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A shared reflection on
cross-Mediterranean cooperation
in the arts

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Alternative

autre

Gaze

regard

نظرة أخرى

<http://medreflection.eurocult.org>

Amsterdam

July 3 - 4, 2006

Debate on the political and cultural factors that influence Euro-Mediterranean cooperation

Algiers

February 16 - 18, 2007

Financing culture – the Algerian example (in cooperation with Editions Barzakh)

Amsterdam

March 1, 2007

The triangular relationship: Istanbul, Turkey, Europe

In July 2006 the ECF and its partners initiated a process of reflection on cultural cooperation between Europe and the Southern Mediterranean.

Projects that pursue artistic and cultural cooperation in North Africa, the Middle East and Turkey face specific challenges, both political and artistic. European cultural actors engaging in such projects are often insufficiently equipped *politically*. Of course they need funding, of course they need practical tools, but they also need to engage in open and challenging debates with their partners in the region.

Ljubljana

May 6 - 8, 2007

Cooperation between the Balkans and the Southern Mediterranean (in cooperation with Bunker Productions)

Amman

June 9 - 11, 2007

Artistic creation between practices of export and cooperation (in cooperation with Makan - House for Expression)

Alexandria

October 22 – 24, 2007

Governance and the position of NGOs from a legal and political perspective (in cooperation with Al Mawred Al Thaqafy / Culture Resource, Cairo)

We wanted to conduct the reflection process in an atmosphere of trust and openness, where artists, cultural actors and intellectuals from North Africa, the Middle East and Turkey could set the agenda and pose the questions important to them. What is *their* take on Europe and on the conditions in which they operate?

We have tried to break away from the usual forms of discourse in order to ask more searching questions such as:

- **How do cultural actors in the Mediterranean region and their European partners actually relate to one another? What are their expectations?**
- **How do partnership programmes affect the design of artistic projects?**
- **How do curators and artistic producers really look upon and approach the audience on the respective 'other side'?**

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Design

De C (Ris van Overeem)

Printed by

Sphinx & Industrie

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Support

The ECF is grateful for the support of NCDO (National Committee for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development). www.ncdo.nl

Published by the

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1075 HN Amsterdam
T +31 20 573 38 68
F +31 20 675 22 31
www.eurocult.org

ISBN/EAN
9789062820498

February 2008

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Building cooperation on shared ground

by Odile Chenal and Susanne Mors

Après avoir soutenu des projets artistiques et porté des programmes de partenariat dans la région méditerranéenne pendant plus de 15 ans, l'ECF a ressenti le besoin de prendre du recul. Elle a souhaité réfléchir à la forme que prend la coopération culturelle entre l'Europe et le Sud de la Méditerranée, à ce qu'elle signifie pour les personnes concernées, et se demander si les questions posées restent pertinentes. Nous avons toujours tendance à considérer la coopération de notre propre point de vue, et consacrons trop peu de temps à comprendre le contexte du partenariat dans la perspective de 'l'autre'.

L'une des difficultés dans le débat actuel consiste à aller au-delà du politiquement correct qui semble souvent dominer le dialogue euro-méditerranéen. Nous souhaitons faire plus qu'invoquer le « dialogue interculturel ». Cette

After more than 15 years of supporting artistic projects and running partnership programmes in the Southern Mediterranean region, the ECF felt a great need to step back and to reflect on how cultural cooperation between Europe and the Southern Mediterranean has actually taken shape, what it means for those concerned, and whether we are still asking ourselves the right questions. We always tend to regard cooperation from our own perspective and not much time is dedicated to understanding the partnership context from the perspective of the 'other'.

As we have been engaged in the Mediterranean region for some time, we have quite a legacy to build on. After our last seminar on the issue of cross-Mediterranean cooperation in Toledo in 2003 ('Beyond enlargement: opening Eastwards, closing Southwards?') we felt the need to understand better the context in which we are now working, from an infrastructural, as well as from an artistic point of view, and to go beyond the Med-hype that exists at present. Our excellent partners – many of whom are profiled in this book – ensured our access at the grassroots level. This is a level we always claim to reach, but whom are we actually reaching there?

One of the difficulties in these debates is to break through the wall of political correctness which often seems to dominate Euro-Med dialogue. We wanted to go beyond the buzz around 'intercultural dialogue'. Intercultural dialogue implies an opening, an invitation to understand, but, when used as a reaction to the famous 'Clash of Civilizations', it is politically loaded and risks fixing roles a priori. We were surprised by the ease and ability with which those who took part in the reflection meetings managed to free themselves from any form of 'representation': they all spoke in their own, individual

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and personal capacity. This meant that, while remaining continually aware of the political context, we all managed to create a space of trust and confidence.

We were impressed by the level of creativity and perseverance shown by cultural actors in the Middle East, North Africa and Turkey, and their capacity to act in difficult circumstances. This reinforces our belief that the creative sector has a leading role to play in finding innovative ways of successfully working in turbulent political environments, and that it can do so while remaining independent. The diversity of the region is also something that should be acknowledged before any cooperation policies or instruments are developed. Regional and multilateral cooperation are important, but we should stop treating the 'Arab world' as a single entity, which happens all too often when policies for funding are being designed.

The challenge now is to bring the conclusions drawn up in an intimate space to a broader arena where they could be shared with a larger group of cultural actors; where they will also attract the attention of the media and policymakers, and have an impact on the way instruments for cultural cooperation are designed and implemented in the future.

Therefore we will continue to advocate – among foundations and other players – the importance of building real partnerships across the Mediterranean.

This needs time and funds – more funds for independent spaces, for contemporary creation, for mobility and for capacity development.

Only if this sector is strong and flourishing at home can it engage in successful and sustainable cooperation across borders. Our partners in the region need

notion implique une ouverture, une invitation à comprendre. Mais lorsqu'on fait y fait appel pour réagir au fameux « choc des civilisations », sa charge politique risque de déterminer les rôles a priori. Nous avons été surpris par la facilité et l'aisance avec laquelle ceux qui ont participé aux groupes de réflexion parvenaient à se dégager de toute forme de « représentation » : chacun parlait en sa qualité propre, individuelle et personnelle. Tous ensemble, nous sommes parvenus, en gardant à l'esprit le contexte politique, à créer un espace de confiance et de dialogue.

