

matko meštrović

to be a volunteer in arts - whom it may concern and what for?

● Trying to answer that question I would start with Friedrich Hayek's tenet. There is no cultural evolution "per se". The process always advances under conditions that reflect human constitutional choices. We can only choose among alternative frameworks within which we let cultural evolution proceed. If we can identify the constraining conditions on which the beneficial working of the process of cultural evolution depends, it becomes a constructive task to assure that such conditions prevail.¹

Are we able to specify the constraining conditions under which a competitive evolutionary process works responsively to individual interests? What are our ambitions? What would we like to do and consider ourselves capable of doing? How much are we personally concerned and aware of our possibilities? What are our forces and is it only a question of power? What power?

1. VERTICAL AXIS

As we head into the Third Millennium, the dominant modality of sociocultural evolution must shift, says Ervin Laszlo. This does not mean that sociocultural evolution with its attainments of social and cultural development must come to an end, only that another mode of evolution must take precedence.²

Laszlo has very clear criteria how to discern two evolutionary modalities - intensive versus extensive. Compared to extensive evolution, intensive evolution unfolds along a different axis. Instead of a two-dimensional extension on the surface of the planet, intensive evolution moves along a vertical axis. It goes deeper into the structure of social communities in order to reach greater heights in the development of human communication and consciousness.

The new sciences, Laszlo argues, are growing beyond classical separation and are showing us an interconnected universe where particles and humans interact within the deepest layers of reality. The full potentials of human communication unfold only when the communicators apprehend the strands of connection through which they communicate. Awareness of these strands is an important factor in humanity's continued evolution. It opens up a vision of a wider culture and ultimately species- and planet-centred dimension. The technologies

that drive intensive evolution create and sustain connection by multiple and quasi-instant links. Intensively evolving communities are oriented not towards conquest and consumption, but towards a deeper structure of social relations. A new phase is about to open for our species, but the threat of delay remains real, Laszlo warns.

2. ANXIETY

The key notions for the improvement of contemporary democracy are participation and power, but no contemporary analyst has adequately dealt at an overall theoretical level with the question of the low level of participation in voting at elections. This reflects a feeling of what Pierre Bourdieu describes as political 'dispossession', rather than satisfaction with the present state of affairs, observes Nick Hewlet.³

Analysts who promote direct, or more direct, democracy address this question head-on arguing for measures which include more local debate, more education to encourage participation, more recognition of 'difference' among voters, and democratic structures on an international level. But many of the same people seem to avoid the other key issue of the power of those with vested interests in keeping contemporary democracy weak. How can present structures be transformed in order to reduce the power of big business, professional politicians, the media and patriarchy, the forces which resist democratic change precisely by using tremendous power? -asks Hewlet with good reason.

It was in Budapest in December last year that a conference was focused on *The Role of the Arts in the Process of Social Change*. The philosopher Renata Salecl dealt with the question of whether we live in a period of anxiety or not, and how new trends in the arts relate to it.⁴

The difference between contemporary art and art of the sixties is that the latter tried to make a political gesture by tearing out the walls of the gallery, while contemporary art has given up on the notion of the political. The return to one's own body or making a work of art out of one's everyday life is perceived as a gesture which says that there is no point in involving oneself in political debates. The only power we have is over ourselves.

●
¹ Vanberg, Viktor (1994) *Cultural Evolution, Collective Learning, and Constitutional Design*, u Reisman David, ed. Economic Thought and Political Theory, Boston / Dordrecht / London: Kluwer Academic Publishers

² Laszlo, Ervin (2001) Human evolution in the Third Millennium, *Futures* Vol. 33, No. 7, Published by Elsevier Science Ltd.

³ Hewlet, Nick (2000) Democracy: liberal and direct, in Browning, Gary et al, (eds) *Understanding Contemporary Society -Theories of the Present*, London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi: Sage Publications

⁴ Salecl, Renata (2001) Art and The New Age of Anxiety, *Culturelink* 34, Zagreb: IMO

Renata Salecl considers that this apolitical turn in the arts is very much linked with the logic of contemporary capitalism. The ideology of turning towards oneself is deeply connected to the logic of developed capitalist societies. It goes hand in hand with the consumer ideology, which constantly demands us to change our appearance and which also makes us realise that there is no point in caring about politics. If, on the one hand, the arts very much try to show everyday life as an art object, on the other hand they try to depict the back of things, inside of the body. It looks as if everything can be exposed and there is nothing more to surprise us beyond that which is supposed to be behind the mask. In contemporary society it looks as if there is no social antagonism any more, i.e., that there is no void. It goes hand in hand with the dominant ideology of "there is no secret". But while ideology makes everything visible in contemporary society, people are nonetheless constantly left with the impression that someone else is running the show behind their backs or that there is a hidden enemy who has to be exposed and eliminated.

