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Some thoughts on the financing of culture

Commerce and the Fine Arts

In our society, there are many sectors that everyone takes for granted – at all events, until they are examined in depth. One such sector is that of culture: practically everybody that one talks to claims to be familiar with it. So in this sense, culture seems to be flourishing.

When questioned more in detail, however, people sound less convincing. Asked to say what they regard as the contents of the realm of culture, and how to define them, eight individuals out of ten will usually not be able to offer a more or less adequate reply. This is not really surprising, as the so-called experts and “insiders” quite often fail themselves to define the aspects with which they are in daily contact. And in the long run, this failure hardly matters at all, as culture is itself able, as though by magic, to protect itself so effectively that it does not need to be defined.

It is by no means our intention to attempt a task which so many have tried to tackle without success. Instead we aim at focussing your attention on the ways in which culture – this undefinable domain of human activity – is financed. It is a phenomenon with many unknowns and is always controversial.

Culture becomes visible or tangible in the form of specific material products such as

books, pictures, sculptures and tapestries, or can take the form of performances that can be perceived optically or acoustically, such as theatrical or choreographic productions and musical offerings. Such works are often, though not always, regarded as coming under the heading of culture.

What do we mean by “not always”? Precisely in this context it is with the help of the question about financing that one can get at least an approximate demarcation between what is art and what is not – in the absence of any better counter-concept.

Culture ≠ covering the costs

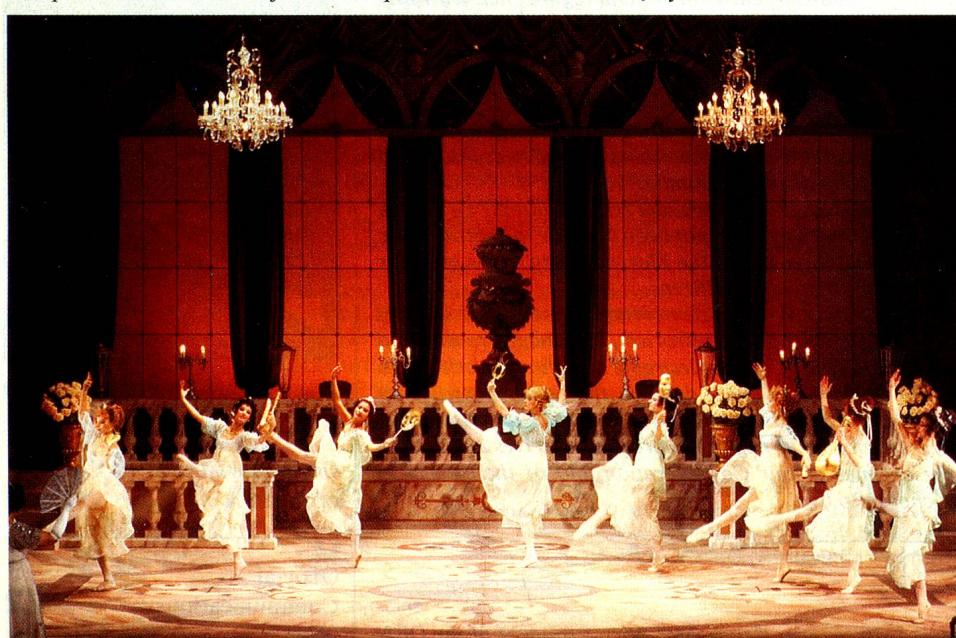
For countless generations, our production of goods needed for our existence has developed in accordance with the principle of covering the costs. Anyone producing an article for sale wants to sell it at a price which at least covers his cost, but if possible gives a margin of profit. But as the means at the disposal of the individual customer are usually



...and cannot be staged without financial support.

Our picture: Scene from the opera «Tosca», by Giacomo Puccini. (Photos: Michael von Graffenreid)

*Musical productions in the theatre involve very considerable expense...
Our picture: Ballet scene from the operetta «Vienna Blood», by Johann Strauss*



limited, the maker of the product must in order to sell it keep the cost down so as to keep the selling price at a reasonable level. For this he needs to purchase his materials at a reasonable cost and to take as little time as possible in the manufacture. Thus the production should – after a shorter or longer period of trial and development – be as simple as possible. Thereby the product loses its character of individuality and uniqueness but lends itself to reproduction at relatively low cost.

