

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARTISTIC CULTURE

SOME METHODOLOGICAL SUGGESTIONS

In today's world, the problems of culture have become world problems, as are those of the protection of the environment, the rational use of natural resources, the demographic situation, international disarmament and the prevention of war. We speak of a "cultural explosion" with regard to the very lively interest that culture arouses today and the increasing needs in this area. We can expect this development to continue, but what is the social significance of the process? What is its origin? To what is it connected?

For many Western sociologists the increased interest in culture indicates the passage of a number of countries into a "post-industrial" society, although it may also be an original form of spontaneous protest of the "hippy" type but of an intellectual order and with a tendency toward antitechnocracy.

The new constitution of the Soviet Union includes the elevation of the cultural level of workers within the principal tasks

Translated from the French by Jeanne Ferguson.

of the State. The elevation of the cultural level of the entire population is, along with the increase in their well-being, an indispensable component of the systematic development of society, the socialist way of life, the process of education of the new man and the formation of the communist conscience of the masses. In this we distinguish on the one hand the vigorous production of intellectual values—today, in fact, there are enormous numbers of people engaged in the medium of creation (around 23,000,000 amateur artists)—and on the other hand the growth in the consumption of intellectual values, thanks to the systematic broadening of the sphere of diffusion of culture, notably through mass media, and thanks to the extension of cultural leisure, that true wealth of man.

To be able to analyze scientifically all these processes of world-wide, regional and national dimensions and to resolve the practical problems of direction, we need complete, sure and systematic socio-economic information. Present economic statistics do not give a completely clear idea of the dialectics of culture and must be complemented by social information. Now, to gather this information we need a thorough system of indices (indicators) of cultural development, a fact that has often been emphasized in international seminars and Unesco documents.

It is obvious that a system of this type must express a general concept, must include social and economic indicators, qualitative and quantitative, general and specific, informing us on one of the basic ideas of sociology: the “level of development of culture,” in which is included the “level of development of artistic culture.”

The search for principles that would permit the measurement of the level of development of a culture or an art by more or less precise indicators is a very old tradition. We find ideas of that nature among the Pythagoreans and the thinkers and artists of the Renaissance, as well as in the Age of Enlightenment and today. This quest keeps up with the scientific-technological revolution by using the electronic calculator.

The first concrete studies employing quantitative methods go back to the turn of the century. A. Oden's book¹ is a good

¹ A. Oden, *Genèse des Grands Hommes*, Vol. II, Paris, 1895.

example. Relying upon the study of 6,384 biographies of French men of letters—a study carried out by applying a method we would today call “content analysis” and directed toward showing a summit of the development of literary creativity—the author established statistically that the flowering of talent is influenced by geographical or ethnological factors but that the determining influences are those of the government (the “administrative milieu”), education and the economic and social status of the parents. Oden calculated that, given equal talent, the child of aristocrats has two hundred times the chance to bring it to fulfillment as a working-class child. Experimental esthetics (G.T. Fechner, L. Whitmer and E. Meumann) also looked for a numerical expression of the influence of beauty, among other factors.

All these attempts to “measure” art encountered serious obstacles, both subjective—the vehement emotional protest of the Art History League and its leader Charles Lalo—and objective, which is more serious, since up until the present, science has had no complete system of indicators, of measurable quantities giving sufficiently exhaustive and precise rendering of the development of culture and art. This is understandable, because the perfection of such a system involves long and laborious research on which scholars only now are beginning to work.

In Russia this research is concentrated in the Scientific Council for Cybernetics, an organ of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (Commission for the Application of Exact Methods to the Study of Artistic Culture) and the Soviet Association of Sociology (Central Section for the Scientific Study of the Sociology of Artistic Culture). We are very receptive to the work of those of our foreign colleagues who have already begun to analyze “the art of measuring art.”

I

Before giving our own conception, we would like to comment briefly on the very interesting work of Alvin Toffler,² a talented

² Alvin Toffler, “The Art of Measuring Art,” *The Sociology of Art and Literature: A Reader*, New York, Washington, 1970.

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American scholar who has had the courage to suggest a certain number of principles for measuring in the area of art by means of a system of quality indicators.

