

‘Revolution is Learned Faster than Culture’:¹ On the Amateur-Professional Relationship in the Artistic Legacies of the People’s Liberation Struggle

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Abstract. This article focuses on the discourses and debates that surrounded the building of the new organizational model of artistic production during the People’s Liberation Struggle (PLS), which sought to bring about a profound transformation of social relations. Drawing on the historical sources, I show how the reconfiguration of the amateur-professional nexus was central to these strivings. Those reconfigurations uncover the complex processes of dealing with the bourgeois canon of art, the class-based notion of expertise and aesthetic value. Moreover, the legacies of artistic production in the PLS question the exclusive theorization of amateurism as a practice ‘from below’ that serves as a corrective to professionalized art, but instead reveals the complex encounters and the profound reconfigurations of these two fields. This historical look, I argue, points to the longstanding dilemmas and challenges that still haunt the contemporary debates about the artistic production as the field of transforming the capitalist modes of production and social relations.

Key Words: amateur-professional relationship, the PLS, artistic production, active masses

»Revolucije se učimo hitreje kot kulture«: o razmerju med amaterizmom in profesionalizmom v umetniški dediščini narodnoosvobodilnega boja

Povzetek. Članek se osredotoča na diskurze in razprave, ki so obkrožale vzpostavitev novega organizacijskega modela umetniške produkcije v času narodnoosvobodilnega boja (NOB), ki je skušal izpeljati globoko preobrazbo družbenih odnosov. Na podlagi zgodovinskih virov

¹ ‘Revolucija se, eto, brže uči nego kultura’ (Čolić 1981, 316).

pokažem, kako je bilo preoblikovanje razmerja med amaterizmom in profesionalizmom osrednjega pomena za ta prizadevanja. Ta preoblikovanja razkrivajo kompleksne procese soočanja z meščanskim kanoonom umetnosti ter razrednim pojmovanjem strokovnosti in estetske vrednosti. Poleg tega zapuščina umetniške produkcije v NOB postavlja pod vprašaj izključno teoretizacijo amaterizma kot prakse »od spodaj«, ki služi kot korektiv profesionalizirani umetnosti, namesto tega pa razkriva kompleksna srečanja in temeljna preoblikovanja obeh področij. Menim, da ta zgodovinski pogled kaže na dileme in izzive, ki še vedno obvladujejo sodobne razprave o umetniški produkciji kot polju transformacije kapitalističnih načinov produkcije in družbenih odnosov.

Ključne besede: razmerje med amaterizmom in profesionalizmom, NOB, umetniška produkcija, aktivne množice

The development of culture and art in the Republic of Užice shows that they merged with the People's Liberation Struggle and that the goal of the revolution and of art was the same: not only the social liberation of a human, but the liberation of her unsuspected creative possibilities [Glišić 1986, 179]²

In his talk On Music ('O muzici') at the First Congress of the Cultural Workers of Croatia in Topusko in 1944, Yugoslav composer and partisan fighter Miroslav Špiler gave a comprehensive overview of the new role of musical activities in the building of socialist society. Musical life cannot be monopolized by artistic 'elites' who are detached from the wider masses and their musical activities, especially the exploited and oppressed peasants and urban proletariat. What he sees as the radical moment in laying the foundations for the new 'overall artistic life of the people' (serb.-cro. *zajednički općenarodni glasbeni život*) is to allow unrecognized artistic talents from all social strata to develop their artistic capacities in both productive and reproductive musical activities (Špiler 1976, 108).

This short excerpt from Špiler's talk gives an insight into the ambitious goals of the Yugoslav People's Liberation Struggle (PLS) in achieving transformation in the cultural sphere, which focused on two main aspects: the active involvement of the wider masses in artistic activities and

² 'Razvoj kulture i umetnosti u Užičkoj republici pokazuje da su one srasle sa narodnoslobodilačkom borbom i da je cilj revolucije i umetnosti bio isti: ne samo socijalno oslobođenje čoveka već oslobođenje i njegovih neslučenih stvaralačkih mogućnosti' (Glišić 1986, 179).

