

SURVIVING THE CULTURE SHOCK CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS FACING GLOBALIZATION AND MULTICULTURALISM

The present position and effectiveness of traditional cultural institutions is put at severe test by the explosive growth of the cultural industry that creates demands for steady flow of uniform products and at the same time changes the patterns of cultural consumption. Furthermore, migration has created all over Europe multicultural societies to which traditional cultural institutions cannot relate properly because they have been historically created as an emanation of the national state and national culture, on the assumption of cohesion and homogeneity rather than cultural diversity and divergence. This presentation will explore the transformative strategies that can make cultural institutions into active agents in furthering intercultural competence and celebrating cultural diversity as a societal resource.

Key words:

culture, globalization, multiculturalism, Western and Central-Eastern Europe

The troubles, challenges and pressures experienced by the established cultural institutions in Europe today are rather similar. Fifteen years after the end of the Cold War the cultural policy agenda in the Western and Central-Eastern Europe has coalesced into one, rather coherent set of issues and challenges. The differences exist, between the national cultural systems, between the regions, between large cities and smaller places, but are not of essential character.

All over Europe a sort of pervasive institutional fatigue is visible in culture, and it is not only the consequence of a reduced support and commitment of public authorities. The performance of many traditional cultural institutions is being put to the test by the explosive growth of the cultural industry, by the digital revolution, and by intensified and altered patterns of migration.

Cultural industry creates a steady flow of uniform products, but also changes the patterns of cultural consumptions, and thus affects the functioning and the impact of the cultural institutions. Even very sophisticated cultural institutions, those with very careful programming and consistently high quality of output, struggle to sustain their level of performance. They face raising operational costs, cannot compete with a steady avalanche of industrial cultural goods that are disseminated worldwide at very low cost and offered on multiple digital platforms. The digital revolution has also altered the expectations we all have in accessing to information, any sort of information, also about the cultural goods. If you have a steady and very fast internet connection, you are used to access everything immediately for free, twenty-four hours a day, from wherever you are: information, entertainment, debate, polemics, opinions, image, music and text. A moody cultural consumer who has become an internet surfer will not have much patience with the limited opening hours of cultural institutions that are closed Monday, that work from 10 to 5, or from 10 to 1 and from 3 to 5. With their sloppy service, with the five exhibit halls that are today closed because there are not enough guardians. With the slow librarians who are so unhelpful in providing service. With the stern watchman and rude coat room attendants. With the long lines before the box office that test one's patience, even if you reserved your ticket in advance on the internet but now are forced to stand in line to retrieve it – as it happened to me in Arcimbaldi in mid May.

Cultural institutions have underestimated this shift in expectations and attitudes, they have reacted to it with delay and hesitantly. They have been very slow to develop good websites, or any websites, and make them informative, but also interactive, multilingual and user-friendly, and they still do not understand that the websites are not just a way to communicate that they exist, but that the websites are *the way* how they exist. Through the websites they can shape the community of their core audience and create a platform to disseminate not only the information about their programmes, but develop the programmes themselves. I made a quick test coming to Milano, looking t the Agenda Milano and Comune Milano websites. I saw, for instance, that of 27 theatre venues in this city, several have no website, several have websites but they don't work or they are under construction, several have old information, but no information on immediately forthcoming events. Only two-three have information in English, only two-three offer the chance of direct sale of tickets. La Scala does that but the electronic form asks all kind of unnecessary questions that are invasive for one's sense of privacy. And only two or three websites are really ambitiously constructed to keep attention and to offer something special, to reward the visitor. Piccolo, for instance, is obviously trying to create a community of loyal Piccolo Teatro viewers. Among the Milano museums, 45 museums are nicely listed on Comune Milano site, quickly described, but again some don't have websites, some have old websites and infor-

mation on old events, not on new events, convey what happened in March, but not what's happening in May. Very few have English text, but Castello, Museo Diocesiano and Bagatti Valsecchi have more sophisticated websites that also have some visual features and a virtual tour. It is not only a delay in investment, in usage of internet opportunities, it is a delay in understanding that the information and communication technology revolution changes in an essential manner the relationship between a cultural institution and the cultural public.

