

Culture @ the Crossroads:

**Culture and Cultural Institutions at the
Beginning of the 21st Century**

By Marc Pachter and Charles Landry

Contents

Preface

Disquiet on the cultural front

Setting new terms for debate

A shifting cultural landscape

Setting the Stage

The Challenge for Culture

Past and Present

Strategic dilemmas for Culture

A series of questions

The changing cultural policy landscape

Assumptions

The crisis of meaning and experience

Expectations for Culture

A historical overview of policy

The age of reconstruction

The age of participation

The 'age of the economic turn'

Towards the cultural turn

The current policy response

Knowledge and employment based policies

Image led policies

Organization led policies

Defensive led policies

Re-positioning culture in broader frameworks

Culture and confidence

Cultural insight

Communicating iconically

Communicating a cultural vision

Cultural leadership and authority

Cultural Institutions

The centrality of ethos

Charting other places of meaning

Escaping from the institutional framework

The qualities of quality

The real and live versus the virtual and the fake

Media arts

An inclusive culture

The role of the artist

From learned to learner

The boundary of measurement

Preserve the best reinvent the rest

A flourishing note

References

CV's



Recent Comedia publications

Culture at the crossroads: Culture and Cultural Institutions at the beginning of the 21st Century

Opening the debate

Preface

The genesis of this short book was an observation that Marc made that in a time of extraordinary change the cultural community had not stood back and asked where it was going in the same way that economics and politics had done. He noted too how those worlds had a forum – for example Davos in the financial context – where their urgent issues could be debated, but that none existed to bring together the many fields of culture in common exploration of the forces now at work shaping the cultural enterprise. We agreed to work together in trying to establish such a ‘Cultural Davos’ and to provide some intellectual underpinning for a fruitful debate to occur. We were, however, both concerned that most conferences allow little room for real conversation rather than “positioning” and sometimes even posturing, and have tried since those first discussions in 1998 to build a constituency of people who share our sense that a genuinely open discussion of the future of culture and cultural institutions is possible and worthwhile. Subsequently a partnership was set up between the Smithsonian Institution, the Getty Foundation, and Comedia to pursue these aims, which worked towards a preliminary event held in Rome in November 1999. The origins of this text stem from that time where a small eclectic group came together to test some of our ideas. The Getty supported the meeting.

The participants, in addition to ourselves, were: Charles Saumarez Smith, director of the English National Portrait Gallery; the musician Brian Eno; the writers Kazuo Ishiguro and Susan Richards; Geoff Mulgan, now head of the performance and innovation unit in London and founder of the think tank Demos; Alberto Melucci, the sociologist and author of *Nomads of the Present*; Adam Gopnik a New York Times journalist; Cornelia Dümcke, a Berlin-based cultural consultant specializing in theatre; Ciaran Benson, a psychologist and former chairman of the Irish Arts Council; Marc Leland a financier and Smithsonian Board member; Franco Bianchini, director of the European Cultural Planning Research

Unit in Leicester; Francois Matarasso from Comedia a writer and specialist on cultural policy; Jack Meyers from the Getty and Claire Fronville from the Smithsonian. We discussed the themes extensively too with a number of people who could not come to Rome, especially the author Pico Iyer, the historian Simon Schama and Bob Palmer who directed the European City of Culture programmes in Glasgow 1990 and Brussels 2000.

Rome confirmed to us that the issues we were addressing had a degree of urgency and we decided to move forward. The Getty Foundation and in particular its president Barry Munitz have subsequently supported an initial 'summit' in Venice in November 2001 called 'The Context for Culture Now'. Should the discussion prove useful to the participants it is envisioned that future biannual meetings would take place to assess changing conditions and perhaps to initiate projects.

Disquiet on the cultural front

The origin of our exploration into the future of culture and cultural institutions stems from an awareness of an atmosphere of disquiet in the cultural world. This is happening on many fronts. It is exemplified by a resource crisis. Conventional sources of funding are re-assessing why they give money to culture and for what purposes and are demanding that culture provides a reinvigorated rationale of its aims and goals. These include governments and other public institutions as well as private patrons of culture, corporations, or social elites. Places that have purposes beyond the bottom line, although seen as beneficial, cannot assume that society will invest in them out of some sense of their inherent "goodness."

Arts sponsorship organizations have noted how difficult it is becoming to convince philanthropists or businesses of the value of investment in culture given alternative worthy causes that have moved up the agenda of urgency from community development to aids/HIV prevention to equipping the less privileged with IT tools. In particular the so called 'new philanthropists' from George Soros, to the Gates Foundation or the Atlantic Trust have a different agenda from the old money. They are more concerned with being directly involved, ensuring the impact of the monies they disperse, as well as using their resources to create individual opportunity. As a consequence automatic, unquestioned support no longer exists in spite of surprise bursts of money such as from the lottery in the UK.

A second concern is increased competition. Institutions such as theatres have always straddled the divides among the classical, the experimental, and the popular and museums too from their beginnings have negotiated the worlds of the academy and of amusement. But now the competition for leisure time is more complex and today there is greater hunger for spectacle and diversion whilst at the same time discretionary investment of time also represents a search for deeper educational value even in places normally seen as simply diversionary. For profit entities, outside traditional cultural institutions, increasingly seek to provide that value as well. What happens when culture and commerce, education and entertainment converge? What is the balance of positives and negatives?

Routine and instinctive commitment is fraying as well because we do not truly know what happens educationally in theatres, galleries or museums as they cannot deliver easily quantifiable and precise indicators and measures of success. In the enlightenment notion, which once held sway, it was a given that cultural experience led to self-improvement. This led cultural institutions to be more self-assured and sustained them in their purpose. In a world of measurement they are having difficulty justifying themselves with precision.

And new agendas are rising to the fore. One concerns social inclusion of a wide variety of communities, broadening the participation and audience base. The acknowledgement of multi-cultural goals, while highlighting the diversity of cultures, can break down the accepted canon of a unified culture, requiring a new assessment of the frameworks and boundaries of culture, particularly in a national context.

One response to this emerging landscape is simply to go with the flow of trends. Another is to fall back on past justifications. There are those listening too much to the commercial drive of our world and there are those listening too little. There are those who rejoice in a fractured base for culture, and those who resist the incorporation of many voices and traditions. Yet neither extreme will work.

At the same time there is a curious burst of new festivals, museums and performing arts centres. In urban regeneration culture is a central part of the toolkit whether in the form of activity programmes or in the building of arts centres. What does that say about the situation of culture? What values are being asserted? Is it all a matter of image transformation and tourist attraction? What

do we make of museums like the Guggenheim group which embrace the role of urban regeneration and invite the commercial world of fashion and product design in the sacred precincts of high art? What of the Eden Project in Cornwall, a series of impressive glass domes built in an old quarry which combines natural landscapes with artistic programmes. What is the cultural argument and what is the content?

The disquiet thus is not only about resourcing but a profound change of terms and redefinition about what cultural institutions are for.

Setting new terms for debate

Our aim in noting this disquiet is to understand what is happening within the cultural landscape. We seek to help create a map that can strategically deal with the resulting dilemmas thereby setting the terms for a discourse on the future of culture and cultural institutions. In so doing we assert that cultural institutions in particular have a value, yet that value needs to be renegotiated. In each period of history institutions of all kinds have to re-engage with their broader society and redefine their relationship to it. Our age has a right to ask why do these institutions exist and what are they for especially given the resources expended on them. In the UK alone over a £billion per annum is spent on them.

We argue that simply asserting their value is not good enough; nor is giving in to commercial imperatives or seeing their value as based only on their usefulness as instruments of social policy. Cultural institutions have to argue their case in their own terms and show, for example, how they distinguish themselves from theme parks or social agencies, while not reverting to exhausted snobbery.

This short book is not a manifesto nor a blueprint for action, instead it seeks to open a lively debate. It does so by unpacking assumptions, by asking difficult questions, such as "what is the difference between the real and fake" in the assertion of cultural value or "what do we mean by serious art?" It suggests the merit and danger of borrowing from other worlds such as the commercial. In so doing it tries to be pragmatic responding to how life is lived rather than asserting how it should be lived. It encourages us to revisit issues such as high quality experience or beauty or relevance. It is, in the end, an advocacy document, challenging the cultural world and cultural institutions to stand back in order to stand up for themselves as vital participants in the modern world.

A shifting cultural landscape

Setting the Stage

The crisis of culture and cultural institutions reflects a crisis in our era's willingness to make judgements – a reluctance to make choices about *what* is significant and meaningful and *why*. Such judgements have historically led to the creation of particular, special places or institutions and forms of expression. In other eras it led, for example, to the building of cathedrals, the development of the chant in the Middle Ages or creating the concert hall and the symphony in the 18th and 19th centuries or the growth of the public library in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Culture understood in this sense is the expression of certain values and valued things that are available in specific imaginative forms and places. We live today with the heritage and implications of those earlier value decisions such as opera houses. How relevant are those earlier decisions and the heritage they left today and what is the process by which we now make judgements, establish standards, and maintain or create frameworks or entities called cultural institutions to transmit those values and judgements?

Many places, from schools and universities to publishing houses or web-portals, might be called cultural institutions. Yet here we focus on public spaces for the expression and presentation of cultural values, such as museums, libraries, and performing spaces - understanding that culture etches itself more broadly into society's fabric.

It is a misconception to think that in this era in the West at least, where anything seems to go and people talk of a 'pick and mix' culture, that people resist making judgements. They do yet often hesitate to acknowledge it. People are making judgements all the time: preferring certain forms of expression, social goals, styles of living, concepts of integrity and purpose - sometimes in harmony with or in opposition to the prevailing *Zeitgeist*.

If judgements are still made and higher goals still sought in the modern human condition, it is fair to ask whether the traditional vocabulary, most often associated with established cultural institutions, such as "quality" and "authority" become limited as ways to understand and communicate those judgements.

Or is this simply taking too seriously the vagaries of modern life? How do we sort out what is fundamental change in today's world and what is simply ephemeral? And what do we make of traditional systems of meaning that persist in our lives including religion and patriotism? What connections have they, or the feelings they represent, to modern cultural institutions?

To explore this arena we range through the changing landscape for culture; describe how historically culture and cultural institutions were more aligned to social goals; assess different perspectives on what culture is and what its role could be in society; highlight a series of awkward questions, on which those concerned with culture need clarity; and then consider how cultural institutions might address the new conditions within which they operate.

The Challenge for Culture

The world is changing dramatically in ways that amount to a paradigm shift. In such situations responding in old routinized ways will not address current problems. Many fields, pre-eminently those within economics and politics, have been forced to rethink their purposes, goals, and procedures. Think of, for example, in the realm of politics the collapse of the absolute categories of right and left; or in economics the shift from an industrial to an information-based production system. The world of culture has as yet not "stood back" in a similar way and fully assessed the implications of these new conditions. Yet culture is buffeted by the same global forces of change which will affect what it does and how the institutions supporting culture operate.

The new conditions include: the ascendance of the marketplace as an arbiter of value and taste and the rise of the entertainment industry; the rise of the knowledge-based economy; a decreased role for the state and the emergence of political formations beyond the left/right continuum; the demand by many publics to participate in defining the values and purposes of society; challenges to the unified canon of knowledge in many fields and a blurring of intellectual boundaries; the growth of multicultural national communities; the reordering of relationships between the sexes; changing conceptions of place, space, time and tempo particularly driven by technological advances; a general sense of fracturing in the unity of a body politic; and a reconsideration of what identity means locally, regionally, and nationally.

Our view is that the world of culture should reassess its purposes within these new conditions and determine what its response should be - not merely to adapt and adjust but also to play a central part in the emerging social and economic landscape.

We recognize the continuing impulse to sort out relevance and importance in human expression and aspiration, yet wonder what the fate of that impulse is in an era devoted above all to material well-being. There are many ways in which society sorts out, prioritizes, gives value to and transmits these aspirations. Cultural institutions are one, yet there are complimentary or competing frameworks of meaning outside the sphere of traditional and contemporary cultural institutions, for example the reassertion of fundamentalist belief systems or the range of emerging beliefs generally referred to as New Age.