the dismantling of the division between the institution of art and other spheres of life. Both are based on Marxist thought about cultural transformation as inherent to revolutionary transformation.³ In his writings on culture and arts, Lenin argues that culture should uplift the masses in order to prepare them for the role of key actors in the creation of the new socialist social relations. This process entails making up for what the working class in capitalism has been deprived of, being completely enslaved by 'the narrow specialization of the modes of production' (Ziherl 1958, 969).⁴ The masses are not simply the recipients of art; their (self-)emancipation toward active political subjects relies on the 'releasing' of their creative capacities. The more the wider social strata are engaged with culture, the more ready they are to take a political destiny into their own hands. In other words, the revolutionary subject should no longer be 'guided' by the professionals, especially in the case of peasants and exploited workers, as a way to change the material conditions of artistic engagement, which, together with other fields of social life, would contribute to the formation of a new socialist society. This fully supports the claim that the Yugoslav socialist revolutionary strivings aimed not only to 'reshape the internal structure of culture, but also revolutionize the position of the "cultural sphere" in the social structure' (Močnik 2005).

Theorizing the Amateur-Professional Nexus through the Lenses of Yugoslav Socialist Revolutionary Legacies

By focusing my examination on the attempts 'to awaken and develop artists in the masses' (Lenin 1950, 124–125) during the PLS, I aim to address the amateur-professional relationship as essential for the building of the new organizational model of artistic production that sought to bring about the profound transformation in all spheres of life which was the key to socialist revolutionary strivings. Focusing on the discourses and debates that surrounded such transformation, I argue, reveals the dilemmas and challenges that still haunt our contemporary approaches to the political potential of art.

My intention here is not so much to establish a direct relation between

³ The common thesis pertaining to Marxist thought about the key role of cultural emancipation of the working class as the basis of its the overall emancipation. For employment of this thesis in the Yugoslav context, see e.g. Jakopović (1976, 21) and Sklevicky (1996, 26).

⁴ See also Lenin's writings on culture and arts (1950).

the historical experience of the PLS and the current moment, but rather to explore how these legacies contribute to the contemporary theorization of artistic engagements as an intervention in the social relations governed by the capitalist mode of production. This examination is motivated by the increasing interest in non-professional or anti-professional activities in various scholarly fields and the need to rethink the modes of artistic production based on expertise and the professionalized reality that dominates the social, economic, political and academic life of global capitalism (Merrifield 2018). Practitioners and scholars in the fields of music, theatre and visual arts have revitalized long-standing discourses on amateurism as a means of democratizing participation in cultural and artistic activities across the class spectrum and as a counter-response to commodified leisure (for an overview, see Bryan-Wilson and Piekut 2020). They focus on the power relations behind knowledge production in the artistic field and the unquestionable authority of trained, vocational, or professional artists. As a category unbound to the notions of skill or expertise, historically associated with vernacular and 'low' cultural production, amateurism helps to unmask the relations of inequality in knowledge production based on gender, race, class, education, geopolitical context, access to resources, etc. and reveals professionalism as strongly rooted in the capitalist Global North/the Anglophone world (Ochoa Gautier 2014). While the amateur and professional spheres often overlap – as non-professional artistic engagement can be just as effective in terms of innovation, productivity or approaching the aesthetic goals of professional(ized) art – the authors argue for the gesture of 'distancing' from the professionalized sphere of artistic production. What Lucia Vodanovic calls the manifestation of a distance, 'a separation but also an engagement with this distant relationship' (2013, 173), reveals artistic expression not simply as the realm of the gifted and trained, but of the privileged who have access and the opportunity to develop their talent through formalized training.

This article aims to contribute to the ongoing conversations about the boundaries between 'professional' and 'amateur' as politically charged, revealing the hierarchies in knowledge production as embedded in the material conditions of life and the modes of production. The historical trajectories of the amateur-professional nexus in the Yugoslav socialist revolutionary context gives us insight into the historical knowledge and experience that is often missing in the contemporary debates. As a distinct moment in history, the PLS laid the groundwork for changing the realization of the pre-war communist cultural and artistic tendencies to dis-

