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The Social Role of Art and Artists in Post-Soviet Moldova:  
Cultural Policy, Institutional Reform, and Europeanization<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:**

This paper examines change and continuity in the social role of art and artists in the former Soviet Republic of Moldova. I argue that visible changes in the art and culture of post-socialist societies are not merely the inevitable effects of capitalism, consumer culture, and globalization. Rather, these changes also reflect fundamental characteristics of a state's relationship with its citizens, particularly in the motivation and ability of citizens to initiate and effect social change. By illustrating localized dimensions of power and agency, the experience and opinions of artists serve as a powerful guide in our attempt to understand whether and how the promises of post-socialism will be achieved throughout the former Soviet bloc.

**Introduction – The Disappearance of Culture**

In the August 21, 1999 issue of *The Economist*, a half page article appeared with the title “The Disappearing Czech Intellectual.” As a news item, this article marked the signing of “Impuls 99,” a document created by church representatives, academics, actors, and writers as a moral censure to the Czech government. But the news value of Impuls 99 pales in comparison to what the event signifies in the ongoing relationship between politics and the intelligentsia. The author asks, is Impuls 99 “A comeback of sorts for the Czech intellectual? Or just a doomed attempt to return to the days when people actually cared what a poet thought? (1999:41)” The author's answer is not long in coming, and in fact already appears in the preceding paragraph of the article. In short, he surmises, Czech intellectuals are fighting a losing battle to regain their former status as public spokespersons, and he tells his readers the following story.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to several institutions that funded this research: the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) for a Individual Advanced Research Opportunity (IARO) grant for nine months of dissertation field research in 2001; the Office of International Programs at Indiana University for a pre-dissertation travel grant in 2000; the Department of Anthropology at Indiana University for Skomp pre-dissertation travel grants in 1999 and 2000; and the Russian and East European Institute of Indiana University for a Mellon pre-dissertation travel grant in 1999. None of these institutions bears responsibility for the analysis and views presented here, however, as these are my own.

Although dissident intellectuals helped bring about the end of communism in Czechoslovakia, and even playwrights, painters, and philosophers took office in the immediate post-communist government, they have since lost their political and social power. “Today... the currency of Czech intellectuals has been devalued by a decade of cynicism, pop culture, and the advent of the bottom line (1999:41).” As the author goes on to explain, intellectuals under communism had moral authority because they could oppose the communist regime – a clear enemy – but once this enemy of the people disappeared, intellectuals’ own motives and morals could be, and were, questioned. At the same time, the new market economy has worked to replace the traditional “high culture” productions of local intellectuals with the “pop culture” produced both locally and imported from abroad.

This article, now five years old and hardly authoritative in and of itself, is nevertheless useful because it so clearly and succinctly draws attention to several of the major issues in the political, social, and economic transitions of the post-communist states of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> The exact details of the turnover or continuity of former power-holders occupies the research and writing time of numerous scholars, and discussions of formal indicators of political transition rarely occur without some discussion of the subjective experience or reaction of citizens to the degree of change or continuity in their governments. Indeed, the same combination of themes appearing in the *Economist* article - loss of a common enemy, suspicion of others, uncertainty over morality’s claim on individual and collective behavior, and the turnover or maintenance of former power-holders – appear in Vladimir Tismaneanu’s (1998) penetrating analysis of the dangerous appeal of extreme nationalisms throughout post-socialist Eastern Europe in the 1990s.

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<sup>2</sup> In this draft, I use post-communist and post-socialist; I also keep a broad comparative area including Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Sometimes for the sake of brevity, I gloss these two regions as the former Soviet Bloc or Eurasia. I may need to provide tighter definitions or more consistent use for a final version.

The *Economist* article also focuses on a relatively minor, but emotionally provocative theme in the study of post-socialist transitions – namely, changes in the public prominence of intellectuals and the forms of “culture” they produce. Changes similar to those in the Czech Republic have been noted throughout the former Soviet Bloc, and – as in the *Economist* article – the replacement of high culture with popular culture in public spaces, has been largely identified as a consequence of the economic changes accompanying democratization. Indeed, Adele Barker (1999) emphasizes the degree to which new forms of popular culture in Russia are “consumer” culture. She finds that new patterns of consuming culture unsettle Russia’s citizens as much the new cultural forms themselves:

It is precisely this new consumer culture – much of which has been inspired by the West, and much of which is anything but elitist – that has become the focus of lively debate and study in both Russia and the West. While the New Russians are buying up Cartier watches as fast as they come into the Almaz Jewelry Store ... many of the older generation are digging in their heels and refusing to go along. What perturbs them is not just the spending habits of the New Russians, but the lack of *kul'tura* that seems to accompany these habits.... Interestingly, class affiliation under the Soviet regime has become much less a marker of how former Soviet citizens are responding to post-Soviet culture than is the fact that Soviet citizens, irrespective of class, were educated to regard culture in general and literature in particular as more than mere entertainment. Thus, for them, some of the most disturbing moments in post-Soviet life center on their discomfort with this new culture, which ostensibly seems to have little to redeem it, either socially or ideologically. [Barker 1999:14]

Even before 1989, some East Europeans viewed new forms of popular and consumer culture in the West with suspicion. Milan Kundera (1984), for example, incorporated the growth of consumer-oriented pop culture in West European societies as a key element of his argument in the essay “A Kidnapped West or Culture Bows Out.” In this essay, Kundera defines Central Europe as the last bastion of “European” ideals, and hints that all of Europe will perish if West European countries fail to pressure their eastern neighbors to reform or dismantle communism and the Soviet influence. A master essayist, Kundera reminds Western Europe how much it has

lost in recent decades, claiming that Jean-Paul Sartre was France's last public intellectual, the kind of individual who could raise the nation's consciousness of injustice at home or abroad to produce enough political pressure to make the French government act on the issue. The success of this essay clearly plays on West European fears of their own loss of high culture, the diminishing number of public intellectuals, and their populations' increased participation in and consumption of mass-produced, mass-disseminated, global (American) "culture." East and West, changes in the "culture" available to and desired by ordinary people is read primarily as an indicator of changing economic relations. Artists and intellectuals lose public prominence, and are publicly silenced, as the market changes because consumers no longer "buy," materially or metaphorically, their products and ideas.

While I do not disagree with this perspective, I also think the issue of the "disappearing intellectuals" and the disappearance of "culture" throughout post-communist Eurasia can be approached more broadly and creatively as a window onto the "problem" of power and agency in post-communist states and societies. In many ways, I am suggesting nothing new, only that we trace the logic of older questions we asked of communist states into the post-communist present. Specifically, artists, intellectuals, and other cultural producers long attracted the attention of those who wanted to understand how the socialist states of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union functioned as political regimes.<sup>3</sup> We should now ask how studying these same individuals can help us understand post-communism.

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<sup>3</sup> Another definitional problem. Artists, intellectuals, and other cultural producers, in my terms, are different ways of referring to those individuals "endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public" (Said 1994:9). Said gives this definition for "intellectuals," but subsumes artists within this broader category. I, however, use "artist" (not "intellectual") in my title, and as my most precise subject of interest for three reasons. First, I do not want pre-existing debates over who or what defines an "intellectual" to distract or predetermine my inquiry; many definitions of intellectuals, including Said's, further distinguish intellectuals from mere "professionals" or "bureaucrats," and often make this distinction by the intellectual's relative independence from and/or critical stance toward the state or other hegemonic power systems. Second, I want to use a term that accurately reflects the identity of the individuals to be affected by

For much of the past century, states and scholars alike expected that art and culture mediated relations between the masses and the political elite. In communist regimes, art and culture were declared effective vehicles of ideology, to be crafted by specialists under party guidance, and unquestioningly absorbed by the masses. Numerous scholars indicate that the process was much more complex and heterodox (recent contributions include Dobrenko 1997, Epstein 1995, Lahusen 1997), but no one disputes the inherent power of art, literature, or culture to induce ideological compliance or resistance with the state. Artists and intellectuals of the communist-era were assumed to have political and social agency; what they said, did, and created accomplished social and political “work” for their respective states.

Accordingly, scholarship tracks intellectual and artistic history in communist regimes with an eye toward gauging the state’s power. What we know as a result is this: From early campaigns that carried the ideological messages of communism through theater, art, and literature; to the creation of communist festivals, holidays, and folklore; and finally to dissidence and the revolutions of 1989-91 – individuals working in the visual, performing, and literary arts were important agents of the state. Because they were valuable and potentially dangerous, the state created and controlled artists through an elaborate system of bureaucratic measures including censorship, institutional patronage, training, and professional opportunities. By the late 1970s, some East European scholars argued that artists were actually in charge of the socialist states – and called them to overthrow the regimes. In the 1980s, artists, performers, and

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Moldova’s cultural policies. At least in the short-term, cultural policies will disproportionately affect individuals employed by and operating within the Ministry of Culture’s institutional system. Since the term “intellectuals” often first connotes people who write, forging a link between literary types and scholars in the humanities and social sciences, it does not seem the most accurate term to use. Literary writers are employed within the Ministry of Culture system, but humanists and social scientists employed in schools, universities, the Academy of Sciences, and other research institutes take part in the Ministry of Science and Education system. Third, the term “cultural producer” both bridges these two institutional gaps and reflects actual usage of the term “om de cultura” (person of culture), but is a bit awkward to use in every instance, and – more importantly – its accuracy would actually detract from my purpose of forcing a reconsideration of the powers assumed and attributed to art and culture.

writers actively initiated public discussions, gatherings, and protests that helped topple communist regimes.

But what has happened to these individuals since the collapse of communism? Are artists still agents for social change? Do they buttress the legitimacy of the new states? Or did they lose these “political” powers as the states that granted them collapsed? What plans do the post-socialist states have for incorporating art and culture into their own projects? Also – do artists want a further role in transforming states, or do they prefer to pursue “apolitical” activities, now that the option is available? And, if not artists, who will mediate relations between the state and “the people”?