Past and Present

For most of human history expressive culture and its mediators, the cultural institutions, have been aligned to the purpose and goals of their society. There is reason to believe that today the situation is different. In the era of the mass-based marketplace economy ruled by commercial patterns of consumption, many cultural institutions have an uneasy relationship with the underlying conditions of the era. The need for higher aspirations still exists and cultural institutions have played a primary role in mediating these, yet the market economy does not intrinsically invite an exploration of higher purposes and goals. So it is less clear what the role of culture is today; nor is it clear whether a more beneficial relationship can be established. The cultural world has provided a series of responses, ranging from principled opposition to the circumstances of modern life, to uncritical acceptance of its demands, to ironic detachment. Is there a more imaginative engagement beyond these responses, that takes into account the era's challenges and possibilities?

At the risk of over-generalization, it seems clear that there was a more natural connection of culture, as defined, with the dominant spirit of earlier eras. Or put another way, there was a consensus as to its role. The greatest modes of cultural expression in the Middle Ages, for example, went to the service of religion. In the Renaissance, they focused largely on the re-creation of the city in the service of princely power. By the Enlightenment, the emphasis switched to the development

of knowledge in the service of establishing an improved citizenry and society. Out of that grew the 19th century cultural institution: the museum and gallery, the public library, and the symphony hall.

At the heart of the 19th century cultural institution lay the notion of the democratization of knowledge, whose purpose was to uplift and improve the broader public to suit the emerging conditions of the industrial era and the nation state.

The 19th century approach to culture had certain characteristics - an underlying philosophy or ethos built on hierarchies of knowledge and cultures, on categorizations and fixed boundaries. Essentially, the elites invited the citizenry to become educated to a prescribed view of the world and its cultural order.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the unified concept of culture linked to social purposes began to break down. What had been an integrated world view in which high culture was inextricably connected to public purpose and supported by public response began to splinter. A sharper division between "high" and "low" culture emerged. High culture became self-referential, beginning first with end-of-century 19th century aestheticism and then transforming itself, in certain frameworks, to the avant-garde movement, which celebrates the artist as rebel and secular saint. Popular culture, bolstered by the rising power of mass society, emerged as an independent force fuelled by the needs and possibilities of commerce built on the new technologies of recording, film, and broadcasting.

Also separating itself out in the twentieth century has been the "instrumental" notion of culture, associated with ideologies of both right and left, according to which culture's principal value hinges on how it serves various strategies and political objectives of social improvement or development.

Today, these three strands of culture -- the avant-garde, the popular, and that concerned with social development -- together with the continuing idea of the traditional culture of refinement, are in tumultuous interplay, causing a confusion of aims for those working in the cultural field. Traditional high culture advocates often feel under siege in the demand to justify their existence through a commitment to democratic objectives, which places on culture what they see as the extraneous burden of social or political goals. Avant-garde culture challenges and is challenged by majority standards, alternating between the stance of

aloofness and the embrace of radical social visions. Those in the group who see culture's purpose primarily as the achievement of broader social aims such as community development and the encouragement of diversity and empowerment fight what they consider elite privilege and insular purpose in both traditional and avant-garde high cultures. And all, in different ways, confront an entertainment standard, with its emphasis on amusement or consumption as an arbiter of value.

Finally, popular/youth culture ignores or rejects an exalted notion of culture, whether community-service or elite based, while occasionally appropriating some of its elements. Culture by and for the young, in particular, works to create innovative and "alternative" forms that may be comfortable with conventional notions of "entertainment" or seek to radically redefine its meaning.

The many stances of modern cultural expression, then, make for a whirlwind of responses to modern conditions: from frustration, defensiveness, indignation, and counter-charges of elitism or superficiality; to irony, whimsy, or play; to experimentation, recombination, and occasionally integration. These responses, sorted out in various ways, have implications for how society may renew its priorities for culture, and in turn how resources will be used, and which cultural institutions will survive.

This debate occurs within a system that is dominated by the early 21st century market economy, which has a set of distinctive features. It is a system primarily focused on the search for material well-being, and individuals within market economy frameworks act in a way to maximize security, comfort, and independence. Transactions within this economy involve continual negotiation, purchase, and the determination of market need.

Characteristic as well of this era is boundary blurring, the recreation and redefinition of identities, hybridization, shifting power bases, the rejection of tradition, the empowerment of the young, the emphasis on individual satisfaction, the reach of globalization and the centrality of the new information technology.

Embedded within this market economy and helping to make it work are the notions of *flexibility, fluidity, portability, permeability, transparency, interactivity, simultaneity, and engagement*. Infusing the system is an interest above all in process and experience; it favours the immediate over the long term;

gratification over fulfilment; inventiveness over convention; openness over privileged access.

This stage of capitalism presents a particular set of problems for culture beyond obvious issues such as needing to justify everything according to the requirements of market standards or the tendency to impoverish some and enrich others. It confuses even the core terminology of culture through the appropriation of key words like *value* and *worth* upon which culture's position is anchored. There is uncertainty as to whether one means value or worth in the sense of money exchange or as some higher non-monetary measure denoted by the term *values*.

In its latest stage the market economy has recognized other aspirations in its public beyond consumption alone - a desire for engagement, involvement and participation. 'Experience required' has become the new mantra of strategy and marketing. It is a union of everyday consumption and spectacle. This process is turning retailing into a part of the entertainment industry often blurring the boundaries between shopping, learning and the experience of culture. It involves creating settings where customers and visitors participate in all-embracing sensory events, whether for shopping, visiting a museum, going to a restaurant or conducting business to business activities. Commercial enterprises have begun to take on core attributes associated with culture and cultural institutions such as the claim to educational goals and by offering a range of presentation forms and program offerings associated with the idea of the experience economy. Disney World's Epcot Center would be an example of the one, Niketown's museum-like stores of the second, and epic bookstores such as Borders in the U.S. and Düsseldorf in Germany of the third.

At the same time there is a corresponding, defensive appropriation of aspects of the market place by cultural institutions. They may borrow commercial criteria in selection processes, evoke entertainment modes in presentation, create facilities nearly indistinguishable from shopping experiences, or justify their existence in terms of marketplace goals.

Borrowings and uneasy graftings are one approach to understand the interconnection of culture and the marketplace. Another is the response broadly defined as post-modernist, which views the jumble of modern conditions with

ironic detachment appropriating stylistic aspects as it suits. In effect, this viewpoint treats this complexity only whimsically.

In examining these conditions our objective is to investigate the possibility of a more sustainable and integrative approach which finds new ways to identify and assert cultural values and priorities, and does not rely on maintaining rigid oppositions between high and popular culture, public and private realms, tradition and experimentation, and even culture and commerce. It posits the search for a non-dualistic conception of modern culture based on neither resistance nor capitulation.

This approach is itself reflective of the spirit of the age, which in science, economics, and politics is challenging the notion of fixed categories, perceived oppositions and impermeable boundaries (E.O. Wilson's work on consilience is one interesting example). Another characteristic of this age is that any idea, project or institution must justify itself and defend its internal logic, in ways that are comprehensible and clear. Taking the position that one's value is beyond questioning, which is often the stance of cultural institutions, is increasingly unacceptable to audiences who as potential supporters, in the private or public sense, require explanation rather than decree. What was self-evident in earlier eras is no longer seen as such. In short, the presumed bedrock of shared values as embodied in cultural institutions and expression is simply no longer there. The challenge to those concerned with culture is to explore how to make the implicit now explicit in order to sustain a public response and support in an era when historic investment, current expenditure, and growing demands are so vast.

Strategic dilemmas for culture

From our view of the world a series of important questions emerge, the answers to which could reshape the self-perception of cultural institutions. They can lead to a reassessment of public and private funding strategies, or the creation of models for cultural leadership and of ways by which cultural institutions might be brought to rethink what they do, as well as the presentation of more effective arguments for culture in the emerging 21st century perspective. We raise the questions first and later comment on them.

1. **Is there something unique about the category of insight we call cultural?**

What qualities distinguish cultural experiences from others? What is the difference if any between a sports and a cultural event or between culture and entertainment? Is it a matter of levels of insight which we cluster within art forms? Do we need specific places and spaces within which to gain cultural insight?

Are invidious comparisons, such as between culture and entertainment, art and hobby or craft, reflective of profound differences or simply snobbish ways to separate out popular from high culture? If profound, is this an important way to distinguish between pandering to and challenging an audience, between sensation and insight, between amusement and education, between serving private profit and public need? Or does this mask an anti-populist bias that sees no difference between respecting the interests and needs of an audience and pandering to it? Can we acknowledge the contributions of various levels of craft, art, expertise, and intention without holding to a rigid hierarchy of forms of expression?

2. **What do we mean by *serious music, artfilm, serious theater, fine art, permanent value*?**

Why do we make these distinctions and do we need to do so? Are they era based? Are they arbitrary? Do they reflect levels of utility, for example art (which simply *is*) as distinguished from craft and hobby? What forms and what levels that are set *within* forms of culture have traditionally been considered serious and how do new forms acquire standing while others fall out of favour? Where does

popular culture stand? Can it demonstrate the same aspirations and thus the same status as what has been called "high culture"? How does the work of someone like Raymond Chandler, for example, achieve the status of literature or the work of the illustrator N.C. Wyeth the status of art? When did film as a genre become an art form and how were distinctions established among its practitioners? What is lost and what is gained when a form of expression, rooted in popular expression and response, such as jazz or more recently rock music is recognized as worthy of academic attention?

3. What is the connection between democracy and culture?

Democratic society today is uncertain about making judgements in cultural matters because many of its constituents see choice-making in this context as inherently undemocratic and bound up in a traditional system of hierarchy, category and privilege. Is there something fundamentally incompatible between cultural standard-setting and the goals of contemporary democratic society?

On the other hand, there is now a view of culture which links its qualities, defined not so much as standard-setting but as creativity, as intrinsic to democratic purpose. Its advocates see cultural expression as fostering values such as social tolerance and harmony, an enriched public life, the generation of civic pride, and the enabling of personal development. This point of view does not always take account of the fact that rich cultural expression can take place in non-democratic systems and contexts and, has been, in fact, historically closely bound to such systems. In our own century culture has not proven to be incompatible with totalitarian regimes.

4. Is there a fundamental difference in generational responses to the conditions of culture?

Some argue that younger generations are now uninterested in what tradition sees as the fundamental attributes of culture: a sense of being *grounded*; an overview involving a sense of continuity with and appreciation of the past; a respect for learning and expertise; a capacity for contemplation. These disappointed critics see a stress on sensation and pleasure and a willingness to be manipulated by commercial culture.

Is this the usual carping about youth characteristic of all eras? Or has something fundamental really changed? Has the modern age failed to transmit the essence of culture? Are we seeing as well the growing effects of commerce and the increasing distractions of technology? And if some of this, at least, is true, does the complaint itself miss the point? Aren't there now new cultural excitements and explorations, new modes of performances and display anchored in contemporary meaning? Are many young people effectively acting as curators and impresarios, setting up their own cultural frameworks?

What then is the role of traditional cultural institutions in this context? To respond to and consider new currents? To assert aspects of culture that are in fact not valued by younger generations to the same extent as by older generations? To allow for new types of cultural institutions to be set up?

5. Do the words *authority*, *quality*, *value*, and *fulfilment* have an old-fashioned ring?

If so, is it the marketplace that has undermined their validity or is it democratic culture? Can a commercial society embrace a notion of quality? Have the concepts themselves become outmoded or is this true only of the terminology? Are there contemporary expressions for the same things? What is meant now by such modern usages as *quality of life*? *quality time*? *museum quality*? *added value*? What is meant by terms of approval favoured by the young, such as *alternative*? or, perennially, *cool*? Do they represent equivalents of what was meant by quality? If we no longer speak of a *civilized* individual, is a comparable term of approbation *creative*? Does this represent a shift from celebrating learned appreciation to valuing expression? Is it the democratic ideal to see all people as potentially creative? Does this allow for gradations of creative value? How do we denote levels of knowledge and appreciation? What is the current status of *snobbery*? To what extent and in what forms does the contemporary age value *style*?