Professor Toffler proposes a model of an imaginary society that he describes as a "high quality culture." This society has fifteen specific characteristics: 1) the wealth and importance of "cultural production"; 2) the unusual variety of this production; 3) its technical perfection; 4) the modernity of the created works in contrast with art of the past; 5) the large number of masterpieces resulting; 6) the high degree of complexity in the works; 7) the fact that they satisfy the taste of an expert public; 8) the constant increase in an aware public; 9) a wide participation in cultural activity; 10) an increase in the number of amateur artists; 11) the geographical decentralization of artistic institutions, such as theaters and museums; 12) the high prestige of artists and, in general, of those who exercise an artistic activity; 13) the amount of their remuneration; 14) the presence among them of indisputable geniuses; 15) the esteem and acceptance received abroad by the artistic production of this society.

Such are the indicators of a high quality cultural society, but Toffler does not make them obligatory. On the contrary, he asks for critical observations; and we are going to address some to him. Our remarks will consist of three principal observations: the first sociological, the second artistic-esthetic and the third methodological.

First observation. The picture of future society as imagined by Professor Toffler has somewhat the effect on us of an abstract painting, not that we consider that all imaginary phenomena are necessarily abstract but because we think that any future society imagined today must develop from concrete social structures actually in existence today. Proceeding from the two opposed types of society—socialist and capitalist—the observations we can make about present cultural tendencies in each of these societies must allow us to contribute some reality to the future high cultural society we are constructing. If the author, who pictures his "imaginary model of society" and lets it be understood that he has in view "post-industrial" society, and moreover in its American variation, had tried to concretize his model by compar-

ing the two situations that are present today in cultural matters in the two opposing systems—to be exact, in the United States and in the Soviet Union—and by referring to one or the other of the indicators he himself proposed—let us say, the prestige of artistic professions in society—he would have been able to affirm, for example, that according to a national survey in the United States, on a scale of appreciation of ninety professions, the writer is in thirty-first place and a theatrical personage ranks fifty-second, while in the Soviet Union the writer is in third place and the theatrical personage in eighth. These comparisons once more allow us to point out that any abstract model of society, even imaginary, but scientific in content, must be founded on a precise and profound understanding of the nature of the future society, its principal forms of property and social structure, because in the end it is precisely the differences in forms of property that condition the differences we find in all other regards, notably, in those concerning cultural values. From this comes the primary need to introduce indicators into the model that show what type of social structure this “highly cultural” society has.

Second observation. The description of future art in the society imagined by Toffler is, in my opinion, an empty concept. We are told that works of art will be numerous, that they will be varied, that they will be technically perfect, that there will be many masterpieces, and so on. But what will be the artistic orientation of this art? Will it be realistic, representational of the forms of life, thus prolonging the great humanist traditions of the history of world culture? Or will it be an art conceived in the spirit of contemporary formalism (an abridged modernism)? To answer this question we need definite indices of the nature of the ideology of this future society of “cultural abundance.”

Third observation. The principle describing an imaginary high cultural society as well as the choice of corresponding indicators are somewhat fortuitous: the author himself recognizes this. The logic and criteria for selecting indicators have no foundation. For example, the principle of the decentralization of artistic institutions is proposed (we would call them establishments)—theaters and museums; but the formation to be given to the

artistic personnel is not specified. Public taste is brought up, but nothing is said of the extent of public knowledge as far as art is concerned. In a word, the proposed series of indicators does not respond to a system and is not structured on levels, which is understandable, because the model in question and its indicators are not based on a single theoretic and methodological concept. This gives rise to the difficulties Professor Toffler encountered when he wanted to bring his interesting idea and audacious enterprise into functional reality.

II

The conception of development expressed in the sociology of artistic culture and, consequently, the elaboration of a system of social indicators of the level of development of artistic culture have as a starting point dialectic-materialist methodology, which allows us to envisage the object of study dynamically and in its entirety.

What does artistic culture represent as an object for study? A collection of manifestations, processes and relationships linked to the artistic activity of man, which may tend toward production, diffusion or consumption of artistic values.