As standardisation reins us in, as Julia Kristeva put it six years ago. the culture and art of revolt, the essential aspect of European culture and art, is under threat. We are submerged by entertainment and performance culture, while being on the brink of the black hole.⁵

3. DISRUPTION

The most crucial area of modern life in which culture exercises a direct influence on domestic well-being and international order is the economy, Francis Fukuyama (1995) asserted giving notice immediately that there is a mistaken tendency to regard economy as a facet of life with its own laws. In all successful economic societies economic communities are united by trust.⁶

The ability to associate depends on the degree to which communities share norms and values. It is out of such shared values that trust comes. The accumulation of social capital is a complicated and in many ways mysterious cultural process. Fukuyama does not explain it, but he refers to cultural anthropologists. They allegedly insist that there are virtually no aspects of culture that are common to all human soci-

eties. Cultural factors are therefore incapable of being systematised into universal laws. On behalf of a more general truth Fukuyama makes no use of distinction between culture and social structure: all cultures seek to constrain the raw-selfishness of human nature! Well, there is no doubt that human beings are, as economists say, fundamentally selfish and that they pursue their selfish interests in a rational way, but they also have a moral side in which they feel obligation to others. A healthy capitalist economy is one in which there will be sufficient social capital in the underlying society to permit businesses, corporations, networks, and the like to be self-organising - explicitly says Fukuyama at the end of his book *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*.

Here again he repeats his well-known interpretation of human historical process as the interplay between two large forces: the first was that of rational desire to satisfy the material needs through the accumulation of wealth, and, the second, the "struggle for recognition". Modern liberal democracy works because the struggle for recognition is now pursued on the economic plane.

In his very promptly produced voluminous new book, *The Great Disruption:*

Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order (1999) there had been no essential modification of this "historical" understanding. Under the caption Trust, Moral Values and Civil Society you can read:

"Anyone who has lived through the decades between the 1950s and the 1990s in the United States or other Western Countries can scarcely fail to recognise the massive value changes that have taken places over this period. These changes in norms and values are complex, but can be put under the general heading of *increasing individualism* ... In modern societies, options for individuals vastly increase, while the ligatures binding them in webs of social obligation are greatly loosened".⁷

4. LAST HOPE

The third sector, also known as the independent or volunteer sector, is the realm in which fiduciary arrangements give way to community bonds. The giving of

●
⁵ Kristeva, Julia (1995) *What Good are Artist Today?*, in Chambert, Christian, ed. *Strategies for Survival - Now!*, The Swedish Art Critics Association Press

⁶ Fukuyama, Francis (1995) *Trust - The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*, New York: Free Press Paperback

⁷ Fukuyama, Francis (1999) *The Great Disruption - Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order*, New York: The Free Press

one's time to others takes the place of market relationships based on selling oneself and one's services to others. This third sector, Jeremy Rifkin is persuaded, already cuts a wide swath through society. Community activities run the gamut from social services to health care, education and research, the arts, religion and advocacy. Volunteers often assist municipal government, donating time to crime prevention work and disaster relief. This independent sector in the United States currently contributes more than 6 percent of the economy and is already responsible for 9 percent of the total employment.⁸

French social scientists introduced the term *social economy* in the 1980s in an attempt to clarify the distinction between the third sector and the market-exchange economy. The social economy is not measured the way one measures capitalism, in terms of salaries, revenues etc., but its outputs integrate social result with indirect economic gains. Rifkin is trying to identify the necessary elements for a compelling alternative vision to the utilitarian ethos of the marketplace. The third sector is where many people first learn how to practice the art of democratic participation. It is where companionship is sought and friendships are formed, where people relax and play and more fully experience the pleasure of life and nature. Margaret Mead once remarked: "... anything that embodies our deepest commitment to the way human life should be lived and cared for, depends on some form ... of volunteerism." Nonetheless, the spirit of the social economy has yet to become a powerful worldview, countervailing that which has led to a rapacious consumption of the earth. Our planet's biosphere has been compromised by resource depletion at one end and environmental pollution at the other.

