

## **Cities, Arts Institutions and the Intercultural Challenge**

Speaking at the end of a day rich in ideas and perspectives, perhaps I can fix your attention by making a plea and a provocation.

First, a plea to Danish arts institutions and other actors to temper their yearning to 'catch up' with the rest of the world (or with some players in the Western world) in matters of internationalism and/or 'interculturalism'. Of course you have not yet gone very far down this road, but your country's historical experience has been rather different from that of the countries that are seen as leaders in this field. Denmark's cultural sense of itself has been different as well. So your trajectory, while it should indeed be driven by a spirit of openness rather than one of closure, will have to be distinctive. Conforming to a single, so-called 'global' model is a trap many cities and countries fall into, making them lose the very distinctiveness we all prize, as they rush to adopt the same models and methods as everybody else – and end up producing internationalist uniformity instead of variety! So please do continue to forge your own Danish way.

My provocation is to agree with those who believe that 'multiculturalism' has failed! Otherwise why would we be so fond of the term 'intercultural'? My grounds are different, to be sure, from those of the culturally chauvinist or populist politician. There are other good reasons to

abandon the multiculturalist stance, such as the fact that the identity politics that underpins the multiculturalist discourse sees cultures as islands unto themselves precisely when today's interconnections and interdependencies require the stances of the 'inter' and the 'trans'. We need to go beyond recognizing the islands. Instead we need to build bridges, linkages and interactions between people with different cultures. This is what in turn generates the need for the 'interculturalism' to which we now overwhelmingly subscribe and which this conference is designed to promote.

The earlier presentations appear to have taken up two separate, although connected, sets of issues. First, why Denmark's institutions of the high arts lag behind the newly-forged internationalism of the art world, the global scope of today's art scene, marked by important shifts or decenterings of power and new patterns of 'glocalized' art production and reception. The second has been to consider how certain arts institutions within a given country – in our case in particular London's Institute of International Visual Arts (Iniva), but Manifesta as well – are addressing the challenges of serving the needs of culturally-diverse populations and stakeholders.

My focus is on this second set of questions. How can cultural institutions help people rethink notions of identity and belonging? How can they help us all reconstitute the communal 'we' in ways that foster both plural identities and the shared identity of common citizenship by placing

themselves on the challenging terrain of the 'intercultural'? I've had the privilege of reflecting about such questions in the process of preparing both a recently published and a forthcoming volume of the 'Cultures and Globalization Series' of publications that I co-edit. The recently published book was called *Heritage, Memory & Identity*; the forthcoming one will be published in early 2012 as *Cities, Cultural Policy and Governance*. In this forthcoming volume, the chapter by the British analyst Phil Wood dealing with intercultural challenges at city level, has been particularly helpful to me in formulating today's remarks.<sup>1</sup> As Wood points out, cities are increasingly the locations in which our daily lives are shaped and where cultural policy has its impacts; cities are *the* settings in which today's unprecedented migratory flows are playing out – and indeed some of us – Khaled, myself – are products of those flows... Cities are the places where the utter inevitability of cultural diversity in today's societies is demonstrated at its most direct.

Whilst nation-state governments jealously retain control of borders and citizenship status, most migrants (and their neighbours) live, work, pray, create, procreate and die in cities. Cities have little power to decide who their residents will be yet they are the places where, through the daily - and largely banal - interactions, conflicts or avoidances of people, the nature of entire societies are being redefined. And so cities have no choice. They simply must stand up and take a more proactive role in these matters, in

forging *convivencia* (the Spanish language has a term for this but English doesn't), in other words ways of living together across the boundaries – real or imagined – of cultural difference.

Against the forces and fears that drive many people into patterns of exclusion, suspicion and conflict, the only bulwark seems to be to develop policies that foster urban societies whose citizens not only 'tolerate' difference – terrible word!! – not only recognize and celebrate it, but also rethink their notions of identity – of both selves and others – in ways that enable and promote an ongoing dynamic of creating difference. So obviously policy must move beyond legalistic and bureaucratic issues of entitlement and attain much more culturally-nuanced understandings. For a local, city-based cosmopolitanism is probably the only way to attain a world which contributes to social and cultural flourishing, rather than one which is driven by fear, antagonism and atrophy. This raises serious questions and challenges, in particular for those concerned with cultural policy and governance in cities all over the world, particularly in Western Europe.

It's really a question of *local* governance challenges, within city hall and on city streets, of coming to terms with the fact that in a 'super-diverse' (that's one of the new buzzwords in this field) environment, different lifestyles, values and may come into contradiction with each other. As Wood rightly observes, one approach to this has been to balkanize the city into ethnic enclaves which rarely interact and therefore avoid conflict. This is

precisely one of the perverse effects of the failed multiculturalism I referred to at the outset, yet it is still widely practiced. All too often city authorities deal with diversity just in instrumental and legalistic terms, through processes whereby outsiders are either rejected, or moved along a conveyor belt to acceptance, by the machinery of state. They generally want to avoid the far more difficult social and cultural and political-economy issues that diversity and migration throw up. They want to deliver a 'one-size-fits-all' service to meet the needs of a homogeneous citizenry, instead of a diverse menu tailored to the needs of a heterogeneous one.

