservative upper stratum of the population. Today the locus has shifted definitely and irretrievably downward” — towards the „comfort class” (*Ibid.*, p. 39). This is a picture of the American system where the major part of culture production is financed by private means, and where this production is primarily market-oriented. Toffler is conscious of the cliché attributed to Americans—that they are cultureless, and he tries to deny it. Nevertheless, there seems to be a difference when comparing the USA with the European nations, and particularly when making comparisons with a small nation like the Slovene. There is a much warmer feeling towards culture in Slovenia, because Slovenes feel indebted to their poets and artists in general as to some sort of founding fathers. There is a grain of truth in the popular saying that there would be no Slo-

vene nation without Prešern (the great romantic poet — 1800—1849.)

On the other hand the Slovene nation has gone through far fewer romantic periods, and its „soul” has undergone fundamental changes. With growing industrialization the poetic dream was no longer possible, nor was the nation itself in danger. In the period of administrative socialism the idea of central government and the concept of sacred („monotheistic”, ideologically pure, nationally constitutive, elitist...) culture were very compatible, overlapping, identical. But this concept of culture was, in fact, schizophrenic. Although it postulated the idea of a proletarian (mass-, democratic...) culture, the concept was in a way aristocratic, elitist: the system of subsidizing was centralized, almost nothing was left to the market, artists were a privileged class with a very high income, they operated like state bureaucrats (an article or a short story of 10 typewritten pages in the early 50 s was paid a fee equal to a one-month-salary of an engineer, „popular” artists were given villas and apartments by the government etc.) Naturally, not all artists, writers or culture producers („kulturniki”) were given the same opportunities, and it became a rule that the conservative, senile and bad artists were earning a lot of money, while the avant-guard, the interesting, the creative, the innovative ones were leading *la vie bohême*, causing political scandals, living under different pressures, etc... Although it might be very difficult to reconstruct the exact relationship between the quantity and extent of government aid to the arts and the total of artistic production, i. e. between the carefully (centrally) organized and controlled input and the mixed (the conservative-impotent-reproductive-sterile- and the controversial-bohemian-innovative) output, it could be argued that the result was less impressive in the case of the generous subsidies than it was in the cases when culture production was more or less spontaneous, living from occasional, erratic and „mistaken” grants, from secondary sources (these artists being employed outside the field of culture, as teachers, librarians, journalists, even as gas attendants), or — this being a very rare and almost illegal case — directly from the market (paintings, „private” editions...). It would be worthwhile to study these relationships in detail, but for the moment and for the purpose of this paper I propose the following hypotheses:

— the more centralized and government-controlled the funds are for subsidizing cultural creativity, the less effect they have, and the less creative is the production;

- the more ideological (corresponding to a dogma) the criteria are for financing culture production, the more ideological (and less aesthetic) is the culture product;
- the more distant (and alienated) the origin of the subsidy is from the culture producer, the more alienated is the culture product, and less culture consumption will take place;
- the less alienated and aristocratic the relationship between the culture producer and the culture consumer is, the larger and more intensive will be the total of culture activities and also the quality of culture communication;
- the less the artist (or culture producer) is dependent on the source of the subsidy and responsible to it, as far as the content of his work is concerned, the more creative and innovative his work will be;
- financing of a small and dogmatically selected number of culture producers will inevitably lead to their corruption and cultural sterility, and no democratization of culture will take place;
- *la vie bohème* by itself is an indicator of non-democratic culture, so is the image of the suffering artist as the „true” artist: this should not lead to the conclusion that any subsidy means corruption, or that subsidized culture cannot be „true” culture; corruption and *la vie bohème* are two sides of the same coin, just as the elitist culture goes with the commercialized culture.