Les acteurs du monde culturel au Moyen-Orient, en Afrique du Nord et en Turquie nous ont impressionnés par leur créativité et leur persévérance, ainsi que par leur capacité à œuvrer dans des conditions difficiles. Ces observations nous confortent dans la conviction que le secteur

artistique peut jouer un rôle moteur s'agissant, dans des environnements politiques difficiles, de trouver des modes d'action efficaces tout en gardant son indépendance.

Le défi est maintenant de porter ces conclusions, tirées d'un cercle restreint, sur une scène plus vaste, où elles puissent être partagées avec un groupe plus large d'acteurs culturels ; de l'amener là où elles trouveront aussi l'attention des médias et des décideurs politiques et aura des répercussions sur la manière de concevoir et de mettre en œuvre les instruments de coopération culturelle à venir. Nous continuerons par conséquent à défendre - face aux bailleurs de fonds et à d'autres acteurs - l'importance de construire des partenariats transméditerranéens bien réels. Cela nécessite du temps, mais aussi davantage de fonds pour financer des lieux indépendants, des créations contemporaines, pour permettre la mobilité et le développement d'infrastructures. C'est seulement en étant fort et prospère que ce secteur pourra engager une coopération efficace et durable par-delà les frontières. Il faut à nos partenaires dans la région plus que du soutien ad hoc. Ils ont besoin de nous sentir engagés pour les aider à construire une base solide à la coopération. Cette publication présente les principaux résultats de notre groupe de réflexion. Elle se fait l'écho de ceux et celles qui y ont participé, intellectuellement et/ou artistiquement. Elle offre aussi des exemples de projets de coopération culturelle 'en marche'. Et si vous voulez en savoir plus, vous trouverez dans le site de l'ECF un dossier spécial (<http://medreflection.eurocult.org>) incluant des articles, études de cas et liens.

more than ad-hoc support. They need to feel that we are committed to helping build a firm ground for this genuine cooperation to flourish.

This publication presents the main findings of the reflection process. You will hear the voices of those who have contributed intellectually and artistically. You will find examples of projects that show cultural cooperation at work. And if you want more, the ECF's website contains an information dossier with all the relevant resources, including essays, profiles and case studies [<http://medreflection.eurocult.org>].

بعد مضي 15 عاماً على دعم مشاريع عمل فنية وتنظيم برامج شراكة في جنوبي المتوسط، إرتأت المؤسسة الأوروبية للثقافة (European Cultural Foundation) أنه من الضرورة بمكان أخذ وقت للمراجعة والتفكير في كيفية نشوء التعاون الثقافي ما بين أوروبا وبلاد جنوبي المتوسط وفي ما يعنيه هذا التعاون بالنسبة إلى المعنيين بالموضوع، وفي احتمال استمرارنا بطرح الأسئلة الصحيحة على أنفسنا، إذ لطالما سعينا إلى النظر إلى التعاون من منظرنا الخاص من دون أن نخصص وقتاً كبيراً لفهم سياق الشراكة من منظار الآخر.

وتكمن إحدى الصعوبات المطروحة في النقاش القائم حالياً في إزالة النقاب عن الصوابية السياسية التي غالباً ما تطغى على الحوار الأوروبي المتوسطي. فقد أردنا الذهاب أبعد من القيل والقال الدائر حول "الحوار ما بين الثقافات". فهذا الحوار يعني انفتاحاً ودعوة لفهم الآخر لكنه حين يُستخدم كردة فعل لمبدأ "تصادم الحضارات" الشهير، يكون محملاً أيضاً بالتضمينات السياسية ويوشك بالتالي تحديد الأدوار مسبقاً. لقد فاجأنا مدى ارتياح المشاركين في اجتماعات التفكير وتمكنهم من تحرير أنفسهم من أي شكل من أشكال "التمثيل" إذ تحدثوا جميعاً بصفاتهم الخاصة والفردية والشخصية. وقد دلّ هذا الأمر على أننا قد تمكنا كئنا، من دون نسيان السياق السياسي، من خلق حيز ثقة وانتماء.

كما تأثرنا بمستوى الإبداع والمثابرة الذي أظهره الناشطون في منطقة الشرق الأوسط وشمال إفريقيا وتركيا وبقدرتهم على التصرف وسط ظروف صعبة، الأمر الذي يوطد إيماننا القائم على ضرورة أن يكون للمجال الخلاق دوراً رئيسياً في إيجاد طرق مبتكرة للعمل بنجاح وسط ظروف سياسية مضطربة، و على قدرته على تأدية هذا الدور بصورة مستقلة.

و يكمن التحدي الحالي في نقل الاستنتاجات المستخلصة في إطار حميمي إلى ساحة أوسع حيث يُمكن للحديث عن التعاون الثقافي الأوروبي-المتوسطي أن تشارك فيه مجموعة أكبر من الناشطين الثقافيين وحيث يسترعي هذا الحديث انتباه وسائل الإعلام وصناع القرار ويُحدث بالتالي تأثيراً على طريقة إعداد اليات التعاون الثقافي وتطبيقها في المستقبل.

لذلك، سنواصل دعمنا، كغيرنا من المؤسسات والناشطين، لأهمية إنشاء شراكات حقيقية في سائر أنحاء المتوسط. ويحتاج هذا الأمر إلى وقت وإلى موارد مالية لتمويل الفعاليات الثقافية المستقلة والأبداع المعاصر و التنقل الفني وتطوير الكفاءات. فإذا تقوى و ازدهر قطاع الشراكة في البلد الأم يمكنه أن يشارك في تعاون ناجح ودائم خارج حدود البلاد. فشركاؤنا في المنطقة يحتاجون إلى أكثر من دعم مناسب: فهم يريدون أن يشعروا أننا ملتزمون بالمساعدة على بناء أرضية صلبة للتعاون.