mantle the modes of artistic engagement based on the capitalist exploitative social and economic conditions. This transformation had a strong class dimension, which presupposed an active participation of all working people in cultural activities, regardless of their social background or level of education.⁵ The PLS thus enabled the close interaction between established artists and cultural workers and the 'ordinary' people, including uneducated and illiterate peasants, the working classes or women, youth and minorities, who were denied access to 'art' (as conceptualized by the bourgeois canon). The intersection between the professional and amateur fields formed the basis for the 'artistic production' (serb.-cro. *umetničko stvaralaštvo*) that was deeply embedded in the revolutionary moment (Miletić and Radovanović 2016, 51). This historical moment untangles the exclusive theorization of amateur art as a practice 'from below' that serves as a corrective to professionalized art, and instead reveals the complex strategies and organizational models not only of the encounter, but also of the profound reconfigurations of these two fields.⁶

Much has been written about the anonymous masses as the main bearers of partisan art that signalled a radical break with artistic production based on class stratification.⁷ Little attention, however, has been paid to the mechanisms and strategies that allowed such interactions to emerge, and more importantly, to be sustained. The mass participation in artistic activities aimed at challenging the professionalized framework of art and artistic expertise relying on the hierarchical relationship between 'high' and 'low' cultural expression.⁸ Realizing such strivings on the ground, however, was a complex process saturated by an array of tensions and contradictions. One of the main stumbling blocks was the unsettling co-

⁵ Among many others, see Petranović (1988), Močnik (2005), Komelj (2009), and Kirn (2020).

⁶ This has been partly explored by the studies focused on the role of amateur musical activities in building the public cultural infrastructure in the villages (Hofman 2011b), the role of amateur music making in the negotiation of gender roles (Hofman 2011c), and on the cultural activities in the socialist factories and bigger enterprises (Koroman 2016; Vaseva 2018; Petrović 2021).

⁷ For more about the transition from individual to collective authorship as one of the most important characteristics of the self-emancipatory process of the working masses in the Yugoslav revolution, see Nedeljkić (1962a; 1962b; 1963), and Hofman (2008). On anonymous authorship and how it is related to the concept of the community to come, see Kirn (2020).

⁸ My intention is not to reopen the question of the autonomy of art that was one of the long-standing concerns of the intellectual circles of that time.

existence between the persisting dominance of the bourgeois institution and understandings of art and the goal of building new artistic life based on its rejection. This further raises the question of the self-taught or self-grown artist and their role in the reconfiguration of the very categories of artist and artistic production. This process concerned the intersection between institutional regimes of arts and the practices on the ground, formal and informal organization, the question of cultural values and recognition, and knowledge production, all related to the building of the socialist social relations.

We can follow the lively debates among the political leadership, intellectuals and cultural workers about the need for a democratization of the artistic field, which should bring about the transformation of the very recognition of what art is and the equality of different forms of expressive practices, especially folk expression. The material I analyse consists of the reports on cultural activities, memoirs (both the ones made during the PLS and during the socialist period), discussions, and papers presented during the congresses of cultural workers.⁹ I am fully aware that each artistic field has its own peculiarities in the understanding and use of the terms 'amateur' and 'professional,' a prime example of this being the field of popular music, where the lack of institutionalized training made self-taught musicians into professionals who live from making music.¹⁰ While a focus on the specificities has its own advantages in tracing how the amateur-professional relationship figured across different artistic fields, I pursue a view that includes a wide range of artistic activities to provide an important insight into the general tendencies.

Liberation of People's 'Natural' Artistic Capacities

Another participant at the 1944 Topusko Congress of Cultural Workers, general Ivan Gornjak, said that 'we are witnessing an extraordinary mo-

⁹ My initial aim was to search through the memoirs of partisan fighters that reflected the everyday experiences of the PLS, looking for the accounts that capture artistic engagement as it unfolded within the broader context of partisan and revolutionary struggle. My attempt was not successful, however, as the cultural activities were usually described very briefly, only in a few sentences as part of the description of other events. While I use some of this material in this article, I eventually turned to the sources that focus on culture, primarily the reports of the congresses of Slovenian and Croatian cultural workers in Semič and Topusko in 1944.