The current practice of perceiving the disappearance of culture and its creators primarily in market terms is helpful in many respects. Yet this approach does not force a re-examination of the assumptions that underlay culture’s prominence during socialism in the first place. Communist states supported culture because they attributed power to culture, and wanted to harness it to their own aims. But if culture has disappeared during post-communism, does that mean it never had, or no longer has, the tremendous ideological power so long associated with it? I phrase the question so starkly because its answer has the potential to inform policies, practices, and interpretations of Eastern Europe’s transitions at a fundamental level.

To engage these questions in the context of a particular post-communist state, this paper examines the specific status of artists vis-à-vis the state in the Republic of Moldova by focusing on a review of the country’s Cultural Policy conducted between 1999-2001. During this time, Moldova’s Ministry of Culture formally sought the Council of Europe’s advice on reforming the state’s relation to art and culture, thus mirroring the state’s larger interests in “Europeanizing” its institutions – an important factor in recent reforms of all post-communist states, even those with

slim chances of entering the European Union. The policy-making rhetoric contained in the Council of Europe's review emphasizes the potential of artists to improve the economy, foster civil society and democratic processes, along with promoting multi-culturalism and improving inter-ethnic relations. I seek to assess the actual power (and desire) of artists to achieve these goals from two directions. The first is, quite simply, to report on what culture-producers claim as possible and desirable roles for culture. The second is to investigate the implicit models of power and agency incorporated in several articulations of cultural policy, and to ask which, if any, adequately reflect the actual experiences, practices, and self-definitions of artists in Moldova and elsewhere in the post-socialist world.

### **Re-forming Cultural Policy in Post-Communist Moldova**

In December 1999, Moldova's Ministry of Culture initiated a review of the state's Cultural Policy with the Council of Europe. By participating in the Council's "National Cultural Policy Review Programme," Moldova's government signaled, once more, the state's intention to be known as a European democracy. As with all its activities, the Council of Europe expects the cultural policy review program to produce "harmony" across European states in their political and social orientation by encouraging all cultural policies to be built out of four key principles. The four principles to be enshrined in "European" cultural policies are

- 1) Respect of identity and of cultural diversity
- 2) Respect of freedom of expression, of association, of opinion (cf. the articles of the European Convention on Human Rights)
- 3) Support of creativity
- 4) Development in the involvement and democratization of culture<sup>4</sup>

To date, twenty-five countries, including Moldova, have participated in this "National Cultural Policy Review Programme." The results of their reviews are stored in a regularly updated on-

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<sup>4</sup> From web page on "National Cultural Policy Reviews," [http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural\\_Co-operation/Culture/Policies/Reviews/\\_Summary.asp](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Co-operation/Culture/Policies/Reviews/_Summary.asp), accessed July 22, 2004.

line database, making it relatively easy to conduct single country or comparative studies of cultural policy from a distance.<sup>5</sup> Certainly this new database is a welcome addition in the policy-making world, and a praiseworthy attempt to help planners brainstorm new ideas and gauge the likely rates of success as well as probable pitfalls before committing substantial human energies and financial resources to their implementation.

With this paper, I do not want to criticize the National Cultural Policy Review Programme, per se, but rather to use a small portion of Moldova's reviewing process which I observed from "up close" to open a wider and more general discussion on the relationship between culture and politics in the post-communist states of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Specifically, I want to call attention to the ambiguity of two of the goals set-out by the Council of Europe – support for diversity and democratization. These goals run through the rhetoric of all Council of Europe activities, and can be seen as key components of what "Europe" means. Thus to be "European" in the eyes of the Council of Europe, any state participating in the review process must document policies that promote both diversity and democratization. Yet what kinds of policies might satisfy these criteria is unclear because the Council's rhetoric is extremely ambiguous. Sometimes the rhetoric suggests that culture can be used instrumentally to achieve diversity and democratization within society (e.g. art exhibits can promote social values of multiculturalism, multiethnicity, and equal rights). At other times it suggests that policies should promote the diversification and democratization of culture itself (e.g. more genres of art should be encouraged and more artists supported). In the ideal society envisioned by the Council of Europe, "cultural diversity" would reflect both political plurality and artistic plurality. But in a post-communist state, how do you reach this ideal? Where do you start?

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<sup>5</sup> The online site is <http://www.culturalpolicies.net/>.



The Council of Europe also uses two definitions for “culture” more or less interchangeably. The predominant sense is that of culture as artistic and intellectual activity and products: the plastic and performing arts, museums, publishing, and libraries. But “culture” for the Council of Europe also refers to the everyday experiences and lives of populations demarcated along linguistic lines. In this way, every ethnic group equally possesses and produces culture, and the protection or promotion of ethnic rights necessarily also protects and promotes culture. The multiplicity of definitions of “culture” in use by the Council of Europe reflects a historical progression in which successive concepts: culture, diversity, pluralism, and ethnicity, among others – have been ideologically connected to democracy. Through a series of invisible logical equations and conversions, it is possible for a panel of examiners from the Council of Europe to assert, unhesitatingly, that the “multi-national and multi-lingual composition of the Moldovan populations ... [is] a self-evident cultural strength (Council of Europe 2001:37).” But how “self-evident” is this situation from within Moldova where the Ministry of Culture deals with “culture” in the first sense, and a separate state organ – the Department for National Relations – deals with “culture” in the second sense by supporting the formation of ethnic “NGOs,” enforcing language laws, and monitoring the rights of ethnic minorities? As a response to these ambiguities, I want to force a closer look at the mechanics and rhetoric of cultural policy, and ask: what social goals can cultural institutions and activities realistically achieve, and what should they be asked to achieve in a “democracy”?

Moldova’s review occurred in several stages between December 1999 and October 2001. Following an initial meeting between Moldova’s Minister of Culture with the Council of Europe’s Head of the Cultural Policy and Action Department in December 1999, the Ministry obtained special funding from the Soros Foundation, and prepared a report on Moldova’s cultural

policy that it sent to a panel of “expert” reviewers chosen by the Council of Europe<sup>6</sup>. In addition to reading the ministry’s report, the review panel spent a week in October 2000 conducting personal interviews with several leading figures in Moldova’s government, artistic and cultural institutions, as well as a handful of local administrators and minority representatives. The reviewers then prepared their recommendations which, together with the Ministry’s report, were presented for semi-public debate in October 2001. This initial debate was to serve as a model occasion for the future practice of ongoing debate over and reform of cultural policy.

As it happened, when the panel of examiners sent by the Council of Europe returned to Moldova in October 2001 to present their analysis and recommendations for debate, I was in the eighth month of a nine-month research stay during which I had been studying the role of local folklorists, educators, and performers in defining the cultural components of Moldova’s national identity. By chance, I learned of the debates, and convinced my IREX-designated field advisor to take me along, as she herself was attending as a proxy for the director of the National Museum of Natural History and Ethnography. I was keen to attend the debates because I was looking forward to hearing an “official” and focused discussion of “culture” after having had so many conversations of my own with performers, artists, teachers, academics, and other “people of culture” in the shadows of concert halls, rehearsals, bus rides, and individual homes and offices. I was surprised to discover during the debates over the Council of Europe’s report how much I had already learned about the ambivalence local intellectuals feel toward post-socialist reforms, including – and perhaps especially – those geared toward creating “democracy” and “Europeanizing” Moldova beyond the narrowest limits of political reform.

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<sup>6</sup> The panel was chaired by the Director of the Cultural Directory at the Ministry of the French Community in Belgium; other members were the President of Romania’s Centre for Cultural Policy and Projects (and formerly the State Secretary for Culture), a researcher at the Utrecht School of the Arts, a lecturer in European Cultural Policy at the University of Northumbria, and a representative from the Council of Europe’s MOSAIC project (Council of Europe 2001:2).

For nine months in 2001, I pursued answers to a research question I had formulated during shorter field stays in 1999 and 2000. How were the activities of children's folkloric ensembles, I asked, contributing to the development of Moldova's national identity, and particularly to the ethnic dimensions of this identity? Along with other issues, debates over ethnic relations and national identity have contributed to post-Soviet Moldova's political instability. The country's population is clearly multi-ethnic: the majority, at approximately 2/3 of the population, are ethnically "Moldovan," while the remaining 1/3 of the population consists of Russians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Gagauz, Roma, and others. But the multi-ethnic nature of the country's "national" identity is far less clear for three reasons. First, because in Soviet terms ethnic Moldovans were the only "nation" in the Soviet Republic of Moldova (all the other ethnic groups in the republic held other statuses), and ethnic Moldovans still consider the country rightfully "theirs." Second, because ethnic groups in Moldova (with the exception of Jews) are defined primarily by language, a debate continues to rage over whether ethnic Moldovans ought to be considered Romanian, and hence whether Moldova is a "Romanian" state<sup>7</sup>. Third, because even though minorities have equal rights, no term has yet emerged that enables citizenship to become a source of national identity for individuals; "Moldovan" still only means ethnic Moldovan, and non-ethnic-Moldovans can only express their relationship to the state as "citizens of Moldova." These three factors combine and recombine in a variety of debates, the most politically volatile of which involve language laws. My research, however, was geared to investigating how folkloric ensembles are negotiating this uncertainty over ethnic and national identities. Specifically, I asked if folklorists, ensemble directors, teachers, and other professional "specialists in tradition" supported the state's official orientations in favor of creating a multi-

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<sup>7</sup> By standard linguistic criteria, there is no Moldovan language distinguishable from Romanian (see Dyer 1996 and King 1995 for extended discussions of how Moldovan and Romanian compare by linguistic as well as socio-linguistic features).

ethnic and multi-cultural national identity for Moldova. I looked for possible answers especially in the standards of authenticity employed in ethnographic collecting, repertoire creation, and performance to see which of the country's many ethnic groups were publicly and authoritatively represented as contributing to Moldova's "national culture" (Cash 2004).