A compilation of voices from the Mediterranean reflection process

Alternative orientations

Compiled by Hanneloes Weeda

Comprendre le contexte local : un préalable à la coopération culturelle et artistique

La coopération culturelle entre l'Europe et la région méditerranéenne est souvent gênée par des orientations stratégiques créées de toutes pièces et des lignes de démarcation géopolitiques et géographiques artificiellement imposées. S'il est une chose que le groupe de réflexion a réussi à faire apparaître, c'est bien le fait que nous devons revoir les paramètres autour desquels s'organise la coopération culturelle euro-méditerranéenne. Il nous faut rechercher de nouvelles configurations, régionales et artistiques, pour inspirer des « *orientations alternatives* ». Cela suppose un changement de perspective, et une nouvelle ouverture à l'égard de la région méditerranéenne, qui rompe avec une vision politique et culturelle figée, préconçue, et reconsidère le

Understanding the local context: a pretext for cultural and artistic cooperation

Cultural cooperation between Europe and the Mediterranean region is repeatedly hampered by artificially-coined strategic orientations and artificially imposed geopolitical and geographical demarcation lines. If the Mediterranean Reflection Process made one thing clear, it is that we must revisit the parameters around which Euro-Med cultural cooperation is organised. There is a need to seek out new constellations, regional and artistic, that inspire, in the words of **Marlous Willemsen**¹, '*alternative orientations*'. This presupposes a shift in mindset, and a fresh openness towards the Mediterranean region, leaving behind the preconceived European political and cultural 'gaze', and seeking anew the local context in which the contemporary arts really function today. It is a frequently heard grievance that European cultural operators are 'unprepared' when they enter the

1

chapter

Mediterranean region, in search of partnership projects, new audiences or cultural goods. In addition, experience reveals that cooperation projects can be burdened by politically correct discourse, confused expectations, misinterpretation and stereotypes. What is more, as **Odile Chenal**² points out, some Euro-Mediterranean relationships can even be overshadowed by a certain sense of apprehension: *'European NGOs can be quite hesitant to bring their Mediterranean partners into difficult or confrontational circumstances, not knowing what effects their projects will have on the local context, and being afraid to make mistakes'*.

Partnership with whom?

International NGOs and donors are mainly dependent on the agendas set by their own governing bodies. They come and seek out what they are looking for. One much voiced concern is the fact that many outsiders assume the Arab region to be a homogenous whole, making little or no nuances in their approach to the individual countries that comprise the region. When outsiders enter the region, in search of partners, in search of artistic cooperation, whom are they actually seeking? Those that are like them? Those with whom they risk entering into conflict, if they don't work with them?

Basma El Hussein³ questions the motivation behind European interest in the region: *'If there were no Iraqi or Palestinian conflicts, would the Arab World be perceived differently? Would this affect the way one deals with the region? Are we interesting enough culturally? Are we loved for who we are, or just because we are the "case in question"?''*

And **Pierre Abi Saab**⁴ suggests a possible driving force behind Euro-Med cultural cooperation: *'Curators use fashionable Arab arts to make the*

contexte local dans lequel les arts contemporains fonctionnent aujourd'hui. Parmi les doléances récurrentes, on entend dire que les acteurs européens du secteur culturel arrivent dans le monde arabe ou en Turquie « sans être préparés », à la recherche de projets de partenariats, de nouveaux publics ou de biens culturels. En outre, l'expérience montre qu'un discours politiquement correct, des attentes confuses, des erreurs d'interprétation et des stéréotypes pèsent sur les projets de coopération. Dans ce paragraphe, nous explorons quelques-unes des questions qui entravent actuellement les partenariats euro-méditerranéens et évoquons le rôle-clé des ONG présentes sur place pour améliorer la connaissance du contexte local.

¹ Deputy Director of the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World, Leiden.

² Deputy Director of the European Cultural Foundation, Amsterdam.

³ Managing Director of Al Mawred Al Thaqafy (Culture Resource), Cairo.

⁴ Beirut-based journalist and critic.

fashionable machine work in Europe! Curator **Nav Haq**⁵ shows that European producers are often incapable of disconnecting the works of art and productions of the Mediterranean region from current geopolitical discourses.

Many regional exhibitions shown in the West are closely linked to migration processes and issues of integration. There seems to be, moreover, a tacit expectation that exhibitions from the Mediterranean will automatically attract the domestic immigrant audience, which, in practice, they generally fail to do.

Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes⁶ sums up the above problematic succinctly: *'Curators, producers and donors—keen though they may be on cooperation—do they themselves know where they are coming from, or the stereotypes they labour under, or how much of their own cloistered identities they may be projecting, in some cases, onto others? Have they thought about the effect of their work, not only on the subject creativity but also on the cultural groups with which they cooperate, and, more generally, on cultural diversity?'*

Entering the region unprepared

These and other examples hint at the extent to which European cultural operators, funders and curators are unprepared as they enter the Mediterranean region. A major task lies ahead for cultural organisations and actors in helping to increase knowledge of the local context in order to bridge this gap. Already NGOs are developing a web of relations with local communities and among themselves. But they could do even more.

Nevenka Koprivšek⁷ reminds us that in Ljubljana, NGO activists tried for many years to bring the NGO sector together, but that it was only when they began to study the local legal frameworks and cultural policies that they were able to bring about change.

According to **Adila Laïdi-Hanieh**⁸ artists should also look at themselves and focus on certain aspects of their identity, whilst remaining aware of how they are perceived both from within and outside the region. **Zeina Arida**⁹ sees danger ahead for artists who are not aware of the way in which outsiders perceive them. To ensure that the region does not become a shopping centre for Western curators, says Zeina, artists must urgently reflect on their identity and on that of Arab contemporary art. During the meeting with Turkish cultural operators and artists held in Amsterdam, the opinion was voiced that what is lacking is a sense of *'symmetrical cooperation'*. Cultural organisations in

Turkey need to be more critical of what Western organisations put on their agendas, and how they push their priorities forward.