6. What are the bases of cultural authority today?

What are the current agencies that provide validation and guidance? Which currently recognized cultural institutions are among them, and for whom do they provide validation? Is there for many a greater need for validation given the uncertainties of the age? How would we define cultural leadership today? Is it

needed? If so, why? Where is it located? Whom and what do we *venerate* and why? What is the role of the artist in this new configuration?

7. Is there a fundamental distinction between culture supported or subsidized by public funds and culture supported principally by private resources?

Does the source of funding shape the very form and expectations for cultural institutions? Does it affect how and why people use and value culture? Does it influence the resulting forms and outcome that emerge? Is the image projected different? Is culture a passive subject of changing political, economic and social circumstances or an active agent? Who determines what purpose, role and values if it is an active agent? Does the source of funding shape that agency? How can the state's use of culture, from economic development to national prestige, be balanced by other purposes?

8. What do we mean by *a cultural institution* today?

Are traditional categories of cultural institutions, such as museums, libraries, theatres, concert halls, and art centres, still effective at the beginning of the 21st century? Can we go beyond the forms we now have of cultural institutions and imagine them existing in other ways? New technologies afford one realm in which this could happen: a *portal*, for example, might, under certain circumstances, be seen to be a cultural institution. Many already consider public television a cultural institution, as we use the term here.

Is it *disinterested purpose* that we see at the heart of our definition? Is it *judgement-making*? The *display* function of a museum, the *browsing* function of a library, or the *performance* function of a theatre or concert hall can and do operate within the retail universe. What then is distinct about a cultural space? Can traditional cultural spaces, for example a museum and library, recombine with each other and with non-traditional spaces, for example the marketplace or the workplace?

And what are the self-imposed limitations on cultural institutions? Must they, for example, have certain hours, or could they run twenty-four hours a day if resources could be found? Is this simply an administrative matter or does it go to the heart of their purpose and usefulness in our era?

Why do we continue to build certain cultural institutions such as museums at an accelerating rate? Are these matters of urban pride and development, the assertion of smaller communities of value and purpose (particular hobbies, for example), or of national educational and regional strategy? Can there be *too many* museums, libraries, galleries, and performance spaces?

9. Are traditional cultural institutions refuges from or collaborators with the modern age?

Museums in particular are now often said to be the cathedrals of the secular era, reconstituting a space for the sacred. For some, they, and other traditional cultural institutions, are places of the spirit, havens for practising the virtues of contemplation, of standing back, taking stock, places of inspiration and consolation. Others, however, in the tradition of Thorstein Veblen, say that cultural institutions simply mirror and underscore aspects of the age of consumption, celebrating the rare and the original principally as a means by which the market economy sets standards of valuation and modern elites distinguish themselves.

In other terms, are cultural institutions becoming centres for social and political expression and debate? Are people turning to cultural institutions as places to express their values and aspirations, having lost faith in their political institutions or religion?

10. What are the consequences for culture of *globalization*?

As a globalized economy emerges cutting across national boundaries and old categories of identity, are there emerging global standards for the expression, performance, and presentation of culture? And what are we to make of reactions to globalization which reassert history (national and ethnic), place, and the local? How does the universalism implied by current global interactions differ from former trans-national and trans-regional systems: for example the overriding belief system of Catholicism in the Middle Ages, or the 19th century cosmopolitan perspective, which represented an expansion of interest in other cultures, but within a hierarchy of values that placed the West on top.

Is the essence of modern globalism the acceptance of difference? This would seem to imply the requirement of cultural institutions to welcome expression for under-served identities, to invite new audiences to participate in traditional institutions and to imagine the creation of institutions around goals of social acceptance and reconciliation.

There is also an emerging phenomenon of identities beyond the fixed categories of the past, which scrambles and in certain cases makes those categories beside the point. Increasingly many people live in a diversity of cultures, absorbing, digesting, and expressing these in new combinations that may become new forms and identities in their own right. There is also the possibility of bland homogenization.

In sum, we can look at the effects of the globalization of cultures as an acceptance of difference, a reassertion of difference, a blurring of difference, as well as a series of imaginative recombinations.

11. Is the *real* being overtaken by the *virtual* and the *fake*? Or is this formulation itself a problem?

Is our sense of the real dislocated by virtual or constructed worlds such as those of cyberspace or theme parks? Are museums or libraries to see themselves as repositories of the authentic, touchstones for the real as distinct from the virtual, the replicated, the sentimental, or the fake? Is the comparable "reality" aspect of theatre or concerts their *liveness*?

In the electronic world, the *virtual* suggests something *less than* the real object or experience. Can it be seen as another kind of experience, with its own validity? It may also be that as technology develops whatever is conveyed electronically will take on properties now exclusively associated with the real thing (such as accurate dimension or the perfect sound of a CD).

Some now argue that the original need not be given special status and that replication provides wider availability and as much educational and artistic value. In domains outside of traditional culture, such as that of industry, the original as prototype does not have greater symbolic value than its replication. What explicitly are the values that culture gives to the original, the rare, the real? Is this the same as the *true*?

Another challenge to the valuation of the real comes from fantastic, nostalgic, and escapist constructions of history, culture, and experience. Do these destroy our appetite for the verifiable, for what can be documented, or do they coexist with those needs and represent valuable cultural expressions? What, in the end, are we to make of the Disney model?

12. Do the most significant challenges to classic cultural assumptions come principally from the forces of commercial modernization?

Can it be argued instead that the contemporary reassertion of fundamental belief systems and the emergence of New Age perspectives pose a comparable challenge to the rationalist and secularist frameworks at the heart of most modern cultural institutions? What should the response be?

The changing cultural policy landscape

Arguments for Culture

Assumptions

Our primary assumption is that people need meaning and purpose in their lives and that a living culture continually sorts out for itself the significance and quality of everything it does; building on its circumstance, available resources and assets. Over time the dynamic of culture then begins to take on a life of its own feeding off its past and responding to an unfolding future bedded on a system of values flowing from the sorting process. Cultural institutions, we argue, could be places which help that process.

Secondly, the transmission of culture is leaving the traditional institutional framework, but in that process could lose some of the positive attributes that those institutions brought, which include: inviting structured discussion of and argument about core values, exploring and inspiring choices and why these choices are made as well as inviting audiences into the conversation about how life should be led. The cultural process within which cultural institutions have had a central role is the discussion of those judgements. These are not a priori judgements about the value of categories such as the commercial and non-commercial, but of the broader landscape of human action. They concern assessments about whether these create possibilities to generate universal meaning, the scope to generate levels of imagination, the durability of messages, the mastery over technique as well as the goals they embody about society's development. Seen thus cultural institutions at their best represent society's continually developing and negotiated ethos

Thirdly we do not assume that the 'best' is the traditional. For example the best of music is not any bit of classical music simply because it is classical, it may equally be a piece of popular music produced for commercial purposes.

The series of deeper trends alluded to are having a cumulative impact representing a ground-shift whose impacts have reached critical mass and affect the content and operation of cultural institutions, the most significant are: the commercialization of culture, the drive to democratisation, boundary blurring in terms of knowledge and technology and the focus on process rather than content.

The crisis of meaning and experience

Commerce has recognized that consuming on its own increasingly provides insufficient meaning and satisfaction. It has sought to wrap the transaction of buying and selling into a broader experience to give it greater purpose. This development labelled *The Experience Economy*¹ is a new mantra and a union of everyday consumption and spectacle. The process is turning retailing into a part of the entertainment industry often blurring the boundaries between shopping, learning and the experience of culture. It involves creating settings where customers and visitors participate in all-embracing sensory events, whether for shopping, visiting a museum, going to a restaurant, conducting business to business activities or providing any personalized service from haircutting to arranging travel. In this process shops can develop museum like features, such as the Discovery Store or Hard Rock Café, with its display of original artefacts, and, vice versa, museums can become more like extensions of entertainment venues, such as the new collection of museum spaces in Las Vegas, where "quality" is added to the menu of possible experiences. This trend is shaking the foundations of museums, libraries, art galleries, science centres, shopping malls, cultural centres as well as virtually every aspect of the business world. Design, multimedia, theatrics and soundscapes increasingly move centre-stage.

With greater choices and higher expectations marketers are competing for customers' attention in order to break through the clutter and sensory overload to capture their focus and to give them a sense of depth. How is this done? By creating experiences that are so distinctive that they stand out in a crowded landscape. Suddenly the power of Disneyland is seen as salvation and organizations are seeking to create their own "brandlands", which are destinations, both real and virtual, that deliver a memorable message by telling a compelling story that reflects magic and wonder. Theme-park-style technology, special effects, and storytelling techniques are applied to projects like the Sephora and Niketown stores, the Lincoln library in Springfield, Illinois; Volkswagen's experience centre Autostadt in its factory in Wolfsburg in Germany. Leading imagineering companies like BRC are working on corporate brandlands, cultural discoverylands, and learninglands wrapping everything up in a cohesive narrative, engaging visuals, and soaring musical scores. Bob Rogers BRC's CEO

¹ *The Experience Economy* James H. Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine II, Harvard Business School Press, 1999.

notes "The 21st century will be a search for meaning". "We're going to find meaning in stories that tell us who we are. Story is what touches people. Story is what changes lives. And that's what we do here in BRC." So commerce tries to make a bigger story out its products.²

The world of business equally recognizes a lack of purpose and meaning in management and administration, as the authors of the "Guru Guide - The best ideas of the top management thinkers" note: 'In many ways the crisis of business is the crisis of meaning. People aren't sure of themselves because they no longer understand the why behind the what. They no longer have the sense that things are well defined..... More and more people have feelings of doubt and uncertainty about the future of their organizations, and consequently about their own careers and futures. More and more organizations and their people are in a crisis of meaning.....Those who would aspire to leadership roles in this new environment must not underestimate the depth of this human need for meaning. It is the most fundamental human craving, an appetite that will not go away'.³

Competing expectations for culture

More people for more reasons are finding that culture has something for them and they want different things from culture. At times this can be contradictory as when people seek equally spectacle and places for reflection, the secular and the spiritual simultaneously. Whilst the church or museum can provide solace, or the amusement park can provide spectacle – rarely are they effectively combined. New Zealand's national museum, Te Papa, is the exception that achieves both. Its Time Warp project involves a virtual reality ride called 'blastback' and 'future rush' but the museum also provides highly contemplative spaces such as the 'marae' – a meeting place for all New Zealanders. The museum also has a role in nation-building and functions as a tool for the development of its home city, Wellington.

We see varying interpretations on what culture does for society:

- ° The community development community argues that culture is valuable for what it does for social purposes, such as empowerment, rather than being inherently worthy.

² Based on *Fast Magazine*,, October 2000, Scott Kirsner

³ *The Guru Guide – The best ideas of the top management thinkers* Joseph Boyett and Jimmie Boyett, Wiley, 1998

- Another instrumentalist position looks at culture in economic terms by assessing how heritage and cultural activities can become triggers for image improvement or can attract investment.
- There is a commercial form of instrumentalism whereby commerce may use cultural strategies for wealth creation. If social good happens along the way, that only shows that the marketplace can lead to a better world.
- City leaders see that cultural distinctiveness represents an asset that needs uncovering and then harnessing in their competitive urban policies.
- Another group focuses on the idea that culture represents the soil from within which creativity emerges and grows, and therefore provides the momentum for development.

Few if any look at culture as a fundamental prop and a way of society to connect to a broader purpose or memory of itself.

A historical overview of policy

How does cultural policy link to these trends? Cultural policy is about choices and because it is about choices it is about values and because it is about values it is about politics which in turn affects resourcing for culture. In developing policy for culture and cultural institutions there is the opportunity for a society to assess cultural value in its own terms. Yet when we analyse cultural policy trends internationally we observe that this is avoided. What has cultural policy been in recent decades and where might it go in the future?

