

## OVERVIEW

The idea here is to examine what we mean when we use the terms art and culture and to look at how these terms have become interchangeable for many people, not least policy makers and funders. The question is who defines these terms and for whom? And what role does and should art and culture play in our lives and what purpose the actions taken in the name of art and culture fulfil (or could/should fulfil) in society. These terms are bandied about and interchanged continuously, without reflection or understanding. Yet, in both theory and practice, art and culture have different and powerful roles to play in recognising and developing who we are and what we can be. In short, culture is our most important and shared experience as human beings and art is one of the many outcomes of culture. How they are understood is vital to empowered ownership of the future and to freedom of expression for the creation and understanding of that future. The desired outcomes of this understanding are equality, empathy, progressive change and nothing less than the shift from creating a future that is devastating to one of hope. The first step towards this horizon is one of understanding the issues and then to debate the challenges and finally to act and work for change. This section gives different perspectives on what is a wide and complex topic but the underlying objective is to at least raise some important perspectives and to state clearly that culture is not the preserve of the arts world and, indeed, that art is in the service of culture; that arts and culture are not separate from the rest of society and that the way arts and culture are currently managed and developed represents a failure to recognize their importance, as both can be and are areas of both liberation and of oppression. And it is at the borders of this struggle for cultural equality and liberation that the future is decided. I (the editor) contribute an essay myself in this section, endeavouring to clarify the terms 'art and culture' and calling for a re-evaluation of how we value, approach and work with art and with culture. Patrycja Kaszynska shines a spotlight on arts and culture as values-driven and what she finds is a complex and multi-layered issue but suggests an approach called 'assembling' that could help liberate the useful from this complexity. Goran Tomka and Višnja Kisić challenge the notion of 'independent culture' and point to interdependence as the way forward. Then, l'Asilo is a living and working example of an organisation who see culture as the fundamental aspect of society that it is.

Fanni Nánay goes deeply into the current situation experienced by Eastern and Central European countries. Using Poland and Hungary as examples, she shows how ideology plays a big part in nationalism. How the emotional vs the rational and the enemy becomes any activity that is not the government. Of how culture is manipulated to create symbolic identification against a manufactured threat. Tunde Adefioye highlights the European colonial legacy and how this is very much still part of both conscious and subconscious thinking when it comes to power relations and their outcomes. Bethany Rex explores the search for a European culture and the vexed question of shared identities and how cultural policy around funding and business models reflect this. Milena Dragičević Šešić highlights how civil society development has been pushed towards the alternative strategies of business models, using the southeast of Europe as an example.

## THE ART AND CULTURE DICHOTOMY

*"It is at the austerity barricades and refugee frontiers that cultural equality vs cultural imperialism is in contest"*

SANDY FITZGERALD

The word 'art' is a noun, an adjective and a verb, all at the same time (for instance 'art song or art film' or to 'art something up'). It comes from the Latin 'artem', the Middle English 'art' and the Old French 'art'. The first known record of the word appears in 13<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts, but it is believed to have been in use much earlier, at least from the founding of Rome. It was used to describe human workmanship, that of a skill or practice, basically a craft.

The word culture also has many uses and can be a noun and a verb and also has a Latin antecedent in the word 'cultura', originally meaning 'cultivating' in Latin only to later, in mid-15<sup>th</sup> century Middle English, signify 'the tilling of land and preparing the earth for crops'. From the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, this has evolved over time to mean 'grow, nurture and cultivate' human development and to encapsulate all human activity and output derived from its creativity and ingenuity.

These two words are obviously different in meaning and usage, but by the middle of the 1990s they had become interchangeable as descriptions of the tag used to define both a practice, a process and a product. How this came about can be traced to a struggle for European influence between the United Kingdom and France (Brexit anyone?), from the time the UK joined the Common Market (EEC) in 1973. Originally the language, institutions and direction of the EEC were dominated by France and this included describing artistic and creative activity as cultural. For instance, 'cultural centre' instead of 'arts centre' and 'cultural department' instead of 'arts council' (see the Art Council of England establishment in 1946 and the French Ministry of Cultural Affairs established in 1959). This came to a head in the 1980s when French Minister for Culture Jack Lang squared off to the US and England, who were both pursuing a neoliberal agenda under Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher respectively (if not respectfully). This art and culture war was represented by Reagan and Thatcher on one side championing successful art product produced by their countries, with Lang on the other side advocating for cultural democracy. Then people started to use both terms (not least the European Union, in that institution's great tradition of trying to keep everyone on board), so as to include different perspectives or just to be inclusive, and they became interchangeable.

