

Präsentation for the conference

“Evaluation of the Impact of Arts and Cultural Education”

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“Arts and Cultural Education as Laboratory“

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First of all I have to admit a certain reluctance to speak to you. As all of you are involved professionally in cultural and arts education – following the results of this conference – there must have been a considerable positive impact on you. Following Anne Bamford’s results at least on 72% of you are representing a privileged selection that makes you different from those who did not enjoy this kind of impact.

But what makes me a little bit more relaxed these are some other experiences I had with groups of music or fine art teachers that seemed to be quite normal in their general attitudes, maybe a little bit more naïve, and worldly innocent in presenting their claims and interests.

The arts as a professional system seem to me a particular attainment of European modern development which is highly related to the idea of individuality and subjectivity. So please allow me to start with my personal career seen as fragment of a case study.

I am a son of a musician and yes, music played an important role during my early years especially when I tried to find my own place in our family mainly against my father by concentrating on classical music while my father was one of the very few jazz musicians in the early post-war period in Austria.

Practicing classical music did not make me a better student. The opposite is true. During my adolescence my school performances were very modest, obviously the “Alpha”- context which was mentioned by Anne Bamford as a prerequisite of good quality provision did not work. As a consequence my desperate parents decided for me to change school. And so I started a career in a vocational school to become an engineer in chemistry. Due to the big workload in this school I had to give up my musical studies and also within the curriculum cultural education was of no importance. And – I have to admit – I did not miss it.

Instead of that we were proud to become chemists as a kind of avant-garde of modern development. And the labour market supported our belief: Each graduate at that time could choose between more than 200 job offers. We felt attractive specialists in demand.

And the role of the arts? Cultural activities had nothing to do with our professional ambitions. Instead of that participating in theatre, music or film events gave us the

opportunity to escape from the hegemonial claims of everyday life, to take part – at least for a few ours – in another world, a world against the existing realities often producible only with alcohol and drugs.

Anyway, the intention to make this kind cultural participation would be a mean for improving our professional skills at that time would have been seen as rather absurd.

I do not want to generalise my case too much and of course these experiences arise from nearly 40 years ago. But one of the very few advantages of becoming older is to find out that I am not living and working in a political vacuum and that therefore historic comparisons can make sense.

In comparing the early 1970th with the present one can find out easily that – due to the different political, economical and social framework – also the ideological context in which cultural and arts education took place at that time considerably differs from today.

This brings me to the assumption that it might make sense in our research not just to look on the impact cultural education might have on the individual learner but also on the impact of the societal framework in a historic moment on the particular concepts of cultural and arts education and maybe also vice versa.

I am aware that this might be a hard job. Being fully involved in legitimizing our every day work it is not easy to step back and throw a glance at our activities from a more distanced point of view. But these efforts seem to me an indispensable prerequisite to find out that our issue - cultural and arts education respectively the results of our research – are and always have been massively influenced by political interests which build the frame in which cultural education takes place.

Following the intentions to professionalize cultural and arts education by providing significant research my plea goes in the direction to equally provide us with a theory to put our discussion in a political framework.

There is a long tradition of knowledge about the political impact of what we call cultural education especially when it comes to the legitimisation of political power. Being here in Paris I dare to quote one of the icons of French history. It was Louis XIV the incorporation of the absolutist state who already knew about the importance of cultural education for his subordinates. More than that the organisation of cultural events was a core issue in the production of hegemony, in which the court of Versailles can be seen as a kind of “total theatre” demanding quite elaborated cultural competencies

In his memoirs in which he wanted to familiarize his son with the instruments of power he pointed out :

“Je ne vous dirai pas seulement, comme on dirait à un simple particulier, que les plaisirs honnêtes ne nous ont pas été donnés sans raison par la nature, qu'ils délassent du travail, fournissent de nouvelles forces pour s'y appliquer, servent à la santé, calment les troubles de l'âme et l'inquiétude des passions, inspirent l'humanité, polissent l'esprit, adoucissent les moeurs, et ôtent à la vertu je ne sais

quelle trempe trop aigre qui la rend quelquefois moins sociable et par conséquent moins utile”. We’ll see if the next French president will come to similar conclusions.

