

COCA-COLA SOCIALISM

THE AMERICANIZATION OF YUGOSLAV POPULAR CULTURE IN THE 1960S

The sixties was a time when everything was possible, when irreconcilables clashed and became compatible. It was a stormy Cold War decade marked with many contradictions, but also with the incessant fighting of superpowers for 'hearts and minds'. As part of that struggle, the USA Americanized the world, achieving its short-term and long-term goals. Namely, Americanization was supposed to, on the one hand, undermine the ideological enemy and tear down communism, while on the other, its goal in the long run was to shape the world in the American mould.

The process itself of Americanization in Yugoslavia was an aspect of the larger process of Cold War Propaganda. The 'warring' sides endeavored to impose the positive values and ways of life of their respective cultures onto Yugoslav society, which from 1948 onwards tried to find 'its own' way. Namely, after its confrontation with the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia turned ever more towards the West. Adopting American influences and American culture was an attempt to show how, and to what extent, the Yugoslav system was liberal, and that it was distancing itself from the Soviet model.

An analysis of the Americanization of Yugoslav culture in the sixties shows that culture, mass consumption and the way of life were all visibly Americanized precisely in this decade, and that it was most visible in popular culture. High culture, such as abstract expressionism and Pop art, American literature, avant-garde theater, jazz, films, as well as the works of Disney, comic books, TV 'soaps', erotic magazines or crime novels, had their place in both the dissemination of American influences and the reshaping of Yugoslav reality.

From the standpoint of the reception of these influences, it turns out that the tendency towards acceptance of Western norms in popular culture and the cultural openness towards the West, played well within Tito's regime, since it scored points both in the eyes of the world and domestically. However, there were limits, and lines were clearly drawn: the openness was considered welcome as long as it did not endanger the ruling dogma, and as long as the system was not questioned. Western culture and standards, as well as Western icons could 'pass', and were even encouraged in order to show the 'human face' of the socialist society, but opposition to ruling dogma was not tolerated, as shown by the various forms of pressure and censorship within the culture. Precisely because of this 'division' and the differing systems of values held by the Yugoslav government, Americanization is an indicator of sorts for the contradictions within Yugoslav society.

One image of Yugoslavia in the sixties is 'rosy' and atypical for a country with a communist system. Hollywood hits cross over to Yugoslavia where American cinema leads the film listings. The public can watch films with the Cold War as their explicit theme, such as *Dr. Strangelove* and *The Russians are Coming, The Russians are Coming*, as well as James Bond movies. Films about partisans and their National Liberation Struggle feature Hollywood stars such as Richard Burton and Orson Welles. Foreign film actors are brought in to make large co-productions. The American director Nicholas Ray drives a red *Porsche* through a country wrapped in red ideology. Jazz greats perform in Yugoslavia, and jazz is played at the most important state manifestations. In addition to this, Yugoslavia gets its own jazz festival. Jukeboxes bring the sounds of Rock n' Roll – Fats Domino, Elvis Presley, Bill Haley, the Beatles and Rolling Stones, and a bit later the Doors, Jimi Hendrix, and Janis Joplin. Yugoslavia becomes the first communist country to feature a magazine dedicated to Rock n' Roll. Big contemporary art exhibits are held, showcasing American abstract expressionism and Pop art, thus giving citizens of Yugoslavia the opportunity to see the works of Pollock, Warhol, Lichtenstein.... Belgrade gets its Museum of Contemporary Art, built to resemble New York's MoMA, and becomes the host of BITEF, an international theater festival showcasing the most avant-garde directors and troupes from around the world. Belgrade saw the performance of the fifth world premier of the musical *Hair*, and a portion of this piece was performed in Dom Omladine in honor of Tito's birthday and Youth Day. There are visits from

Arthur Rubinstein, the most prestigious symphonic orchestras, and Yugoslavia embraces the avant-garde music of John Cage. The works of Henry Miller and John Updike are published. Young people read Salinger, Kerouac and some even Marcuse. Parents begin to raise their children according to Dr. Spock. Audiences are excited by American TV series, they watch Disney's animated films, and they read comic books. News stands across the country carry foreign fashion magazines, as well as *Playboy*. People consume Pepsi-Cola and Coca-Cola. Grocery shopping is done in supermarkets. Jeans, mini-skirts, and hippie attire can be seen everywhere. This image is of course only a cursory glance at America's presence and the results of Americanization in Yugoslavia in the sixties. According to this image, Yugoslavia is fully Americanized: a modern, liberal country in which Americanization permeates everything and encompasses all segments of society.

