

EUROPE OR THE CULTURAL IMPERATIVE

by

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"If I had to start all over again I would start with culture" said Jean Monnet, and few indeed are the meetings held to advance the ideal of European unity at which his aphorism is not quoted and requoted. Today, many of us in Europe feel powerless and without a sense of direction, a feeling we share with many citizens of other continents. It is doubtless due to the continued resistance from so many quarters to the building of Europe as a political unit, the continuing economic difficulties of most European countries, the growing fragility of our societies, the lack of short-term solutions to our problems, and the lack of models and utopias on which to mould our future.

For these reasons perhaps, the widespread resort to culture and education as the priority of priorities is largely a ritual invocation or a convenient disclaimer of responsibility. Even so, we must recognize that culture has become the great protagonist of our times, and that cultural co-operation is one of the most promising paths to the dimly-glimpsed goal of a united Europe.

The last 30 years have witnessed social and economic progress and regression on a vast scale, and during that time cultural processes and products, whatever standards we judge them by, have

grown enormously. Between 1958 and 1988 most of the indicators by which they can be assessed (book production and circulation, exchanges of students and teachers, library foundation and improvement, the number of art exhibitions and of radio and television transmitters and receivers, preservation and accessibility of the national architectural heritage, promotion of the linguistic heritage, the spread of cultural information, the opening of cultural centres, support to artists, writers and composers, the organization of cultural itineraries, and many other such events) have doubled, trebled or quadrupled.

This is not all. The tendency for governments to take over the management of cultural affairs has meant that the 25 countries members of the European Cultural Convention use the term culture, either by itself or with some such qualification as educational, communications, youth, sports, artistic, property, justice, information, or health, as part of the title of a national or federal ministry responsible for such matters.

II. THREE KINDS OF CULTURE

The word culture, nowadays, covers three areas that look different but are treated and put over in much the same way : the traditional idea of culture (comprising artistic, literary, musical and aesthetic activities and works, and often known as

"cultivated" or "pure culture"); popular everyday culture, (closely associated with local or community or basic traditions - what might be called the historical and anthropological approach to culture); and mass culture, (produced and spread by the cultural industries and the mass media, whose favourite approach is via iconic expression and simplified content).

In these three broad areas there is a variety of cultural designations, shifting and uncertain in outline and often bracketed together as opponents (traditional and avant-garde culture, mass culture and élite culture, bourgeois and proletarian culture, establishment and alternative culture, pure culture and counter-culture, and so on), whose polyvalent meaning spans the multiplicity of form and content in this wide arc of social achievement.

. III. THE INSEPARABILITY OF ECONOMICS AND CULTURE

We have to recognize that culture, as defined above, is becoming increasingly important to the economy. This is probably because society is much more leisured than it used to be - the quality of leisure has similarly improved - and also because of the extraordinary growth of the culture industries. Admittedly statistics, especially cultural statistics, can be made to support either side of a sociological argument; nevertheless it is noteworthy that the sector that shows the highest average index of

sectoral growth in the Gross National Product is culture.

I want to make clear that I am speaking of culture in its wider sense, which as I have just said includes culture from the anthropological angle, and mass culture, particularly of the audiovisual kind. To take only one example from which we can adequately assess the scale of these increases, and get some idea of why Great Britain has taken the lead I would merely point to the use of tape recorders, nine million of which, have been sold in Great Britain, where it forms part of the cultural arsenal of nearly 30 per cent of all British families.

Obviously, listing these facts may provoke the "high-minded" reaction that linking economics and culture means commercializing disinterested production and debasing the altruistic and spontaneous character of culture. Looked at from this angle, any talk of producing, distributing and consuming cultural practices and artefacts attacks not merely the independence of culture as a human activity, but its very identity.