But « les plaisirs » should not just serve the production of peaceful humanity, with which we up to now mainly associate with culture. There is also another impact that can be found in the discussion of the 18th century, less idealistic. I quote from a publication “pratique du théâtre” written by Francois Hedelin Abbé d’Aubignac intending to combine education and culture:

“C’est une secrète instruction des choses les plus utiles au Peuple & et les plus difficiles à lui persuader. Car pour les Spectacles où sont imprimées quelques images de la guerre, ils accoutument peu à peu les hommes à manier les armes, ils leur rendent familiers les instrumens de la mort, & leur inspirent insensiblement la fermeté de coeur contre toutes sortes de perils”.

Similar aspects during the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy: When Vienna of today is proud of the State Opera, Burgtheater, the Art Historian Museum the construction is only understandable as a political mean to represent the glory of the Emperor Franz Josef as the icon of a European Super Power

And the importance of culture was not only an issue for a small bourgeois elite. It found its equivalence in simple cultural manifestations in the school system for all. It was a condition sine qua non that every primary school teacher had to practice a music instrument. Singing in school and of course also in church or in the army was much more frequent than nowadays.

But the intention was not to make the pupils better learners. The only intention of the school system at that time was to produce patriotically tempered adults that are obedient with their very modest role in society admiring the glory of the ruler.

Fascinatingly almost all dictatorial regimes of the 20th century gave cultural education a very high priority.

Is it the mass choirs in the former Soviet Union to praise the glory of comrade Stalin or is it the broadly based program of the Nazis called “Kraft durch Freude” – the goal was always the same: Making the people active supporters of the regime.

Just to give you one quotation: The aim of German music patronage is to be a serving intermediary between the arts and the people...German musical culture has to be understood to be the nurturing of the highest musical patronage in its totality and its quintessential purity. For this we want to acquire the German people by systematic education”. The Nazis made use of cultural education in a very purposeful way to distribute their aesthetic priorities as broadly as possible. To listen to music and to make music also in remote areas became a broadly accepted habit supported by firmly organised artistic and pedagogical forces.

Some of these efforts even outlasted their creators: The most prominent example is maybe the “New Year’s Concert,” which takes place in the so-called “Golden Hall” of the Musikverein, and is broadcast around the globe. The event was invented by the Nazis in 1941 to enhance the morale of the German and Austrian population to stand with the regime although times of war became harder and harder.

Traditionally, this concert ends with the “Donauwalzer” and the “Radetzky marsch”. When enjoying the music of Strauss, one tends to also forget another fact: when the bourgeois auditorium of today enthusiastically claps its hands to the rhythm of the march, they do not remember the fact that Radetzky was one of the generals in Emperor Franz Joseph’s army who put an end to the bourgeois revolution of 1848. And today’s successors of the victims are celebrating the suppressor of yesterday.

You might think in democratically organised societies the context is irrelevant. I don’t think so. Instead of that this kind of historic comparison opens the chance to discover the ideological dimensions of cultural education provision of today.

You may have a look to England where during the last years several cultural policy waves swept over cultural and educational institutions when it comes to the instrumentalisation of cultural education is it for pushing cultural and creative industries, is it social integration or is it cultural entitlement. The next might be the cultural interpretation of the British involvement in the Iraqi war or global warming.

And it also could be that yet this conference is following a hidden political agenda.

More dangerously and politically influential seems to me a view into the Balkans. There is a film by Pepe Danquart and Miriam Quinte called “After Saison”. Both filmmakers accompanied the so called Koschnik-Mission; Hans Koschnik was assigned by the European Union to coordinate the re-unification of the Croats and the Muslims in the city of Mostar, which before the war was a normal and vibrant city with a hybrid culture combining Muslim, catholic and Serb tradition living together quite peacefully. And he failed because of Croat resistance and no support from the EU-countries.