Far from being either 'rosy' or the American dream, the second image of Yugoslavia in the sixties is in a lot of ways the image of reality in communist countries. The system imprisons its dissidents, Milovan Đilas and Mihajlo Mihajlov. The problem of nationalities appears and sharpens the tensions between ethnicities. The number of unemployed rises. The trade deficit increases. The national currency is devalued. Following the economic reforms of 1965, there is marked jump in inflation. There are demonstrations against the war in Vietnam, but there are also demonstrations against the situation within the country. Constitutional amendments open the way to the deconstruction of the state. Cultural pressures mount – for the first time a film is banned by court order, and film censorship is increased. The theater, open to the most adventurous avant-garde expression if not to the questioning of Yugoslavia's revolutionary past or communist dogma, also sees its first bans. There is pressure on the press – *Književne novine*, *Student*, and *Naši Dani*. Power cuts are ever more common. There are shortages of bread...

Both of these images are that of Yugoslav reality: one heard Rock n' Roll, just as one heard revolutionary songs and songs about Tito; cinemas showed American films, while also showing films about National Liberation Struggle and the revolution; children watched Disney's animated films, all the while pledging allegiance to Tito and wearing red scarves; people consumed Coca-Cola, but Russian kvass as well; the Apollo 11 astronauts were beloved, but Yuri Gagarin was beloved, too; Belgrade took pride in its Labor Union Center, a prime example of

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In this Yugoslavia, turned towards two sides and with many contradictions, in process of Americanization, it seems that momentary political gains were more important than deeper and longer lasting traces within popular culture and everyday life. With the institutionalization of American popular culture, the Yugoslav government was showing the West that it was indeed a liberal country; through this liberalism, it was in turn showing the East that it could in fact make its own way into socialism and that this even had advantages. A tolerance towards Hollywood, jazz, Rock n' Roll, comic books, Pop art, Coca-Cola, jeans..., was still a 'smaller price' to pay for the benevolence of Washington and other Western centers, than more important ideological concessions or accommodations.

In light of very short term, often only day long, there is no doubt that results of Americanization did occur. Generally, the most successful short-term goal of the US was having Yugoslavia as its Trojan horse behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War, and the US took advantage of this on occasion; while for Yugoslavia, it was the fact that for a 'small price' – for Donald Duck, Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe, Pop art, La Mamma, and Coca-Cola (to illustrate the point) – it was able to present itself to the world as a liberal country.

However, even with the superficial aims of Americanization, society developed through adopting Western norms and cultural values of the West. The principle of freedom, a cornerstone of Western democracy, did not arrive in Yugoslavia through a multi-party system, the freedom of speech and action, but in a more limited way. However, even as such, arriving through jazz, Rock n' Roll, film, or through commonplace, everyday things, such as a visit to the supermarket, it forced the acceptance, if not the full realization, of the essence of the word freedom,

1803 „Yugoslavia: Half Karl & Half Groucho“, *Time*, May 7, 1965. <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,898778-2,00.html>> (January 28, 2011).

1804 „Yugoslavia: Socialism of Sorts“, *Time*, June 10, 1966. <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,942012,00.html>> (January 28, 2011).

which did, limitations notwithstanding, fundamentally change Yugoslav society and the worldview of ordinary people.

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Naturally, day to day life in socialism, in difficult economic and complicated political circumstances, could not be as easily Americanized as the everyday life in certain Western countries. Simply put, the American dream could not be Yugoslav reality. Mixed use rooms in newly built project housing were not the same as skyscraper condominiums with modern interiors; nor were houses and gardens throughout Yugoslav villages anything like American farms, the *Fića* on muddy roads was not the same as a *Buick* on a freeway. Regardless of the differences, the image of America as the Promised Land remained permanently burnt into the consciousness of the people of socialist Yugoslavia. Whether they yearned for America or not, ordinary people in the land of self-governing socialism could enjoy an Americanized popular culture, and an Americanized daily life, even if, just like in Yugoslavia itself, the heritage of that culture and that routine had another side. When we put together the realities of life, along with the ultimate uncertainty in the political life of the country, we get a picture of the achievement of the American dream in a Yugoslav way, one that had Hollywood's rosy tones, but also frames from the so-called 'black wave' of Yugoslav cinema. Regardless of the Hollywoodization of Yugoslav reality, 'the film' did not have a happy end.