These conditions and pre-requisites cannot by definition apply to a work of art. For what fascinates, captivates, and puts a spell on us, as well as giving us food for thought, pleasure and happiness, and perhaps astonishes us too, is the feeling that we are encountering a little morsel of creation, a work stemming from human spirit, human creativity and human genius. If one were to

apply the principle of profitability to such works, almost all the essential elements characterising a true work of art would be lost – or in some cases, the price would have to be exorbitantly high. This can be realised if one takes the example of a theatrical performance. The staging of a great operatic work necessitates an enormous expenditure: the musicians in the orchestra and the singers must be paid, and in addition one has to pay the indispensable technical and administrative staff, and the cost of scenery and costumes, of publicity, programmes and so forth. And one should not forget the premises where the opera is to be performed. Taking all these expenses into account, when it comes to fixing cost-covering admission prices, one must either be able to count on mass attendances over a long “run”, or be obliged to set the price correspondingly

Patronage

Furtherance of culture by a «patron», as an end in itself, with nothing in return, and usually given anonymously. A patron is often called a «Mäzen» in German, a “mécène” in French or a “mecenate” in Italian, and, very occasionally, a “Maecenas” in English. These names are derived from that of the wealthy Roman nobleman called Maecenas who in the first century B.C. gave much support to the writers of his times.

high – both courses usually being quite unthinkable. So it comes down to the well-known though often forgotten or suppressed phenomenon of the celebrated “fifty-franc note” on every occupied (or unoccupied!) seat for the evening performance. To put it in a nutshell, a theatre can only afford to stage demanding works if it can count on financial support.

Mutatis mutandis, the same rule applies in the other sectors of artistic creativity. A painter must be able either to sell his works, or to find financial support for his plans. After all, not every artist can sell his works at all, except at prices that bring him only what would, when converted, correspond to a derisory hourly wage. An author who has worked for many months on a book, will have to be sure of big sales if he hopes to achieve an income comparable with that of an average wage-earner. Likewise, here in Switzerland a composer of serious musical works will hardly be able to earn a living from them. Such a composer has a double handicap: his work must pass



Apart from the preservation of monuments and of regional traditions, cinematic art is the only cultural activity whose furtherance is provided for in our constitution. Our pictures: Scenes from the film «Reise der Hoffnung», by Xavier Koller. (Photos: Barbara Davatz)



through two stages before it can be heard by an audience, as the score must be printed and published, and afterwards performed (another big expense item). In principle, such problems as these are encountered also by ballet groups and film makers: the cost of seeing their artistic ambitions realised is very great.

Culture ≠ mass-production

Let us now, as an interim result, confirm this: works of art are not suitable for industrial mass-production (whereby there are

of course exceptions to prove the rule – though not usually during the artist's lifetime!). Furthermore there is a special characteristic of the Swiss culture scene which prejudices the situation of the artist's earnings. Swiss cultural life is enormously variegated and rich in its forms of expression – but its structure is usually of a somewhat small-scale character. Thus many works of art reach only a very limited public. An author's only chance of achieving a big circulation of his book is – apart from its quality – for it to be taken up by an



important (i.e. usually, alas, foreign) publisher who can guarantee him the necessary promotion.

“Literature follows Bread” was the title of the Jubilee publication of the Swiss Society of Authors in 1987. Without promotion – and primarily promotion of material character – nothing can really succeed in the