¹⁰ Ethnomusicologists argue that amateur music is 'rather a label than a distinction' (Finnegan 2007, 18), while the amateur-professional relationship is a complex continuum that can also involve making an emotional claim and a political statement (see Finnegan 2007; Baily 2016).

ment in this region as once semi-literate and illiterate people are now participating in writing either wall newspapers or pocket newspapers' and 'are active participants and creators of a better reality' (Gošnjak 1976, 30). He emphasized the cultural-educational work (serb.-cro. *kulturno-prosvetni rad*) as essential for increasing the intellectual and artistic capacities of partisan fighters. The cultural-propagandistic or educational-propagandistic committees (often called cultural groups or cultural sections) in the partisan units were responsible for improvement of their literacy and organization of cultural activities. Yugoslav intellectual and partisan fighter Moša Pijade recalled the full dedication to the organization of cultural events (*mitinzi, priredbe*), which consisted of theatrical performances, poetry, and choral singing, most of them produced by the partisan fighters themselves (1976, 32).

The work of the cultural-educational committees did not concern only the partisan units, but extended to the organization of cultural events and activities for the people in the liberated territories or in the areas the partisan units passed through. Mobilizing the local population to take an active part in artistic activities was a demanding task of systematically raising their awareness of the importance of artistic activities for a better life for all. For this reason, as soon as the partisan units liberated certain territory, they established the alternative cultural infrastructure. Ivan Čaće, writer and painter, notes that they first searched for talented peasants who would engage in writing and painting, if possible, 'in every village, and collect and publish the peasants' works, while giving feedback for those whose works still need polishing' (1976, 94).

Writing in more detail about the organization in the cultural field after the foundation of the Republic of Užice (Užička republika), the first liberated territory in Europe in 1941, Milutin Čolić (1981, 313) notes that the artistic unit of the Užice partisan brigade¹¹ initially consisted of twenty 'fighters – "artists"' (his emphasis). The majority of them were not trained artists, but had an aspiration or a talent for singing, acting, playing, dancing, or writing music and poetry (Đurić 1981, 321), many of whom were active in the pre-wwII workers' cultural societies.¹² According to the testimonies, the untrained but talented individuals were the main bearers of the cultural life in the Užice Republic, although with the significant help of the professionals. In only two months, they established three choirs –

¹¹ Also called artistic section or artistic theatre (Čolić 1981, 313).

¹² Sources also note that the search for 'talents' was not always successful and report on the constant lack of people who could be engaged in the cultural activities.

men's, women's and mixed, and even four orchestras: symphonic, wind, folk and pop (serb.-cro. *narodni* and *zabavni*) (Glišić 1986, 169). The activities of those ensembles were not limited to the town of Užice only, but they regularly performed in the surrounding villages.¹³

The active participation of 'ordinary' people, peasants and workers, in the cultural activities was essential for the reconfiguration of relations of production in the artistic field. Reflecting on how class consciousness was deeply connected to amateur music-making activities during the PLS, Dragutin Cvetko wrote: 'All those who had talent or were willing to learn basic musical skills, but who were deprived of educational or performance opportunities before the war, were able to develop and realize their talent during the war' (in Križnar 1992, 10).¹⁴ Ivan Čaće uses the term 'the self-activist artists' (serb.-cro. *umetnici samoaktivisti*) to denote 'an army of fighters and background workers – men and women – who write poems, sketches, plays (*igrokaze*) and the like; who paint, edit magazines, give lectures and generally engage in cultural work; who, so to speak, have started from scratch' (1976, 96). This statement fully illustrates the rhetoric of the 'deep democratization' of people's cultural life, in which the masses are both *the object and the subject* of emancipation (Gabrič 1991, 492).

Achieving this in practice meant a constant effort to overcome the fixed positions of *producers, reproducers and consumers* established by the pre-World War II bourgeois canon of art. While these positions remained, they were no longer reserved for a certain group of people according to their profession, education, or expertise. Špiler (1976, 113) wrote that at the beginning of World War II, the wider masses were mainly involved in the reproductive musical activities (serb.-cro. *reproduktivna glasbena djelatnost*), which continued to be the main form of their artistic engagement in the PLS. In this way, the division between those who can 'produce' art and those who can just reproduce it, maintains the stratifications based on expertise and thus stands in the way of revolutionary strivings. The next step, therefore, would be to give people from different social strata a voice in all aspects of musical production, reproduction and consumption (p. 114). To understand his stance, we have to be aware that it de-

¹³ For the condensed history of the cultural activities in the Užice Republic, see Miletić and Radovanović (2016, 61–102). On musical life in the PLS, see Pejović (1965), Hercigonja (1972), Tomašek (1982), Križnar (1992), and Hofman (2008; 2011a).