As I have suggested in the above hypotheses which are inspired by the new development in the Yugoslav system of culture financing, democratization will take place beyond the alternatives of centralized financing and the mere market logic. As was emphasized at the beginning, the situation is transitional, it is a culture in transition, a reorganization in progress — and several residues of the old system still persist. On the other hand, the new system is often misunderstood and misused. There have been controversies about the new status of culture, some people arguing that it is nothing else but spending the people's money, that it cannot be productive (as opposed to industry where the surplus value is being produced.) My view is the opposite: culture is no mere refined reflection of social changes or some sort of sublime superstructure dependent upon the generosity of the base, of economic relations. It is true (according to Marx) that culture (along with other „forms of social consciousness”) be-

longs to the superstructure, but it has a very important, a long-term influence on the base, and it contributes a great deal to the social product. It is entitled to a part of the surplus value. As a specific kind of production that has a long-run kind of effect, it cannot be sold at usual prices, and cannot be left to the short-run logic of the market. Therefore, subsidizing („advance-payment”) is just and necessary.

With these presuppositions in mind I shall briefly discuss the contemporary financial situation in a particular sphere of cultural creativity, in *publishing* (books). Several writers have been complaining recently about shameful fees for this kind of work, particularly for fiction, essays and poetry. They are justified in their complaint. In 1974 the situation is a mirror-picture of the situation in the fifties. Writers no longer get engineers' salaries for a 10-page article and they are not granted villas or apartments. The majority of them do not and cannot live from writing alone. But a very important change did take place: they all publish, and *la vie bohème* does not exist at all.

What is a fee like today? Most writers sign contracts for a flat fee, and most publishers subsidize literature with the money they make from other, commercial editions, from their bookstores or elsewhere, and, naturally, they look for subsidies from the culture communities. The flat fee depends on the financial situation of the publisher, on the quality and prestige of the author and sometimes on his age (?)... and ranges from 600 to 2,000 (very high, unusual!) dinars for 16 typewritten pages — or 38 — 125 dinars per page. Playwrights are a little better off: they usually get 10,000 dinars for a television script 8,000 to 20,000 dinars for a theater play. They do not get much (a one-liter Yugoslav-made car costs 55,000 dinars), and they get considerably less than their colleagues did in the 1950's. Today a writer earns an engineer's salary with a play or a book.

On the other hand, however, there is a very important sign of democratization — the number of published books has doubled if not tripled. The number of books (written by Slovenian authors) published in 1959 was 579. For 1972 the figure was 1222.

There is one more important novelty to be recorded in favor of the new (democratic) trend. The new law (still in debate) regulating the operation of the new culture communities gives a better chance to free-lance artists and others who are creating their culture products outside of their regular place of employment.

Until now decisions on cultural policy were made by professional „culture people”, by the people who were on the pay-roll of some culture institution, and not by those who create products processed by those institutions, unless some writer or painter had accidentally been playing both roles: a manager in a museum, theater or publishing house who is at the same time a cultural producer. Different memoranda, resolutions and programs also point out the need for full involvement by „outsiders” in the self-management system of culture institutions. Much of this, of course, remains to be seen.

The twenty years of evolution in the Yugoslav system of cultural financing, cultural production and its consumption are marked by growing democratization. A part of this process is due to the general democratization of the political system, to growing industrialization and technical progress (elimination of illiteracy introduction of television, higher standard of living...) This kind of democratization is common to all European and American nations, and is very colorfully described by Toffler. There is another side of the democratization process however which is typically Yugoslav, and which is due to our self-management system. This is the accessibility of culture. Perhaps it cannot be measured by qualitative indicators (the only safe recipe for the democratization of culture is still the „quantitative” one) but it means a new quality: cultural production has not been presented to consumers via or only through the market, but also through the vote of culture consumers in their local culture assemblies. This principle did not brake the shift from the elitist culture at the comfort-class level but rather led it all the way downwards to the base. I shall not say the work is complete but it is being done quite seriously.

The new artist may not be as pompous as he used to be, and he does not enjoy the prestige of the old *literati* or a state bureaucrat, but he is much freer to express his own ideas, and he may very soon reach a comradely agreement with the community of culture consumers of all strata who will acknowledge his production as necessary and noble. As Dewey put it: maybe not every man can be a poet, but every man has the right to a free aesthetic experience. The problem of cultural democracy is: how much of this kind of freedom does a society allow.