In spite of this there seems to be no possible doubt that nowadays culture and economics are two inseparable halves of a single whole, or as Jack Lang challengingly says : "économie et culture, même combat". This does not mean that the products of culture exhaust their raison d'être by being produced and consumed, bought and sold; on the contrary they are more

complete, they have a superior spiritual dimension, a symbolic extra that comes from their own cultural identity, that makes them something more than just goods for sale.

IV. AT GRIPS WITH CULTURAL POLICY

"Cultural policy" is a much discussed and very problematic phrase. To one school of thought it is a contradiction in terms, to another the familiar device used by autocrats the world over to indoctrinate and manipulate their citizens; at best, an anti-democratic and paternalist tool of the enlightened despot, or at worst, a short cut to the chaos and repression of the Chinese cultural revolution.

How, then, these polemicists ask, can the natural spontaneity and genuineness of cultural behaviour be reconciled with official tight-lacing and regimentation? How can the variety and originality of creative art survive bureaucratic regulation and control? This argument has been much repeated over the last 20 years, in versions that vary with national history, cultural tradition and social background from the most subtle to the most aggressive; in the last two decades its most radical expression has been in the Anglo-Saxon countries.

There, it has enjoyed the powerful scientific and social backing of the Chicago School and the publicity given to it by

ideologies exalting the ego and the inner life, which reduce community affairs to social affairs, social affairs to public affairs, public affairs to state affairs, and state affairs to oppression by dictatorial, wasteful and inefficient bureaucracy.

Modern history has led us to identify all the means by which power is exercised, and to reduce these to public power, or rather to the power of the State and of national and regional government. As a result the exercise of power, both by politics (meaning who has power, and what power) and by policy (the 'nuts and bolts' of power) has been polarized around a single authority, the State.

Obviously the multiplicity of different aims, activities, means, bodies and periods of operation, and their innumerable potential combinations, will produce a host of possible cultural policies. The main difference between them is, I believe, due to the difference in their aims, and follows three patterns which normally succeed each other but may be simultaneous.

(A) The first pattern is based on patronage. It is characterized by aid to artistic and cultural creation of the kind referred to above as cultivated or pure culture. Patronage, in its own estimation, is disinterested and aims only at protecting creative artists and encouraging culture; but even the most cursory examination of works of art shows that it follows the

preferences of the wealthy patron. The cathedrals, palaces, monuments, paintings and sculpture, literature and music it has produced, although artistically and aesthetically self-sufficient, point to - or mirror - the values and interests (or as some would say, the tastes) of the popes, kings, princes, cardinals, States or burghers who promoted and encouraged their production.

Indisputably, every policy in any social activity - science, economics, health, culture and so on - is part of a wider plan whose broad lines it follows no less than its own particular ones. Thus nineteenth century economic policy was based on the liberal creed; it stood for free competition and a balanced market; the economic recession and unemployment caused by the 1929 crisis led to an economic policy of stimulus to production and full employment; and the growing economic inequality between one country and another, and above all awareness of that fact, led to the widespread pursuit of economic policies aimed at development.

Similarly, in cultural policy the second pattern pushes its way to the fore in the early 1950s. Its touchstone is democracy. It wants to democratize cultural decisions, to delegate to the people (through its political representatives, the government) the right to choose what cultural productions or activities are to be given preference and what artists or creative workers should be helped. It tries to make enjoyment of the peaks of culture no

longer the privilege of a minority but the common property of the community, to give everyone easy access to works of art, and to "popularize" what is traditionally known as culture (fine arts and the humanities) to the greatest possible extent.

This pattern, styled "democratization of culture", forms part of the ideology current just after the Second World War. It extends to culture a practice already existing in politics, economics and social affairs. The right to culture becomes a human right, and its potential in an expanding world economy seems limited only by the will of the community. All UNESCO's work on culture in the 1960s, and the point of view and cultural objectives adopted in France by the new Ministry of Culture and repeated by the Third, Fourth and Fifth Plans, are on that model.