¹⁴ See also Hrovatin (1961) and Kalan (1975).

rives from the Western art music paradigm,¹⁵ which neglects the productive relations in other fields of music activities, primarily folk expression, something I will return to in the next section.

The specific conditions of the PLS and the guerrilla mode of fighting opened up the possibilities for transgressing the established divisions of roles in artistic production, often out of necessity: due to the precarious conditions, the constant movement, and the lack of people and resources, trained individuals were no longer the only creators of artistic content. Written sources indicate the constant lack and fluctuation of people as the main problem in maintaining cultural groups or making them more structured and organized. For example, the constant lack of musicians (instrumentalists)¹⁶ or sheet music, lyrics, and ready-made dramatic texts required to take on new, often multiple roles in writing, performing, conducting, and acting (Vojvodić 1987, 64).

However, we cannot say that this was only a result of the exceptional-ity of the war and revolutionary moment. The agenda of 'educational and liberating ideological and political work with the people' (serb.-cro. *prosvetni odgojni-obrazovni i oslobodilački idejno-politički rad u narodu*) meant the continuous agitation of the importance of culture on the ground. Members of the culture groups organized extensive debates with the audience after the cultural events, visited people in their homes and used every possible opportunity to explain the importance of culture for building new social relations. All this ought to promote the idea of 'active masses' against the position of masses as the passive consumers of the 'given' cultural offer.¹⁷

In the efforts to encourage cultural expression among all working people – be they peasants, workers, or intelligentsia – the PLS set up new ways

¹⁵ The folk expression does not support the thesis of separated phases of production and reproduction. The oral transmission is based not only on anonymous authorship, but on a process of creation as a process of reproduction: in the case of folk songs, they were constantly (re)created through new variants.

¹⁶ Vojvodić (1987, 13) reports that in 1942 there was no single instrumentalist – accordion player – in the whole of Lika.

¹⁷ In my previous work, I have written extensively about how cultural activities in Yugoslav villages had a strong self-organized and participatory dimension, as they were supported by a robust cultural infrastructure that aimed to involve marginalized social groups, such as women and ethnic minorities, in cultural activities as part of a discourse of socialist modernization. I show how this fostered collaboration between the organizers of cultural activities, people from local communities and writers, ethnologists, composers, journalists, and local authorities and party administrators (Hofman 2011c, 35–37).

of artistic knowledge transmission. The artistic units tried to instil confidence in people to start writing, painting, and composing. Special attention was paid to the 'beginners,' who should be less concerned about the 'quality' of their works, but should concentrate on developing their skills. The most successful amateurs were automatically given new tasks and a leading role in 'training' new cadres and organizing the cultural activities and newly formed cultural groups, regardless of generational, gender, ethnic, social background, educational and other differences. This meant an important shift in the process of knowledge transmission, which now took place outside of the formal framework of schools and academies, in the improvised setting of quick courses¹⁸ and the interactions between professionals, newly trained people and the ones completely inexperienced. Illustrative examples of this can be found in partisan testimonies, in which uneducated peasants, who were transformed from 'just' the audience or listeners into authors, composers, or conductors in the partisan units, acquired diplomas or master's degrees in composition or conducting after the war. For instance, Avdo Smailović confessed that he could not have obtained a university education without the radical transformation of social relations brought about by the socialist revolution (Tomašek 1982, 313).

Destabilization of the seemingly fixed positions of producers, reproducers and consumers/receivers paved the way for challenging the necessity of formal knowledge as a requirement for being active in the artistic field. The prime tool for the transformation was the people's (self-)awareness that they were not limited to the role of consumers of the cultural offer created by someone trained or skilled.