Migration has created all over Europe multicultural societies, especially in the big cities. Traditional cultural institutions have troubles responding to this altered demography properly, because they have been historically created as an emanation of the national state and of the national culture, on an ideological assumption of national homogeneity. Now, they have to deal with cultural diversity. And yet, they have not been created for cultural diversity, but to embody and reinforce the spirit of the nation. A new demographic constellation goes in a way against the grain of many traditional cultural institutions.

Under the influence of these three factors – globalisation with the cultural industry, revolution of information & communication technology, and migration – certainties that have been valid for 200 years, about stable audiences, coherent taste, loyalty to some traditional forms of high culture, are not valid any longer or are being quickly eroded. Institutions that have enjoyed prestige and support of private and public bodies because of their cultural and educational mission, venerable tradition and their ideologically constructed prestige are finding themselves under a raising pressure to operate like business. They are constantly being told to better earn some money and generate their own income to supplement the shrinking subsidies. But they have not been created for business operations and as they are trying, even trying very hard, they often fail and slide into demoralization and institutional fatigue. It is moreover a kind of institutional disorientation, and in some cases, institutional panic.

Redress is sought in political patronage, even if this means compromising own independence for the sake of political support that will come from one party or one prominent political leader, who will then ensure the continuity of public subsidy. Other institutions expect some personal policy miracle, like in La Scala, the appearance of some messianic top leader who will suddenly solve like a magician, with one trick, all the accumulated problems and usher a period of stability, prestige and affluence. Third option is to embark on exhausting, repeated institutional reorganisations to cut costs, and thus risk sliding into some kind of institutional anorexia, spending a lot of money on very expensive consultants. That is very much the Dutch way, but also the British way.

Those and other pseudo-strategies seek to avoid a thorough reconsideration of the institution in its surroundings and radical conclusions whose implementation could turn out to be painful as it would affect the staff, its habits and routines, assumptions and institutional mythology. Traditional and reputable institutions invest their prestige in self-defence and display a great deal of institutional resilience to change. They are capable of mimicking change, to pretend that they are changing, but seek to keep things as they used to be. And if they try to make themselves more appealing to culturally diverse public by some marketing tricks alone, it will also quickly be seen through as posturing.

A more constructive direction for many cultural institutions is to examine how can they endow their core cultural mission with some civic mission, and how can they make themselves useful in enhancing intercultural competence. No cultural institution, however, can be expected to make a significant contribution to the intercultural competence in a city unless this institution starts working very carefully at the development of intercultural competence of its own leadership, its own board, its own staff, of its associated artists and ultimately own audiences. This build up of intercultural competence has to become a matter not just of goodwill but of institutional strategy, of an internalised and implemented policy, thus a process: to change the attitudes and the mentality within the institution, to build some skills and sensitivities that are presently lacking and to develop connections and networks, often using not so conventional scouts, ambassadors and intermediaries.

In practice, most cultural organisations will discover that they can hope to achieve this goal if they take their educational mission more seriously, if they acknowledge that the educational work is not something additional to their central cultural mission, but that the educational engagement is a primary trajectory to carry out their cultural mission and appeal to an altered demography in their surroundings, and reach a more culturally diverse audience. In practically every multicultural city the primary and secondary school population is much more diverse than the adult population, in some of the Dutch cities like Rotterdam and Amsterdam, more than 50% of children in the elementary schools have at least one non-Dutch parent. Pupils in the elementary and secondary schools are easier to reach than a population in general, and the teachers are valuable intermediaries. In the perspective of acquiring intercultural competence as a strategic objective, educational efforts of a cultural institution, a theatre, museum, gallery, cannot be viewed as something auxiliary, something that one lonely educational officer or an overworked, understaffed educational department will do. Today, the persistent educational engagement is the central trajectory to build a new, culturally diverse audience, despite all the entrapments, paternalism, and risks of institutional arrogance.

A closer look at the widespread dysfunctionality of so many cultural organisations over Europe indicates that it is very much the consequence of a very narrow typology of cultural organisations that we have inherited from the Seventeenth, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, and that has not been modified and not expanded a lot in the course of the Twentieth Century. What characterises this typology? Traditional cultural institutions are rather narrowly specialised, tend to focus on artistic excellence, but that sometimes leads them into an artistic ghetto and leaves them open to charges of elitism, and if they are perceived as elitist they might have problems getting public subsidies. The inherited institutional typology is also marked by a certain average size, presumptions of continuity, narrow locus of activity, rigid programming models and lines, one-sided external associations. All these markers need to be re-examined in view of these contemporary challenges shaped by global cultural industry, digital revolution and migration.