This has led to confusion, a diffusion of the potential of both art and culture and, worse, support for the notion of 'price' over 'value', to paraphrase Oscar Wilde, when it comes to the cultural and creative industries. If this was only a matter of commodifying the art world, then it would be no more or less than another market economy triumph, but the importance of culture and the central role it plays in human development makes its marginalisation and obfuscation a matter of grave concern.

As is intimated in its original definition, culture is everything that we create as human beings. It is what we manifest in the world outside of nature. In short, it is the construction of what we call 'life' and this creating of culture is the part of our existence that we potentially have control over, as opposed to nature. This leads us to the very important question of how we want to live our lives and develop our futures. Art, for its part, is one of the many outcomes of culture and, at the same time, a tool for constructing culture along with science, politics, religion, economics and all of the other cultural manifestations created by us humans. The fundamental question is one of cultural empowerment and how much of an investment and ownership we have in creating the future and this is where the battle lines are drawn in the cultural wars, not in the marginalized struggles about arts funding. It is at the austerity barricades and refugee frontiers that cultural equality vs cultural imperialism is in contest and it is at such critical interfaces that the future will be created. And the word 'created' must be emphasised here because, like an artwork, we do create the future, from abstract into reality. It is a blank canvas and like a canvas you can create anything you wish in and on that space. Everything can change, if you decide to change it, by making ideas manifest in the real world. And this is what conservative politicians and those who want power for its own sake are afraid of. If people are empowered by the thought of creating their future, then you can begin to see why self-empowerment and creativity might be threatening to a controlling cabal.

The replacement for cultural empowerment is the dominant philosophy of our time, consumerism, a pursuit that is so all-persuasive that it now informs *and* represents culture for most people. Which leaves the development of culture, defined as art, to a small elite, neutralising any possibility of a shared culture and making creative expression exclusive and a hierarchy of the anointed. That art has been defined as culture, and then both are marginalized, means that the humanizing and empowerment roles of creativity and culture as developmental tools have not been removed by accident. It has been policy for a very long time, indeed since the introduction of democracy, as one way of mitigating the threat of democracy to those who want to dominate and profit from resources, people and the sources of power.

There is a famous quote attributed to various Nazis, which says 'whenever I hear the word culture, I reach for my revolver'. In reality, this is a line from a play by Hanns Johst, an officially-approved writer of the Third Reich. This short attribution holds a wealth of revelations when trying to understand the definition, role and purpose of art and culture. Firstly, it signals the central importance of culture in politics and how, over many generations, the very idea of culture was seen as a threat and has been suppressed. Secondly, artists have a major role to play in defining culture and influencing major social change, for good or ill. The arts deal in emotions. It is through song and story that societies find their purpose and strength: the powerful images of Leni Riefenstahl; the murals of Belfast; the

music of Bob Dylan. The election of Donald Trump and the Brexit outcome, plus the rise of nationalism, xenophobia and racism, is not rational. None of this is based on facts or reality. It is the result of feelings, of emotions, of fear, or anger or even love. Which means artists should have a major role in society and, consequently, have major responsibilities. But only if there are clear cultural development policies, framed in a future that takes account of all the aspects of a just and healthy society.

If you still think cultural equality is not an issue and that funding does not play a role in maintaining certain values and hierarchies, take a look at how radical actions for cultural change are responded to by funders, be they town halls, regional and national governments or private foundations or sponsors. The private donors we can dismiss because, in a way, they are the most transparent and usually have a clear agenda, be that promoting a product or a particular point of view. But the governmental agencies are opaque and policy papers and decisions are often vague and open-ended, though there are a number of constants: the 'signature' artist should be at the centre of the activity; no political content; a sensitivity to prevailing morality; an emphasis on the product and not the process; recognition by a range of 'experts' in the worth of the venture (critics, artistic peers, other funding agencies, revered institutions), increasing the status or profile of a country and its leaders. Take all of this together and what you have is a maintaining of the establishment, and the more extreme the establishment, the more 'maintenance' it carries out. Any perceived threat to that establishment will not get funding or support. Radicalism is controlled and drained away through funding. If this doesn't work, the next step is suppression, imprisonment or worse.