To meet such needs, cities need to know themselves. Do they know who is living where, Wood asks, how they live and who they interact with, in a world where communities of several thousand can appear or disappear in a matter of months? Do they have the will and the competence to make sense of this fluidity and translate it into policy and action? These and other questions arising out of 'super-diversity' will have to be asked across the full range of city functions from education and housing to libraries and graveyard provision, and this in turn asks serious questions of the flexibility of the local political culture and bureaucratic machine to adapt to change, to break out of its silos and work transversally and holistically. And whilst some cities may have had several decades to adapt to these conditions others are being asked to make the transition in just a matter of years, with varying degrees of success.

Now cultural institutions play a key role here. Most of these cultural institutions, particularly those that are custodians of the heritage, whether tangible or intangible, were created in very different times, for very different audiences than the ones they now serve. They were created explicitly for and by a dominant or monolithic culture, or as part of the nation-building process and they have tended to house collections that were coded for and were therefore decidable by or meaningful to only those belonging to certain classes in society. Elena Delgado (cited by Wood) of Madrid's *Museo de América* is a museum curator who sets out the challenges perfectly:

The significance of a museum lies not only in its collections, but also in the reflections and insights it is able to trigger around the objects, the knowledge it provides and the multiple visions and interpretations it offers on the heritage in its care (...) As metaphorical "free zones", museums must strive to take their place at the intersections, in those spaces where individuals and distinct cultural identities can act and interact, transform and be transformed (...) In order to become a space for negotiation, museums must disown those homogenising and discriminating values which are still very closely connected to their role in legitimising historic identity. ...) one task for cultural and educational institutions should be the development of strategies to help citizens learn to live with conflict, with the other and with difference, by promoting attitudes which lead to the intersection of cultures and of knowledge.

Maximizing cultural learning opportunities at those intersections are key responsibilities for all cultural organizations in our contemporary cultural moment. For given the primacy of group representation that drives us today, all such organizations, in particular museums, see their remit extending into the whole of the institution's territory or sphere of interest; their working assets to be not just their own collections but the total

patrimony, material and immaterial, of that defined territory; they see their audiences – yes, in the plural – to be those of the entire local population past, present and future. It's only by representing the full demographic, social and cultural diversity of the urban populations of today that cultural organizations can promote a more inclusive and pluralistic public culture, one that recognizes a multiplicity of cultural rights and is self-empowering for all those who have a stake in it.

In this context, I want also to share with you, practically *expressis verbis*, the ways in which an influential cultural policy scholar, the sociologist Tony Bennett, has articulated various key dimensions of the challenge our 'differing diversities' represent.<sup>2</sup> First, he locates the four key frameworks' in which policy needs to be made:

1. the civic contexts that bear upon the cultural rights and entitlements awarded to different cultural streams in the population;
2. the administrative contexts that determine how people belonging to such cultural communities are dealt with or given agency;
3. the social contexts, or the social objectives that policies about the 'cultural' should be connected to;
4. the economic contexts, or how these cultural communities can have access to infrastructure and resources for their 'cultural industries'

Within these frameworks, policy-making issues arise in the following four areas:

1. public spheres: as vehicles for debate, cultural expression and solidarity within and between the members of different cultural groups;
2. changing social dynamics: how people maintain an active involvement in their cultures and what are the resources they can draw upon for such purposes;
3. cultural markets: which play an increasingly significant role in enhancing these social dynamics;
4. questions of everyday life: how cultural differences inform are knitted into the fabric of everyday life.

There are in turn four policy principles that ought to flow from these:

1. the entitlement to equal opportunity for each citizen to participate in all the practices that constitute the field of culture;
2. the entitlement of each citizen to function effectively within society without being required to change her/his cultural allegiances and affiliations;

3. the obligation to sustain and develop different cultural streams for the ongoing expression of cultural difference;
4. the obligation to promote interactions between people with different cultures, rather than distinct cultures as separate enclaves.

The last principle is essential to ensuring that cultural identities form and re-form in ways that will generate **a continuing dynamic for diversity**. A continuing dynamic for diversity: that is the key stake when we stress the importance of working at the intersections, of escaping the pitfalls of the kind of mosaic multiculturalism that is so completely inadequate. A continuous process of recombining of existing combinations needs to be in play.