One such breakthrough came in 1945, when the members of the Anton Cesarec partisan theatre group attended a professional theatre performance in Trieste for the first time: 'For almost three years, we have been the bearers of a part of culture in the entire territory of Croatia, and most of the members of the August Cesarec theatre group are entering a real theatre for the first time. For the first time, they are seeing a real theatrical performance, with professional, trained actors' (Vojvodić 1987, 97–98). Yet to what extent did this enable the reconfiguration of artistic knowledge production and the value associated with the particular types of artistic expression?

¹⁸ The informal education during the PLS is a topic in of itself and deserves profound examination.

Artistic (Self-)Emancipation between 'Liberation' and 'Cultivation'

The strivings to establish the new material conditions of artistic production based on the close interaction between professionals and amateurs were constantly faced with the difficulties of overcoming the values assigned to certain genres, forms and practices and the position of (artistic) authority. As far as musical activities are concerned, the ambitious goal of establishing the people's musical life, as simultaneously distant from both national and 'high' culture and based on 'natural artistic instinct without regard to the conventions of music theory' (Žganec 1962, 15), demanded dealing with a deeply rooted and internalized values associated with a certain type of training or knowledge necessarily for music-making.

The main stumbling block was the hierarchies based on formal education and expertise: renowned artists were the main authority in directing and organizing musical activities. Due to their position of authority, prominent figures were still invited to assess the quality of the programme and offer advice for its improvement. 'It is not that the artists have only changed their halls or elite cultural spaces with the open wooden stages and partisan camps. The artist is now a politician and a pedagogue,' states Miroslav Špiler (1976, 113).

Therefore, we cannot ignore the fact that the foundation of the new canon of people's musical life could not completely dismantle the established forms of knowledge production and transmission based on the Western art music paradigm as the universal framework for music-making. For example, apart from fighting illiteracy, one of the main goals of people's emancipation during the PLS was also eradicating 'musical illiteracy' (serb.-cro. *muzički analfabetizam*), learning of Western musical notation. This aimed at raising the level of understanding of music, especially for young talented people who did not have access to formal musical education. Through the exposure to this content, the lower classes of illiterate peasants and workers would gain agency needed to change the internal hierarchies in the field of artistic production. Still, such an approach reinforced the long-standing unequal status of oral culture (folklore) in relation to written culture, the former playing a key role in the enlightenment of the masses.¹⁹

¹⁹ In her research of ethnographic records of partisan songs, Jelka Vukobratović (forthcoming) notes that songs based on the local folklore idiom (in particularly untampered scales) did not enter the written songbooks, in particular the ones created after WWII. About the folk expression in the PLS and the partisan songs, see Hrovatin (1960), Hercigonja and

As a result of this, introducing the Western art music idiom to the masses was a challenge. I found several notes about the behaviour of the audience at the cultural events, who often needed to be 'educated' about the proper way of listening to the concert performance. In a vignette about the concert performance of mixed and men's choirs in 1941 in Užice, Milutin Čolić describes how the conductor Dragoljub Jovašević, who was conducting in front of 2000 people, reacted to the audience who, instead of waiting patiently for the end of the performance, started talking and making noise (serb.-cro. *galamiti*). He turned to them and complained that they should be ashamed of disrespecting Smetana, but he immediately added how they, as partisan fighters should know that (Čolić 1981, 316).

The recollection of Stanka Vrinjanin, a pre-World War II pianist and partisan fighter, of the musical activities during the PLS is particularly telling. A trained musician with a degree in piano from the Music Academy in Zagreb, she was assigned the task of teaching music and establishing the children's choir in the town of Glina in Croatia. She recalls that even the selection of children for the choir was a difficult task, as most of them were so unfamiliar with the 12-tone equal temperament music scale that she was unable to assess their singing abilities on the piano. Musically attuned to the folk idiom of the area, the children could not easily adapt to the postulates of Western art music and although she invested a considerable effort in 'tuning' their singing, they continued singing spontaneously in the folk manner, refusing to reproduce the melody and be guided by the conductor. Eventually, she managed to put together a repertoire consisting of various pieces (including folk songs), which they performed in the partisan units and at cultural events (in Tomašek 1982, 347).