In a social analysis, artistic culture may be viewed in a number of lights: artistic genre—*theater, music, literature, plastic arts, cinema*; forms of artistic production—*professional art, mass communication (television, radio and the press), artistic buildings, beautifying the surroundings, clothing, the exterior aspect of the city, artisanat, amateur artistic creations, folklore*; types of artistic production—*modern works and those of classical heritage, national production and foreign production, production of such or such a nation or of such or such a continent—European, Asiatic, or, on a larger scale, Occidental, Oriental, and so on*; all artistic repertory included in this role; the processes of social development and function—*creation, conservation, diffusion, consumption of artistic production*.

The study of the social laws of the development of artistic culture in their qualitative and quantitative expression by means of measurable indicators is only possible if we have recourse

to modern scientific methods, especially to the systematic and complex approach, which is the best suited to the subject, given its extreme complexity.

These conditions stated, we will now limit ourselves to remarks on the five methodological principles we propose for a systematic approach to developmental laws of artistic culture and their social indicators.

1. THE NEED FOR A SCIENTIFIC BASIS

The traditional approach to the study of the laws of development of artistic culture is that of art history; we could say “art apropos of art.” Art history texts (if we exclude the factual history of art) are closer to art than to science. They present facts in an individual and inimitable style, that of their authors; they strive to give a concrete description of artistic phenomena; they have an emotional “coloration”; they are in themselves a result that cannot be reproduced by any other author; they are independent of the cumulative effect; and so on. In other words, these texts (for example, drama criticism) are in a way a translation by which we go from the language of one art (the theater) to that of another (literature).

However, when it is a question of planning and making decisions in a cultural subject, we have need of quite a different approach, one that we may call “the science of art.” The results obtained from socio-economic research must be precisely stated quantitatively by means of computation; they must be reproduced experimentally; they must be verified under acceptable conditions. We must be able to give preference to the simplest explanation when we find ourselves faced with two equally plausible explanations; the cumulative effect must come into play.

The system of indicators of the development of artistic culture will not become an efficient instrument of the sociology of culture unless these conditions (and some others) that allow the placing of acquired knowledge on scientific bases, are respected.

2. THE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF STUDY

In social analysis, the methodology that we adopt is on three

levels, and the criteria that distinguish them are the following: the *subject* of the study, understood as a system; the *methods* used to carry out this study; the *language* employed to define the subject. Finally, there is the *execution*, which under the circumstances may be both the point of departure and the end of the study: the combination of planning and organizational measurements toward which tends the information acquired at each of the following levels.

First level is that of a *general sociological theory* that in our dialectic-materialist methodology is historical materialism. At this level the social system in its entirety is taken as the subject for study—that is, society in all the diversity of its phenomena, artistic culture (or art) being seen as an element of the given social system (alongside other elements, such as forms of social consciousness—science, religion, morals, and so on). Methods used are general and theoretical scientific methods; language is the normal language; information obtained is directed toward the strategic level of the government of the society in its entirety.

At this level, the indicators seen as measurable indices of the essential manifestations of the subject under study are social ideas, very general, allowing a description of the singularities of the development of the artistic culture and disengaging the characteristics of this culture: its national character, its class character, its ideological orientation, its artistic and esthetic tendencies—in a word, all the aspects of artistic culture that in the final analysis are conditioned by the predominant means of production and by the ideology that governs the social organization of the given society. Moreover, the socio-esthetic analysis of the different works at this level of research allows us to give a concrete esthetic expression to these qualitative sociological indicators.

The second level is that of the *special sociological theory*. At this level, and in this theory, the subject under study is the entire artistic culture as a system having different subsystems: “artistic production,” “artistic demand” and “social institutions of artistic culture”; the methods used are special scientific methods and empirical methods. Alongside current and normal language, elements of an artificial language (mathematics) begin to appear. Information collected through the sociology of the artistic culture

is directed toward the tactical level of government, that is, the planning and organization of artistic culture in its entirety.

At this level of study, the characteristics that may serve as indicators of development are artistic production, artistic demand, functioning of social institutions of artistic culture and data allowing them to be realized—for example, data on urban culture, village culture, on the place given to this culture in structuring leisure time, and so on. The analysis effected within the framework of the sociology of artistic culture furnishes qualitative-quantitative indicators of the development provided by special sociology. In other words, it will become possible not only to give a qualitative description of the phenomena, processes and relationships studied in the artistic culture, but also to deal with their quantitative evaluation.