The trouble, however, is that many people – whether they take position on behalf of incumbent majorities or of minority/immigrant groups – continue to see cultures as bounded wholes that are fixed, static, unchanging; reifying each group's culture as a thing, a 'property' (the very semantics is revealing) that can be lost, forgotten, or recovered. Such usage misses completely the movement and dynamism which characterises life within and between contemporary globalized cities. As the Argentinian commentator Nestór García Canclini points out, this reality

reminds us of interaction and encounter, i.e. what happens when a relationship of exchange is established between groups. Whereas multiculturalism entails the acceptance of difference, interculturality implies

that negotiation, conflict and mutual exchange exist between different groups.<sup>3</sup>

Interculturality also implies movement in the identity of individuals and groups – away from fixed and immutable positions to hybrid and multiple identities. It also accepts that conflict is not only inevitable but a normal part of a healthy and dynamic 'cosmopolis'. It advocates an *agonistic* approach which finds new relationships and innovations emerging from mediated conflict, rather than the *antagonistic* contests which currently characterise many of our diverse cities. Let me share with you the writer Salman Rushdie's celebrated view, put forward in response to his attackers:

hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. Mélange, hotch-potch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it. *The Satanic Verses* is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love-song to our mongrel selves.'

Although I could stop here, I want to conclude instead by including immigrants, today's 'transnational communities', within the scope of our critical reflections on identity awareness and formulation. Here I must acknowledge a debt to the cultural studies scholar Ien Ang and her chapter entitled 'Heritage and Diaspora: Unsettling the National' that appeared in the volume *Heritage, Memory & Identity*.<sup>4</sup>

We tend to think of the implications of the transnational movements of peoples only in terms of how they crack open the nationalist narrative of

seamless national unity: all countries today harbour populations with multiple memories and identities, many of whom simply may not *want* to inherit and/or represent or be represented by, a single essence, a single essentialized identity. These people often embody the 'lived tension... of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring there.' If they exist 'in-between' two (or more) places they always tend to be subjected to the conflicting pulls of 'where they're from' and 'where they're at'. Paul Gilroy has described this abiding experience of cultural displacement in terms of a 'double consciousness', but perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of a fragmented, shifting and mixed-up consciousness. That is, diasporic identities are always simultaneously and ambiguously deterritorialised and reterritorialised, they always hover between 'home and away', attachment and detachment, identification and disidentification. And the challenge may be less that of holding on to the memory of the distant homeland but on re-establishing cultural identities in diverse new locations (where the old homeland may well be a mere genealogical influence or a virtual attachment). From this perspective, diasporas are dispersed, fluid, hybrid transnational formations with shifting, and constitutively ambivalent (dis)identifications to many places around the world, shaped by the contradictory experience of 'dwelling-in-displacement'.

So the diasporic experience is not just about the nostalgic remembering of the past, or about the place left behind, but also about life

in the present and the process of reinvention towards a new future. This process of reinvention under conditions of displacement and in new sites of settlement may also require a rupture with the past, rather than its virtual continuation through preservation of a particular cultural heritage. In this sense, Ang also reminds us, cultural identity may act as a constraining factor for migrants, because its focus on preserving that identity tends to de-emphasize and devalue the importance of change, transformation and hybridity. Recognizing migrant groups through 'their cultures' either in the land of settlement or in the country of origin, may in fact freeze them in an image of the past, and thereby reinforce their cultural marginalization, rather than their empowerment. Thus, being locked into the identity of 'immigrant' forever reminds the diasporic subject that s/he comes from 'elsewhere' and doesn't really belong 'here'. At the same time, being cast as one who got 'away' from 'home' may only strengthen a sense of cultural dependency and inferiority vis-à-vis the putative 'homeland', where the diasporic subject will always tend to be positioned as having 'lost' their 'authentic' cultural identity.

Many people with histories of migration may actually choose to discard their diasporic attachments in favour of new, hybrid identities that are not chained to the gravitational pull of ancestral origin. Here we arrive, Ang observes, at the limits of the usefulness of the idea of 'culture' and the various concepts that cluster around it, but also at the conceptual limits of

the discourse of 'diaspora' itself: both are complicit in the validation of a conservative notion of culture and identity. What bringing 'culture' and 'diaspora' together highlights, then, is the enduring tension between freedom and belonging, embrace of the new and fidelity to the old. 'This gets us to the heart of the experience of displacement, and the ambivalence that shoots through it... The biggest challenge for policy and best practice is to allow the careful, creative and intelligent articulation of that ambivalence, the unsettling of the national (whichever nation it may be).'

In the end, then, cultural institutions need to operate in ways that allow individuals and cultural communities to interact, to transform and be transformed in an ongoing dynamics of diversity. This means challenging established frameworks, changing attitudes and priorities, shifting resources and moving cultural practices strategically in the right direction. And needless to say, if cultural actors want to contribute usefully to these transformations, they themselves need to clarify their thoughts and agendas.

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<sup>1</sup> Wood, P. (2012) 'Challenges of governance in multi-ethnic cities' in H.K. Anheier and Y.R. Isar (eds.), *Cities, Cultural Policy & Governance, The Cultures and Globalization Series, 5*. London: SAGE Publications.

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, T. (2001) *Differing Diversities. Cultural Policy and Cultural Diversity*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.

<sup>3</sup> Garcia Canclini, N. (2005) *Hybrid Cultures*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press.

<sup>4</sup> Ang, I. (2011) 'Unsettling the National: *Heritage and Diaspora*' in *Heritage, Memory & Identity, The Cultures and Globalization Series, 4*. London: SAGE Publications.