For cultural operators to be able to correct distorted images and misrepresentations and to open a window on the Mediterranean region there is one urgent precondition, namely the drawing up of a common ground of operation. **Charlotte Huygens**¹⁰ sums this up in two sentences: *'Instead of remaining tied to stereotyped, orientalist oppositions between East and West, and overestimating their importance, well balanced, long term cultural relations are better served by the definition of the common ground between Europe and the MENA countries. (...) While the process of reflection and debate should certainly also aim at the improvement of facilities as a condition sine qua non, the starting point should surely be the discussion, where somewhere between the two ends, and among all possible variations and combinations, the most inspiring meeting places for cultural operators can be found, that is, the right spaces for dialogue.'*

From partnership to real cooperation

In the cases where real cooperation does take place, partners from both sides are mutually enriched in their understanding of the 'other'. **Hala Galal**¹¹ reveals the following: *'What I know is that when European experts come to see what we do here, they sometimes ask me: "Why do you do this and not that, why don't you do it this way instead?". Then when they come back several months later, they often say: "You were right, it doesn't work this way at home". It is not for me to say, but I think that they learn a great deal about us with these kinds of experiences and projects. In any case, this type of project is based on exchange.'* **Hanan Kassab Hassan**¹² goes a step further and in fact uses the whole issue of 'understanding the local context', as the theme for the festival she is running in 2008, called *Damascus: Cultural Capital of the Arab World*. The festival provides the context to show outsiders, often influenced by negative stereotypes of Damascus, another image of the city: *'It's the image of a country that has always been a meeting place and a focus for creativity; (...) a country where the culture is a mixture of Arab poetry, Syriac song, Kurdish music, Circassian dance, Turkish cuisine, and Armenian photography. It's also the picture of a country where you can walk alone in the early hours of the morning without the slightest concern, and where you can knock on any door and be invited in for a cup of coffee.'*

⁵ Independent curator based in London.

⁶ General Director of Transeuropéennes, Paris.

⁷ Director of Bunker Productions, Ljubljana.

⁸ Lecturer in modern and contemporary Arab thought, and Palestinian contemporary arts at Bir Zeit University.

⁹ Director of the Arab Image Foundation, Beirut.

¹⁰ Curator of Arts and the Islamic World, Netherlands.

¹¹ Director of the Egyptian film production company SEMAT.

¹² Director of the High Institute of Dramatic Arts, Damascus, and secretary-general of 'Damascus: Cultural Capital of the Arab World 2008'.

Beaucoup s'étonnent de la manière dont les politiques culturelles de l'UE ou des États membres, et même les politiques des fondations en matière de coopération culturelle avec la région méditerranéenne, parviennent à rester en équilibre entre l'intérêt pour le contexte local évoqué dans la section précédente, et la relative méconnaissance de ce contexte. La socio-anthropologue turque Ayse Caglar a relevé des différences d'attitudes par trop évidentes à l'égard de la région, qui déterminent d'avance la forme que prendront les politiques de coopération et de financement : « Il y a, d'une part, le langage politique dur employé pour les questions relatives aux frontières et à la sécurité et, d'autre part, le langage ouvert, plus doux, familier, de la 'politique de voisinage' (une relation sympathique de confiance et d'hospitalité... mais sans proximité excessive, en maintenant une distance de sécurité). » C'est dans le cadre de ce paradoxe que les financeurs de l'art et de la culture, dans la région méditerranéenne, et avec elle, fixent leurs priorités. Il est possible de cerner, sur la base des remarques faites au cours du processus de réflexion, l'attitude des bailleurs de fonds européens dans la région. Ils oscillent entre les deux pôles opposés définis par Ayse Caglar : certains, influencés par la politique, sont tentés d'investir, toujours de manière ponctuelle, à court terme, dans des domaines sensibles et en vogue ; d'autres, poussés par des préoccupations de voisinage, développent des projets de coopération aux motivations sociales; les uns comme les autres se heurtent aux questions de mobilité et de visas...

Euro-Med funding and partnership: engagement and responsibility

For many it remains ambiguous how EU or member state cultural policies, and even foundations' policies on cultural cooperation with the Mediterranean region manage to balance on a fine line between retaining an interest in, and yet remaining relatively ignorant of, the local context which we read about in the previous section. Social anthropologist **Ayse Caglar**¹³ from Turkey has pointed out the all too obvious differences in attitude that exist towards the region and which predetermine the manner in which cooperation and funding policies are formed: *'On the one hand we have the hard political language used for border and security issues. On the other hand we have the open, softer, family language of the "neighbourhood policy" (a nice relationship of trust and hospitality – not too close, but keeping a safe distance).'* It is in the context of the above paradox that funders of arts and culture in and with the Mediterranean region set their priorities. From remarks made during the reflection process, it is possible to paint a general picture of the way in which European funders operate in the region, as they oscillate between the two opposing poles defined by Ayse; some lured by political pressure to invest in fashionable topical dilemmas, always punctual and short-lived; others driven by neighbourly concern to develop socially motivated cooperation projects; and all restricted by mobility and visa issues. *'It must be said that the projects supported by Europe spend a great deal of money on isolated events and on events that leave few traces once they've taken place. It would be more relevant to create structures that last, and to devote more support for the mobility of artists. Our youth are isolated. They have no chance of travelling, and it's next to impossible to obtain a visa',* says

Hanan Kassab Hassan. Sofiane Hadjadj,¹⁴ whose publishing house Editions Barzakh in Algiers has received foreign funding on more than one

occasion, highlights the underestimated drawbacks of short-term project funding: *'The support of the French Cultural Centre for Francophone Publishing (CCF) was very important for us. It provided our business with an injection of money that we used to finance other publishing projects. But this support had obvious limitations. It could only be sporadic, and for this reason, it did not permit us to develop our publishing house. (...) The inherent risk in this kind of financial support is this: it makes us more economically comfortable and, as a result, we risk turning away from the principal objectives of any publisher—reaching a precise readership, helping to develop public reading, and promoting the national book business, etc. We risk only publishing the books that we love, but ones that don't correspond to any public expectation—real or imaginary.'*