Culture Sponsoring

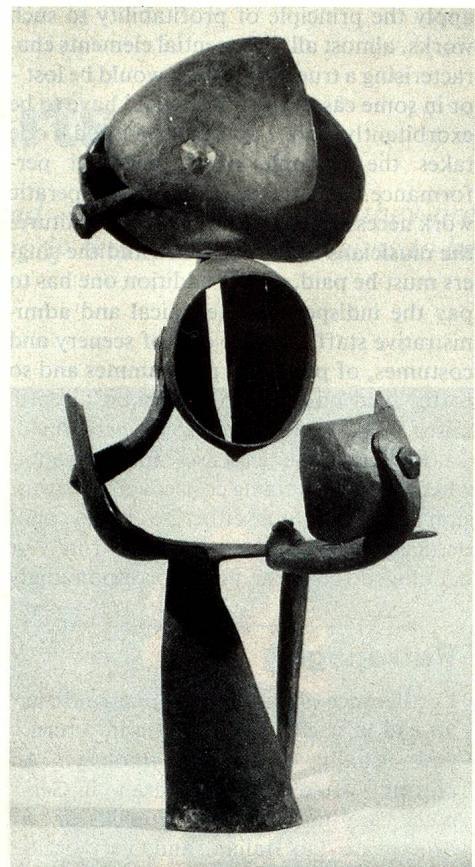
Furtherance of culture, financed by a commercial firm for promoting its «image» and for obtaining publicity.

cultural scene, was the somewhat prosaic diagnosis of the Society. But a cursory examination of cultural history will show at once that this is not a development of our own times, in a very cost-intensive country, but is proof that throughout the ages, most artists have been dependent on financial support and patronage.

Promotion of culture – past and present

In earlier centuries it was the ruling classes – from the legendary Maecenas of classical

antiquity to the princely courts of the declining “Ancien Régime” – that supported the arts and promoted the artists. But in the 19th century this role of patron was increasingly assumed by the modern city state. Admittedly, some limits were – and still are – clearly established. State and Culture were in both intellectual and political circles as much a pair of opposites as fire and water! This situation produced, so to say, a “natural”, and more or less clearly expressed fear of a “State Culture” developing, and kept the engagement of the public authorities in cultural matters well within bounds – much to the benefit of culture! For – and this is something I am firmly convinced about – the State ought in this field to limit its activities. In Switzerland’s many-sided and fine-meshed structure a principle that has been given the name of “double subsidiarity” has developed. This means that culture and its promotion are first and foremost the concern of the private sector. Only if and when there is a threat to the survival of national values, if private contributions reach the limits of material capability and competence, or if social discrimination threatens, should the State be



It would be a completely misguided reaction to regard the sponsor in a «black-and-white» light, as a profit-hungry investor... Our picture: Robert Müller (1920): «La Mangue» («The Mango»), 1956. Wrought iron. Property of the Swiss Confederation.

Quand on réfléchit, on fait plus qu'être assis ...



Comprendre les besoins alimentaires suppose que l'on observe de près toutes les formes de l'activité humaine.

L'effort intellectuel et un mode de vie sédentaire exigent une alimentation qui aide à penser sans engendrer la lourdeur consécutive à une nourriture trop riche.

Un bon aliment ne doit pas être seulement bon au goût et pratique à consommer. Il doit aussi dispenser les éléments nutritifs dans de justes proportions, ainsi que les calories nécessaires

avec un taux d'assimilation approprié à l'activité.

Première entreprise alimentaire du monde, nous nous devons de connaître tous les problèmes de l'alimentation. Nous nous soucions donc de l'homme, de ses occupations, de ses loisirs. C'est pourquoi les produits Nestlé sont plus que de la simple nourriture.

 **Nestlé** bien plus que la première entreprise alimentaire du monde.

entitled and empowered to share in the responsibility and play the part of a collaborator. And in the matter of State engagement in the cultural sphere there is a further rule in the subsidiarity context: the primary role, the first step, is for the cantonal and municipal authorities, as they are closer to the scene of what is going on. Only if and when the resources and competences of the cantonal and municipal bodies have been exhausted should the Confederation appear on the scene. The commitment of the State in connection with cultural promotion will be primarily aimed at balancing and safeguarding national and international interests. Consequently it is predominantly the “big jobs” that in the history of our Federal State (even without any constitutional basis) have involved the Federation in the promotion of culture. Nobody would today deny that such “big jobs” as the National Museum, the National Library and the Federal Archives are matters for the Federation to deal with. Nor would any canton



Revision of the Swiss Copyright Law

The School, the Video-Cassette and the Village Baker

One special aspect of the problem of financing cultural activities is that of copyright legislation (i.e., a law to safeguard the interests of the originators of intellectual works) in connection with the revision of which the Federal Office for Intellectual Property has produced a draft which has given rise to much discussion.