The third level is that of *empirical sociological research*, in which the elements of a larger system—artistic culture—are studied as a system. These “element-systems” may be the different *aspects* of artistic culture—such as theater, cinema or the plastic arts; the *forms* of artistic production—for example, amateur art, “club” art and folklore; the *types* of artistic production—such as popular culture of the North; the different *processes*—such as creation, diffusion or consumption of artistic culture.

At this level the methods are empirical methods of statistical evaluation; the results are expressed in mathematical and graphic language; they are primarily used at the operational level of the direction of institutions of artistic culture. The indicators of development of artistic culture may thus be measurable characteristics, such as the size of the number of cadres, the number of types of artistic collectives, the prestige of artistic professions, and so on; the artistic repertory—its extent, its composition (aspects, genres, themes, problems or heros); the means of diffusion—composition of the cultural institutions, extent of mass communication, activity of artistic criticism; the public—its socio-demographic composition, its artistic needs, its reasons for attending the institutions, its choice, appreciation, level of knowledge and preparation, its degree of participation in artistic culture.

Thus, at the level of the sociology of artistic culture, which includes empirical sociological study, we see the possibility of introducing quantitative, measurable indicators allowing a syste-

matic and integral description of the development of artistic culture.

3. SYSTEMATIC STUDY

The integral description of artistic culture by means of a system of indicators comes up against the complexity of the task if only because the phenomena of the development of artistic culture are still far from lending themselves to a quantitative evaluation, and even when it is possible to measure them, these measurements are made with different criteria, which does not permit a cumulative effect that should come from the accumulation of the factors at play in the matter of the sociology of artistic culture. One of the conditions that appears indispensable to us in the systematic analysis of the development of artistic culture and in the elaboration of a system of indicators is *amplitude*. In other words, the development of artistic culture should be described according to a definite system of coordinates having at least "three dimensions."

Within the *vertical* dimension we pass from general to middle and finally to empirical indicators. In this dimension, the indicators of a given level "cannot be applied" to the description of phenomena, processes and relationships of a different level, first because of the non-correspondence of their degree of generalization and, secondly, because they do not have the same level of quantitative measurability. The vertical hierarchy must be strictly observed, otherwise it becomes impossible to construct the "tree of indicators," with its "roots" (first level), "trunk" (second level) and "crown" (third level, empirical).

The *horizontal* dimension assumes a systematization of the indicators of the same level of study. If we place ourselves, for example, at the level of special sociology, let us say of the sociology of artistic culture, the system includes subsystems, namely, artistic production, whose volume may be precisely stated by indicators, the same as characteristics that are both qualitative and quantitative of these different aspects, forms and types; the artistic needs, characterized by their volume, structure, intensity, electivity, constance, the degree of consciousness of which they are the object, and so on; social institutions of artistic culture, whose material and technical basis, personnel, structure and

management, programs, may be described by indicators. At each level, at each transverse section of this horizontal description, the commensurability of the qualitative-quantitative indicators used should be rigorously maintained.

The dynamic dimension assumes that the chosen indicators, belonging to both the vertical and horizontal dimensions, will allow a temporal description of the process of development of artistic culture. It is the only means to study the dynamics, that is, the rhythms and acceleration (or slowing down), of the processes under way. At least two exigencies arise from this: (1) the need for “transversal” indicators, that is, those constantly present in the system and allowing us by means of defined units of calculation to follow the evolution of the phenomena, processes and relationships created within the artistic culture and (2) the need for “potential” indicators, lacking today but possible tomorrow (television did not exist yesterday: today it is an integrating part of culture, including artistic culture). We can foresee these “potential” indicators, and it would be wise to prepare an adequate place at the level in which they will be situated in the system of coordinates. This implies on the one hand that the system must be flexible enough to be able to incorporate the new indicators without collapsing and on the other that the indicators themselves must be of different types.