Valuating foreign funding and state funding

So where then lies the added value of foreign funding? *'The main point is that partnerships are an invaluable stimulus to encounters with other universes, other histories, other preoccupations; and this experience of otherness can be used to build bridges between Algeria and the rest of the world'*, comments **Sofiane**. As everywhere in the world, non-governmental funding for cultural cooperation projects fills a gap left open by the state. The state releases a great deal of money for the arts, but often attaches to it a certain number of 'expectations' or 'requirements'. Without state support, however, the maintenance of the cultural infrastructure would be highly problematic. From the introduction to the Algiers meeting we quote: *'In less than twenty years, this [the role of the state: Ed] has been completely transformed. Omnipresent, omnipotent, it was once the principal employer and source of revenue for the economy as a whole, compared to which the barely tolerated private sector was a poor relation. Today, it is attempting to disengage itself from this position in favour of market economics, through a series of financial mechanisms. And if there is an area in which the disengagement process has been particularly spectacular, it is that of culture. In a market economy, and without public funds, how was this unorthodox merchandise to be financed? The State, paradoxically, has continued to be the main financial backer of cultural activity through commissions, subsidies and, in recent years, major commemorations that mobilise the entire cultural apparatus for extended periods, e.g. "The Year of Algeria in France"; and "Algiers 2007, Capital of the Arab World". And these, admittedly, have provided new sources of funding for cultural objects.'* Not only colleagues from the

¹³⁾ Associate Professor and Department Head of the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology at the Central European University, Budapest.

¹⁴⁾ Co-director of Barzakh Editions, Algiers

Mediterranean, but also from the Balkans recognise traces of these developments in their own countries.

A major question is, to what extent is there an alternative, in the Mediterranean region, to the public funding of culture? *'In Algeria, private investment in culture remains marginal, with the notable exception of music. And this is no coincidence. The music industry brings in short-term profits with little initial outlay. With liberalisation, firms have nonetheless begun to put themselves forward as potential partners for small-scale producers of cultural products, with sponsorship and publicity campaigns. But this type of funding remains too uncertain and unpredictable to give rise to enduring cultural enterprises.'*

For some cultural operators, though, the state remains a source for partnership, without the support of which cultural activity would be seriously endangered. Alternative funding sources and private investment should not replace state funding, but can complement and supplement it, in those areas that miss the boat in regular government funding strategies. Others, however, are more pessimistic about state support. They prefer to develop initiatives along private lines, enjoying the relative freedom of manoeuvre and the lower level of bureaucracy. **Basma El Hussein**y draws attention to the political dimension of the 'cultural' role of any public sector and how this inevitably affects the status of cultural activity in a country. But, since radically changing the state support system would lead to massive unemployment in the cultural sector, **Laila Hourani**¹⁵ concludes that NGOs cannot but deal with the state and cannot afford to simply ignore it, by creating a parallel cultural sector.

The role of foreign funding

Grants for cultural and artistic projects from private foundations and other sources from outside the Mediterranean countries naturally remain a welcome source of funding for many artists and organisations in the Mediterranean region. Such funding allows them to carry out projects for which it may be impossible to find domestic support. However, the manner in which funders hop in and out of the region, disregarding their responsibility for a process they set in motion and fail to sustain, is highly criticised. Moroccan video artists and film makers **Abdelaziz Taleb** and **Abdellatif Benfaïdoul**¹⁶ gave us the following account: *'We believe funders can and should do more than simply give money or offer their resources. We apply for a grant, they give us the money, we send the report, and that's it. No dialogue, no distribution of the results of the project. Funders should engage more after the project is*

over, for example by offering different platforms, discussing the results, facilitating a follow-up. We are able to do so little, compared to what they can do in their position. They can help us connect with other projects, plug us into their international network, make sure people know about each other's work. Independent foundations should play this role. We need more than money, we need continuity.' In connection to this, the following question was posed in Alexandria: Should we seek to meet all needs by funding alone, or should we design programmes that can build the community of artists and generate the optimal environment for the practice of art?

Responsibility and long-term commitment

More long-term commitment should not replace domestic responsibility, but complement it, for example by strengthening and empowering local organisations (capacity building), or by helping to influence policy on the local level. International funders or foundations tend to support visible events, but not the infrastructure which makes them possible. Foundations also tend to base their policies on secondary criteria, such as peace and reconciliation, intercultural exchange, or social integration. They are eager to invest in the region and come with the attitude that they are here to make a change. *'What do European funders want from Turkey?'* was a question posed by **Ahmet Polat**¹⁷ at the meeting in Amsterdam. This leads to an 'artistic grey area' where artistic practices are not valued and supported in their own right, but judged in terms of their social and political impact. In the long run this can be damaging for an independent arts sector in the region. As **William Wells**¹⁸ said in Amman: *'We were always talking about the funders in terms of us and them'*. This is why Townhouse Gallery in Cairo put a great deal of effort into matching international funding with local support, gained by stimulating interest for the gallery's activities outside of the inner artistic circles. One suggestion, put forward by **Henrik Placht**¹⁹ could be that funders active in arts and culture look more into the practices of development agencies, which generally have longer term human resources capacity building strategies. Funders need to be willing and able to adapt their support strategies according to the needs that differ in each country and in each political situation. If they are not willing to adapt to and engage with the consequences of working in an unstable region, then maybe they should re-consider their engagement in such a region at all, was an opinion voiced in the Amman workshop.

¹⁵ Regional manager Creativity and Mutuality of the British Council in Syria.

¹⁶ Video artists and film makers, based in the Netherlands.

¹⁷ Photographer, based in Istanbul.

¹⁸ Founder and director of the Townhouse Gallery in Cairo, Egypt.

¹⁹ Initiator and founder of the International Academy of Art, Palestine.