The present law dates back to 1922 – thus to a time when nobody could dream of the possibilities of duplication which modern technology would bring in the form of photocopying machines and tape-recorders for audio and video cassettes. In many European countries, it has long since been accepted that fees should be payable in respect of the mass duplication (by means of photocopying apparatus and re-recording on to blank tapes) of works still in copyright, i.e., not in the public domain, and their loaning or renting (e.g., through libraries). The fees collected are shared out by special organisations, in accordance with a pre-determined “key”, among the authors, composers, and sometimes the interpreters.

Our Swiss legislation on copyright is completely out-of-date and lacks such safeguards, and even the above-mentioned draft for a new law provides on the contrary for measures in favour of consumers and exploiters for what is in effect a far-reaching expropriation of the property of authors and composers, who are thereby deprived of reasonable remuneration for the use of the works that they have created, and have to depend on meagre hand-outs, and the very occasional award of a prize. We are gradually turning into a nation whose members misuse third party intellectual property as though it were their own – without scruples and often without even realising the unfairness of their actions.

The following account of the experience of one person suffering from this situation comes from film-maker Fredi M. Murer and illustrates the practice of quiescent expropriation which is going on every day.

Some time ago, near to the school, there was a baker who lived mainly by selling rolls of bread to the school children during their “breaks”. One day, a teacher at the school invited me to visit the village in order to take part in a discussion about one of my films. I accepted the invitation, and made the two-hour journey by train and post-office bus to the school near the bakery. At that time, I undertook such visits quite frequently and without payment of a fee. The schools had to reimburse my expenses, and at the end of the year, a percentage share in the rentals came to me from the film distributors – not a fortune but a few thousand francs to make a small contribution towards my cultural activities and as the author of the films.

The teacher told me very proudly, before the discussion began, that he had transferred my film by re-recording it on video when it was shown on television. I then placed myself in front of the 30-pupil school class and the TV receiver, which was standing on an expensive looking video recorder. After I had delivered my talk, the teacher thanked me on behalf of the school class and the school management. “How fortunate it is”, he said, “that we have video nowadays”, as his budget made no provision for film rental or reimbursement of expenses, let alone fees for the “visiting professors”! But “for an artist, it is an honour for him to have his works shown, and should compensate him for making the journey”.

I recognised at once that this teacher must be a socialist in disguise, and I was enthused by his idealistic ideas. So before I invited myself to a meal, and started on my journey home, I encouraged his pupils to follow their teacher’s example, and to steal their rolls for their “breaks” from the bakery, in honour of the baker’s artistic achievement. The children found the suggestion excellent, and so did the baker, who then crossed the street to the butcher’s shop, where he in a similar manner paid tribute to the art of sausage-making. As his turnover of rolls for the breaks increased so much, the baker soon ran out of flour, and when he attempted to obtain supply of this in the same way as adopted by the teacher to get a copy of Murer’s film, he got caught.