But there is reason to be hopeful that a new vision based on transformation of consciousness and a new commitment to community will take hold. With millions of human beings spending more and more of their waking hours away from work in the formal economy, the importance of formal work to their lives will diminish - including its hold over their concept of self-worth. For the increasing number for whom there will be no jobs at all in the market sector, government will be faced with two choices: finance with additional police protection and the building of more jails or finance

with alternative forms of work in the third sector. In many developing nations, the third sector is becoming a more effective force for dealing with local needs than either the private or public sectors. This is especially true where the formal market economy plays little role in the economic life of the community.

Obviously the social economy has become the last best hope for re-establishing an alternative institutional framework for a civilisation in transition. There is no lack of optimism in Rifkin, but his optimism differs from that of the high-tech savants who remain unconvinced of the crisis at hand. For them, the hardware and software already exist to speed our passage into a new silicon-based civilisation. They seem unaware of a new form of barbarism waiting just outside the walls of the modern world, and of the masses whose cries for justice and inclusion still go unheard.

5. CIVIL LABOUR

The neoliberal utopia is a kind of democratic illiteracy, says Ulrich Beck. For the market is not its own justification; it is an economic form viable only in interplay with material security, social rights and democracy, and hence with the democratic state. To gamble everything on the free market is to destroy, along with democracy, that whole economic mode. If change continues this way, in the next ten years only half of employees will hold a full-time job for a long period of their lives. With the end of the work society, the mood of doom and gloom resulting from technological advances in labour productivity and from the awareness of ecological destruction can be turned around into the beginning of the self-active political society, he believes.⁹

Contemporary societies are going through a fundamental transformation which radically challenges the understanding of modernity rooted in the European Enlightenment. The changes take place despite the fact that they are to the disadvantage of large majorities and to the advantage only of elite minorities of global players. The term 'reflexive modernity' which Beck proposes refers to the transition from the first modernity locked within the national state toward a second, open, risk-filled modernity. The transition is taking place within the continuity of 'capitalist

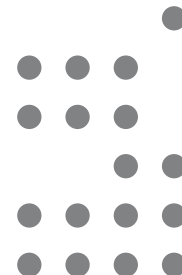
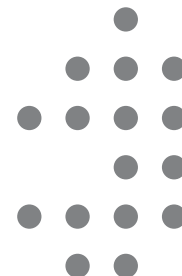
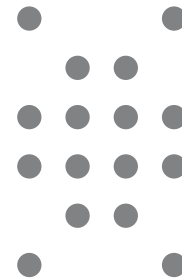
⁸ Rifkin, Jeremy (1995) *The End of Work - The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era*, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons

⁹ Beck, Ulrich (2000) *The Brave New World of Work*, Cambridge: Polity Press

modernisation, which removes the fetters of the national and welfare state. The guiding ideas and core institutional responses of the first modernity no longer appear self-evident. This is true of the idea of territoriality in relation to globalisation; of full employment in relation to the work society; of fixed ideas of community and hierarchy in relation to individualisation; of a 'natural' division of labour in relation between the sexes. It is true of limitless growth in relation to the ecological crisis.

The farewell to the work society will perhaps cause less pain and anguish if there is the prospect of successfully moving toward a world civil society that is at once global and local. This step requires an attainable and enticing goal to be visible on the horizon, capable of awakening a still dormant hope that a new gaze can be directed without shame at the hidden charms of the new, Beck emphatically points out. Those who wish to escape the spell of the work society must see political society in a new historical meaning of the term - a society that gives material form to the idea of civil rights.

Civil labour means the politics of the first step. Unlike forms of voluntary commitment, civil labour is not paid work but it is rewarded with civic money and thereby socially recognised and valued. In the money society, money is simply the measure of all things. Civic money means a quantity for getting by with. The entrepreneurship can and must be associated with work for the common good. Public welfare entrepreneurs combine in their person that which appears to be excluded by the prevailing logic of functionally differentiated societies. Civil labour may thus become an innovation that permits other innovations. A culture of creativity. ●



→ **Matko Meštrović**, Ph.D. - is a theorist and critic of art, and one of the founders of the New Tendencies international artistic movement active in Zagreb in the 1960s. He has published several books dealing with the notion of art in a socio-economical context.