Three broad phases can be identified although the timing of these phases may differ from country to country: from the late 1940s to the late 1960s; the 1970s and early '80s, and from the mid-'80s to the present day, with a fourth – the 'cultural turn' - emerging now. A policy rationale does not neatly replace the previous one with the passage from one historical period to the next. The process is more one of accumulation and overlay, with an often uneasy coexistence of old and new rationales. The focus of this review will be on Europe in the post-war period.

The age of reconstruction

In the 'age of reconstruction' from the late '40s to the late '60s the public policy debate was dominated by a focus on economic growth, welfarist planning, physical and civic reconstruction, and by a belief in instrumental rationality. In many respects, 19th century definitions of 'culture' shaped debate. The main rationale for implementing cultural policies was their perceived value in re-educating and civilizing people after the horrors of the war, with a strong bias against the uncomfortable and contaminating forces of commercial popular culture, and towards the well-established canons of pre-electronic (19th century) 'high' culture. The prevailing attitude towards 'culture' was a continuation of the 19th and early 20th century tradition, which largely viewed appreciation of the classics in the arts as an antidote to the spiritual and even environmental damage wrought by industrialization. As a result, cultural policies were primarily focused on creating or expanding an infrastructure of traditional, building-based arts institutions located in city centres, such as opera houses, museums, and civic theatres, and on widening access to them through the provision of public subsidy.

Cultural policies were underpinned by a notion of 'citizenship' which saw people's right to access culture as part of wider 'social rights'. Unproblematically it assumed that the culture in which people participated was a pre-prescribed unified canon, inherited and given, on which they would not leave their mark or shape it in turn. There was conception of a homogenous, national culture, handed down to 'ordinary people' by elites. Especially after the onset of the Cold War in 1947, cultural policies adopted the less ambitious goal of the 'democratisation of culture', based on the power of experts to define cultural value and the role of the state to 'civilise' the majority of people by making culture more widely accessible to them. Cultural managers during this historical phase tended to have a curatorial, more than a developmental role. They tended to be experts in particular disciplines, and were often endowed with a sophisticated scholarly knowledge of particular cultural forms.

The age of participation

The 'age of participation' in the 1970s and early '80s challenged the previous model of cultural policy-making as a result of interconnected changes in social, political, administrative, technological and intellectual spheres exemplified by the events of May 1968. A major factor in the growing importance of cultural policies was the post-1968 emergence of grassroots and social movements such as feminism, community action, environmentalism, youth revolts, gay and ethnic minority activism. These movements were often closely associated with

'alternative' cultural production and distribution circuits comprising experimental theatre groups, rock bands, independent film-makers and cinemas, free radio stations, free festivals, recording studios, independent record labels, small publishing houses, radical bookshops, newspaper and magazines, and visual arts exhibitions in non-traditional venues.

This cultural universe challenged traditional distinctions between 'high' and 'low' cultural forms - for example, between classical and popular music - and adopted a very broad definition of 'culture' combining in imaginative ways old and new, highbrow and lowbrow elements. The growing availability of the relatively low cost new technologies of cultural production used by the new urban social movements increasingly blurred distinctions between commercial and non-commercial, amateur and professional, consumer and producer. These trends were accompanied by the rise of a postmodern aesthetics, in the fields of both cultural criticism and artistic production, questioning traditional notions of cultural value and hierarchy. The new urban social movements influenced many city politicians, mostly of the Left, who expanded the remit of their interventions to include popular and commercial forms of culture, and recognized that cultural policy could act as a vehicle both for mobilising people for purposes of party legitimisation and ideological contestation, and to construct forms of city identity which could be shared by people from different neighbourhoods and belonging to different communities of interest.

The conception of citizenship underpinning cultural policies during this historical phase was a radicalisation of emancipatory tendencies. The monolithic and elite notion of culture, assumed as the groundwork of social citizenship, became subject to explicit challenge from the cultural politics of the new social movements. During this historical phase, cultural managers become often more politicized. Many of them saw themselves as activists, as an integral part of cultural-political movements such as "community arts" and "community media" in Britain, *Sozio-Kultur* in Germany, and socio-cultural animation in France.

The age of the economic turn

From the mid-'80s there was a clear shift away from the socio-political concerns prevailing during the 1970s and early '80s towards economic development priorities. Growing pressures on the financial resources of governments helped downgrade the earlier emphasis on the importance of access to culture, particularly for disadvantaged groups. In responding to the structural economic

crises, most visible in the decline of traditional forms of 'heavy' manufacturing industry, many politicians and policy-makers gradually replaced the 1970s emphasis on personal and community development and participation with arguments highlighting the potential contribution of culture to economic and physical regeneration. Cultural activities and cultural institutions were increasingly seen as valuable tools to diversify the local economic base in an attempt to compensate for jobs lost in traditional industrial and services sectors. A lively, cosmopolitan cultural life more and more became a crucial ingredient of city and regional marketing and internationalization strategies, designed to attract mobile international capital and specialized personnel. Insofar as there was a notion of the cultured citizen at all in the new market-oriented cultural policies, it was often simply that of the passive, depoliticized consumer. Cultural goods and services were increasingly viewed as commodities like any others, entitlement to which would be dependent on market choice and opportunities. So claims for cultural rights were increasingly being legitimated, not on democratic, but on market grounds, and they are treated as such, as merely new forms of consumer demand.

The construction of 'flagship' cultural buildings such as museums, art galleries, libraries, concert halls, opera houses and theatres became part of the repertoire of development. Yet one of the legacies of these policies is the fact that maintenance costs and loan charges were often so high that they absorbed most of the resources available for programming leaving us often with beautiful containers without content. There was a tendency in times of financial stringency to curtail revenue funding for those activities seen as 'marginal', often aimed at disadvantaged social groups or innovative and experimental in character, than to withdraw money invested in theatres, concert halls and other building-based, traditional arts institutions.

The establishment of certain areas of cities as 'cultural districts' in some cases - as in Frankfurt's new Museum Quarter - was problematic in terms of social and cultural sustainability, in that it generated gentrification, displaced local residents and facilities, and increased land values, rents, and the local cost of living. These processes ironically drove out many cultural producers, who had been instrumental in the district's designation as 'cultural' but could no longer afford to be based there. As a graffiti in Montreal proclaimed "artists are the storm-troopers of gentrification", highlighting the dilemma. During this historical phase, cultural management training and professional ideologies absorbed much of the

language and many of the assumptions of managers of other sectors. The influence of the languages of accountancy and of product marketing on cultural institutions became increasingly evident.⁴

Towards the cultural turn

Many argue we are currently experiencing a 'cultural turn' where culture is moving centre-stage when even economics and politics is culturally driven in manifold ways. How are cultural institutions responding to these trends?

Economically, it is argued, value derives increasingly from symbolic and cultural knowledge. Any good or service is less based on its physical presence and more on the symbolic value inserted whether by the quality of design, its cultural associations such as a fashion icon, a personality or genre, an artistic or sub-cultural movement. Services and goods cannot just be invested with cognitive knowledge such as the intelligence applied to understanding production techniques or markets the former elements of competitive advantage. They now need knowledge of aesthetic and cultural values or qualities to add value. Consumers are making judgements about these aesthetic qualities all the time. Furthermore there is cyclical interchange between listening and responding producers and critical consumers shifting the traditional relationship between the two so that in the end you do not know who is the producer and who is the consumer. This is most marked in the computer games software industry where committed consumers effectively create the new products.

Having cultural capital is key if a company is appealing to a market and it needs to demonstrate to that market that it has earned credibility by knowing the cultural signs, symbols, language, conventions and unwritten rules of behaviour of its purchasing community. The advertising campaigns of Levi's, Armani or Diesel are witness to this understanding. Interestingly too in terms of sponsorship of culture it is the advertising and cultural industries that are now most difficult to reach as they believe they have the cultural capital themselves, whereas an IT company might feel the association with cultural movers and shakers or cultural institutions creates valuable associations.

Similarly there is the recognition even by institutions such as the World Bank that the success of development and economic processes are culturally defined and that if people go with the grain and understanding of their cultures that this

⁴ This historical argument is based on the work of Franco Bianchini

provides a backbone to adapt to change in contrast to culture becoming a defensive shield. Part of their new understanding is to encourage the development or safeguarding of cultural institutions such as museums. The same is true for urban development where city leaders increasingly believe in a culture of creativity to move forward and as part of these agendas look to cultural institutions to provide some anchoring to their aims as can be seen in Barcelona, Bilbao, Frankfurt or Copenhagen. Therefore cultural factors determine development as it taps beliefs, traditions, behaviours and the resulting things people do. So if a city were to have low self-esteem and confidence or it feels imaginative these would be cultural factors determining how it develops.

At this juncture culture in its humanistic and artistic dimension connects to the desire of places to understand themselves better in order to become creative given its role as an empowering, self-expressive activity, or as helping provide meaning, purpose and direction and the arts' role in fostering aesthetic appreciation and as creative industries. This is given added weight because the arts encourage a particular form of critical imagination and symbolic form of communication, which need to be embedded more deeply into the culture of institutions. Secondly, the arts are concerned with quality, attractiveness, performance, beauty and the design of our environment and how it is animated – a key feature in a holistic, urbanistic approach to development.

The role of cultural institutions in providing guidance and in helping us decode the sophisticated cultural developments in our economic and political environment is highlighted more firmly. In understanding where we are and where we are going we need to understand where we come from – we need a frame of reference illuminating past values, purposes and what brought meaning to past lives. It is only so that we can begin to appreciate the connections of things, know the best and the worst, make comparisons between things, test possibilities and enhance our capacity to make choices. Historically that frame in the West might have been too narrow setting up our culture as superior to others which were either seen as inferior or exoticized. The tragic events of New York and Washington in September 2001 only re-emphasize the need to understand others culturally.

Defining 'cultural knowledge' as the key knowledge base of a society recognises that knowledge is a collective accomplishment, where new knowledge is conditional on what has come before and is rarely if ever generated by an

individual in isolation, and is inflected by the cultural, institutional, and physical settings within which it is produced.

The current policy response

Given the notion of the 'cultural turn' how is policy responding? Five distinctive types of response are noticeable when we assess the international arena, although they overlap. Importantly none seem to address culture in its own terms or the role of cultural institutions and rather more assess culture's power in terms of its instrumental effects.

Knowledge and employment based policies

Part of the advocacy argument for culture in the last two decades was based on showing that culture and especially the cultural industries had an impact on jobs and that in the emerging knowledge economy it is the content provided largely by artists that adds value to the converging platform of the IT and communications industries. This has led, in the UK for example, to focus its policies on reskilling, on media and IT training, the encouragement of creativity and learning and especially the conditions for the cultural industries to work effectively as well as using the arts to stimulate creative approaches in the workplace. There is little if any mention of what the role of cultural institutions might be in this programme.

Image led policies

The objective of such policies is to highlight culture's role in creating perceptions and images in order to provide profile and to drive international promotional strategies. These recognize the force of the arts economy as a means of projecting a sense of cultural vitality as well as using cultural flagships, often constructed as icons as in Bilbao or decades before in Sydney, from concert halls to theatres or museums. While often effective, these policies are more attuned to aggrandizement than to considering what the contents or programming of such new institutions might be. This can lead to immense problems; witness the flurry of national lottery initiated projects in the UK, with a number on the verge of collapse such as the Armouries in Leeds or National Centre for Popular Music in Sheffield and the sad example of the Dome.

Organization led policies

These are driven by organizational imperatives flowing often from a funding crisis as happened in the UK and is happening now in Germany or the transition countries of Eastern Europe. Here the cost of maintaining a large physical cultural

infrastructure is seen as unsustainable or the organizational structures as inappropriate in dealing with a more mixed funding environment where stronger linkages with the commercial sector are sought. This often affects the internal management structure with the balance between artistic and managerial direction shifting towards the latter.

Defensive led policies

These focus on the protection of cultural diversity, implementing safeguards such as on intellectual property rights or piracy, protecting domestic cultural industries against globalization and homogenisation and safeguarding moral values threatened by the unfettered use of the internet in places such as Singapore or the transition countries in Eastern Europe.