4. TYPOLOGY OF THE INDICATORS

Insofar as the indicators must allow us to define something as varied and complex as artistic culture, their classification and typological characterization can only be just as varied. This is why we will have to hold ourselves here to the three types of indicators that seem to us the most important.

a) *Quantitative indicators and qualitative indicators.* In our opinion, we may admit as indicators those that can be quantitatively evaluated and are commensurables, as well as those that at first sight do not have a quantitative expression and are defined as qualitative. It is precisely there that the question arises as to the meaning of “measure.” If we mean to give a numerical expression to phenomena, processes and relationships under study, we may say that at the first step of knowledge all

phenomena may be measured. In fact, it is always possible to establish whether such or such a characteristic is present or absent. The concept may be presented thus: present characteristic=1; absent characteristic=0. This is already an initial scale of "qualifications." In some cases, this "qualitative measurement" (nominal gradation) presents few difficulties. For example, the creative-artistic activity of an individual or a group (non-professional) may be partly evaluated in terms of the attitude with regard to amateur art (according to their participation or non-participation in the creation of artistic works). To do this, we divide them into two classes: participant=1; non-participant = 0. In other cases a very careful analysis is necessary, but it permits us just the same to pass from the pithy imprecision of art history to the rigor of sociology, once we have concluded (keeping in mind all the "pros" and "cons" and "in spite ofs", the "conventions," the "absolutes," the "abstractions" and "concrete evidence") that yes or no, such or such a work belongs to realist art: if yes, = 1; if no, = 0.

Thus the measurement of qualitative characteristics may begin by a scale of qualifications, which in itself is, for art, a step in the direction of future efforts of qualitative-quantitative classification, similar to that by which the classification of all the flora and fauna around us began: a classification based on the presence or absence of such or such a criterion or indication. The time for an "ecology of art" has arrived.

b) *Direct indicators and indirect indicators.* The first refer to everything that permits the description of the phenomena, processes and relationships found in the system itself of artistic culture. These indicators may be extremely varied. They may be qualitative—for example, describing the artistic and esthetic tendency of a given art—or quantitative indicators telling us, for example, the number of visitors to such or such cultural institutions. The second, indirect indicators, only describe the tendencies in the development of artistic culture in a mediate way, that is, through a neighboring system of the first. For example, we can "measure" the cultural situation of a society by referring to the number of cases of anti-social conduct. Nevertheless, the handling of these data is extremely complex, because there is an entire series of mediate factors between the "consequence" and

the “cause,” and to be able to establish the “tightness” and orientation of this causality we must necessarily take its measurement.

Indirect indicators may be very close to the object they describe. This is true, for example, for economic-statistical indicators as far as the functioning of artistic culture in a society is concerned. At first sight they even seem to “directly” describe the situation and characterize the culture “from the inside.” However, they are actually “pseudo-direct” indicators. To give an example, can we consider that the number of people who go to see a film (that is, the number of tickets sold) is always directly equivalent to the artistic quality of the film? That depends, shall we say. In the case of *Hamlet* or *Bambi*, yes, but in the case of a vulgar “detective” film, we would say no. When it is a question of describing the economic aspect of artistic functioning, these indicators may effectively “directly” describe the situation. But when it is a question of the social aspect and the artistic and esthetic aspects, economic indicators cannot be considered as “direct” means of measurement. First, because they describe an intermediate product (for example, the attendance at cultural establishments) and not the final result; second, because economic indicators must be complemented by a “coefficient of quality” (established by experts) in order to become complex indicators applicable in all cases, alongside simple indicators that are self-sufficient.

c) *Complex indicators and simple indicators.* The elaboration of complex indicators of the development of artistic culture is a gradual process of integrating simple indicators into more general indicators. At the level of empirical sociology, the simple data that have been gathered become integrated into complex indicators. These make up simple indicators at the level of special sociology and in their turn are integrated into new, complex indicators at the second stage which, being expanded, pass to the level of general sociology. In that way the dialectical passage from the specific to the general is accomplished, with a decrease in the number of indicators as the field is enlarged. If at the empirical level we have several hundred indicators, at the level of special sociology we have only a dozen or so, and at the level of general sociology, only a few.