Between February and October 2001, these questions had led me beyond the directors of a few well-known children's folkloric ensembles in the capital, to speak with individuals employed by the Ministry of Culture, local level departments of culture, the Department of National Relations, the National Center for Folkarts, academic and museum folklorists and ethnographers, the directors of the Musicians Union and Folkartists Union, and several other "cultural" institutions. As I tagged along to various events, work-related errands, and celebrations with my primary informants, we met up with artists and musicians, writers and poets, actors, theater managers and directors, and radio and television journalists. The vast majority of these individuals were Romanian-speakers, that is ethnic Moldovans, and had been cultivating their relationships with each other since at least the 1980s. At least publicly, these individuals defined themselves as "democrats," opposing communism and Soviet ideologies. They were particularly vocal in denouncing Soviet policies in culture, education, and inter-ethnic relations; most often, they talked of how the Soviets distorted "Moldovan" identity – artificially separating Moldovans from Romanians with language, history, and cultural programs (including folklore) that emphasized a long history of Moldovans' mixing with other ethnic groups; and at the same time, Russifying language, culture, and society through a variety of subtle and overt mechanisms, from cyrillicizing the Moldovan language to moving Russian workers into the

Republic of Moldova<sup>8</sup>. Although these individuals belonged to many different professions, they recognized a commonality between themselves as “oameni de cultură” – men, or people, of culture. Although most of my contacts were Romanian-speakers, their professional circles could expand to include minorities, and I occasionally witnessed minority individuals establish a common cause with their Romanian-speaking colleagues precisely by emphasizing their shared status as “people of culture.” At the debates, I counted twelve individuals I had met on previous occasions; out of the thirty-seven individuals with whom the examiners conducted their initial interviews, I had also spoken with nine.

### *Europeanization*

By participating in the Council of Europe’s program of cultural policy reviews, Moldova’s government and Ministry of Culture signaled a willingness to receive, at a minimum, guidance on how to “develop a comprehensive approach to policies [for?] diversity.”<sup>9</sup> For the Council of Europe, however, its program for cultural policy reviews belongs to a wider set of activities related to promoting security and democracy within Europe. As a participant in the review program, therefore, Moldova’s policies and institutions are also subject to tests of “European-ness” as the Council defines this quality and seeks to protect it.

Over the past half century, the Council has continually expanded its role as arbiter and protector of “European-ness.” For example, when it was originally established in 1949, the Council of Europe had three major goals. It would -

- 1) defend human rights, parliamentary democracy and the rule of law,

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<sup>8</sup> Charles King’s (2000) history of cultural politics in Moldova is the most nuanced and balanced account yet available, but Dima () and Bruchis () better convey the emotional response and narrative style of ethnic Moldovans telling this history.

<sup>9</sup> From web page on “Culture and Heritage,” [http://www.coe.int/T/E/Com/About\\_Coe/Culture.asp](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Com/About_Coe/Culture.asp), accessed July 22, 2004.

- 2) develop continent-wide agreements to standardize member countries' social and legal practices,
- 3) promote awareness of a European identity based on shared values and cutting across different cultures.

In the subsequent fifty years, political changes in Europe altered the Council's vision of how to best achieve these goals, and since 1989, the Council carries out its original mandate in three main ways –

- 1) acting as a political anchor and human rights watchdog for Europe's post-communist democracies,
- 2) assisting the countries of central and eastern Europe in carrying out and consolidating political, legal and constitutional reform in parallel with economic reform,
- 3) providing know-how in areas such as human rights, local democracy, education, culture and the environment.

In 1993, the Council also clarified its commitment to developing “democratic security” as a complement to “military security,” in order to ensure peace and stability within Europe. And in 1997, the Council of Europe adopted an action plan that called for work in four key areas - “democracy and human rights, social cohesion, the security of citizens and democratic values and cultural diversity.”<sup>10</sup>

The Council of Europe is clearly an ambitious organization. For more than fifty years, it has sought to make “Europe” synonymous with “democracy,” and to standardize claims to “European” identities across the continent by continuously refining what legal, political, social, and economic structures a state must have to be considered “European.” At the same time, it has sought to define “Europe” as politically and culturally diverse, and now polices states that do not also have structures, programs, and policies in place that reflect an equal attachment to diversity.

In principle, the Council of Europe's original commitment to extending democracy, even to creating “democratic cultures,” does not need to involve the arts. Yet the Council supports

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<sup>10</sup> Information and quotes above from web page, “About the Council of Europe,” [http://www.coe.int/T/e/Com/about\\_coe/](http://www.coe.int/T/e/Com/about_coe/), accessed July 22, 2004.

several initiatives related specifically to culture, heritage, sport and youth. The cultural initiatives include programs on 1) intercultural dialogue and conflict prevention, 2) cultural diversity and cultural citizenship (the national policy reviews are part of this), 3) promotion of European cinema, 4) creation of art exhibits, and 5) cultural heritage protection programs.<sup>11</sup> From a critical perspective, one wonders – how do cinema, art exhibits, and cultural heritage protection programs contribute to democracy?

### *The Ministry's Report*

With its vision of promoting democracy and security within Europe through all available means, the Council of Europe's panel of reviewers was disappointed by Moldova's existing cultural policies. In part, the reviewers' disappointment stemmed from the form of the report. The report, as I received it, divides into five general sections: an introduction (Moldova's vital statistics and history); cultural policy and its relation to the state's general policies; primary branches of culture; position of state language; and the culture of ethnic minorities<sup>12</sup>. The third section is largest and discusses the general status of each of several cultural domains (music and performing arts, theater, cinema, plastic arts, folklore and folkart, cultural patrimony, libraries, and literature). The effect of this approach, however, "struck the Examiners as representing a position statement for the Ministry, and for specific cultural sectors, rather than a comprehensive analysis of overall policy: such an analysis is needed and will require a wide-ranging self-evaluation of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (Council of Europe (CoE)

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<sup>11</sup> From web page on "Culture and Heritage," [http://www.coe.int/T/E/Com/About\\_Coe/Culture.asp](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Com/About_Coe/Culture.asp), accessed July 22, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> I am using the report I received at the debates (Ministry of Culture 2001), as the basis of my analysis, but I do not know if the report I received at the debates was the same reviewed by the panel, or if it had been updated in the meantime. Some of the panel's recommendations, such as adding a section on methodology, do not appear; on the other hand, a list of authors is included. I am inclined to believe that changes between the version reviewed by the panel and the one I received are minimal and superficial, since the panel's criticisms still seem relevant for the version I received.

2001:6).” The examiners were also uncertain of the report’s reliability in general, and urged the Ministry, before publishing the report, to add a section explaining “the methodology adopted in compiling the National Report: who the authors are, who has been consulted, and what further steps the Ministry intends to take (7).” Indeed, the report’s alternating rhetoric of triumph and despair in the current economic conditions of each of several cultural sectors justifies the reviewers’ unease with the quality and reliability of the “self-assessment” of policy effectiveness that they expected to read.

Yet the report I received at the debates in October 2001 is a fascinating document precisely because of the position statement it crafts. The first and second sections particularly provide a formulation of Moldova’s own interest in cultural policy and interpretation of the country’s concordance with “European” principles, values, and practices. Thus, for example Moldova’s history is presented in short order, focusing on the following key points: The Republic of Moldova became a state in the wake of Soviet collapse. The state’s consolidation was made difficult by the Transnistrian separatists, and there continue to be human rights violations in Transnistria. Moldova’s constitution enshrines the principle of Human Rights, especially as laid-out in the European Convention on Human Rights, and acknowledges that these rights include economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights. Moldova acknowledges that the state must guarantee that these rights can be exercised, and has outlined the mechanisms and levers for the implementation of a system to promote and respect human rights in accord with international standards (Ministry of Culture (MoC) 2001:4).

This mode of presentation is in sharp contrast to the reviewers’ report which also includes a history of Moldova, but one that reaches back to the fourteenth century to establish the roots of the country’s contemporary culture (CoE 2001:8). Which mode of historiography comes closer



to satisfying the “European” objectives of honoring diversity and democracy? In my view, the Ministry does by avoiding a number of issues tied to debates about ethnic relations and national identity (e.g. the Romanian identity of the medieval principality of Moldova, and the nationalist movement of the 1980s, the ethnic dimensions of the Transnistrian conflict). The Ministry presents the history of a state only, and moreover a state that upholds the rule of law. In contrast, the Council of Europe’s historiography foregrounds questions of ethnic and national identity.

The Ministry also provides an explanation of its interest in developing cultural policy. In a nutshell, the Ministry writes that the destruction of the [Soviet] totalitarian system and the resulting transformation requires a search for realistic solutions, particularly in terms of changes in mentality (new values and responsibilities) that will support that same transformation.

Importantly, the Ministry does not identify the transformation as being specifically toward democracy or capitalism – only as being away from totalitarianism. Moldova, however, faces two (or three) main barriers in achieving such shifts, identified as follows. First, representatives of the previous regime are reluctant to giving up art as a propaganda tool. Second, the masses are nostalgic for egalitarian conditions; and (third) even the intelligentsia misses guaranteed state support. The report’s authors argue that the role of culture and of “people of culture” is “well known” in shaping national and spiritual identity, especially in moments of crisis.

Unfortunately, the report concludes, in this particular moment of crisis, in the post-totalitarian transformation, culture itself is in crisis, and it is unclear how it, and “people of culture” can contribute to the transformation. After detailing the results of a program between 1997-2000 to rejuvenate art and culture in Moldova, the authors conclude their discussion of cultural policy by acknowledging that “the Republic of Moldova’s actual cultural policy [is] a policy that corresponds to controversial (check) realities, dramas of the transition period (MoC 2001:7).”