Re-positioning culture as part of broader frameworks

This policy strand is based on the idea that culture is a resource whereby every facet of a particular culture from its history to contemporary events; a quirky circumstance or a city's sub-cultures can be used as a resource or a trigger that can be turned into an asset. The approach seeks to link a cultural perspective to thinking through policies in other fields, such as housing or transport. It asks questions such as can we build housing so that it reflects the local culture in terms of construction or decoration. By placing cultural resources at the centre of policy-making, interactive and synergistic relationships are established with any type of public policy - in fields ranging from economic development to housing, health, education, social services, tourism, urban planning, architecture, townscape design, and cultural policy itself. The Council of Europe's document 'In from the Margins' is an example.⁵

None of these policy frameworks it seems have a cultural mission or vision with a deep sense of ambition for artists, the arts or cultural institutions.

⁵ Thanks to Rod Fisher for clarifying these trends

Culture and confidence

Cultural insight

A rich cultural experience provides meaning and purpose through triggering insight. It does this by moving and inspiring us so we feel a genuine emotional response - felt directly in an unmediated way, without cheaply making us feel what we should feel. The profundity of the experience can be short term but is often transformative and revelatory. It connects to our instincts and intellect and thus enriches self-understanding and learning. At their best cultural institutions through their programmes and mode of communication engender the feeling that one *understands* at any number of levels so helping us grasp complexity.

Cultural institutions can invite exploration and challenge without foreclosing or having a fixed form. This may be the big distinction between them and the Disney experience, which restricts real exploration for the visitor. It needs to extract money from visitors, it focuses on security and order issues; its drive to profitability can mean generosity of space suffer. It seeks less to challenge - it wants more to make comfortable so that sales go up. Waterstones and Borders bookshops on occasion come close to the exploratory ideal of a cultural institution without too tightly binding what is explored rather like a good library. Commercial outfits done well can create generosity in their atmosphere. Yet a fine library also has a massive backstock that can delve into the legacy increasingly aided by new technology. By contrast in the midst of a Borders is a commercial bookshop so considerations of profitability of each unit of space always applies – and thus they cannot focus on backstock. Thus added weight can be provided by cultural institutions by the possibility of continuing to experience the best of what has been achieved before – by creating some sense of lineage. They also make some things available for memory.

Communicating iconically

Museums, galleries, theatres communicate iconically. This enriched communication has certain qualities and understanding the distinction between narrative and iconic communication is important. Narrative communication is concerned with creating arguments. Iconic communication seeks to 'squash meaning' into a tight time frame. The challenge of cultural institutions is to

embed narrative qualities and deeper, principled understandings within projects which have iconic power.

This is largely generated through stories that create a narrative flow, a sequence, a content so giving rise to meaning and even a moral. The object, be it a picture or artefact, lives within the story and provides a point of context and a frame from which to explore. It is the relationship between the story and object that counts. Equally though in the performing arts some forms of cultural expression such as music can communicate in a way that over-rides linear thought processes so generating a register of experience that stories and objects cannot.

A typical form of iconic communication can be seen in New Zealand's national museum – Te Papa. The name itself that translates as 'Our place' resonates with symbolic meaning behind which lies a powerful expression of the bi-cultural nature of the country 'recognizing the *mana* (authority) and significance of each of the two mainstreams of traditions and cultural heritage - Maoris and Pakehas – so providing the means for each to contribute to the nation's identity'. 'A place where truth is no longer taken for granted, but is understood to be the sum of many histories, many versions, many voices'. This sensibility is built, in part, into the physical fabric. A long, noble, reflection-inducing staircase proceeds past outward-looking bays towards the top, where a dramatic promontory projects us out towards the drama of sea and sky, before we reach the *marae atea* (the traditional Maori meeting place) which is a symbolic home for all New Zealanders. This requires little explanation and is instinctively understood.

District 6 Museum in Cape Town is adjacent to the city centre, where once one of the few multi-racial areas in South Africa existed, yet apartheid at its cruelest razed it to the ground in the late 1970's with its coloured populations dispersed to townships 15km away. A community was destroyed. District 6 Museum, a voluntary initiative has taken over a local church in the former district and is seeking to help the process of healing by symbolically re-creating the community. The centre-piece of the museum are the outlines of the streets of district 6, which visitors walk across; the names of people who lived in houses are slowly being filled in as former residents or their children help re-establish the tapestry of what was once a vibrant area. An ever-lengthening linen sheet is witness to the signatures of now 1000's of residents and visitors. The museum serves both as a memorial, a place of learning, an urban planning centre and community centre for

a group re-creating their identity physically and metaphorically. Again the visitor needs little explanation.

The decision to leave a dramatic empty space in the entrance of the Tate Modern – when they actually leave it as empty space - has huge iconic quality. It engenders not just *expectation* but, by breaking the rules of efficient use of space it suggests other priorities.

Common Ground suggested an idea with iconic quality by proposing to create new river-based songs for London, involving all communities along the river. The river divides and joins Londoners. Such a participatory event would change how they felt about London, enabling people to meet and link cultural and political regeneration, preparing the ground for addressing other tangible problems of London having so enhanced commitment and civic pride.

Helsinki's Forces of Light programme by focusing on the elemental power of light speaks to the soul of a country which for many months is shrouded in darkness. Basic polarities form an integral part of Finnish culture: it embraces both heat and cold—snow and sauna; solitude and Finnish tango; light and dark; land and sea. There are light traditions in all its guises, such as candles burning in windows in the pre-Christmas period, the Lucia candle parade, the placing of candles on graves, and the lights that mark Independence Day. A winter Festival of Light is appropriate as it goes with the flow of tradition and a culture rooted in the natural world yet is conceived in a contemporary way linking it to Finland's innovation in design so transforming the city for two weeks of the year.

Even a word can have iconic power. The idea of zero tolerance initiated in New York to combat crime is an example. Everybody knows immediately the power of the word 'zero'. It is a packed phrase and people know what it means and what is expected without complex explanations: linked to the word 'tolerance' it provides psychological comfort.

Identifying the iconic trigger whether a map, a space, light, a song or even a word like zero is most difficult as communication needs to relate to the place, its traditions and identity. The power of iconic communication is also its danger if not leavened by an understanding and acceptance of deeper principles.⁶ Thus the

⁶ We are grateful to Tom Burke for highlighting these distinctions

transaction and process between the person, the object or the institution conditions the uniqueness of a cultural institution. They are places less of formal instruction than of spiritual engagement.

Communicating a cultural vision

The pressure on cultural institutions to perform increasingly exclusively within market-based principles has dampened their vision and confidence eliciting two typical responses. In addressing the key questions of meaning such as 'why are we here?' some argue that cultural institutions often intimidate, hector, demand or instruct responses - thereby not connecting to their genuine aspirations. This can come across as pompous, inappropriate and archaic. Alternatively the worst of cultural institutions attempt to imitate a Disneyesque response without the fun – coming across as too earnest or self-important. In telling their story those operating within the leisure framework at their best seem to communicate without over-claiming, without hectoring or belabouring and with an element of play. So it can be more fun to be manipulated by a Disney than when a cultural institution acts self-importantly.

Take Walt Disney's original vision: 'The idea of Disneyland is simple. It will be a place for people to find happiness and knowledge. It will be a place for parents and children to spend pleasant times in another's company; a place for teachers and pupils to discover greater ways of understanding and education. Here the older generation can recapture the nostalgia of days gone by, and the younger generation can savour the challenge of the future. Here will be the wonders of Nature and Man for all to see and understand. Disneyland will be based upon and dedicated to the ideals, the dreams and hard facts that have created America. And it will be uniquely equipped to dramatize these dreams and facts and send them forth as a source of courage and inspiration to all the world. Disneyland will be something of a fair, an exhibition, playground, a community centre, a museum of living facts, and a showplace of beauty and magic. It will be filled with the accomplishments, the joys and hopes of the world we live in. And it will remind us and show us how to make those wonders part of our lives'.⁷

We may criticize Disney on many levels, yet he has understood human nature and connected to a bigger story of where we have come from and where we are

⁷ See Guru book page 20/21.

going. In that sense there is a lesson for cultural institutions. It is not that they exist to make people happy. But they need to fulfil human needs of curiosity, aspiration, wonder, purpose, and depth of response.

Cultural leadership and authority

As society recasts its priorities we have come to mistrust traditional sources of cultural authority. Indeed, formerly a person who understood the cultural was seen as a leader and education put stress on cultural knowledge. Yet the focus on instrumental reasoning has shifted leadership from cultural authority to economic, administrative and management authority and their judgements - attributes that can be applied to any domain. These forms of knowledge are also process rather than content driven. As a consequence a museum or a festival is nowadays less likely to be run by someone steeped in culture on society's behalf and more likely be a manager with an instrumental mindset.

Unless culture creates a confident argument for itself based on its own judgements, criteria and indicators about what it thinks is good or bad its institutions will be run by people whose authority comes from outside the cultural domain. The best of them will share the cultural values of the institution they have come to manage and will have to share in the search for clear cultural purpose.

Every era needs its own specific form of leadership to match prevailing conditions. When there is an accepted, mutually agreed framework for action or more static environment two approaches predominate as core values and goals are pre-set: a laissez faire leadership, hands-off approach, which can foster self-responsibility and team-building or a hands-on approach, that is pragmatic, technocratic in style and tactically flexible.

In moments of crisis or dramatic change though transformational leadership is required and less the skills of the co-ordinator or manager. Issues such as the ceremonial functions of a leader, their control of policy making or management are less significant. Cultural institutions face such a moment. Cultural leadership needs to come from within the cultural community itself as the social and political system will provide no guidance. In a sense the fight back to re-establish cultural authority needs to begin.

Cultural leaders will need to move from being merely strategists to being visionaries. Whilst strategists command and demand visionaries excite and entice. They will need to move from being commanders of institutions to being able to tell a story about the bigger picture and where their institution fits in so moving from being institutional engineers to change agents. The big picture will inevitably involve a story – a story that answers questions about identity: Who am I, where did I come from, what group do I belong to, where is life going, what things in life are true, good and beautiful. Thus cultural leaders should provide answers concerning personal, social and moral choices – and through their programming gain legitimacy. The story should interweave what their institution could be and how to get there. It also needs constant renewal through interplay between their constituency and wider circumstances. The cultural leader will anticipate trends, appreciating feedback and will encourage debate about problems and possibilities. Their communication needs to be compelling as they will compete with existing stories for attention such as those provided by shopping malls, leisure centres, theme parks or television.

What are the qualities of leadership required from cultural leaders now? There are ordinary, innovative and visionary leaders. The first simply reflect the desires or needs of the group they lead. An innovative leader questions circumstances to draw out the latent needs, bringing fresh insight to new areas. Visionary leaders by contrast harness the power of completely new ideas getting beyond the ding-dong of day-to-day debate. One task of cultural leaders is to build cultural leadership elsewhere - in public, business and voluntary bodies of all kinds so contributing to the pursuit of widespread change rather than sectional or personal interests.

A combination of skills will be called for — moral leadership to help choice making, intellectual leadership to identify original solutions, emotional leadership to inspire or simply efficient leadership to build confidence. Importantly these ideas need to be coherent and appropriate to local circumstance.⁸ They must also be linked to solid managerial talents.

Why is it we fear cultural leaders whilst we accept political and economic leaders? When a politician or business person leads we do not call them elitist, perhaps

⁸ These arguments are developed in Howard Gardner, *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership*, Harper Collins, London, 1997

because the former are accountable to democratic assemblies and the latter although not accountable have generated wealth. If cultural leaders generate inspiration and meaning can they not be part of the leadership circle?

An additional aspect of leadership concerns the roles of leadership institutions such as London's National Theatre. How do they lead and has the programming reflected that leadership or is the notion of being a national theatre outdated? The National has been criticized for producing popular and commercially successful plays such as Oklahoma!, Candide or My Fair Lady yet they argue that music theatre has a power to unify quite disparate audience groups by doing these shows well. This should be the criterion for judgement not whether the play's origins were commercial. It focuses too on the broader theatrical tradition and contemporary trends nationally and internationally so providing a wide view of theatre. On the other hand other theatres have initiated similar projects attempting to produce the best their craft can offer. In an age of decentralization with regional identities making up the patchwork of a nation it is perhaps more important to encourage many theatres of national significance rather than designating just one as national.