A range of objective factors make it additionally difficult for some cultural organizations to overcome the restraints of this inherited typology with its characteristic features. Museums are primarily determined by their own collections, that have been historically formed, and not developed for the sake of cultural diversity and not in order to enhance intercultural competence. However, as many museums have discovered, despite their collections, with them and along them, there are many ways that a museum can engage in a productive way to enhance intercultural competence of its audience, by making public groups contribute to the collection or offer on loan own objects for specific temporary exhibitions. There are other inhibiting aspects, such as location, type of housing, commonly intimidating nineteenth century architecture, lacking clear routing and transparency. Pricing policy, opening hours, specially designed programmes for families with small children on weekends: these are essential elements how even historically conditioned cultural organisations could improve their accessibility and appeal today.

But it is also a moment, I think, to really think about the new types of cultural organisations that still need to be invented and that are being slowly invented today here and there in Europe, that will be much more capable to deal with globalisation, compete with the cultural industry, rely on the digital revolution and respond to migration – because they will be purposefully designed to cope with these challenges and designed to function as democratic, inclusive public spaces. In the midst of the multicultural urban life, taken as a fact but not as a fatality, they will be seeking to probe the cultural differences, to negotiate them, and to demystify them, to see them as dynamic altering forces and not as some sort of impenetrable obstacle. If I try to stretch my imagination, seeking to sketch out what this new typology should encompass, I would name, tentatively, a few

characteristics: accessibility, the fluidity of public space so that the public is not departmentalised and fixed in the space, transparency of spaces, small to medium size – too big is again a problem – offering at the same time a variety of different engagements, flexible in handling different publics in different parts of the day. Thus also cultural organisations need to adjust to the 24-hour economy and 24-hour lifestyle, enhanced by the 24-hour internet using habits.

Institutions need to integrate an artistic dimension or a cultural function with an educational and social function, so that they can have a broad appeal as places of learning, artistic enjoyment and enrichment, and as places of socialisation, as theatres used to be in the seventeenth century, but are hardly today. Spaces should be open the whole day, and for the better part of night, appealing throughout the day to different generations and different lifestyles, having perhaps more senior citizens in the morning, but more young people in the evening. But also function as destinations where people might come with one purpose but end up doing something completely else than why they came for, and yet go home happy and satisfied. Territories that obviously need to have some sort of safety, but not an obsessive, intrusive control that increasingly marks the shopping malls.

If these spaces are not shy in combining cultural, artistic and educational content, they perhaps also need, for the sake of sustainability, to include some commercial functions and services, and not be shy about them, but understand them as something that belongs there but should not become the dominant purpose, otherwise they will end up as a shopping centre. A good bookstore and a good cafeteria are a must, but it is not the end of the range, but only the beginning. Rotterdam World Museum that used to be once a traditional ethnological museum hosts now a travel agency whose service desk one encounters first upon entering. The logic is that people who come to a world museum are also people interested in travelling to all far places, and they are creating maximum synergy out of this coincidence. The museum is also expanding the café and the restaurant, and the menu and the design, to reflect the world cultures that are so magnificently presented in a wonderful collection. There are dancing events, and the opening hours are to be stretched to 11 pm, while most museums in the Netherlands, as in Milano, close at 5 pm. The Rotterdam Museum is furthermore developing a partnership with Hewlett Packard and Tiscali because it wants to keep in touch with people who travel to faraway places, and wants also to be digitally in touch with the visitors while they travel around the world and email back home their photos from their mobile phones for an instantaneous display. And the museum is seeking to reinforce the communication with those people who have lent own cultural artefacts to the museum for temporary exhibits.

The Rotterdam Museum director was recently asked after a presentations of his innovative plans whether his organisation is till a museum? “Well, it’s a very good question,” he answered, “and we have been posing it to ourselves seriously, but yes, we are a museum but one that transcends the traditional boundaries.” And indeed, they still have the core museum features, because they have their own collection and they have to take care of it by engaging in all this usual collection management and conservation work that is essential for a museum. But in its presentation, in complex programming, in its communication with the public, they are going well beyond the traditional and historically determined shape of activities, appropriate to most museums.