They write that Moldova has learned much from other countries and expects to continue learning from others as it refines its cultural policies.

In the form that I received it, Moldova's report on cultural policy documents how, from a local perspective, Moldova is returning to or joining "European" cultural norms. In contrast to the reviewers' response, there is little rhetoric about democracy, multiculturalism, or making culture "profitable" or otherwise a contributor to wider social goals. Rather, the discussion and documentation is of being "post-totalitarian," and of having embarked on enacting legislation and other institutional reforms that demonstrate a turn away from Soviet ideology and practice toward European and universal norms.

#### *The Council of Europe's Review and Recommendations*

In contrast to the discussion of totalitarianism in the report prepared by the Ministry of Culture, the reviewers' corresponding report and recommendations give little attention to the specific nature of the social conditions from which Moldova is transitioning. Their opening paragraph, for example, acknowledges only the technical difficulties and material hardships of reform:

We begin our report by congratulating the Moldovan authorities for their decision to review their national cultural policy in a European context, just ten years after their country gained independence, amid an on-going programme of political and administrative reform and social change, and at a time of extreme economic hardship. At such a time culture will either, as we hope, become one of the principle agents of Moldova's successful development as a democratic European state but could, equally, find itself marginalized by the many pressures of the transition process. [CoE 2001:6]

Although sensitive to Moldova's many dilemmas related to political and economic reforms, the reviewers abstain from any discussion of the social-psychological dimensions of transition. This contrasts significantly with the Ministry's report which begins with an introduction focused

almost exclusively on the social-psychological experiences of post-totalitarianism, and the corresponding difficulties of re-orienting the population toward democracy. Reading these two documents together – the Ministry’s self-report on its cultural policies, and the report and recommendations offered by the Council of Europe in response – reveals a gap in the conceptual worlds of “local” and “European” policy-makers that deserves further scrutiny.

Specifically, the report and recommendations offered by the Council of Europe reflect a vision of the state as a strong, but flexible scaffolding, which helps integrate culture, society, politics, and economics primarily through indirect means. Thus through the initiative of individuals, organizations, and institutions operating in the domains of culture, society, politics, and economics, these same domains support each other and the state itself.

The reviewers’ report, for example, emphasizes the interdependency between culture and society. They begin their discussion of policy (after introductory sections on methodology and Moldova’s history) with a quote from Bhiku Parekh, a theorist of multiculturalism:

A society’s culture is closely tied up with its economic, political, and other institutions. No society first develops culture and then these institutions, or vice versa. They are all equally vital to its survival, emerge and develop together, and are influenced by each other. [Parekh 2000, cited in CoE 2001:10]

Correspondingly, they acknowledge that while culture in Moldova should expect reduced financial resources during the country’s period of economic hardship, they also urge the government not to neglect the funding and development of culture in the belief that culture is somehow an expendable “frill.” The reviewers continue their argument, however, by insisting that culture (especially the Ministry of Culture) must recognize its own power and responsibility to contribute to Moldova’s overall transition:

the role of culture as a dynamic agent for social change and cohesion, economic regeneration, sustainable development and civil society must rapidly become more widely understood at a political level.... We urge the Moldovan government to consider

afresh the determining role that culture can play in the current transition period and beyond. This will mean taking bold, practical and urgent steps ... in order to promote an ambitious and forward-looking cultural policy that can secure specific and substantive benefits for the country and its future social and economic prosperity. [CoE 2001:10]

If constructed carefully and pursued deliberately and vigorously, cultural policy has the potential to achieve dramatic results in Moldova's democratization as it is felt by citizens themselves in their daily lives.

The pursuit of a vigorous and diverse cultural policy will encourage the sustained development of civil society – a society where individual rights flourish, democratic participation is the norm, and multiple associations or agencies develop their own projects within a framework of free competition which it is the task of the authorities to guarantee. [CoE 2001:12]

The authors of the report imagine that carefully constructed policies can yield a harmonious and organic integration between culture, everyday lives, and state-organized institutions and activities. The authors further imagine that Moldova should be a democratic and capitalistic society, and thus indicate that while the state should provide overall guidelines for the development of culture, along with some funding, the bulk of funding and project initiatives should come from institutional directorships, non-governmental organizations, businesses and private citizens, and even cultural producers themselves.

The Council of Europe's recommendations are clearly designed to help Moldova's cultural scene develop into something that approximates the cultural systems of states in Western Europe. Indeed, the Ministry of Culture participated in the review program because it too desires such a transformation. So the question is not whether Moldova will have a cultural policy in general, but how it will create policies that achieve the desired effects of a "European" society in all its dimensions. As I see it, the key difficulty lies in evaluating the empirical validity of the models embedded in policy itself.

That is, the reviewers tout the harmonious and organic integration between culture, everyday lives, and state-organized institutions and activities as a key feature of “European” cultural policy. So too do they depict the engagement of artists and other cultural producers with the transformation and development of the economy, political values, and civil society as a particular feature of “democratic” societies. Yet these same features could be said to characterize the cultural policies of socialist states. In a 1970 UNESCO publication, for example, A.A. Zvorykin, described the Soviet Union’s cultural policy as being rooted in the observation that cultural activity has an educational function. Exposure to culture and training in cultural activities was expected to yield individuals capable and willing of building a communist society. If we switch the word “communist” out for “democratic,” we find essentially the same underlying model in which carefully constructed policies, institutions, and procedures can effectively harness culture to achieve broad social goals that are defined by the state and based primarily on the state’s own desire to achieve a particular status and identity in the international community.

In later sections, I will examine the mechanics of Soviet and European models of cultural policy more closely. Some differences will emerge. For example, the Soviet model does resemble a “machine” while the Council of Europe’s vision, as previously described, comes off looking more like a free-standing, moving, weight-bearing sculpture. Both, however, require human energy to keep them up and moving, and artists and other cultural producers are expected to supply a particular kind of energy. The question is, how able and willing are these cultural producers, individually and as a class, to participate in the upkeep of a *state*, whatever its structural modifications? This question is valid for any country, but especially important for post-communist countries which are trying to replace the machine with the sculpture. In these

countries, the state needs to enlist the very same human beings to build the new sculpture who previously built and broke (or at least experienced the breaking of) the old machine.

### **Art, Culture, and the State**

An important legacy of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union is an ongoing debate among intellectuals and artists about their role, and the role of art and culture, relative to the state. Specifically, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, critiques against the political complicity of intellectuals and artists in the socialist states of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union increased. The socialist regimes initially allotted a special role for intellectuals and artists, as producers of culture, in building communism by raising consciousness, developing values, and educating the masses. Because cultural producers had such an important role, the state policed and curbed their creative activity through censorship, as well as more indirect means including competitions for employment, publication opportunities, and travel abroad (Verdery 1991). Against the older image of the intellectual's relative powerlessness against the state and forced complicity, however, some authors began (e.g. Konrád and Szelényi 1979) to suggest that the relationship between the state and intellectuals that one expects in capitalist societies was reversed under socialism. Instead of the "intellectual" being defined in opposition to the state, and living "outside" state influence and power, intellectuals were, in fact, in charge of the socialist state. Miklós Haraszti (1987) argues that artists too, were at the "heart of power" in socialist Eastern Europe. Under socialism, "intellectual activity and the structure of the state were like muscles and bones in an indivisible, organic unity" (1987:18). Art, he argues, is not necessarily an expression of freedom; it can exist

and flourish under authoritarian systems, as revealed by the activities of “state artists” in socialist countries who not only became complicit in their own censorship, but were also social planners.

Cultural producers responded to these debates through the kinds of work they pursued, and the ways they explained it to themselves and others. For example, the professional folkloric performers, artists, and directors with whom I work most closely stress the ways in which the more “authentic” forms of folklore they began to pursue professionally in the 1980s diverged, both ideologically and formally, from what the Soviet regime demanded of them. More specifically, Soviet ideology encouraged the choreographic standardization and stylization of folkloric music and dance (to elevate folklore as an art on par with classical music and ballet), *and* the incorporation of dramatic sequences that would convey the Soviet commitment to fostering inter-ethnic friendship and brotherhood. Members of the folkloric movement of the 1980s, however, responded to what they viewed as an imposition of politics on culture by creating “authentic” folkloric ensembles. In contrast to existing ensembles of *muzică și dans popular*, “authentic” *folcloric* and *etno-folcloric* ensembles performed music, dance, and traditions that had been collected in villages; they performed wearing old costumes, also collected in villages; and they used traditional rituals (religious, calendrical, and life-cycle) to provide the narrative backdrop and dramatic framing for their presentations. Between 1989-2001, at least fifteen new festivals and competitions were organized specifically for “authentic” folkloric ensembles. In other words, members of the folkloric movement created a new genre of performing art in the last decade of Soviet rule that was distinguished precisely by its attempt to discover and recover “art” and “culture” that was the spontaneous expression of particularly “human” experiences, yearnings, and desires. One is not supposed to ask about the “social” or “political” function of this art; and one is not supposed to ask what economic profit this kind of

art might yield. In the context of the late Soviet period, “authentic” folklore aimed directly at human hearts and bodies, sparking memory, soothing old aches and longings, and speaking of universal human experiences, the rhythms of the earth and its seasons, and old forms of morality and decency.

Although my own research proceeds from a relentless questioning of the political dimensions of “authentic” folklore, my informants also frequently remind me of the “real” way to understand folklore’s significance. One of my most poignant reminders came from Andrei Tamăzlacaru, a prominent ethno-musicologist who is generally considered the “father” of the folkloric movement. Scrunched together in the back seat of a car on the way to a folkloric festival one day, I asked why there were so many folk singers in such a small country. I thought I already knew the answer: the Soviet state provided many training and employment opportunities in the performing arts; indeed, other performers and teachers had already told me as much. But Andrei Tamăzlacaru paused for a long while before softly voicing his hypothesis. He said, “because Moldova is such a small country, people are crowded, and lift their voices to define themselves.” Tamăzlacaru’s response carried much more than poetry; in contrast to the answer I expected which would only explain how people become publicly visible and recognized as “singers,” Tamăzlacaru’s answer explains why people sing in the first place. The way members of the folkloric movement describe their work to themselves and others is not just in terms of opposition to the Soviet regime, but more importantly as work that is beyond the very scope of the state, politics, or society. As they see it, their work, has to do with the ultimate questions about humans and their souls. Why do people sing? Certainly the answer is older and deeper than the material conditions and political ideology of any known state.