Cultural Institutions

An institution is anything that is systematic, has a process, a code of rules, a memory and a plan. As such it embodies and establishes unifying values, ideals, goals and procedures through which it seeks to build legitimacy and respect for its purposes.

A cultural institution whatever its subject focus or geographical location is concerned qualities such as identity, memory and creativity. By reflecting on culture it harnesses memory. It establishes identity by harnessing memory and creativity based on the value systems and various expressions of a people or a place. Culture is society's lodestar, reminding it of its purposes and goals. A cultural institution is a mediating mechanism. Even though cultural institutions do not need to be physical spaces - a festival tradition, the BBC or PBS or long-standing radio show can be a cultural institution - museums, galleries and performing arts centres hold a special place in the arena of cultural institutions, because of their expertise and flexible space. They thus have great resources at their disposal. But can other types of institutions take over their role?

Cultural institutions are agencies of 'ethos,' which Geoff Mulgan summarizing Norman Strauss' ideas encapsulates well: 'An ethos is a unifying vision that brings together a set of clearly comprehensible principles and a narrative account of what [...] is to be achieved. Ethos is a tool for the regeneration of coherence. This is the first task of any organization. [...] It requires self-understanding and that of its operating environment. It demands skills for the higher order integration of what may seem to be conflicting information and incompatible interest groups. [...] Its response to a new situation is relatively easy to see when it has such an ethos. Its response is relatively predictable when its principles are transparent to everyone. [...] Having defined an ethos a government (or a cultural institution) has a very powerful tool: a guide to priorities and resources, a common identity and purpose that binds people together. [...] Ethos is a decision making tool [...] when new problems arise they do not have to be considered from scratch. Ethos is a variety or complexity reducing tool [...] that links the visionary and the practical [...] There are three layers that need to be coherent [...] the meta or grand strategy of ethos, vision, ethics and transformation; the core strategy of management, control, rules, budgets, initiatives and monitoring, the base strategy of routine, repetitive operations.'

Charting other places of meaning

Cultural institutions operate in a competitive arena for providing frameworks for generating substance and meaning to our lives, bordered on the one side by new entertainment environments and on the other by other allegiances, including the church and religion; patriotism, one's country or national places; social causes from environmentalism to human rights; kinship and friendships; shops and entertainment and even work. What is the status of other meaning making frameworks and where do they stand? Are they on the rise or decline, are they in crisis or do they operate with vigour? Have emerging concerns got more vigour and are the older ones merely sustaining themselves?

Clearly these other affiliations are also in a state of flux. Traditional religion is challenged by modern forces in many nations and one response is the re-assertion of religious fundamentalism. With renewed globalization national identities are being renegotiated. Perhaps most importantly there is a shift in the relation of culture and nature. The rise of the environmental crisis has perhaps led culture to lose out to nature in the battle for meaning.

Escaping from the institutional framework

As conventions break down creators now need increased fluidity in how they create performances, the spaces they use and in their connections to audiences both real and virtual.

The move from an art-form focus to an interdisciplinary approach creates difficulties for institutions that support purist art-forms. The most renowned performance impresarios today such as Lev Dodin, Robert Lepage, Bob Wilson, Peter Sellars or William Forsyth or companies such as Group F, Macnas or Doeg Troup are more anarchic moving across all areas and as a consequence many traditional spaces have outlived their usefulness. More often than not they are moving into site specific work utilizing interesting locations and often natural landscapes as well as working with their audiences as participants. The results can be carnivalesque or even extravaganzas.

Interesting experiments have been made in 'anti-spaces' such as shipyards. In 1990 in Glasgow in their European City one of the most innovative performances was 'The Ship' which involved re-creating the city's rise and fall in ship-building in a disused yard where the audience was enveloped in the experience. In Helsinki 2000 the massive still functioning 250 metre long Hietilahti shipyard shed was the setting for 'Twilight Nights' a massive fantasy of sound, light and images. The shipworkers provided support as crane drivers, safety officers and performers; the walls were used as climbing frames where singers performed and out of the depth of the water rose dancing divers. The overwhelming size of the venue even allowed for a skijumping platform from which jumpers floated high up and down into the water as well as an orchestra which slowly glided along the length of the site. It enabled the idea of what a venue is to be rethought. Was this music, dance or theatre? Could a traditional theatre setting with a proscenium arch have enabled such a performance?

Some new spaces such as Mercat del Flors in Barcelona or the Halle Schaerbeek in Brussels have made their name as multi-disciplinary institutions with fully flexible spaces rather than forcing the artist into a mould. Indeed in the performing arts it is now artists who are the big names rather than the cultural institutions associated with a particular physical space.

Equally some traditional art forms such as opera are having difficulty in keeping up traditions as their cost base is unsustainable and only tried and tested performances draw in largely older audiences which have been nurtured over generations. The consequences of these economic constraints are controlling and limiting artistic development. The same can be seen in the blockbuster phenomenon in the visual arts where major institutions need such shows from an economic point of view, yet for them to work they need traditional fare. There are attempts to break out of these constraints such as with the creation of small opera companies or as in the Münster biennale which seeks to tie together a series of smaller shows spread across the city into a dispersed blockbuster.

Similar trends are happening with classical music with many orchestras playing museum like roles as they focus on the traditional repertoire within accepted settings. Troupes such as Ensemble Contemporaine in Paris are an instance of creating non-traditional sounds or QO2 which mix and match the classical with DJ type music - a crossover that is attracting new audiences.

Another instance of typical activity associated with cultural institutions that is escaping the traditional framework is Utopian Nights in London. This represents a mixture of workplace and culture space, of seminar, food event, and exhibition, of the rebirth and recasting of the salon and the campfire. An English design-firm, Interbrand Newell and Sorrell, started ten years ago a program of bringing in a variety of people to speak to their staff about a passion they felt for some activity. This was transformed into a public event, with an invited guest list of 200 from a variety of "stations in life." It has become one of the most desirable invitations in London. The programs happen five times a year and are keyed to an in house exhibition and a party with food linked to the guest's talk. School teachers and cabinet ministers mingle in a community that has come to build its own dynamic. The unapologetic goal of the evenings is "inspiration."

An example too is the dining and debating club boom seen particularly in London and Paris. In London a number of clubs were founded in recent years - the Boisdale, the Maverick, the Asylum and in Paris the philosopher cafes are on the rise again. They are a reinvention of the Parisian salon, somewhere between a dinner party and a think tank offering the intellectual formality of the lecture with the informality of the pub chat. Traditional clubs they argue were for people who agreed with each other, yet the new tend to be for the opposite reason. The idea is not to win arguments, but to stimulate debate. 'The trick of the new dining

clubs is to combine enough structure to distinguish themselves from a night down the pub, with sufficient informality to distinguish themselves from traditional clubs'. A similar notion can be seen in the rise of the Buddha Bar phenomenon in Paris. This is now a brand and a destination as a bar, a meeting place and a music venue as well as a record label initiated by Claude Challe. Their growing series a double CD's called Buddha Bar which promote a distinct form of world music in addition act as a global branding device for the Buddha Bar concept.

The qualities of quality

Judging quality in terms of culture is out of fashion yet strangely when we buy a commercial product or service from the mundane to the special we focus on their characteristics of quality as a matter of course. If someone goes into a shop to buy sausages they feel perfectly comfortable about grading them according to price, perceived taste, ingredients, look and quality. The same is true when buying a piece of furniture like a bed or chair, we assess then the design, appropriateness for purpose and skill with which they have been put together. Equally we have no fear in recommending someone to read a good book.

In contrast the quality debate has nearly been eradicated in terms of what happens in cultural institutions such as museums or art galleries. Judgement for the last two decades has centred around the context within which works of art were produced. For example, in art history since the 1970's the radical contextual agenda has diminished the idea that one work of art could be better than another. There was a protest against the notion of a trained eye. There has been more concern about looking at the conditions under which an artwork was made in relation to its time or communal origins rather than looking at what happens between the viewer and work of art. Ours has been an era of extreme relativism where anything goes buttressed by the democratic idea that everyone can do things equally well. This is not to argue that making art at whatever level does not provide an enriching experience and has a variety of positive impacts for the maker or participant, but people do send their children to a drawing class to get better. Furthermore even when judging works of art or performance in terms of context one can still be better executed than another. There must be a middle position between absolute relativism and establishing rigid quality standards whether this be a pop song, a piece of modern classical music or a theme park ride. There is a spectrum within which processes of judgement occur.

Every type of object or performance has a set of qualities for which those used to assessing will try to develop a common language. This will not be the same for all works of art from a theatre performance to a community arts project or a crafted basket although some criteria may be common. For example its utility and use value, materials used, how it is made or performed, the meaning generated, craftsmanship, symbolic value or in relation to the visual forms that inhabit a culture. It is the discussion of these attributes that makes and develops a culture.

The real and live versus the virtual and the fake

One would expect the original object or place to have a greater aura as they play on the historical imagination. Seeing the original generates a different level of frisson it is argued. The original can have a sense of survival and the patina of ages inscribed in it. The same is true for live performances which *engage* in that their experiential quality is often heightened through the tension and fragility exuded as artists perform as well as its impermanence as you have to catch it when it happens and you cannot play it back. A CD can reproduce 'perfect' sound yet live theatre or music adds a qualitatively different experience part of which is to do with the occasion of going out as well as its public dimension. The best of the original or live is probably better than the virtual or reproduced. The argument between the two can, however, be overdone. We do not have a problem about a buying a CD or looking at images in books. But looked at in a museum or gallery such replicas as a postcard or poster of a picture or virtual reality representations of objects do not resonate sufficiently. The judgement lies in the range of registers an object or performance generates and the expectations we bring to the place we encounter or experience them.

'Fake' or 'inauthentic' sounds derogatory, yet if fakes or powerful copies are done purposively they can move us more than the original. Indeed an element of theatricality may be required to trigger imagination. It may be that greater authenticity lies in the quality of the experience constructed and transmitted than in the presentation of the surviving remnant, which can not transmit original meaning as well.

A contrast

If we contrast the experience of the holocaust in the 'real' Auschwitz with the Holocaust Museum in Washington or the Imperial War Museum's exhibition in London some of these issues are highlighted. Auschwitz is now part of Oswiecim

with local apartment blocks abutting the site. Two iconic moments are particularly powerful as their image has been etched into world imagination. The first is the sign 'Arbeit macht frei' ('work makes you free') above the entrance to the more self-contained and complete original site where Jews, gypsies and political detainees were led to their ultimate death. The mounds of old shoes, spectacles, hair and day-to-day objects elicit easily a tearful response. The ordinariness of the buildings, the empty small rooms where inmates were tortured to death in unspeakable ways combined with the banality of bureaucratic notices cannot fail to affect the visitor. The imagination needs little to trigger its sense of despair and terror. Equally powerful are the gates and watchtower at the entrance of site two nearby in Birkenau where trains arrived – an immediately recognizable symbol. For the rest the Polish government has left the site largely as it found it in 1945 and here the visitor struggles somewhat to reconstruct for themselves and to get the sense of horror that inmates experienced.

The Holocaust Museum in Washington is a contrast and an instance of a museum created from the beginning as a means of constructing an experience for the visitor, rather than having objects or the original as its principal focus. The museum depends for its narrative story on its architecture, use of light and sound to create an all-encompassing experience. As you enter you are given a pass which identifies you with a concentration camp inmate, and thus the strategy presented is principally theatrical rather than a didactic presentation of a collection and it is done with a powerful sense of historical symbolism trying to re-create a collective memory. It seeks to envelop people in an unusual atmosphere trying to engender feelings of loneliness, helplessness, a visceral involvement and a hint of panic as a means of being 'a resonator of memory'. It does so by leading people down a prescribed path deepening people's involvement along the way as they become immersed in the constructed experience of being a Jew under Nazism. One highpoint is the three storey Tower of Faces with photographs of the over 3000 Jews slaughtered in Eishishok in Lithuania – a community that had lived there for over 900 years. The tension finally has the possibility of being released in the Hall of Remembrance.