(C) At the end of the 1960s came "weariness of welfare", the end of economic expansion, awareness of the cost in resources and hence of the limits of growth, and contestation of the dominant kind of society in the developed countries of the capitalist West. With them came dissatisfaction with the pattern of "democratization of culture"; this pyramidal policy was accused of paternalism and state control, of imposing a particular kind of culture (cultivated culture) and of conspicuous lack of success in extending the public practice of culture.

UNESCO, which has undoubtedly been a pioneer in this domain,

made a head-on assault on this subject in the First World Conference on cultural policy (Venice, 1970). At that Conference and in the four UNESCO Regional Conferences of the last decade the third pattern, "cultural democracy", was introduced and spread throughout the world. In the same period the Council of Europe and several countries including Sweden, Italy and France explicitly adopted the new pattern.

It is concerned more with activities than works of art, more with participating in the process of art than with consuming its products. The two previous policies had stood for a sophisticated, monolithic style of culture; the new policy exalted cultures of all groups, classes, countries and communities, regarding all of their members as, to some extent, directly and actively involved in their production. the new policy was to develop the individual, and through him peoples and society.

V. CULTURAL IDENTITY

One of the central ideas (we have so far called them patterns) used to assemble and make meaningful cultural activities as part of cultural co-operation in Europe is European identity. Although it acts as a pattern, that is as a pole organizing a set of activities directed towards a common goal, its epistemological status is equal to that of the major watchwords just referred to.

Like them it is vague and ineffectual. Inevitably, therefore, its use is preceded by exploration, however brief, of its essential meaning and potential worth as an instrument.

"Identity" is one of the words most frequently occurring in the vocabulary of politicians and national and international public administrations. It is also one of the most elusive and shadowy. Frege and John Austin agree that its frontiers are essentially negative, as they can be envisaged only from the angle of external concepts.

Although every individual considered in isolation is irrelevant, in spite of belonging to a community, to the formation of a collective identity, he or she may, and in fact does, nevertheless constitute and belong to many and various collective identities. For subjective and/or artificial reasons, this multiple belonging may be experienced as antagonistic, disjunctive or integrative. Take as an example a native of Carcaixent in the Ribera Alta of Valencia, a cultural milieu with Catalan, Castilian, Aragonese and Manchego attributes, situated in Spain, which is an historical and political entity on the northern shores of the Western Mediterranean, forming part of another historical and cultural entity known to us as Europe.

Can these six ecocultural and historical and political identities, some of them possessed together with other identities,

traces and elements, analogues and antonyms, compatibles and incompatibles, be experienced to the full and simultaneously ? Is it, or is it not, possible to be at one and the same time completely a native of Carcaixent, the Ribera Alta, Valencia, Spain, the Mediterranean area and Europe ? Can natives of Carcaixent feel that they come from the Ribera Alta when its most important town is not Carcaixent but its rival Alzira ? Can the Catalan cultural strain in the common Valencian identity be perceived apart from the Spanish identity of the native of Valencia ? Can the Mediterranean quality of the Spanish-European be integrated with the Scandinavian quality of the Norwegian European, in a collective European identity ?

Obviously, it all depends what we mean by integrated. If we mean expelling antagonistic factors, cancelling the validity of opposites, denying the differential force of origins other than one's own, the constitution of any communal identity will become a violation and destruction of the polymorphic complexity of reality.

If, on the contrary, integration means keeping the poles of every conflict in a state of opposition and interaction, accentuating disruptive and connecting interferences and influences, accelerating the circulation of competence and complementary abilities, instilling in the individual the collective spirit and in the collectivity the spirit of

individualism, in reason faith and in faith a rational approach, in empiricism utopia and in utopia experiment, in revolution the spirit of conservation and in conservatism radical transformation, not in head-on collision but, as Morin would say, in a relation of transverse dialogue, it is then possible that the many-sided, the varied, the antagonistic will persist and reach self-achievement in unity without fusion or implosion. Then a common identity will become possible without surrender or deletion. Its power will be in proportion to the fruitfulness of its disputes, the richness of its breakaways, and the effervescence of its oppositions. We do not have to choose between gothic and baroque, or set them up in opposition, but to lay claim to both of them at once, and also to Enlightenment and Romanticism, Spinoza and Nietzsche, the Vikings and Moslem Spain, for all these are at the single and multiple heart of European collective identity.