By 1991, when Moldova gained independence, the definition of the “artist” through his or her opposition to the state and more generally to politics was in ascendance. Indeed, Moldova’s artists, intellectuals, and cultural producers are generally credited with organizing the republic’s first movements for independence (Crowther 1997:319, Solchanyk 1990:198), and the first demands (still being voiced) came for “cultural” demands related to language, education, and the recognition of historical “facts.” The nearly fifteen years since the collapse of the Soviet state has not erased the effects of this long-standing debate over the artist’s role in Moldova, nor – I suspect – in other post-socialist societies.

For better or for worse, the Council of Europe’s review panel did not problematize the social role of artists. They acknowledge that artists are “economic beings” (2001:21), and encourage the Ministry to take into account their financial needs, not only in terms of current salaries and facilities, but also in terms of job opportunities and re-training at the ends of their artistic careers. But they do not ask how Moldova’s artists currently make decisions about the projects they undertake, and therefore they (and we) do not really know whether Moldova’s artists are willing (or able) to take up their “proper” place in the harmoniously balanced social structure that defines a democratic, capitalistic, European society.

Fifteen years after declaring themselves against official state politics, ideologies, and policies, are artists willing to declare themselves as supporters of a new state’s politics, ideologies, and policies? Was their opposition to a particular state, or is it more universally and generally against all forms of institutionalized “political” power? If they are willing to support the new state’s endeavors to generate democracy and a multicultural climate, do they have the ability to do so? Or is the population too well-trained in its own skepticism of art to engage with any intended messages? Or perhaps democracy and diversity can be ensured through market

relations alone, and artists do not need to infuse their work with explicitly “democratic” or “multicultural” themes. In that case, the state needs only to foster the development of a healthy market in artistic and cultural works, preferably locally produced, which will doubly assist in building the economy. But will the population consume locally produced art and culture in meaningful quantities? The answers to these questions will necessarily impact Moldova’s success in developing and implementing cultural policies of the kinds discussed during the reviewing process.

### **Debates on Culture**

On October 6, 2001, the directors of several cultural institutions and unions who assembled for a day of debates on cultural policy that had been organized by the Ministry of Culture were relatively silent on the questions I have just posed after reading these two reports. Among those invited were the directors of the National Museum of History and the National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History, the rector of the University of the Arts, the presidents of the Writers’ and Musicians’ Unions, the president of the Folk Artists’ Union, the director of the State Ensemble of *Popular* Dance and Music (*Joc*), the directors of the National Library and the National Center for Folk Arts, as well as members of the Department of Culture in Cahul County. Representatives of some ethnic minority groups were also invited. These included the president of a Roma association, the president of an Azeri association, the former-director of the Department of National Relations, and the current vice-director of this department. A representative from the Soros Foundation was also invited because of the foundation’s leading role in sponsoring cultural and education projects that support the

development of an open society in Moldova including the funding for the Ministry of Culture's work on the review process itself.

The cultural representatives received the report only at the beginning of the debates, and did not have the opportunity to read it in advance. The debates were thus not a discussion of the report itself, but an airing of grievances on behalf of individual cultural institutions. Participants offered the ministry some tentative solutions for the problems faced by their own institutions, but there was no expressed interest in dismantling these institutions or entirely freeing them from state (i.e. ministry) support. The major issue discussed was the crisis of state-level funding for cultural institutions and activities. The representatives of minority groups were silent.<sup>13</sup>

Although the debates lasted all day, no speakers touched what I have identified as the critical problems posed by a careful reading of the report. On other occasions, however, these individuals and their colleagues had been less silent in expressing their thoughts on the appropriate relations between culture and politics.

### *Living for Culture*

In the first place, it is important to ask whether artists support the specific kinds of structural, institutional, and legislative reforms that the Council of Europe recommends? In brief, yes. Visual artists and musicians that I spoke with often initiated discussions of contracts, copyrights, and fair compensation for their work. For example, a well-travelled painter living in the capital told me one evening about his own dissatisfactions. He had recently participated in a competition to illustrate a reading primer, and (along with another artist) received the commission. The two artists prepared the illustrations - A. spent four months on his part – but

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<sup>13</sup> There was one exception. The Roma representative reacted when another speaker claimed that there were “no ethnic problems” in the country. The Roma representative’s argument that Romani culture was overlooked did not generate additional discussion.

then the book was not published. They had received a small advance at the beginning of the project, but nothing for the remainder of the work. Clearly their non-remuneration violates the spirit of their contract with the publisher if not the letter; they had lost both time and money, since they could not use the four months they spent illustrating this book to work on other profitable projects. Indeed, A. complained that this kind of occurrence happens far too often, and it is difficult to gauge which projects will actually “pay-off” once he has “paid-out” with time, labor, and materials. He is aware too of the principle of copyrights, and suspects that his rights are often infringed. He told me of an instance when he had designed a billboard. He had signed it, as his own art, but his signature was later removed. Was it a violation of intellectual property? Maybe, but in an environment with no laws to protect artists, the artist is powerless to even make such a claim.

On another occasion, I attended the reception after a folkloric festival that had been held in the southern village of Slobozia Mare. In addition to the directors of participating ensembles and the festival’s organizers, a variety of local officials, performers, and administrators in the cultural system attended the reception. One of these local men pulled me aside and began spontaneously to talk about the need for new initiatives to protect culture-producers who live in villages. He said, prefacing his comments as intending no disrespect for the festival organizer, that there needs to be a way to acknowledge the people from whom folklore is collected. Too often, he said, people come and collect folklore and then perform it, but the person from whom it was collected gets no credit, and has no chance to comment on the interpretation. Perhaps some sort of payment should be given to informants as well, but certainly, he said there should be a system of documentation and crediting the original “owners” of the folklore.

As a general rule, ensembles that perform “authentic” folklore do record the name of their original informant, his or her native village, and the village in which the folklore was collected. The most strict juries also check the programs submitted by ensembles in a competition to see that this information is recorded. My conversation partner, however, seems to have been urging the implementation of a system with legal weight. For him, the professional conventions of practicing folklorists do not provide adequate recognition of villagers’ artistic and intellectual rights as culture-producers and heritage “owners”.

These two cases hardly exhaust the list of complaints about the misuse and abuse of artistic, cultural, and intellectual works. Contracts that fall through, works that are never paid for, books and articles commissioned and never published, performances scheduled and then cancelled, original materials published or presented by someone else without due credit; every cultural producer has been slighted several times over. Loss of time, money, labor, and recognition are serious problems, and people would like to see this state of affairs change so that an artist or intellectual could reasonably live by his or her own merits and efforts alone.

On the other hand, the current situation also requires culture producers to explain to themselves why they persist in producing artistic and intellectual works in such an unprofitable milieu. From this perspective, “culture” is rhetorically disconnected from questions of financial gain as well as politics. When describing their work, for example, artists and intellectuals often refer to themselves more generally as “people of culture.” They are, they say, “crazy” because they do not work for money, only to produce, develop, and transmit “culture.” “Normal” people work, so they acknowledge, for material sustenance; not so, them. A specialist at the National Center for Folkarts claims that he directs a folkloric ensemble only as a “hobby,” but he spends at rehearsals easily totals twenty hours every week. Another man who works as a music

teacher claims that he directs an additional ensemble for the “pleasure” he has teaching children folklore. Indeed, a cultural administrator from Chişinău indicates that most of the folkloric ensembles throughout the country are led by similar individuals who are “working” out of their own interest and pleasure. At present, he insists, only such interest and pleasure sustains culture in the country. And for this reason, he argues that the government should take some responsibility for culture by increasing its funding for folkloric and other cultural activities, in a sense “rewarding” people for the service they have provided the state. From this perspective, cultural reforms that encourage artists to function in a competitive market, choose their activities in terms of material “costs and benefits,” and adapt new practices and activities that allow them to “make money” instead of being supported by the state – might actually discourage many people from continuing their current level of artistic and cultural involvement.

Although the Council of Europe’s panel of reviewers present their work with the Ministry of Culture as *beginning* an ongoing discussion of culture’s role in Moldovan society, such a discussion met me at every turn in the early months of 2001. At the beginning of April 2001, for example, I attended the multi-day and multi-village folkloric festival *Duminica la Florii*. A Gagauz ensemble director I had met during my first visit to Moldova in the summer of 1999 resumed our previous discussion of culture. “Culture,” he reminded me was like gold, and the source of a nation’s wealth. But culture, he also reminded me, comes “from the soul” and is not dependent on money. He interpreted my own research in Moldova as proof of his statement; why else would I come to Moldova, except that it is rich in culture, and America is poor? This conversation did not remain between us, but became the basis of his toasts to his colleagues for the duration of the festival.

In his first toast of the weekend, for example, A. reminded his colleagues that culture is the “face of the nation.” He continued (with a nod to me) saying that “if Moldova does not use its traditions, it will end up like America – with money, but no culture.” The following day, he toasted the assembled organizers, local officials, and ensemble directors by noting that everyone at the table was involved in culture. He acknowledged that he was Gagauz, and would therefore speak in Russian (not Gagauz) so that everyone would understand what he wanted to say. The government, he said, had made a mistake in the question of nationalities and politics<sup>14</sup>. His fellow “people of culture” seemed to agree. At the festival’s closing lunch the following day, he began a toast in exactly the same manner, but then continued what he had not fully said the night before. There are similarities between Gagauz culture and Moldovan culture, he noted, as the traditions performed at the festival had just illustrated: the Moldovan *Lazarehul* is also known to the Gagauz, and although they refer to this tradition with a different name, both groups use the same music. Again, he said, culture must be at a state’s foundation.