The new Museum of World Cultures in Goteborg is also challenging the traditional paradigm by not having permanent exhibits, by insisting on complex temporary programs, enhanced with sophisticated digital image and sound and not just based on well lit objects, displayed behind glass with an accompanying text, by programming films, concerts, lectures, symposia and running a café and a restaurant in a splendid, purposefully constructed building, erected on a strategic location in the city.

Diverse programming features will hopefully elicit loyalty of diverse audience groups. Equally important is the loyalty of various artistic teams and ensembles, programmed and regularly brought back, but it does not mean that any artistic group should assume the monopoly on the artistic usage of the space. There is not much future for the traditional concept of the repertory theatre with a steady ensemble, controlling the public playhouse. Instead, a venue will thrive by programming and sometimes producing work of various artistic teams, invited for an evening, a week or a 3 months long residency, in complex templates of daily programming.

This is not a plea for the rejuvenation of the concept of houses of culture in the way Malraux invented them as De Gaulle’s minister of culture, nor am I invoking the model of fortresses of high culture such as the New York Lincoln Centre for the Performing Arts embodies. A consideration of a new typology of cultural institutions needs to examine what is the real problem with the new Museum Quartier in Vienna, one of these pioneers of spaces with combined functions, and why La Villette in Paris works quite well? What are the real chances of the Millennium space in Budapest to overcome the abuse and corruption that have marred its inception? And what are the perspectives of Arcimbaldi, now that La Scala went back with operation to its richly restored 18th century building, what are the perspectives of the entire La Bicocca area, with factories, former factories and a huge university complex whose architectural sterility and coldness shocked me upon a recent visit and reminded me of what I forty years ago I saw in Jean-

Luc Goddard film *Alphaville* as a dystopian projection of a remote future. Within forty years this dystopian future has beaten us up, and we are expected to see those intimidating and alienating type of spaces as places of discovery, learning, intensive sociability, young people' socialisation. This is not just a Milano problem since this asocial campus architecture one can see everywhere in Europe. Obviously, the quality and sort of architecture that will enable the emergence of inclusive public space, responsive to cultural diversity and multiple functions cannot be left aside.

Frequently, it is easier and more promising to recycle old buildings than to build new ones. Rather than to imagine and design in advance a space that is supposed to fulfil all those complex expectations it might be better to let the usage determine and dictate the transformation of the place and its gradual conversion. If someone thinks of recycling a former factory or hospital or military barracks to turn it into a complex cultural space with marked educational, recreational and social functions, it is perhaps better to think of a prolonged, phased process where the utter outcomes will not be predetermined at the very beginning in an assertive and imposing blueprint but gradually adjusted and converted, according to the patterns of usage and manifested needs and aspirations. Practice driven gradual recycling instead of finality imposed from the staring premises.

It an altered urban situation, with its economic, logistic and ecological pressures, intercultural tensions and social dynamic, traditional institutions need to undergo radical overhaul of programming, production, operation, mentality and ethos. Simultaneously, the inherited typology of cultural institutions needs to be enriched with eclectic, synergetic models, needed to revitalize a democratic public sphere, sustained primarily, but not exclusively, with public subsidies.

KAKO PREŽIVETI KULTURNI ŠOK: KULTURNE INSTITUCIJE U SUOČAVANJU SA GLOBALIZACIJOM I MULTIKULTURALIZMOM

Rezime

Sadašnja pozicija i efektivnost tradicionalnih kulturnih institucija su na velikoj probi unutar eksplozivnog rasta kulturne industrije koja, s jedne strane, stvara potrebu za stabilnim protokom uniformnih proizvoda i, u isto vreme, menja modele kulturne potrošnje. Štaviše, na delu je kretanje širom evropskih kulturnih društava u odnosu na koje kulturne institucije ne mogu valjano odgovoriti, budući da su istorijski nastale kao emanacija nacionalne države i nacionalne kulture, dakle na osnovu kohezije i homogenosti a ne kulturnog diversiteta i divergencije. Ova prezentacija ima za cilj da istraži transformativne strategije koje će kulturne institucije proizvesti u aktivne agente za potrebe unapređenja interkulturalnog takmičenja i slavljenja kulturnog diversiteta kao društvenog resursa.