Similarly, the collective identity of France is made up of the French Revolution and Joan of Arc, the Massacre of St. Bartholomew and the Edict of Nantes, Descartes and Pascal, Racine and Baudelaire. The collective identity of Spain, in spite of the long quarrel between orthodox and heterodox Spain, is made up of Christians, Moors and Jews, Andalucia and Catalunya, the Catholic Kings and the Cadiz Cortes, "Los Nombres de Cristo" and "Lazarillo de Tormes", the Inquisition and anarcho-syndicalism.

I have just mentioned the decisive importance of identification processes in affirming and strengthening a collective identity. Attempts to stimulate European cultural identity must of course recognize its infinitely varied content and manifestations. Language, the essential support and highest expression of individual and collective identity, is the first means offered to us; the cultural multiplicity of Europe is such that conservation and development of its multilinguistic heritage is the most imperative condition of its existence. A citizen of Europe is essentially multilingual.

Therefore teaching several European languages in each country, at school and to the public at large; protecting minority languages; and developing computerized linguistic data so that it counteracts the industrialization of the natural languages of Europe and promotes office automation of a linguistic kind, are essential tasks.

The same is true of our written heritage, where encouraging translation, protecting books, combating illiteracy and stimulating reading, computerizing libraries and establishing interlocking networks in library management are aims pursued by virtually all European intergovernmental organizations.

The artistic heritage - of archaeology, architecture, painting, sculpture and graphics - is of the greatest importance

to national identification and to the wider concept of community identification. For this reason, and because of their priceless cultural (and economic) value, the safeguard and enrichment of this "capital" are prominent among cultural activities. However, the cultural heritage, as a characteristic and area of identity, has undergone two great changes in the last twenty years. The first is that it has been extended to cover the anthropological side of culture, and now includes all goods and products relating to the past of each community and important to its collective entity - the folklore, industrial, gastronomic, scientific, technical and audiovisual parts of its heritage, to name only a few.

Secondly, its use has become closely connected with its preservation. Nowadays access to the national heritage is inseparable for reasons of economic profit and cultural productivity, restoration and maintenance, from its use for fund-raising purposes. This shows the importance of the cultural heritage in promoting a sense of European identity. Art exhibitions with a distinctively European slant, for example on Romanesque art, the Vikings, Charlemagne, the French Revolution, Moslem Spain, Queen Christina of Sweden, the Renaissance, Celtic civilisation, Christian IV of Denmark, Romanticism, and the Knights of Malta, are occasions that make Europeans realize that although their national traditions differ they are ultimately chips of the same block. Cultural tours, taking advantage of

growing leisure and the fashion for tourism, follow itineraries of pan-European interest like the pilgrimage routes to Santiago de Compostela, the Baroque movement, the silk and wine roads, and the great cathedrals, to make citizens of Europe aware of their European identity.

Similar results would be achieved by more vigorous cultural publicity. Europe is a perpetual flowering of cultural events, a many-sided endless festival of many kinds in many places, as a result of its political independence and the cultural variety of its States, regions and cities. This admirable profusion, the basis of the riches of our European culture, is hindered by insufficient publicity, so that these events are all too often unheard of outside their immediate neighbourhood. Ignorance of what is going on beyond our local, regional or national cultural frontiers is the greatest handicap afflicting the exercise of culture in Europe and the development of a European collective identity. This is all the more surprising and revealing in the "information society" so characteristic of our time.

European cultural events should be given far more publicity. It should be directed primarily at professional cultural organizers, particularly those promoting and organizing cultural programmes, and secondly at the general public; publicity should lead to greater knowledge, and greater knowledge to greater awareness of a European identity.

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