

Emerging Culture: Weak Labels vs. Strong Views

For many years culture has been too slow: static, self-celebrating, devoted to a club of presumed cultivated individuals; the convention used to consider culture as the source of spiritual value, therefore objective and eternal. Slow culture cannot evolve.

Recently what we define culture has become too fast: spectacular, superficial, devoted to mass-tourists prepared to buy nights in hotels and meals in restaurants. Fast culture cares about income.

In both cases labels count quite a lot; it is a matter of communication, either selective as before or ecumenical as after. Culture has been no more than a list of objects and facts, whose inclusion in the magic set strongly depended upon the ritual presence of such items into museums, theatres and sites: the container gave power to the contents. This ended up to freeze culture as a homogeneous system, and to drain the audience into a cloned mass. Mummified culture was useful for its disneysation too, aiming its comfortable homogeneity at the attraction of a wider audience and at making some money.

But culture is something different. Rather than being the treasury chest of iconic beauty it is the instinctive, cognitive and sentimental approach of unique and uncomparable individuals who appreciate its heterogeneity. This changes the whole framework: culture can be fertile since it acknowledges and accepts its magmatic, evolutionary, unpredictable nature. Culture as a method rather than a label requires a different map where various connections and hybridations occur. The most advanced analysis speaks of converging supply and migrant demand; the whole cycle of conception, creation, production and diffusion goes through new horizontal and vertical dimensions.

The prevailing convention needed experts and formal assessments. In such a way culture was the object of dimensional evaluations (highbrow vs. lowbrow culture, as well as élitist vs. popular arts), excluding a wide and intriguing variety of projects and products only because they moved out of the mainstream flows. While official culture is sadly agonising many things occur. The articles written by Antonella Ardizzone on the complexity of musical districts, and by Anna Eccettuato and Martha Friel on the active ageing EU program, offer views and directions for a new cultural landscape, where horizontal connections and synergies can generate value and inoculate the cultural virus into a wide, smart and sophisticated community; vertical integrations can forecast a much richer cultural text due to the participation of the elderly (and therefore wiser and more experienced) able to convey memories, critical views and knowledge to a curious audience through a storytelling game. Of course such new dimensions do represent a strong option for the financial perspectives of culture, combining accountability and sustainability.

Culture changes expanding its realm towards new formats; invading the urban texture with ironic projects, community actions, asymmetrical exchanges; involving people with new channels for funding, participating, creating. It may sound quite odd that many new cultural experiences arise in Italy, the cradle of self-referential labels. A hostile environment, where bizantine rules and unjustified taboos prevail, provides creative artists and culture professionals with an unexplored land where strong views can generate new roles for culture. It's time to grow.



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