In the film the viewer is confronted with some old Muslim saying: “...we already forgot everything – to turn towards Mecca every morning – praying – religion as something to practice every day... this kind of cultural attitudes became unimportant here: we have been people from Mostar living with others from Mostar. Now, after having been divided by constraint, we had to learn again by force. Now we squat in a Muslim ghetto and are observed to comply the religious rules... the songs, we forgot long ago... the rituals we have to learn newly and practice...this was dead a long time ago”

Similar stories you can hear from people of Sarajevo and other cities where religious and cultural education took place by constraint a phenomenon the rest of Europe where newborn babies in Kosice-Sacra are equipped with huge ear-phones to listen to Mozart and Vivaldi to make them feel better and more harmonious could not find an appropriate answer up to now.

Yes of course, this is an extreme example but this kind of cultural education takes place today here in Europe and makes us in a certain way responsible –when talking about the impact of cultural and arts education – to also look at the political intentions of the particular provision.

My message in this respect is quite clear: There is nothing good in providing cultural or arts education in itself. Instead of that it is the intention, the attitude and by that the

responsibility of the provider that might be the most important criterion to discuss quality issues.

As we are talking in this session about future perspectives I had a look into the results of a project funded by the European Commission after the 9/11 disaster with the title: "The Arts and War – Culture and Strategy", coordinated by the German art theoreticians Bazon Brock and Gerlinde Koschik.

For our laboratory Bazon Brock gives the advice to find a clear distinction between cultural and arts education.

His concept of cultural education is quite broadly based. It starts from the very beginning of our lifetime (maybe in the hospital of Kosice with earphones) and comprises all learning efforts that enable us to live in particular cultural contexts. The contradictory moment of this kind of comprehensive learning consists in the fact that we are all constraint to life in a frame of cultural reference – there is no particularity in this. We all of us are culturally grounded – there is no way to avoid it. What makes us different is the way we express it.

The problem starts when cultural relationships find their constituency in inclusion and exclusion and by that making the insiders dominating the outsiders. But this is not a cultural problem. This is a political problem we have to solve politically.

Therefore Bazon Brock proposes a next round of secularisation: When it was a particular European attainment to accomplish the secularisation of religion by freeing the state from religious influences we could now start to divide state affairs from cultural affairs to avoid the "emergency case" when culture becomes reality.

My proposal in this connection would be to start educative efforts to combine cultural and civic education. Especially in times were religion tries to gain political influence again, in times when efforts of re-nationalisation are increasingly seduced to play the cultural card we have a clear option whether we want to look backward searching for cultural identities as a way of denial of realities or to learn how to self-alienate from culture to find a critical distance not only to foreign but to your so-called own culture.

One of the best tools for that might be to re-connect arts education with the arts, much too often forgotten in our discussion. The idea of the autonomy of the arts is an essential component of the European enlightenment movement and by that a particular European attainment. It was the representatives of the arts who started in the 18th century to free themselves - like the sciences -from cultural paternalism. Today the arts are universally and internationally oriented representing not a particular cultural but a trans-cultural position in a global civilisation to overcome cultural regionalism.

In this attitude I agree with Martha Nussbaum, the US-American political philosopher who newly for the DAA Foundation pleaded for an arts education to create a decent world culture, including the ability to think critically, to transcend local loyalties and to approach international problems as a "citizen of the world". And – she adds – perhaps most important, the ability to imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person.

But with this statement we are already somewhere in utopia, for the ancient Greeks “ou-topos”, a non place somewhere at the border between day and night, pain and joy, desperation and hope, being and not-being, in between, where the arts still might have cathartic effects.

With such a cathartic effect I was confronted during an international meeting like ours already some years ago. We not just had theoretical discussions. We also got personal insights in selected examples of good practice. One of it took place during a physical training lesson in an ordinary grammar school somewhere in Lower Austria. It was a sports trainer equally interested in dance that developed with his pupils a little performance. The task of the youngsters was to play the roles of ghosts, to wake up during witching hour, very slowly start moving, than faster and faster to come to a peak and than get slower and slower again and at the end of the hour fall back in lifelessness.

Looking into the faces of the dancers I felt the full tension when a play becomes the truth. And then I looked into the eyes of my colleagues. Like mine they were full of tears trying to find back their way from the very other end of life.

I don't know how to measure the impact of this performance bit I know it is exactly this kind of experience that makes me working in our field.