A’s toasts especially reveal the deep political charge of the apolitical stance taken by the majority of cultural producers I encountered during my fieldwork. During his final toast, a woman from the Ministry of Culture interrupted him several times. Her first objection was in A.’s choice of Russian; why did he not speak in Romanian, she wanted to know? A third person, the festival’s organizer, interjected that A. understood Romanian perfectly well, and insisted that A. be able to finish his toast. As A. concluded his toast, however, the woman pulled him into a heated discussion together with the festival organizer. I can only imagine that she wanted to further clarify A.’s position on the relative status of the Romanian and Russian languages, as the

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<sup>14</sup> I inferred that the mistake was in highlighting ethnic differences instead of similarities of culture; this seems to be the point A. was making the following day as he extended his discussion.

tendency of minorities to value and use Russian more often than Romanian is a sore point for politically-aware Romanian-speakers.

As a Gagauz man, A.'s participation in the folkloric movement challenges the movement as a whole to "live-up" to its apolitical promises. In theory, the standards of "authenticity" do not discriminate between which ethnic groups can appear as bearers of "national" culture and identity on Moldova's stages. And, in theory, members of the folkloric movement do not promote any form of "ethnic" politicking. In practice, however, members of the folkloric community and movement are predominantly Romanian-speakers. They usually equate the "culture" being rescued from Soviet political manipulations with "Romanian" or "Moldovan" culture, and generally disapprove of the recent mobilization of Gagauz and other minorities for language and other rights in the new state. Within the folkloric community, A. is a controversial figure, and he must certainly know it. His toasts are especially provocative then, for the ways in which they seek to establish common ground between his own controversial activities (promoting Gagauz culture) and the shared beliefs and aspirations of his colleagues. And what is it that he says most often? "Culture" is not about money, and not about politics. It is about the soul; it comes from a people's soul. It is the source of a nation's wealth, and should form the foundation of a state. But – it should not be the other way around, where the state, politics, and nationalities policies dictate culture.

If these statements are the kind that unite culture producers throughout the country, across employment sectors, and even across ethnic lines, then what kind of debate on culture's social role can we expect to emerge in Moldova? If culture's role is to promote "democracy" as an ideology, then we may find few cultural producers willing to join in. Individuals make complex decisions in choosing the sites of their creative activities, and explaining the choices to



others. Of the two men leading folkloric groups for “pleasure” mentioned earlier, for example, one ensemble performed for the Communist Party, while another man refused to take his ensemble to a camp designed to promote multiculturalism. Both men consider themselves “democrats,” but viewed only through a lens of political ideology, their actions would seem to betray this. In the first case, the man explained to me that he accepted the invitation because it paid, but just as importantly that he performs in the hopes that someone in the audience will like something; perhaps, his ensemble’s performance would touch the grandchildren of the Communist Party members in attendance. In the second case, my informant claimed he decided not to participate in the camp because – even though it would have paid relatively well – the woman organizing it was not “serious” about folklore. In both cases these two men balanced their professional commitment to “culture” against possible financial gains and political alliances. Indeed each voluntarily explained how his decision kept “culture” out of the reach of politics or money.

At present, artists in Moldova do choose their activities with consideration of economic “costs and benefits” and do consider the political implications and possible social impact of their choices. But – they also make these choices in ways that allow them to perceive their work in and with “culture” as being a free expression of beauty and pleasure. Are these artists the same ones that the Council of Europe imagines will collaborate with the state to build a democratic and multicultural society?

## Variations on Cultural Policy

In the past half-century, “cultural policy” has flourished as a principle of local and state governance the world over. McKim Marriott (1963) writes of the increasing importance of cultural policy in the twentieth century as follows.

The [recent] availability of such means of [mass] communication also opens up new potentialities for the manipulation of culture. The possibility of educating their citizens to a newly chosen way of life, of mobilizing them in support of deliberately cultivated values, of representing them to the world according to a consciously created image – all these are open to the elites of the new states, either in actuality or in prospect.... If culture may indeed be managed, then the analysis of cultural policy may be placed alongside the analysis of the other “arts of the possible” – economic policy, military strategy, and politics. [Marriott 1963:29]

Marriott writes of the “newness” of cultural policy, but in the past forty years, the world’s populations have been exposed to a variety of cultural policies, both in terms of experiencing those of their own states and by the increasingly available information about those of other states. Moldova’s artists have experience with previous Soviet cultural policies, for example, and even explain their present stance as “people of culture” against political involvement in large part as a response to those policies. The Council of Europe is also hardly the first international organization to encourage countries to review their cultural policies and make the results publicly available for international comparison. UNESCO, for example, undertook a similar project during the 1960s-1980s. I have selected a few additional visions out of this tremendous variety on what cultural policy can or should accomplish, to further consider whether the Council of Europe has suggested a workable model of relations between state, society, and artist for Moldova and other post-communist states.

The UNESCO volumes in and of themselves encourage readers to imagine the diverse possibilities in developing and implementing cultural policy. By 1982, sixty volumes had been published in UNESCO’s series on cultural policy, the majority of them country-specific case

studies. As evident in the list below, UNESCO cast a wide net to gather comparative data on cultural policies throughout the world; the study's scope included socialist as well as capitalist societies, long-established nation-states and recently de-colonized countries. Perhaps the least represented countries are those of Western Europe.

Former Soviet Union – USSR, Byelorussian SSR, Ukrainian SSR

Eastern Europe - Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, Romania, East Germany

Western Europe - France, Great Britain, Italy, Finland, West Germany, Austria, United Kingdom

Elsewhere - United States, Japan, Tunisia, India, Cuba, Egypt, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Iran, New Zealand, Israel, Senegal, Indonesia, Philippines, Liberia, Tanzania, Kenya, Afghanistan, Cameroon, Togo, Zaire, Ghana, Korea, Canada, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Guyana, Peru, Columbia, Algeria, Panama, Bolivia, Argentina, Guinea, Australia, Guatemala, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Sudan, Mongolia, Yemen

Topical – *Cultural Policy: A Preliminary Study*, and *Cultural Policy as Human Rights*

[Shevchuk 1982:73-74; i.e. series list following text; my categorization]

Without digging through UNESCO's history, it is hard to guess at how the decisions to include certain countries and not others were made; certainly there seem a few strange choices: there are volumes for both Great Britain and the United Kingdom, for example, and the Byelorussian and Ukrainian SSRs somehow merited studies apart from the one published for the whole USSR.

Glancing through a few of these volumes, a few other details stand out. First, unlike the Council of Europe reviews which are supposedly initiated and compiled by the Ministry of Culture in a given country, a variety of individuals and institutions prepared the UNESCO reports. The USSR's report, for example, was prepared by three individuals from the Institute of Applied Social Studies at the USSR Academy of Sciences (Zvorykin 1970:7); the Ukrainian

volume was also prepared by a professor, but this time from the Cultural Institute of Kiev (Shevchuk 1982:7); in the Byelorussian SSR, credit for preparing the text goes to the Institute of Art Criticism, Ethnography and Folklore of the Byelorussian Academy of Sciences, and a single author's name is not listed (Institute of Art Criticism 1970:7). In other countries, Ministries of Culture, UNESCO Commissions, various state directorates, and apparently unaffiliated individuals prepared the reports. Secondly, the table of contents and organization of material varies between reports. From these two details alone – variation in authorship and organization of contents and presentation – we might surmise that UNESCO's series does not yield easily comparable data on cultural policy.

The UNESCO volumes do, however, set forth a definition of cultural policy which provides a useful departure point for our further discussion. Cultural policy is, a “body of operational principles, administrative and budgetary practices and procedures which provide a basis for cultural action by the State (Zvorykin 1970:7).” Unlike the Council of Europe, UNESCO does not advance a preference for some political ideologies or state organizational forms over others. Rather, it acknowledges that “obviously there cannot be *one* cultural policy suited to all countries; each Member State determines its own cultural policy according to the cultural values, aims and choices it sets for itself (Zvorykin 1970:7, original italics).” Significantly, this definition of policy assumes, as the norm, a strong role for the state in directing culture. As the above definition suggests, it is the state that uses policies to create channels of action, impetus, and direction for the growth, development, and manifestation of culture. If a state allocates the power to affect “cultural action” to other actors, so be it; but UNESCO does not assume that a state should or would let the responsibility for culture rest in non-governmental hands. Why bother presenting material in a roughly comparative fashion

then? – “To contribute to the dissemination of information ... illustrating problems, experiments and achievements in individual countries chosen as representative of differing socio-economic systems, regional areas and levels of development (Zvorykin 1970:7).” Always the champion of diversity, UNESCO positions itself as a disinterested international and intellectual resource: it wants to leave the internal bickering over cultural policy to states themselves. It will simply help provide the information for actors in these policy debates to make informed and rational decisions using comparative data from other countries’ trials, errors, and aspirations. Clearly UNESCO defines its international mandate differently from the Council of Europe, and it is worth pointing out this initial contrast because a commitment to building democracy is not the only motivation an organization or individual might have in approaching cultural policy. At the same time, both organizations assume that states *should* have cultural policies. Furthermore, cultural policies are not something states should simply locate in the practices of everyday politics, economics, and civil society. Rather, states should actively create cultural policies to achieve greater goals.

