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The elitism and democratization of culture

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Raymond Williams, in *Keywords: the vocabulary of culture and society*, (2015), defines "Culture" as one of the most complicated words in English. The socio-historical course that involves the term contributes significantly to a difficulty in defining what culture is.

Common sense often associates the use of the term culture with a erudite person who has had wide access to formal studies. This association often leads to an elitism of culture. Especially in Brazil, where access to education still involves a socio-economic issue, to think that only formally educated people can have culture, immediately allows one to deduce that only the rich will have access to culture.

This implies a common situation when we think about culture, which is a segregation between the so-called "high culture" and another called "low culture". This separation presupposes a distinction between something that is good and often unaccessible or enjoyed, and another that is considered inferior and generally more widespread.

Antonio Cândido, in his famous text *The Right to Literature*, proposes that there be a fight for everyone to have access to culture, and that this distinction between high and low culture can not separate society into two incommunicable spheres.

Commenting on the deprivation of much of society from the possibility of enjoying authors of the so-called high literature, touching the economic and social issues that permeate Brazilian society, Antonio Candido says:

These modalities are important and noble, but it is problematic to consider them as sufficient for the great majority who, because of poverty and ignorance, are prevented from reaching erudite works. (CÂNDIDO, 19XX, p.256)¹.

Theodor Adorno in his text *Cultural Industry* points out that there is this form of understanding of culture that is created for consumption, which is distinguished from the mass culture that arises from a people and their customs,

¹Translated from the excerpt: "Estas modalidades são importantes e nobres, mas é grave considerá-las como suficientes para a grande maioria que, devido à pobreza e à ignorância, é impedida de chegar às obras eruditas."

whether popular or erudite. Although this can be divided into the patterns that have already been cited, popular and scholarly, for Adorno, they do not have as main purpose the trade.

For Adorno, these do not have as main purpose the commerce. Industrial culture strengthened by the capitalist system neutralizes the social critique of works of the arts, and offers the public something already known, reinforcing their alienation.

In addition, the problems of the elitism of culture in Brazil are also geographically. Large metropolitan centers receive more investment and hence offer a greater variety of exposures to different audiences, while more distant spaces receive almost no investment.

While this discrepancy of developments enables the creation of popular spaces of artistic expression, such as *saraus* and *Cooperifa*, it also maintains segregation, fueling the permanence of the problematic common sense of division between high and low culture.

At a time of so much polarization in the country, with museum exhibits being closed and extremism gaining strength, the study of culture comes as a respite to instill resistance forces. Dealing with art and studying it in Brazil, and often in other places as well, is not rewarding, it is viewed with contempt in societies driven by capital.

When the elite is interested in and consumes a certain type of art, even if it is something born on the sidelines, such as funk, this item is highlighted. Born in the peripheries, the funk came into evidence, even arising a specific type, called funk ostentation.

This highlights how geographic, social and economic issues of culture go hand in hand. Even in Brazil, where the economic elite is not necessarily the same as the cultural elite, access to cultural events does not have a large audience.

According to UNESCO data, only a small part of the population attends cinemas once a year and more than 70% have never been to a dance show, although there are many who go out to dance. This shows how culture is seen as separate from everyday life, not integrated into people's lives.

Some initiatives seek to integrate society with these events, offering free events or local displacement, such as an open essay, for example, but often what

happens is the generation of the sense of non-belonging and the permanence of the public's removal.

In many respects, the question of the democratization of culture goes through political incentives. But a country that has let burned down one of its great museums does not seem very concerned about making culture a right for everyone.

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