Nevertheless, there are simple indicators that, in some way, are complex in themselves, in the sense that they define themselves. In this regard, we recall something that Marx wrote in his economic-philosophic manuscripts of 1844: “*The relationship between a man and a woman is direct, natural and necessary.* In this generic, *natural* relationship, the relationship of man to nature is... his relationship to man, as his relationship to man is his relationship to nature, his own *natural* predestination. Thus in this relationship appears, reduced to a patent *fact*, the measure in which human essence has become for man his nature or the measure in which his nature has become the human essence of man. From this relationship we can therefore *judge the general level of the culture of man.*”³ The nature of this relationship reveals the measure in which *man* has become for himself a *generic being*, that is, *man*, and thinks of himself as such. The relationship of man to woman is the most *natural* relationship of man to man. It thus reveals the measure in which the *natural* behavior of man has become *human*, or the measure in which the *human* essence has become for him a *natural* essence, in other words, the measure in which his *human nature* has become nature for him. This relationship also reveals the measure in which the *need* of man has become a *human* need, that is, the measure in which the *other* (man) as a man has become a need for him...”⁴

Marx believed that it is possible to measure the state of a society and culture by its *attitude toward woman*, and he defined this criterion as primordial and generic, common to all men. According to Marx, in the analysis of human needs we can use this criterion to determine what they contain of culture. In this sense, for Marx human is synonymous with cultural. In other words, the lack of culture is defined by how much nature there is in man and his degree of culture by what there is of human in his nature.

We know only a few socio-significative indicators of this type, even less that these indicators must combine qualitative characteristics and quantitative commensurability. We think that along-

³ The underlining in this sentence is ours. The other passages were underlined by Marx himself.

⁴ K. Marx and F. Engels, *Manuscripts de 1844*, “Economie, politique et philosophie,” Paris, Editions sociales, 1962.

side the attitude toward women, the *attitude toward children* may also serve as an indicator of the level of development of such or such a society.

Today the press publishes a certain amount of information on the attitude toward children in various Western countries. According to *Paris-Match* 25,000 children are tortured each year by adults, and two children are killed by their parents every day. According to the German publication *Die Welt* the number of victims of cruel treatment in the Federal Republic is as high as 30,000 a year, of which almost a thousand die. In the United States, more than a million children are beaten and tortured every year, and 2,000 die from this treatment. In addition, if we can believe the newspapers, these figures should be doubled. Even though this indicator comes from the judicial system, it nevertheless can constitute a global indicator, simple, socio-significative, of the state of culture in such or such a nation.

Thus, in the application of research to the three levels we are now going to examine, we can make use of complex indicators as well as of simple and self-sufficient indicators.

5. THE PRACTICAL FINALITY

The practical finality of scientific studies with regard to the sociology of artistic culture has a triple orientation and answers three types of needs.

Scientific needs. Studying the laws of the development of artistic culture, sociology itself, like all the other sciences, has a definite need for a system of indicators with scientific bases.

Socio-political needs. It is well known that the conditions for the development of an artistic culture differ according to the type of society and are thus relatively specific. This is why today, while the forms of coexistence between systems of different social structure are enlarging and at the same time the ideological struggle is intensifying, the indicators of the development of culture become indispensable instruments for the comparison of cultural levels—for example, if we wish to establish a comparison between socialism and capitalism, which differs from the first exactly with regard to the initiation of the masses to culture. The socialist way of life is characterized by putting the elevation

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of the cultural level of the people on the same level as the elevation of the material level, as a consequence of which the culture itself in socialist countries has necessarily a definite and programmed end, a national and international significance. Socialist conditions permit the realization of a vast and complex program of socio-cultural edification, similar to space program research, on a national scale and that of world socialism.

The needs of a governmental order. In order to realize in a satisfactory way the national tasks that have been established, it is of use to bring up the quality and efficiency of the system of cultural direction. Now, this is possible on the condition that government practice relies on the results of scientific studies, especially on the systems of objective, credible and sure indicators that may be perfected as a result of these studies.

In short, a system of indicators, based on a definite overall concept, namely, the idea of the three sociological levels, should permit the correct orientation of the different masses of information toward the three levels of appropriate decisions: operational, tactical and strategic.