### *Why connect the state with culture?*

New and “developing” countries are not the only states that may create cultural policies to harness culture to other social, political, or economic goals. In 1964, Frederick Dorian published a study of arts patronage in nine West European countries. He wanted to demonstrate and explore the strong governmental support for arts and culture throughout Europe to locate potential models for changing the economic situation of arts in the United States. Dorian pointed to the discrepancy in the early 1960s between the growing public interest in and consumption of high and popular cultural forms, and the government’s disinterest in ensuring the financial

stability of major arts institutions and programs (1964:1). This, he notes, is in contrast to the situation in Europe where even during World War II and post-war reconstruction, European governments allocated substantial funds to cultural institutions and activities. Even “the Soviet countries, Russia and her satellites,” he writes, “do not differ from the Western democracies in the principle of governmental subsidization of the arts (1964:5). . . .” Dorian does not include communist bloc countries in his study because he believes that art should promote democracy; the communist and non-communist states of Europe disagree only “in their definition of the role of art in society. The democratic belief in the fundamental free values of all art clashes with the totalitarian concept that upholds art and artists as tools of the political state (5).” But it is precisely the potential connection between art and democracy that Dorian underscores as he argues for greater governmental support of the arts in the United States:

Art patronage is a prime force of civilization, west and east of the Atlantic. And in its broadest sense, the problem of art support concerns every American; for a free art life – its creative strength as well as its full enjoyment – is allied with the basic concepts of genuine democracy. It is bound up, as European history has shown so dramatically and fatefully, with the cause of personal liberty and spiritual leadership in the free world.  
[1964:7]

Following case studies of nine countries, Dorian continues his argument in the conclusion. The task, he insists, is to instill a commitment to culture in American citizens so that they (as the government) will vote to create programs, allocate funds, and otherwise support the development of the arts. In so doing, Americans will exercise (and encourage the general exercise of) personal liberty and spiritual leadership, and produce yet greater civilization. How might this actually occur? Well, Dorian points to patterns of European socialization and education, prefiguring Benedict Anderson’s (1991) discussion of the technologies of producing imagined communities, by emphasizing the ubiquity of the events, institutions, and personages of high culture in European newspapers (opera reviews on the front pages!), stamps, and street names,

and to the corresponding naming of theaters and other arts buildings as “state” and “national” institutions. The official histories children learn in school also emphasize cultural achievements, further integrating a respect for national culture into the young citizen’s sense of nascent political identity. “Young Europeans,” Dorian notes, “are aware that their government is closely identified with the art life of the nation. Some of the great theaters are called state theaters .... To support them is patriotic (1964:435).” Do Europeans really go to the theater out of patriotism? I have my doubts, but as a rhetorical strategy to mobilize Americans to support culture (as part of their patriotic duty), I’m sure Dorian’s argument appealed to many readers.

By the mid-1970s, America’s public support for the arts had grown significantly, and the Twentieth Century Fund had commissioned Dick Netzer, Dean and Professor of Economics at the Graduate School of Public Administration of New York University, to study the optimal level of public-support for the arts. As Netzer reports in his resulting book, *The Subsidized Muse: Public Support for the Arts in the United States* (1978), arts spending defies easy and formulaic equations of how much money should be spent and how by government, private foundations, and individual consumers. The problem, he notes, is that artistic and cultural activities are “merit goods”; they are considered inherently desirable, and therefore – if some is good, more is necessarily better. In other words, Netzer does not anticipate the general population deciding that they have access to too much art; public demands for increased arts spending could therefore continue indefinitely – a situation that public and private donors alike clearly do not want. Netzer’s study covers substantial data on trends in arts spending and consumption in the United States over recent decades, and gently leads the reader through the economic analysis of these factors before he reaches his final recommendations as follows.

Minimize or eliminate subsidies for amateur activities in the arts

Subsidize the major arts institutions more selectively

Continue to foster geographic dispersion, but require more state and local government matching

Increase support of individual artists and service organizations

Make some “profit-seeking” arts activities eligible for government support

Define the jurisdiction of arts-funding agencies carefully and narrowly

[Netzer 1978:182]

Netzer’s recommendations are interesting for the immediate resemblance several have to the recommendations given by the Council of Europe to Moldova’s Ministry of Culture.

Specifically, the advice to increase selectivity in funding major institutions and to encourage local-level support for the arts are similar; several of the recommendations, however, are quite different. Indeed, Netzer offers his advice with an awareness of the history of arts funding in the United States. For example, even though art and culture are “merit goods” for much of the American public by the 1970s, Netzer notes that government support for the arts is relatively new. He dates indirect government support for the arts to 1913 when the federal government instituted income taxes, but also made contributions to arts organizations tax-deductible (1978:4). Direct support throughout the country, however, dates only to the 1960s, and seems to have resulted from pressures placed by “cosmopolitan Americans” on government to raise American “civilization” to European standards. Dorian was apparently not alone in his pleas:

For a good many years, cosmopolitan Americans viewed as evidence of cultural barbarism the failure of the United States to provide as much public support of the arts and cultural institutions as a number of much poorer European countries. American parsimony has been contrasted with public maintenance of opera even in small Italian cities; the generous support provided by the nation-wide British Arts Council and municipal tax rates in Britain; and the lavish and loving reconstruction of war-damaged opera houses, theaters, and museums in continental European countries east and west of the Iron Curtain.



From this perspective, we have joined the ranks of the civilized nations only in the last ten years or so. [Netzer 1978:3]

Yet as the very existence of Netzer's book indicates, American funders – both public and private – are still fundamentally parsimonious. They want to know when they will have spent enough money to become “civilized,” so that at that point, they can divert financial resources to other non-arts projects.

Neither Netzer nor Dorian talk explicitly in terms of cultural policy, but clearly this is where both of their interests tend. Both attempt to outline guidelines for state-funding of arts and culture. Their argumentation for *why* the state should support arts, however, rests on a few highly salient, but inadequately explored, associations. “Europe,” “civilization,” “democracy,” and “freedom” emerge as the primary images of what America and Americans would like to be, and both authors and the general public have learned to associate “art” and “culture” as key symbols of these images. They do not, however, ask the fundamental questions: if America builds opera theaters and art museums, will it become Europe? If the government makes ballet, painting, and symphony more accessible to citizens in all regions of the country, occupations, and income levels, will we create democracy? Will we have freed people, and promoted their individual liberty? The silence on these questions becomes audible when compared to the silences inherent in the writings on cultural policy in other countries.

### *Socialist Cultural Policies*

In the volume on Soviet cultural policy published by UNESCO, for example, there is no discussion of how much money has been or should be spent on art and culture. In contrast, the statistical data marshaled for a report on cultural policy discusses the number of theaters,

performing troupes, published books, and their relative increase over time, without a corresponding questioning (as in Netzer's book) of the possibility of "maxing-out" on the returns from arts spending. Even if these debates go on behind closed doors, the official Soviet view matches the American populace's view, and diverges from that of the American government and other funders: if some art and culture is good, more will always be better.

Zvorykin's (1970) presentation of Soviet cultural policy bears further discussion. He locates the origins of Soviet cultural policy with Lenin, particularly with Lenin's assertion that the Soviet Union could not achieve anything in the economic and political spheres if workers and peasants did not rise to a higher level of education. As Lynn Mally points out, "culture" was an ambiguous term during the Russian Revolution (as it remains everywhere today), with meanings "ranging from the shared values and assumptions of an entire society to a simple synonym for fine art (1990:xvi)." Neither the Bolsheviks in general, nor Lenin himself, consistently used a single definition for "culture", although they constantly talked of culture's central importance to their revolutionary aims. As Mally puts it, "Lenin himself used the word in strikingly different ways. Sometimes he meant the accumulated knowledge of educated elites, other times the civilized accomplishments of modern industrial society, such as cleanliness and punctuality (1990:xvi)." At any rate, as Lenin eventually articulated the relationship between culture and socialism, he asserted that the population needed "cultural development" in order to bear the demands of socialism, and hence, Zvorykin writes, Lenin initiated the "cultural revolution" as the first manifestation of Soviet cultural policy (Zvorykin 1970:9).

Zvorykin's presentation of Soviet cultural policy in the UNESCO series transmits a clear vision of how and why culture should be connected to the state. He writes, for example, that since Lenin's time, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union creates policies (of all types) based

on the people's "interests and aspirations"; in turn, governmental organs implement the Party's policies. Zvorykin is careful to note that various groups in society sometimes take up the implementation of policy ideas as well (1970:10), so that "cultural activities in the U.S.S.R. are controlled by governmental and non-governmental organizations (1970:18)." Indeed, changes in cultural policy since 1965 suggest to Zvorykin that the role of non-governmental organizations will continue to increase in the future, although he offers no explanation as to why this would be so. Moreover, he provides a historical overview of changes in Soviet cultural policy. These changes correspond to the general development of the Soviet Union from a revolutionary to a fully communist society. Thus, during the period of Cultural Revolution (1917-27), Zvorykin summarizes cultural policy as being concerned with making previous cultural achievements available to the masses (1970:15). This general policy corresponded with Lenin's position that "the working class and their party were the only lawful heirs to everything progressive in culture created by preceding generations, which it was incumbent on them to carry on (Zvorykin 1970:14)." In the second period of Soviet development, 1928-58, Zvorykin notes that the dominant emphasis in cultural policy was to transform culture along socialist lines. After 1958, cultural policy again shifted; this time to transforming socialist culture into communist culture.

These shifts make sense, Zvorykin reminds his reader, when we remember that the unifying idea in each period is that cultural activity has an educational function. Specifically, exposure to culture, and training in cultural activities, is supposed to yield individuals who can and will build a communist society. Thus for example, Zvorykin provides substantial data on aesthetic education. The chapter on the "dissemination of culture" is rich in data documenting a variety of technologies that all serve the common purpose of increasing the population's exposure to "culture." We might be tempted to view some of these technologies, like television,

as “entertainment,” with relatively little positive social value, but Zvorykin insists that mass media also raises the population’s “cultural level”; he is quite proud to say that the average Soviet citizen goes to the cinema approximately nineteen times in a year, and argues that this high (and increasing) frequency of watching films most certainly enhances an individual’s economic productivity. After providing a discussion of how the Soviet state budget allocates funds to cultural institutions and activities (republic and local governments are supposed to yield most of the money for education and culture, but some institutions also have their own budgets and are expected to be self-financing (1970:20)), Zvorykin concludes that state support of culture, arts, and education is a sound investment, enabling the state to achieve more of its goals than it can achieve through politics alone.