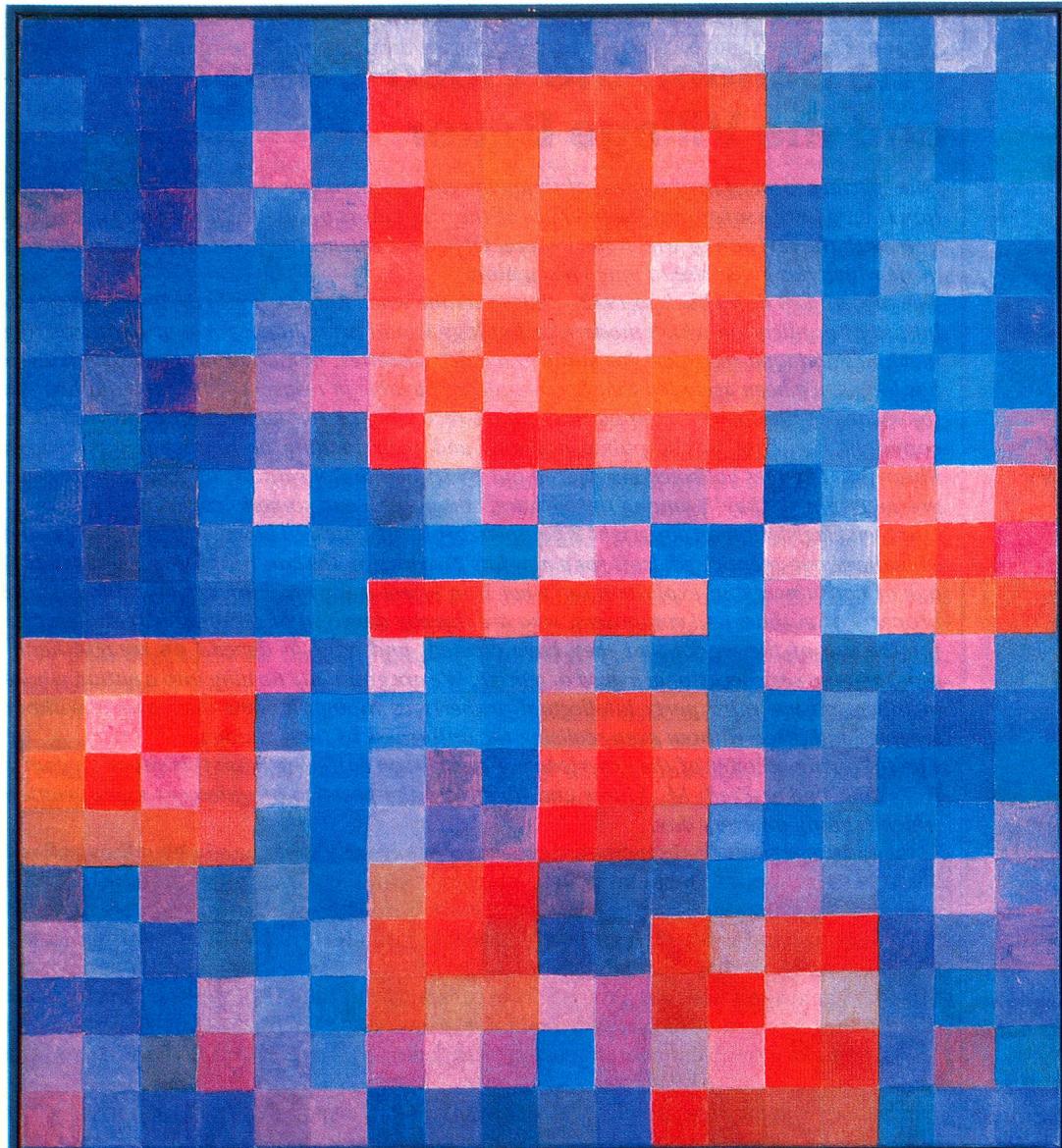
From the remand jail where he was awaiting trial, the baker sent me a postcard worded in the following sorrowful manner: “When school-children steal rolls from the baker to eat during the “break”, or their teachers show them, for educational purposes, films that have been transferred on to video cassettes when they were shown on television, these seem to be the same sort of offence, but I suppose the first one is the less serious one”. To this wise insight of the master baker, I have, as a “master film baker” nothing to add.

...and the patron or *Maecenas* as the noble benefactor.

Our picture: Karl Geiser (1898–1957). «David», about 1937. Bronze. Property of the Swiss Confederation. (Archive photos)

today deny that assistance from the Federation has in connection with measures for the preservation of ancient monuments and regional tradition made a decisive contribution towards the protection of our national cultural heritage and thereby towards the defence and conservation of an important part of our national identity. In this connection, as also in relation to promotion of the film industry, the Federation has at its disposal explicit constitutional provisions. In respect of other sectors of activity, there is no express assignment of competence: a situation which urgently needs to be corrected, in view of the importance of culture and its promotion in a modern society.

In 1986 a first attempt to secure the inclusion in the constitution of a special article for cultural matters was a failure, as the popular referendum was based on a badly worded “initiative” and also because of the



Art and culture stubbornly elude definition, time and time again. Our picture: Johannes Itten (1888–1967). «Modulation in red and blue», 1964. Oil on canvas. Property of the Swiss Confederation. (Archive photo)

procedural rules applying at that time to referendums). Now the Federal Council is preparing a fresh attempt, and the draft wording of a new article for promotion of culture will before the end of this current year be circulated to all interested institutions for their comments.

