

## Future Culture: Back To Normality

### Art wars

The cultural galaxy is under siege. A meteoric storm gradually threatens the survival of many warriors who try to interpret obscure rules; some historic buildings, devoted to crucial rites such as the visit to old artefacts and crumbling remains, are bound to progressive decay; vital resources are in advanced stage of extinction, leaving treasure chests dramatically empty; rulers and scholars often warn against powerful enemies, although they seem to be unable to identify them (do they come from barbarian tribes? from the emerging wealth clubs? from some enemy civilisation?). It is Apocalypse, what else?

Looking at our fragile galaxy with attention we would discover that things are not so tragic as many observers may assess. There are problems, this is true. Many of these problems are new and unexpected. We do not possess any weapon to eliminate such problems, and even the view of the horizon is not at all clear and unequivocal. At the same time many things are occurring, quite often in the shadow, out of the places and groups where conventions are crafted and consolidated. The only possible reaction to changes and threats is action, not certainly discussion. Action requires thought and interpretation. But simply waiting for someone else's action is wrong.

Things will be never again as they used to be. A galaxy is in danger if it rejects evolution. Do we want to simply survive? It is time to examine the state of health of what we define culture, a complex set of objects, places, experiences and intuitions whose expansion and variety reject the conventional framework and require new views, effective tools, consistent approaches and versatile action. As in a war report, we can draft a list of the losses. Culture used to be based upon simple, powerful concepts and beliefs that are fading away. Culture, as we know it, was invented within the manufacturing economy: the enjoyment of the arts, an exercise old as humanity, has been standardised as the object of social and economic exchange. It has been special, almost ineffable, physically isolated and accessible only to the initiated. Now the pillars of that wisdom become progressively weaker.

### Orbits

The economy has been based upon the centrality of the individual. Needs and choices, values and projects, every seed for action has been considered as depending on the pursuit of happiness. Useless to say that in the manufacturing world happiness is quantitative and it grows with the amount of commodities consumed, of money deposited, of capital owned. Such a rigid and dimensional paradigm has strongly influenced the cultural views, ignoring the richness and complexity of its anthropological meaning, and considering erudition (the mere mechanical memory of facts, dates and names) as the only credible symptom of cultivation.

The territorial features of our lives have been drawn around the productive hubs and the bureaucratic headquarters, responding to the need of functional urban spaces, quick paths, clear social hierarchies. In such a precise map culture has kept an isolated and ritual position, being locked in beautiful buildings and denying people any sign that could describe it and attract newcomers to its enjoyment. Many recent projects show a radical inversion of such a convention: festivals and many other cultural events are spreading in the urban framework, invading areas used every day by ordinary people (i.e. all of us) for their normal life. Cultural supply becomes wider and shows a powerful ability to combine its text with the fertile shape of our towns.

The value of culture has been either left to the experts (the only ones who could understand an evidently special hermetic object), or delivered to the accountants (the only ones who could focus upon the budget of an evidently ordinary commodity). In both cases culture has been justified only with the monetary impact argument. It was just an urban legend: everything generates a monetary impact, quite often much higher than that of museums and theatres. In order for cultural processes to be wisely interpreted we need to understand the width and length (i.e. space and time) of its impact, and focus upon subtle connections such as the complex network of relationships that only culture can activate.

## Landing

Culture is being reshaped because society is radically changing. We are discovering our identity in a hybrid social framework where synergic orientation counts much more than rigid protection; we are exploring cultural options with a hypertextual approach, adopting a variety of technical tools aimed at emphasizing our perceptions and at enriching our critical digestion. Identity is the evolutionary outcome of an indefinite number of dynamics: the value of culture rises progressively in exchanges, networks and synergies fed in a chaotic humus where things change continuously and the relationship between roots and orientations describes identity as a self-raising feature.

Assessments become quite impossible. While in the manufacturing paradigm everything was defined by unanimously accepted labels, the emerging economy simply lays down their comfortable rigidity whose burden would slow or even stop any possible move ahead. Binary labels still try to dominate the cultural realm, and their cheap abuse is an obstacle against fertility; culture's toolbox is asymmetrical, involving a wide variety of skills, experiences, views and intuitions. In such a respect the iconic and the anthropological definitions of culture melt together: the distance between social appraisal and individual enjoyment disappear, since they feed reciprocally.

No more special or ordinary, culture is normal. Only analysing its specific features we can face its complexity, understand its value, manage its projects and drive its future. We just need a non-prejudicial approach, based upon the awareness that like in every story of fertility and growth a magmatic cauldron is more effective than any machine. It requires trust in collective intelligence, be it polyphonic discussion (as Tomomi Noguchi highlights reporting about the recent Forum d'Avignon), network analysis (as Donatella Saccone suggests for a wide evaluation of cultural projects) or even coffee-break atmosphere (as Domenica Moscato describes in an open space philosophy).

After too many decades as vertical excellence reserved for the few, culture comes back to earth and reveals its powerful horizontal width, based upon multiplicity and hybridation, located everywhere in the urban grid and in the landscape, able to set a rich dialogue with all of us. Normal culture for normal people.



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