At the start of any meeting like the one that took place in Ljubljana, proximity produces both a tension and a void, both of them conspicuous. The tension has to do with the fact that each participant is thinking about his or her proper place in the encounter, and the sense of his or her presence. The void, always relative, but always perceptible, has to be physically and mentally occupied if any sharing is to take place. It is a resonance, first and foremost. Often materialising round a conference table, it ritualises the encounter and proposes a horizon. In Ljubljana, it took some time for a void to form, and to begin vibrating. It was necessary, first of all, to get past the paralysing distance that was inherent in the risk of speaking. And speaking is impossible if those with whom one is trying to communicate do not adopt a position of anticipating the speaker's discourse, or indeed eliciting it. The last session in Ljubljana, with its agenda of division, war, objective walls and subjective frontiers, was a memorable moment of discursive movement towards gravity and profundity, towards the truth of engagement. It was an occasion when proximity created connections. The departure of the first participant felt like a loss, but we went our separate ways with a sense that the void had been occupied, and that we ourselves were now inhabited by a part of it, a certain absence, and also something of the walls that had been raised up to confine diversity. Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes

Au début d'une rencontre comme celle de Ljubljana, le côtoiement produit à la fois une tension et un vide, tous deux perceptibles.

La tension tient à ce que chacun s'interroge sur sa propre place dans la réunion et sur le sens de sa présence. Le vide, toujours relatif, mais toujours perceptible, est celui qu'il faut physiquement et mentalement se mettre à habiter pour que le partage ait lieu.

Ce vide est d'abord résonance. Souvent matérialisé par le carré formé par les tables, il ritualise la rencontre, lui offrant l'horizon vers quoi tendre. A Ljubljana, il fallut du temps pour que ce vide prenne forme, pour qu'il se mette à vibrer. Il fallut sortir de cette distance paralysante inhérente au risque de dire. Or dire n'est pas possible si celles et ceux avec qui l'on parle ne se mettent pas en position d'anticiper la parole de l'autre, de la susciter. La dernière séance de la réunion de Ljubljana, qui porta sur la division, la guerre, les murs réels et les frontières mentales, reste dans les mémoires comme un moment exceptionnel de dégagement de la parole vers la gravité et la profondeur, vers la vérité de l'engagement. Dès lors, le côtoiement a fait lien. Le départ du premier participant a été vécu comme une perte. Nous nous sommes séparés dans le sentiment que le vide a été habité et qu'en nous désormais habite une part de ce vide et une part d'absence, et une part des murs érigés pour confiner le divers. Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes

As contradictory as it may appear, it is in search of this 'otherness' that most people cross the borders of their own country and go in search of new input to their personal lives and professional practice. On the one hand, they have a strong desire to get to know other cultures, and a sincere interest in meeting the representatives of those cultures. On the other hand, they are not seeking shared developments or common features, but whatever makes for difference. Charlotte Huygens

The arts field is a fruitful venue for any type of encounter, because it is the most difficult field in which to put closures. In the arts field unsettling processes take place, prompted by political and social developments, because artists are often IN, but not PART OF those developments. Ayse Caglar

Audiences: constructed, imagined, real...

'When presenting contemporary arts to certain audiences, the presented work might be totally alien to them, it might include artistic and aesthetic codes which these audiences are unfamiliar with. This raises the question: Do the presenters of contemporary arts impose their aesthetic and artistic codes and values to the audience without even attempting to validate their codes?' ²⁰

Western contemporary art forms tend to be 'imposed' on local audiences, asserts **Marie Elias**²¹. Does imported art really 'fit' the local context? Are local audiences prepared to receive European contemporary art forms? For intercultural cooperation to be really intercultural, should production not match the audience? In Amman, **Salwa Mikdadi**²² focused on the question of how it is possible for curators to organise exhibitions that really do respond to the needs of both local and international audiences. As touched upon in the first paragraph, there is a general feeling in the region that cultural operators rely heavily on Western approaches when designing their projects, leaving aside local traditions—like story-telling for example—traditions that are inherently familiar to local audiences. Instead, certain topical themes, especially those that receive media attention, such as the position of women, are favoured. But do local audiences recognise themselves in such abstract 'meta' discourses as these, rooted as they are in an external perspective on the region, on trend-influenced perceptions from outside? Would it not be more productive to engage with issues and subjects that have a clear domestic resonance, that touch the hearts of people in the Mediterranean region, and not only Western audiences? A heavy focus and reliance on cultural and artistic events that are initiated by non-Mediterranean cultural actors automatically creates a distance between the events and the local audiences. In this respect, more stable regional and local cooperation in the preparation of productions would take art out of its established context and closer to the public.

Publics : construits, imaginés, réels...

Les formes d'art contemporain tendent à être « imposées » aux publics locaux. Dans ces conditions, cet art peut-il vraiment « convenir » au contexte local ? Les publics locaux sont-ils préparés à recevoir les formes européennes d'art contemporain ? Pour que la coopération soit *réellement* interculturelle, la production ne devrait-elle pas correspondre au public ? Dans ce paragraphe, nous nous concentrons sur la question des modalités qui permettraient d'organiser des manifestations répondant véritablement aux besoins des publics *aussi bien locaux qu'internationaux*. On constate dans la région le sentiment général que les acteurs du secteur culturel s'appuient fortement sur des approches occidentales pour concevoir leurs projets, laissant de côté les traditions locales qui - comme celle du conte - sont typiquement destinées à la famille ou à un public local. À l'inverse, certains thèmes sont privilégiés, en particulier lorsqu'ils suscitent l'attention des médias, comme la place des femmes ou l'Islam. Mais les publics locaux se reconnaissent-ils dans des « méta »-discours aussi abstraits que ceux-ci, enracinés dans un point de vue extérieur sur la région, dans des perceptions externes sujettes aux modes ? Ne serait-il pas plus productif de nous engager dans des thématiques et

²⁰ Extract from the report of the expert meeting held in Amman, from 9 -11 June 2007, by Paul Keller.