Whilst you do not get the powerful sense of the original this careful reconstruction allows Washington to develop a richer, more inclusive, chronological narrative tying different components of the holocaust experience together which Auschwitz as the original does not. They are equally 'good' or even authentic in their own way.

The Imperial War Museum also has a substantial holocaust exhibition as part of its broader displays on war. Whilst like Auschwitz and Washington it has mounds of shoes and day-to-days objects Jews had to give up, its resonance is weakened by being one exhibition amongst many in a museum. It thus feels less enveloping. The historical narrative is conveyed more than the authentic experience. The Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles is also centred on the holocaust, yet provides an experience that is overwhelmed by the conscious use of 'clever' technology and an abstracted message of universal tolerance that preaches rather than moves one to visceral indeed iconic understanding.

The post-modernist might argue that all experience is equally valid yet in terms of triggering experiential registers there seem to be gradations, which do not question the validity of secondary reproduction. Scholarly work is studied in reproduction and in terms of access the web has a democratic role, whose experience may be enough yet perhaps also lead to the desire to see or touch the original

Media arts

Technology does more than ease communication or allow us to gather and transmit data. It transforms the media and art-forms themselves and the nature of communications. The multimedia revolution is generating unlimited capacity into the home creating passports to a new mediated world that is becoming uniformly accessible without our ever leaving the armchair. It alters too the ways in which people perceive participation, actively or passively, by promoting a different, profound interactivity. And by inviting participation it can inspire creativity. The focus on open networking generates a new form of networking capacity that not only changes access to cultural experiences or institutions, but can become a replacement for them. Using technology is indeed a leisure pursuit in its own right. Technology too is the enabler of convergence and boundary blurring between art-forms, as was in its time photography or film, and interactive web-sites are already being treated as works of art. Internet communications are driven by organizations such as Time Warner which are hubs of this new world with the English language as a dominant communications medium creating many cross-cultural problems as over 70% of web-sites are in English. Problems even include colour, in China, for example, red means going

forward whilst in the West it means 'stop' or 'warning' and has a negative connotation.

New forms of cultural institutions focused on technology are emerging such as Arts Electronica in Linz or the Centre for Arts and Media Technology in Karlsruhe which create novel settings for technology driven arts. The latter centre has more than 48,000 square metres of usable space, housed in a former munitions factory. It houses in addition to a Media Museum, an Institute for Visual Media, an Institute of Media and Acoustics, a media library, a media theatre, a Museum for Contemporary Art and, under different direction, the State Academy of Design and the Municipal Gallery of the City of Karlsruhe. It seeks to be a hub of a new urban quarter where inter-action and inter-trading will occur. "Touring the Media Museum is like roaming an electronic theme park, a futuristic playground for grown-ups where miniature theatres, videos and oversize images morph, dance, respond to questions and urge visitors along on fictive journeys.....Though many of the installations ask hard questions about serious issues, the museum simply brushes aside the barrier between art and entertainment.....Artists are invited to establish long term residence in the labs.....experimenting in sound as well the visual context. . . . the media arts have created the first global arts scene. . . just about everyone in the field knows everyone else." (NY Times 14/2/99)

The concept of Sci~art is another development that challenges traditional institutions with organizations such as the Media Lab at MIT at the forefront of thinking. It is based on the premise that the most fruitful developments in human thinking frequently take place at those points where different lines of creativity meet such as that of scientists, technologists and artists. It now promises to extend beyond its small beginnings to become a catalyst for generating products and services for the future either artistic or commercial. The British Sci~art competition programme has generated nearly 1000 collaborations between scientists and artists creating forms of art, often housed in university institutions, and its success has exceeded initial expectations.

Sci~art has enabled a common core of knowledge and creativity to be shared by scientists and artists. For example, 'pattern' is an idea where both science and art demand the discovery of a partially concealed pattern. This is a common denominator. In turn the discovery of pattern is design. Everyone designs who devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones. Technology becomes a shared language of understanding; logical processes

need to be engaged in order to address the central issue of design – that is how things ought to be and devising artefacts to attain specific goals.

An inclusive culture

Dealing with diversity, difference and distinctiveness by creating dialogue is one of the key issues of the 21st century – and there is a key role for cultural institutions and cultural programmes in making spaces for conversation between differing groups. Addressing the divides between the diverse and the different, the included and excluded is now recognized a more urgent political and social question. Cultural institutions as public spaces, which belong to us all have a responsibility as to who does and who does not feel part of cultural activities or institutions. More often than not the term is a shorthand for poverty - an indicator of social exclusion rather than its cause. Another view sees the marginalisation of people and groups as a more or less deliberate result of how majority groups in society organise and operate. The cause then becomes the responsibility of society as a whole.

Our concepts of cultural equity have not changed significantly over the past thirty years, though practice has undoubtedly evolved and improved. Initiatives still tend to be developed according to one of two concepts. The more common is the access principle which underlies initiatives designed to encourage more people from poorer social groups or ethnic backgrounds to take up the existing cultural offer. This represents a renewed commitment to post-war concepts of the democratisation of culture as it potentially expands audiences and revenues yet programming itself is not affected, coinciding with existing cultural interests. The alternative tries to use cultural programmes to address the symptoms of social exclusion, including health, crime, unemployment and so on, by using cultural programming instrumentally to achieve non-cultural objectives and within which the community arts sector has been a leader

There are, however, significant weaknesses to both approaches. Although the access principle has, for example, underpinned British cultural policy since 1945, there is little evidence that it has had much impact on audience profiles, which have tended simply to reflect the changing character of society over that period.

By locating cultural deprivation, if there is such a thing, in those who are thought to experience it, rather than as the direct result of the way society organizes

cultural activity, access and anti-poverty initiatives only alleviate the symptoms of cultural inequity. The causes remain untouched. Cultural institutions are involved in the creation and protection of values, but whose? If people feel on the margins by the way majority interests operate, we must at least ask whether the cultural system however unconsciously, contributes to that process. Does everyone have an equal stake in their museum, library or gallery in the sense of being able to contribute to how it represents them and their community. Do public cultural institutions today reflect all the people of their locality? Did they ever? Is the reality that they reflect the values, identity and interests of one group at the expense of marginalising difference, minority cultures or dissent?

When public funds are involved a sustainable response to the challenge must be a cultural one arising from the heart of institutions' values and purpose, rather than an additional, project-based approach which can only address symptoms. Cultural inclusion is about our right to be full, culturally self-determining members of a democratic society. It implies people participating actively in cultural decision-making and having access to the resources to create and the platforms to present their own work. Cultural inclusion implies allowing people to comment on, even rewrite the stories which museums or others tell us about ourselves. This touches on the multi-cultural and inter-cultural agenda, which is a relatively common experience at the level of individual consumption of food, music or the purchase of crafts objects, but less so elsewhere. It does not displace the curator, artist, educator or other cultural professional: it invites them to rethink how their gifts and experience can be opened to genuine partnership and within an open conversation. It means working towards institutions whose interpretation of culture, value and history are not relativist but dynamic, aware of the tensions between perspectives within contemporary society and more important to it as a result. It means forging new hybrid cultural identities which secure our shared values beyond commercial and political interests while celebrating passion, debate and diversity. Cultural inclusion is defined by the quality of communication, engagement and creative activity and rather than who controls the cultural object.⁹

A compelling example of a cultural institution coming to terms with new notions of participation, new concepts of knowledge generation, and new presentation styles to accommodate historically excluded communities is the National Museum of the American Indian at the Smithsonian Institution which has opened in stages

⁹ This section is based on the work of Francois Mataraso

and plans to open its flagship museum within 2-3 years. At the core of the museum is the premise that Native American ways of knowledge about objects and other forms of cultural meaning are no less valid than those of anthropology (whose insights continue to be respected). Under its remarkable director, Richard West, the Museum aims for the inclusion of a multiplicity of Native American and non-Native American perspectives in a meeting place of culture, memory, knowledge, and strategies of human survival.

The role of the artist

What is the role of the artist in this new configuration? Over time this has shifted. At some point their role was to glorify their patrons and later as the artist achieved a more independent status their role transformed as they emerged more as critics, visionaries, and entertainers. Their relationship to institutions changed too with institutions providing the platform for their work. Indeed it would be artists who often ran institutions such as theatres or galleries. Yet as the management ethos has taken hold and economic priorities have been fore-fronted with their emphasis on performance indicators such as audience reach a different type of institutional leader has emerged whose task is often to promote and market the economically sound. The artist's role has diminished at the expense of visionary skills. The battle between the visionary and marketable can be seen too in the running of festivals such as the year long European City of Culture events or Edinburgh, Adelaide or Charleston where a continuous tension exists as to which role to give prominence. To complicate matters further artists increasingly work in commercial contexts as an integral part of the creative industries in their own right as performers or as makers of objects. They are often commissioned as well by shopping centres, property developers or leisure operators to add artistic value of their endeavours.

The jury is out as to whether these commercial experiments serve artistic or cultural values. An instance is the acclaimed landmark and hugely successful British Bluewater Shopping Centre in Dartford developed by the Australian company Lend Lease, one of the world's largest developers. Here stone and metal carved historic themes are infused throughout the centre on balustrades, friezes, plinths or as part of faccias or fountains seeking to add depth and a thematic drive to the shopping experience. The images show a baker, a welder, hatmakers, coopers and all kinds of making activities that no longer exist in a retail environment as well as uplifting poems projecting an image of nostalgia for a world long gone. Incorporated too is a branch of the Natural History Museum

providing a dinosaur experience as well as a learning centre and even a coffee shop intersperses its muzac with rapid bursts of Italian language lessons. The intention of Lend Lease is to lift aspiration while the overall atmosphere remains one of selling.

From learned to learner

Where do we go from here and what attitudes to ourselves should we adopt as individuals and organizations? A clarion call might to acknowledge that: 'In times of drastic change it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists' (Eric Hoffer). The future challenge may be to go one step further and for us to try to be both simultaneously.

The kind of person increasingly valued is less someone who is deemed historically cultured and civilized and more someone judged imaginative, inventive, a creator of new possibilities. Creativity as the central part of learning is seen as the way to apply knowledge and skills in new ways to achieve valued goals. We have thus moved from valuing judgement to valuing processes, whereby the culture of inquiry is more important than the outcome – a mode of inquiry based on trust; freedom of action; varying the contexts, networks and connections. Yet creativity and learning on their own tell us nothing about beliefs, goals and aspirations. The abstract concept 'creativity' as distinct from the word creation or to create was first coined by Albert North Whitehead in 1927 to denote a realm of freedom and liberation.

A creative environment creates the conditions for learning. Learning needs to move centrestage, it is argued, to secure future well-being especially in a period of rapid, yet consistent social transformation. Thereby individuals can continue to develop their adaptive skills and capacities; organisations and institutions can recognise how to harness the potential of those they work with and be able to respond flexibly and imaginatively to the resulting opportunities, difficulties and emerging needs. A learning society, it is said, understands that the diversity and differences between communities can become a source of enrichment, understanding and potential. Such a society is much more than a society whose members are simply well educated; it goes well beyond merely learning in the classroom. It is a place where the idea of learning infuses every tissue and where individuals and organisations are encouraged to learn about the dynamics of

where they live and how it is changing; a place which on that basis changes the way it learns whether through schools or any other institution that can help can foster understanding and knowledge; a place in which all its members are encouraged to learn; finally and perhaps most importantly a place that can learn to change the conditions of its learning, democratically.

A learner thus is someone who develops by learning from experiences and those of others, who understands themselves and reflects upon that understanding - a 'reflexive person'. The question remains: Is learning on its own enough? The learning process, like creativity, tells us nothing about what should be learned or what quality is. It is here that we need to re-learn to make judgements.