Sponsoring and patronage

Let us now return to the important commitment of the private sector towards the furtherance of culture. The bodies and individuals in that sector, whose contributions cannot (and should not) be listed precisely (unlike those of the State), include all those firms and persons that are prepared to incur some expense in return for their enjoyment of works of art. As regards the establishment of prices in the various fields, one could compile a whole book – opinions range from demands that everything should

“Pro Helvetia” has its 50th birthday

New Horizons

The Federal “Pro Helvetia” Foundation for Cultural Affairs celebrated the 50th anniversary of its existence at the end of last year. In January 1990, the Federal Council elected for the first time a woman as president of the foundation council: the member of the Council of States Rosemarie Simmen from Solothurn.

Originally (1939) set up for the protection of Switzerland’s cultural independence, it developed into the most important instrument of the Confederation in matters of cultural policy. The list of its functions defines for the domestic scene the care of our cultural heritage, the promotion of creative cultural activities, and the furthering of cultural ex-

changes between Switzerland’s linguistic regions, while in connection with foreign countries its task is the overall care of cultural relations.

The increasing mutual interdependence of the countries, the radical changes in Europe and the dialogue with the peoples of the Third World have not failed to exert influence on Pro Helvetia: there is little doubt that its activities in relation to other countries will soon open up wider horizons than those relating to domestic matters, where it seems mainly concerned with allocating subsidies and tackling the problem of the so-called “Röschtigraben”. The financial resources of the Foundation are limited and considerably more aid from the Federal authorities is urgently needed.

WIL



Before the concert. (Photo: Michael von Graffenried)

be "for free" to the views of idealists and serious collectors, in a never-ending discussion. Whoever in the private sector – either an individual or owner of a firm – invests substantial sums of money in cultural activities, and expects or demands something in return is usually referred to nowadays by the fashionable term of "sponsor". The activity known as sponsoring has become widespread and the word for it has secured a firm place in our vocabulary. Not every form of financial support can however be classified as sponsoring. In an admittedly somewhat simplified systematisation (the demarcations are very fluid) one can differentiate

between the sponsor and the "classical" private donor by noting that the former regards cultural activities as an area (like others including sport, for instance) in which it is possible to find a partner for a contractually agreed business transaction. In such cases, both parties look forward to benefits: the party engaged in cultural activities will have a chance to carry out his latest project, his ideas, his ambitious plans, while the sponsor obtains from his partner publicity for his product, or for himself, or even, as so often is the case, a chance to polish up his "image". In contrast the true patron in the Maecenas tradition – such per-

sons still actually exist as relics from a past age – makes his donation and usually gets nothing in return (except perhaps his own personal satisfaction). And as a classical patron, in accordance with the traditional rules, he probably remains anonymous. But like all systematisations, even this method of making a comparison suffers from its simplification. It would not be fair to see the sponsor alone as a profit-hungry and prestige-seeking investor willing to trample culture underfoot, and the patron as a noble benefactor, as happens on occasion. Both of them have something in common: each has recognised the significance and the important function of culture in our modern society, and takes advantage of it in his own way.

Art and commerce: a theme for endless discussions, and dissertations to fill many a volume. In this contribution to "Swiss Review", illustrated by examples of contemporary Swiss cultural activities, our aim has been to describe certain aspects, to give a few impulses and to throw light on some facets. One thing should finally be made clear: a true work of art can never be regarded purely as a piece of merchandise. If matters came to such a pass, the world would indeed be in a sorry state and Mankind would have suffered a loss beyond remedy. And we should not forget that whatever cannot be replaced is priceless in every sense of the word.

Hans Rudolf Dörig
Deputy-Director of the Federal
Office for Cultural Affairs

Even in the draft for the new, revised, copyright law, intellectual property is not adequately protected, for instance as regards «piracy» (illicit duplication) of video cassettes. Our picture: Scene from «The Visit by the Old Lady», by Friedrich Dürrenmatt, featuring Maria Schell in the title role. (Photo: Esther Schneider)