²¹ Dramaturge and critic, University of Damascus.

²² Berkeley-based independent curator and art historian who writes on modern and contemporary art of the Arab world.

des sujets qui ont clairement une résonance locale, qui touchent le cœur des populations de la région méditerranéenne, et pas seulement les publics occidentaux ? Une focalisation trop forte sur des événements culturels et artistiques initiés par des acteurs européens crée automatiquement une distance entre ces événements et les publics locaux. C'est pourquoi une coopération régionale et locale plus constante dans la préparation des productions sortirait l'art de son cadre élitiste et le rapprocherait du grand public.

Dans ce paragraphe, Adila Laïdi-Hanieh plaide pour la construction de stratégies de développement du public à long terme, pour des stratégies actives et intégratives. Pour trouver l'intégralité de ce chapitre en anglais, vous pouvez visiter <http://medreflection.eurocult.org>.

Adila Laïdi-Hanieh concludes through her analysis that cooperation tends to take place between the same communities—the usual suspects—on both sides of the Mediterranean, namely those with a certain level of 'culture' or international orientation. In fact, the content of much contemporary art presupposes a certain level of culture. The style is abstract, ironic, post-modern, minimalist etc. What is being offered, in terms of style, can be quite alien to the general public.

In the light of the above disparity between production/art and its audience, **Adila** produced an analytical paper for the Mediterranean Reflection Process, which discusses the above phenomenon and argues for the build up of long-term, activist, inclusive audience development strategies by way of a commitment to building dynamic and pluralist societies. The text on pages 30 through 33 is a short abstract of this paper, the full version of which can be found on the European Cultural Foundation's website (<http://medreflection.eurocult.org>).

الفصل الأول: توجهات بديلة

1. فهم البيئة المحلية: مُبرر من أجل تعاون ثقافي وفني

إن التوجهات الاستراتيجية الموضوعية بشكل اصطناعي والخطوط الحدودية الجيو السياسية والجغرافية المفروضة اصطناعياً تُعرقل التعاون الثقافي ما بين أوروبا ومنطقة المتوسط. فإن أوضحت سلسلة الأفكار في إطار مجموعة التفكير الأرومتوسطي - أمراً فهو أنه علينا أن نناقش من جديد المبادئ التي تنظم التعاون الثقافي الأرومتوسطي. فهناك ضرورة إلى البحث عن مسارات جديدة إقليمية وفنية تحت على إرساء "توجهات بديلة"، مما يستلزم تغييراً في طريقة التفكير وانفتاحاً جديداً نحو منطقة البحر الأبيض المتوسط، والتخلي عن "الرأي" الأوروبي السياسي والثقافي المُسبق التكوين، هذا فضلاً عن البحث ثانية عن الإطار المحلي التي ضمنه تؤدي الفنون المعاصرة هدفها بحق اليوم. وكثيراً ما يُشكى من أن الناشطين الأوروبين الثقافيين "ليسوا مهيين" إلى ذلك عندما يدخلون العالم العربي أو تركياً بحثاً عن مشاريع شراكة أو جماهير جديدة أو منتوجات ثقافية، تكشف التجربة أن الحديث عن الصوابية السياسية وأن التوقعات المُبهمة وإساءة التفسير والأفكار المُسبقة عناصر تُشكل مجتمعة عائقاً أمام مشاريع الشراكة. ونبحث في هذا المقطع في بعض المسائل التي تُعرقل حالياً الشراكات الأوروبية-المتوسطية كما نلّمح إلى الحلّ الذي تملكه المنظمات غير الحكومية للتعريف أكثر بالسياق المحلي.

2. التمويل والشراكة الأرومتوسطيان: التزام ومسؤولية

لا يزال الكثيرون يرون غامضة الفكرة المرتكزة على كفيّة تمكن السياسات الثقافية للاتحاد الأوروبي أو الدول الأعضاء فيه وحتى سياسات المؤسسات المتعلقة بالتعاون الثقافي مع البلاد المتوسطية من أن تُوازن بشكل جيد ما بين إبداء اهتمام بالسياق المحلي الذي قرأنا عنه في الفقرة السابقة والبقاء مع ذلك جاهلة نسبياً لهذا السياق. فقد أشار عالم الأنثروبولوجيا الاجتماعي التركي "أيز كاغلار" إلى كلّ الاختلافات المفروغ منها في المواقف تجاه المنطقة والتي تحدّد مسبقاً الطريقة التي من خلالها ينشأ التعاون وتُصاغ سياسات التمويل في المنطقة، قائلاً: " لدينا من جهة اللغة السياسية القاسية المستخدمة في المسائل الخاصة بالحدود وبأمن البلاد، ومن جهة أخرى اللغة المنفتحة والأكثر ليونة والعائلية الخاصة بـ"سياسة الجوار" (إنها علاقة طيبة قائمة على الثقة والضيافة، وهي غير حميمة جداً لكن تضع بين الطرفين مسافة أمنة). وفي سياق التناقض الأنف الذكر، يحدّد الممولون في مجالي الفنون والثقافة في منطقة المتوسط أولوياتهم. وإنطلاقاً من ملاحظات أديت خلال اجتماعات مجموعة التفكير الأرومتوسطي، من الممكن رسم صورة عامة عن طريقة عمل الممولين الأوروبين في المنطقة، إذ نجدهم يتأرجحون بين الطرفين المتعارضين اللذين حددهما "أيز". فبعض الممولين أغراه الضغط السياسي للاستمرار في موضوعات معضلات مألوفة تكون دائماً دقيقة المواعيد وقصيرة الأجل، فيما وجد البعض الآخر نفسه تحت تأثير علاقة الجوار بطور مشاريع تعاون قائمة على الدافع الاجتماعي. وكلا الطرفان مقيدان بقضيتي التنقل والتأثيرات...