This vignette portrays the constraints of dealing with the value assigned to the Western art music canon. It also raises the question about where and how the emancipation through artistic engagement can unfold. The debates of the time were not blind to these constraints and the inequalities deriving from artistic competence. The real transformation might happen, Ivan Čaće (1976, 99) explains, 'when the self-taught artist is given the opportunity to be "developed" into a cultural worker, to take responsibility for the important task in the development of the new society.' In further elaborating on this, he adds that the main contribution to the

Danon (1962), and Hofman (2004; 2008). For the more general relation between oral and written culture through the concept of aurality, see Ochoa Gautier (2014).

struggle against the 'old' patterns of artistic production is not simply glorifying peasant's naïve art. In the pre-wwii period, the artistic elite started criticizing peasant artists when they did not conform to the expectations of the unpolished, 'childishly primitive' and 'sweetly naïve' amateur aesthetic, but began to depict the reality of peasant lives; they were accused of being 'contaminated' by the modern tendencies or the professionalized 'school' (p. 95). In other words, the value of self-taught artistic works is sustained only when it aligns with the expectations of the 'position' that was assigned to them within the bourgeois norms of artistic production. For the experts, peasants' works lost their 'artistic value' when they came closer to professional or trained aesthetics.

This reflection shows how artistic engagement became disruptive not when non-professionals met the expectations of the self-taught, amateur aesthetic, but when they refused the clear boundaries between 'high art' and 'folk art' and a class division attached to it. Therefore, an important part of the overall emancipation of people in the PLS was the recognition of the value of non-professional forms of artistic engagement, but without glorifying the difference or keeping them isolated in their marginality or exceptionality. The main target of transformation was the class stratifications that are at the core of artistic production in capitalism. Therefore, the peasant population's artistic activities should not be delimited by their (identitarian) position, but the new coordinates of artistic production nurtured embracing various forms and practices of artistic engagement. The same counted for the formally educated composers, performers or conductors who were widely exposed to folk music.²⁰ It is precisely these encounters that make it possible to challenge the bourgeois notions of the artist, of artistic production.

Conclusion

The quotation from the beginning of this article summarizes the central concern of the cultural policy debates during the PLS: to what extent the immediate goals of the socialist revolution are in line with the transformation of the cultural field. Numerous debates at the time dealt with the tension between the mass participation of people and the 'quality' of artistic expression or, in other words, the attempts to elevate the people's

²⁰ About the intersection between folk music and Western art music in the works of composers, see the introduction to *The Collection of Partisan Folk Songs* (Hercigonja and Danon 1962) and Atanasovski (2011).

capacities and the need to stick to the forms adjusted to the wider masses. Navigating the two often resulted in the practice where prominent artists and cultural workers were called upon to evaluate and improve the quality of the cultural activities, which meant that the 'more developed' expressive forms were widely disseminated across the social spectrum. With regards to music in particular, while official discourses emphasized the importance of folk music expression, this does not diminish the value of Western art musical practices as the 'highest' form of artistic expression.

I argue that we have to be careful in our critique of these constraints as it can conform the long-standing discourses of the harmful consequences of the 'forced' socialist modernization that 'erased' the 'authentic' folk expression by imposing the West-European 'elite' modes of cultural production on the masses. Lately, such views have been reinforced by the decolonial turn and the increased interest in the 'peasant' or 'indigenous' artistic knowledge and practices as marginalized or suppressed. As Lucia Vodanovic demonstrates, the works of the self-taught artists have been praised for their 'unpolished' aesthetics that presumes sincerity, immediacy, a sense of 'naturalness,' and an unusual use of new artistic means (2013, 171) from the perspective of the 'oppressed' subject – whether indigenous people, uneducated peasants, migrants or people from unprivileged social backgrounds.

The Yugoslav revolutionary legacies of the reconfiguration of the amateur-professional relationship, in contrast, remind us about the shortcomings of uplifting underprivileged individuals and communities within the existing field of artistic production informed by the capitalist modes of production and class division. The historical lesson of the PLS brings to the fore the transformation of the amateur-professional relationship as inherent in the transformation of that very system, in which both amateur and professional transcend the particular class position attached to the particular style or aesthetic practices (such as 'folk' or 'elite/high' expression). It invites the focus on the agency of an amateur in reconfiguring the modes of artistic production that is part of the broader socio-political transformation toward dismantling the capitalist modes of artistic production.

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