The boundary of measurement

In a world of measurement those who define the measures control priorities, define content and outcomes. It is incumbent upon cultural institutions to redefine the realm of measurement in their own terms so they can shape their standards of impact and success. These might include: what is quality, inspiration, insight, levels of experience, the capacity to explore or understand? Economic measurements of value such as attendance figures, surveys on satisfaction or profitability, set up a false opposition between 'giving the people what they want' and the goal of the cultural community to introduce experience and insight that visitors do not yet know that they want until confidently presented to them. This battle is reducing culture or simplifying it, whilst it should be defining itself beyond its instrumental role. It threatens also to dismiss culture that is not conceived only as market-driven or social-results driven as anti-democratic. The British Ministry of Culture, as an instance, is afraid to say what culture is and what it values, focusing more on what culture can do for you, its priorities being access, equality and educative impact. In the older notions of culture and cultural institutions typical marketplace indicators were not relevant - culture said of itself 'it is and that speaks for itself'. The issue was not how many people came to an event, but what it represented. By rethinking evaluation to consider how we measure quality and qualities performance indicators are enriched even effecting measurement techniques in general. Quality can be measured. The challenge is to quantify the qualitative so allowing deeper questions about the nature of the experience of a cultural institution.

As David Yankelovich the renowned American pollster noted: 'The first step is to measure whatever can be easily measured. This is okay as far as it goes. The second step is to disregard that which can't be measured or give it an arbitrary value. This is artificial and misleading. The third step is to presume what can't be measured isn't really important. This is blindness. The fourth step is to say that what can't be easily measured really doesn't exist. This is suicide!'

Preserve the best reinvent the rest

Many of our cultural institutions developed in the 19th century with 19th century ideals and approaches. Their buildings exuded a message and an image of themselves. Often responding to the classical legacy many looked like temples with daunting Corinthian columns projecting a sense of awe and distance between institution and citizenry – think of the New York Public Library, the British Museum or the Pergamon in Berlin. They were citadels of knowledge inviting the citizenry in under certain conditions. Their primary focus was the collection with curatorial expertise its focus rather than the needs of an audience.

Underlying their existence was also an ideal of self-improvement for visitors, which took a particular form, such as standards of behaviour, a taxonomic categorization of knowledge and an acceptance of unchallenged authority.

Some of these values hold good today, yet its forms may need re-assessing. For example, building styles in a democratic age are more open, accessible and permeable with the use of transparent materials such as glass. The Swedes refer to their public libraries as public living rooms, highlighting comfort, convenience and ease of use. The prize winning libraries in Wellington in New Zealand by Ian Acland, or in Peckham South London by Will Alsop and in the Hague by Richard Meier are examples of this genre.

The language of self-improvement has equally evolved away from its self-righteous worthy feel with a hint of school marmishness, allowing little self-expression and accepting the acknowledged canon. Creating conditions for empowerment, providing opportunities for fulfilment and engagement are terms now used expressing the mood of the times. The self-improving social purpose remains but is framed in terms of bridging the gap between the information rich and information poor or tackling the digital divide with a focus on technique. An example is the Lasipalatsi cyber-library in Helsinki.

Yet language matters in other ways. For example to express the library ambition largely in terms of information focuses exclusively on its utilitarian role to the exclusion of wider purposes, such as exploration, discovery and the gaining of insight. Similarly the London borough of Tower Hamlets is re-configuring its libraries as Ideas Stores with the commercial language of purchase of knowledge creeping in. The focus on the core browsing function of libraries embodying within it a sense of hitting upon the unknown or to be transformed is being eroded.

How institutions communicate has changed too. The hierarchical unified canon of knowledge is under siege by multi-cultural understandings and there is an increased understanding that there is good in the popular as in the high and that not all 'high culture' is by definition of the highest quality.

A Final Note

This little book proposes some big questions we can't pretend to have answered, and raises some big issues we can't pretend to have full defined. Yet the reader will sense that these are not presented as mere "provocations." We two trans-Atlantic colleagues share a sense of urgency rather than an interest in discourse for its own sake. In a process that the Brit Charles Landry would call 'ding dong' and the American Marc Pachter 'give and take,' we have tried to do ourselves what we advocate for the cultural community in general: unpack assumptions, avoid posturing, exchange worries, confusions, insights, and even revelatory moments.

We do all this because we genuinely believe that cultural institutions are at a crossroads comparable to that faced by the environmentalist movement some four decades ago. The conditions under which we operate are changing, not only in the availability of resources, but in the expectations placed upon us. In response we in the cultural community have too often been reactors rather than actors, retreating to old certainties and snobberies in some cases or asking how high to jump in others. If we have values we need to interpret them for our times, if we have our own ways of contributing to the well-being of society we need to assert them.

Culture is not a "soft" sector. It is not the luxury we afford ourselves after the serious business of society has been transacted. It exists at the most

fundamental level of human need. But to be effective, culture, in its organized form, needs to ask hard questions of itself. It can neither sniff at those who presume to challenge or measure its value nor build a fortress around outmoded notions, formats, and practices.

We hope we have kick-started that discussion.

References

This is not a bibliography but a listing of a number of books we have found useful and stimulating.

Hickey, Dave (1997) *Air Guitar: Essays in Art and Democracy*, Distributed Arts Publishers, New York

Iyer, Pico (2000) *The Global Soul: Jet Lag, Shopping Malls and the Search for Home*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London

Karp, Ivan (1991) *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C.

Staniszewski, Mary A. (1998) *The Power of Display: a History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.

Steiner, George (2001) *Grammars of Creation*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn.

Taylor, Gary (1996), *Cultural Selection: Why Achievements survive the Test of Time – and others don't*, Basic Books, New York

Varedoe, Kirk and Gopnik, Adam (1988) *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture*, Harry Abrams, New York

Young, James E. (1994) *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn.

CV's

Charles Landry founded Comedia in 1978. During that time he has undertaken numerous projects concerned with revitalising public, social and economic life through cultural activity in over 20 countries. He is regarded as an authority on city futures and the use of culture in revitalization; cultural planning and heritage issues. He has written or co-written ten books including most recently 'The Creative City: A toolkit for urban innovators' published in May 2000 to widespread acclaim. He has lectured widely in Europe, the USA, Australia and Africa and has presented over 90 keynote addresses.

Marc Pachter is the Director of the American National Portrait Gallery and Acting Director of the National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C. His 27 year career at the Smithsonian has included work as Chief Historian of the National Portrait Gallery and oversight, for ten years, of the Smithsonian Institution's external affairs, both national and international. Pachter, whose interest in the future of cultural institutions led to the creation of a forum sponsored by the Getty and the British Museum, recently served as Chair of the session on "Museums in the 21st Century" held in May, 2001 at the Salzburg Seminar and will deliver a Slade lecture at Oxford on the museum as a sacred place in February, 2002.

COMEDIA is a policy research and development agency seeking to think creatively about culture and cities. It advises decision-makers by working in multi-disciplinary teams and with associated organizations drawing on a wide network of specialists and linking local people with international thinkers and practitioners. It has worked in over 30 countries in 5 continents. Comedia has six programme themes focusing on: the development of creative cities and creative urban milieux; the social impact of the arts; the future of public libraries and the development of the idea of the informed citizen; the role of public parks and public space; the future of the non-profit sector and the viability and vitality of cities.



Recent Comedia publications

The Creative City: A toolkit for urban innovators

Draws on examples from around the world to set out a new radical vision for cities, with creative solutions to their problems. *'The Creative City will be one of the key urban texts of the next decade. It is a truly millennial book and shows how new modes of thinking can help regenerate cities facing the challenge of survival.'* - Sir Peter Hall, Bartlett Professor of Planning, University College, London.

Charles Landry, 300 pages A5 £17.95

Resourcing Culture: Briefing Papers on Culture and Development

Culture is increasingly recognized as crucial to sustainable human development because it is our cultural values which determine our goals and sense of fulfilment. Development processes which fail to recognize and which simplistically divide peoples resources from their aspirations or their health from how they feel struggle to produce lasting improvements. If we are to meet the challenges of the new century we will have to engage with development in the context and through the medium of human cultures.

Edited by Francois Matarasso Contributors include: Carol Steinberg, Helen Gould, Kit Grauer, Yohanna Loucheur, Danielle Cliché, Nestor Garcia Canclini. 96 pages A4 £10 2001

The Richness of Cities

The final report of this acclaimed new study (with 12 associated working papers) signals a radical new way of thinking about urban policy. It celebrates the power of modern cities to act a crucibles of innovative solutions to the great economic, social and environmental issues of our time. **Final Report**

Liz Greenhalgh & Ken Worpole, 72 pages A4 £15 1999

Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts

This major report looks at the impact of participation in arts activities at local level, drawing on dozens of projects from the Western Isles to Portsmouth, and beyond the UK. The report reveals the vital role they play in the life of communities of all kinds contributing directly to their skills base, long-term confidence and viability. It argues for recognition of their value by Government, local authorities and other bodies concerned with social development. It also argues that the publicly-funded arts world should take greater account of its social responsibilities, and seek to work actively with social policy partners.

François Matarasso 120 pp. A4 £20 1997

Innovative and Sustainable Cities

An assessment survey and evaluation of over 500 urban innovations and best practices from over 20 countries in Europe, covering environmental, social, business and cultural initiatives to complete a six year study by the European Foundation for Living and Working Conditions. Includes a taxonomy of urban innovations.

Sir Peter Hall & Charles Landry, 113 pages A4 £15 1998

Learning development

Draws on new research into the impact of libraries on personal and community development in the context of current issues such as education and learning, employment, families and young people, poverty, health, social inclusion, local democracy and culture. The report is a short and readable introduction. While library professionals will find it a useful pointer to new research, it will help elected members, professionals in other services and students to gain a broader understanding of public libraries.

François Matarasso, 72 pages A5 £6, 1998

Beyond book issues: the social potential of library projects

Reviews projects submitted to the Holt Jackson/Library Association Community Initiative awards to assess the extent to which these projects produce social benefits. It finds substantial outcomes for personal and community development, concluding that library projects and outreach work have a valuable role to play in community growth. The study concludes that the existing library performance indicators are an inadequate management tool for the library of the 21st century, given its educational, leisure and community development functions.

François Matarasso, 60 pages A4 £15, 1998

Parklife: urban parks and social renewal

Recently described as 'a report which will change forever our perception of urban parks and open spaces within our towns and cities', Park Life covers every conceivable aspect of the crisis facing the funding, management, and use of open space in Britain's towns and cities. Details of the 12 park working papers published in 1996 are available on request.

Liz Greenhalgh & Ken Worpole, £20 1997

All publications available through:

Eco-Distribution

Crosswell,

Eglywswrwr,

Pembrokeshire,

SA41 3TE

0123 989 1431

jill.chandler@virgin.net

The discussions on which 'Culture at the Crossroads' is based were one of the most stimulating occasions I have experienced, provoking deep thought about how culture has changed in the last half century and how cultural institutions have — and should — be responding to such changes.

Charles Saumarez Smith, director of the National Portrait Gallery, London

" The right questions must be asked first before we begin to search for new answers. 'Culture at the Crossroads' is a valuable contribution to further the debate about culture and the need to define the critical dilemmas we face. "

Bob Palmer, former director of the European City of Culture in Glasgow 1990 and Brussels 2000

Cultural institutions are in a dilemma. They have to make difficult decisions about what is important and what is not, what is ephemeral and what is not, what needs protecting and what should be left to look after itself. Those decisions will change the future by shaping our understanding of who we are and what we take seriously. This important book is about that process - and the choices we can make in it.

Brian Eno

First published in the UK in 2001 by Comedia

Copyright © Marc Pachter and Charles Landry

All rights reserved

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 1 837667 13 2

Comedia,

The Round, Bournes Green

Near Stroud, GL6 7NL, UK

e-mail charleslandry@comedia.org.uk

<http://www.comedia.org.uk>

Printed and bound by Da Costa Print/The Book Factory
Pims House, Mildmay Avenue,
London N1 4RS

This and other Comedia publications available through

Eco-Distribution

Crosswell,

Eglywswrw,

Pembrokeshire,

SA41 3TE

0123 989 1431

jill.chandler@virgin.net