There are many examples of the results of this censorship, some through funding mechanisms, others through more robust state intervention: the predominance of the white male artist; the separation of activities into hierarchical categories, e.g. education; popular; amateur; disability; community (with fine art at the top of the hierarchy); segregation into 'types' (why does some work go into an ethnological museum, while 'real' art is shown in a national gallery?); awards and prizes. A cursory look at history will illustrate this point: Augusto Boal, founder of Theatre of the Oppressed, arrested and tortured during the Brazilian dictatorship; Ken Saro-Wiwa, Nigerian writer falsely accused, tried and executed; radical arts movements, such as Dadaism and Surrealism, neutralised by the establishment not by exclusion but by inclusion (money elevated their artistic activism to the status of 'masterpieces', completely destroying their message for change). It is true that radical ideas and egalitarian principles can and do penetrate the system but this is usually despite the policies, not because of them.

Creativity has empowered me and shaped my life. I have witnessed its power at every level in my work in the arts and culture sector of many years. I can attest to the revelation of individuals and communities finding their own voice, empowerment and possibilities through creativity. This is quite often different from the individual artist and their career path, as so much arts funding supports. The problem is not subsidies for artists but the lack of funding for culture and the conscious and unconscious repression of cultural equality. I also find the lack of responsibility of the majority of artists to engage, support and contribute to society and its development perturbing. Joseph Beuys said artists should be the 'sculptors of society' because they are people who have the freedom to change things. And this change must be about participation in culture, 'sculpting' the future, citizens

as activists and creators and not just the passive audience. Augusto Boal said that theatre as we know it today was conceived by ancient rulers as a way of controlling the populace: the passive observers and the actors, the audience and the protagonist. Today this is evident in the overwhelming domination of entertainment and the all-invasive presence of the virtual world. Remember that nothing in this virtual world is real and that this is not only a battle for our hearts and minds but it is, more importantly, a distraction for our consciousness to allow others to operate in the real world. This is cultural domination that we invite into our lives with Orwellian vicissitude.

The problem with the discourse around the economic crash, the terrorist threat and rise of the extreme right, is that the wider cultural context from which they arise is not discussed or understood. The idea that these and other critical problems can be 'fixed' and everything returns to 'normal' is delusion on a grand and dangerous scale. These problems have been a long time coming and are the result of policies and operating systems that date back to the beginning of globalization and the industrial revolution, built on the back of imperialism and slavery, and culture is at the centre of both the calamitous times we live in and a possible solution. In his excellent book 'Beyond Culture', Edward T. Hall says:

*"The answer (to the disastrous situation the world finds itself in) lies not in restricting human endeavors, but in evolving new alternatives, new possibilities, new dimensions, new options, and new avenues for creative uses of human beings based on the recognition of the multiple and unusual talents so manifest in the diversity of the human race"*

In other words, the systematic exclusion and repression of people's input to cultural development (through inequality, consumerism, racism and all the other reductionist approaches), the denial of pluralistic cultural voices in society and the blocking of people's natural creativity, all led by the marginalization of culture, as both a term and an action, and the removal of culture from strategies about

our future, have led us to this cliff-edge moment for our species. We must place culture and not the economy at the centre of finding solutions by coupling funding to outcomes and not having the sustainability (in all senses of the word) debate in isolation from the wider cultural debate. Culture is a collective endeavour for personal and for humanity's enrichment. Its original meaning to till, grow and cultivate is apt as a description of how we might go about nurturing our lives and our world. It is time to change our focus from art to culture and to discuss art in the context of culture.

If we look back at these designations - art and culture - their usage and what has been done in their name, the time seems right not only to redefine and re-appropriate these terms but to also separate both words and their practices. To then reset policies and engage with the holistic possibility for future development that culture offers, supported by not only art but all other disciplines. Social, political and economic approaches need the context of culture to re-examine their role and purpose, culture being nothing less than the creation of the future. A future in which everyone contributes and no one is left behind in the great artwork called life. This is not a utopian view but becomes more and more vital with every day that passes. People must be convinced to use their creativity to build and progress society, rather than their anger, frustration and rage to destroy. If leaders just capitalize on this latter dystopian view, then we are closing down the possibilities of collectively dreaming into reality the promise that our species is obviously capable of. Culture must be democratized and art refocused as creative expression, both essential and both inherent in all human evolution. This is not a new idea but sits in a long tradition of progressive thought that needs continual revisiting and updating, lest it be trampled into dust by the ever-present and primitive need to dominate and subjugate, in favour of the few over the many.

*"The idea of culture rests on a metaphor: the tending of natural growth. And indeed it is on growth, as a metaphor and as a fact, that the ultimate emphasis must be placed."* Culture and Society - Raymond Williams, 1958