The improvement of the cultural standard of the population determines, in large measure, the progress made in technology, in the organization of production and in the social activity of the workers, the development of the principle of democratic self-government and the transition to a communist type of society. [Zvorykin 1970:48]

Following similar lines, a volume entitled *The Cultural Policy of Socialism*, published by Sofia Press in 1986, offers another version of how culture and the state should be connected within socialist states. Not a part of the UNESCO series, *The Cultural Policy of Socialism* is a collection of addresses given by Todor Zhivkov, the longstanding First Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party, from 1956 through the 1980s. Zhivkov suggests a series of dates as landmarks in the development of the Bulgarian Communist Party’s Cultural Policy:

April 1956, Plenum of the Central Committee (CC) of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP)

July 1968, Plenum of the CC of the BCP

1971, BCP’s Tenth Congress

December 1972, Plenum of the CC of the BCP

1979, Plenum of the CC of the BCP on education

1981, BCP's Twelfth Congress

[Zhivkov 1986:291]

From this list of major events, however, only two of the selections included in this volume actually correspond with any of the mentioned occasions – a 1971 report from the Central Committee to the whole congress, “The Arts – Worthy of Our Times,” and a 1981 report from the Central Committee to the whole congress, “For a New Upsurge in Socialist Art and Culture.” Thus this work is not particularly useful for constructing a history of cultural policy in socialist Bulgaria. It is useful, however, for two things.

The first element worth briefly noting is that although an international concern for developing things called “cultural policy” might seem quite recent, and of “western” or “democratic” provenance, Zhivkov dates Bulgaria’s concern for establishing cultural policies to 1956. As he notes in a speech from 1983-4, “In the process of formation and development of our April 1956 policy in the intellectual sphere, we laid down several basic guidelines, adherence to which has contributed to the advancement of our culture (1986:288).” Furthermore, there were five of these guidelines established in 1956:

- 1) The formulation of a new slogan, ‘Closer to Life, Closer to the People!’ to guide writers and others.
- 2) The establishment of the “principle of the class and Party character of socialist culture” – i.e. the articulation of standards for evaluating intellectual and artistic work.
- 3) The intent to pursue international co-operation and collaboration (within the socialist world, and especially with the Soviet Union).

- 4) The “promotion of socialist democracy and ever wider involvement of the workers in the field of science, education, literature and the arts in the management of the respective areas of the intellectual sphere.” This assertion of Bulgaria’s “public-state” or “state-public” principle reflects essentially the party’s expectation that unions and organized citizen groups would shoulder increasing responsibility for activities and would collaborate with the state in organizing events (Zhivkov provides a more detailed description of this principle in another location, see p. 13).
- 5) The establishment as a goal the “objective increase of the significance of science, education, literature and the arts in the process of socialist construction.”

[Zhivkov 1986:291; my re-formulation into a list]

In the absence of texts from 1956 to illustrate Zhivkov’s assertions, however, it is difficult from this volume alone to assess whether Bulgaria had a self-consciously articulated “cultural policy” in the 1950s. The earliest text included in this volume within which I found references to “cultural policy” is from the early 1970s (1986:182).<sup>15</sup> Whether Bulgarian interest in cultural policies dates to the 1950s or the 1970s, in either case, their interest is essentially contemporaneous with that manifest in Western Europe and the United States.

The second aspect of this collection that is especially useful is the clarity with which Zhivkov articulates a vision of how art and culture should be connected to the state and its dominant ideology. For example, he asserts “It is we, the communists, the Marxist-Leninists

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<sup>15</sup> Clearly this one volume does not provide a satisfying account of the history of Bulgarian cultural policy. In addition to needing a more comprehensive selection of texts and transcripts from various Party and government meetings and events, it would also be necessary to give accurate translations of terms. This volume has already been translated into English, so it is not clear whether the translator applied “cultural policy” as an anachronistic term. Although I do not speak Bulgarian, other languages do not always facilitate unambiguous discussions of “cultural policy” as a phenomenon. In Romanian, for example, one phrase - *politica culturală* – can be equally well translated as “cultural politics” or “cultural policy.” The phrase also carries the range of meanings covered by the two English terms, referencing both official government statements and orientations (policy) and political maneuverings involving culture.

who are the bearers and exponents of the true scientific perception of the dialectical link between the material and the intellectual sphere, of the tremendous role of science, education and culture in the life of society (1986:286).” Key to the communist vision of culture, whether articulated in the Soviet Union or Bulgaria, is – as Zhivkov puts it – “the dialectical link between the material and intellectual sphere.” Although the state is technically concerned with overseeing political relations abroad and economic development at home, it recognizes that art and culture can be its allies in these endeavors. Where Zvorykin focused on the potential economic and technological advancements supported by culture in the Soviet Union, however, Zhivkov focuses on art’s revolutionary power. By opening art and intellectual work to the (pre-socialist) non-elite, he argues, the socialist state will benefit in turn because when the masses participate in art, they also pull out the remnants of old ideologies that previously contributed to their (political) exclusion, disempowerment, and lack of consciousness. In other words, simply by expanding the opportunities for people to participate in the creation and consumption of culture, the socialist state can achieve the revolutionary goals of the Communist Party. There is more of course – the standards used to evaluate art and culture must also be continually updated to reflect “the new, progressive ideas and struggles of the time (Zhivkov 1986:30),” but in essence, the socialist state supports culture with very clear ideas of how it should benefit the state in turn.

What strikes me most about these two presentations of cultural policy in socialist states is how clearly those states articulated the ideal relations between social domains. Although Zvorykin and Zhivkov differ in their presentations of what culture is supposed to do (promote economic and technological progress or further ideology and political participation), they both present a neatly mechanical model of the state. Their explanations draw arrows clearly indicating the system of social levers and pulleys that should harness culture’s social, political,

and economic potential. This model almost certainly distorts reality severely, but its very presence contrasts sharply with models linking culture to democracy. Between the Council of Europe's recommendations to Moldova, Dorian's appeals to America, and Netzer's assessment of American arts funding, no clear model emerges of the pulleys and levers that harness art to the social promotion of democracy and tolerance. If democracy actually exists as a social reality and not just a rhetorical appeal to mask economic relations, but cannot be modeled as a machine, with blueprints that can be adapted in any state, then how does it work? Where is agency located? Who or what has the power to create democracy and keep it going? The Council of Europe suggests artists have this power and agency, even in post-communist Moldova, but do they?

### **Power and Agency in a Post-Communist State**

In their correspondence with the Ministry of Culture, the Council of Europe's committee of examiners urged the ministry to provide statistical data and documentation of actual changes in their final report. The initial report, they indicated, was more position statement than policy analysis. Indeed, the initial report positions current policy as concerning itself with the de-Sovietization, de-totalitarization, and re-nationalization of Moldova through initiatives in art and culture. The initial report also documents the continuous adoption of European provisions. While the Commissioners claim that the report does not actually reflect substantive progress toward achieving policy goals, it seems possible to me that – for the Ministry – the sequence of European positions adopted does document progress in de-Sovietization, de-totalitarization, and re-nationalization. In other words, progress toward “Europeanness” has become the indicator of successful cultural policy in post-socialist Moldova, just as progress toward “communism”



served to indicate success under the previous regimes. Progress toward each of these can be documented with a series of statistical data, without a corresponding analysis of the interconnections between the data.

If we want to know whether changes in Moldova's cultural policies and practices are contributing to building democracy, we must look beyond the official reports. Certainly the Ministry intends to uphold democracy, but what are the effects of its actual initiatives? For this, we require ethnographic investigations, and – even more importantly – a clear understanding of the mechanics of culture. How do artists work? How is art perceived by audiences? And what does art change about human behavior in political and social life?

The current determination of artists in Moldova to describe their creative activities as beyond the boundaries of political, economic, or social concerns requires serious consideration. Definitions of intellectuals frequently emphasize the intellectual's disproportionate power to shape public opinion and motivate collective action. The intellectual wields this power through his or her creative activities, by manipulating ideas, words, and other symbolic forms. For this reason, artists are often considered intellectuals, and expected to exercise disproportionate power and influence in society's development. Yet thinkers like Foucault (1980?) and Eric Wolf (1999) also remind us that a society's dominant ideas, concepts, and ideologies prompt and constrain action by predetermining what is thinkable, imaginable, and doable. At the level of self-presentation and discourse, artists in Moldova currently deny themselves and their creative activities political agency. Among members of the folkloric community at least, this self-denial of political agency is intrinsically related to their rejection of the Soviet system. We might say that the determined non-agency of artists and intellectuals within communist societies made *post-communism* a reality.

By setting Moldova's cultural policy review against the self-definitions of local artists and cultural producers, I have attempted to open up, however slightly, the possibility that in their "transitions," the post-communist states of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union can reveal new perspectives on the nature of social action and change. Thus instead of seeing "problems" in Moldova's transformation of its cultural institutions and cultural system, I have looked for possible sites of resistance to, or simple incomprehensibilities, of the model of change proposed by the Council of Europe. As they attempt to become democratic countries, the post-communist states of Eurasia encounter models based on the past experiences of other countries; but, East Europe's present is not West Europe's past, and in fact both their pasts and presents have been mutually constituted. The history of cultural policy and the social role assigned to art and artists points especially to a history of shared assumptions about the nature of social power and agency. Investigating current attempts to reform cultural policy along democratic lines may therefore point to new ways of conceptualizing the significance of art and culture beyond existing modernist and postmodernist paradigms.

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