3. الجماهير: التي تم تكوينها والمتخيلة و الموجودة فعلا

تميل أشكال الفن الغربية المعاصرة إلى أن "تفرض" على الجماهير المحلية. لكن هل فعلاً "يناسب" الفن المستورد السياق المحلي؟ وهل الجماهير المحلية مهينة لتلقي أشكال الفن الأوروبية المعاصرة؟ ومن أجل قيام تعاون فعلي بين ثقافتين، ألا يجدر بالمنتجات أن تتلاءم مع الجمهور؟ تُركز في هذا المقطع على سؤال كيف يمكن للمنسقين الفنيين تنظيم معارض تلبي فعلاً حاجات الجماهير المحلية والدولية... ●●●

ويسود المنطقة إحساس عام بأن الناشطين الثقافيين يعتمدون بشكل كبير على المقاربات الغربية لدى تصميم مشاريعهم، طارحين جانباً التقاليد المحلية كفن الحكّي على سبيل المثال، وهي تقاليد مألوفة فطرياً لدى الجماهير المحلية. وعضواً عن ذلك، تلقى بعض المواضيع الراهنة تفضيلاً، خاصة تلك التي توليها وسائل الإعلام اهتماماً، كوضعية النساء أو الإسلام. ولكن هل تجد الجماهير المحلية ذاتها في هذه الخطابات التجريدية والمتجذرة في مقاربات خارجية عن المنطقة؟

أليس من المنفعة أكثر التطرق إلى قضايا ومواضيع تلقى صدى محلياً وتؤثر في نفوس سكان منطقة المتوسط وليس فقط في نفوس الجماهير الغربية؟ إن تركيزاً واعتماداً كبيرين على الفعاليات الثقافية والفنية التي يطلقها ناشطون ثقافيون لا يتحدرون من منطقة المتوسط يخلقان تلقائياً هوة ما بين هذه الفعاليات والجماهير المحلية. وفي هذا الإطار، من شأن تعاون دائم أكبر من الناحيتين الإقليمية والمحلية في سبيل التحضير للانتاجات الفنية أن يضع الفن خارج الإطار المخصص له ويقرّبه من العامة. وفي هذا المقطع، تحاول السيدة عديلة العاندي هنية الإقناع بضرورة وضع استراتيجيات طويلة الأمد، ناشطة وشاملة و هادفة إلى استقطاب عدد أكبر من الجماهير.

Changement de paradigme : construire des pratiques culturelles d'inclusion

Par Adila Laïdi-Hanieh

Ces 15 dernières années ont apporté de nouvelles possibilités aux opérateurs culturels arabes: Au niveau technologique, la révolution multimédia a introduit de nouveaux outils de production et de distribution; au plan légal et financier, de nouvelles opportunités s'ouvrent pour s'organiser et travailler en dehors des structures gouvernementales; dans la région arabe, des organisations indépendantes proposent des espaces pour accueillir des événements et aller à la rencontre d'un nouveau public. À l'extérieur, l'immigration et le terrorisme ont stimulé la curiosité à l'égard la culture arabe, et les structures euro-méditerranéennes donnent des opportunités sans précédent en termes de financement, de formation, d'échanges, de coproduction et de rencontres avec de nouveaux publics. Plus important, les arts contemporains (visuels, performance et multimédias) tendent à être plus conceptuels, ce qui transforme les pratiques artistiques en vecteurs de discours critique, loin des abstractions lyriques modernistes ou des tentatives de renouvellement du *Turath* (héritage culturel) du siècle dernier.

Problématique

Si le marché extérieur (panarabe et occidental) et le soutien aux produits culturels arabes

Abstract of the essay

Paradigm shift: building inclusive cultural practices

by Adila Laïdi-Hanieh

These are interesting times for Arab cultural operators. The last 15 years have offered new possibilities: technologically, the IT revolution offers new affordable tools for production and distribution; legally and financially, new opportunities are offered to organise outside governmental structures; in the Arab region, new independent organisations offer space to host events and meet a new public. Externally, immigration and terrorism have stimulated curiosity in Arab culture, and Euro-Med structures offer unprecedented opportunities for funding, training, touring, co-production and meeting new audiences. More importantly, contemporary arts (visual, performing and multimedia) tend towards the conceptual, which is transforming artistic and aesthetic practice into critical discourse, away from the Modernist lyrical abstractions or *Turath* revivals of the 1940s-1980s.

Problematic

If there is a growing outside market (Pan-Arab and Western) and support for Arab cultural products, internally the situation is not the same. A casual visitor to an art exhibition, concert, library, bookstore, non-commercial film screening, lecture, or performance, can detect the consistent gap between the makeup of the audience (mostly adult and/or middle class, with a significant percentage of expatriates) and the makeup of the population at large: 60% of the region's population is under 25 years old, the literacy rate of the regional adult (15 years old and above) is 66%, and gross national income for the region stands at \$2, 241 per capita.

For example, an opening night filled to capacity, can be followed by days of quasi empty halls, except for the odd tourist, expatriate, or school children. Or, an audience of 500 attending a one-off performance by an avant-garde star singer in a city of 16 million is considered a success.

Also, a print run of 5,000 for the book of an internationally recognised poet is considered normal; etc.

However, in some of these same cities, live performances over dinner–theatre, *chansonnier* and comedy companies, fill theatres for days and sometimes years, as do cinemas showing action films and Egyptian comedies. Music and/or folklore entertainment festivals co-funded by governments and the private sector, and governmentally organised book fairs draw thousands, turning into bestsellers books on religion, astrology and cuisine.

I argue that a combination of five main reasons are at the root of this:

The first is *economic*, since the traditional consumer of culture—the middle class—is shrinking in many Arab countries. At the opposite end, many of the newly rich classes that emerged after free market reforms or from the informal sector of the economy are more often than not affected by a second reason:

The second is *intellectual*: Illiteracy, but also the fact that national educational systems have failed to stimulate their graduates' intellectual curiosity. This is combined with the wave of outward conservatism and religiosity that moots the power of attraction any secular intellectual events or products might have.

Third may be a general symptom of a wider *non-participation deficit* of Arab citizens, due to the meaninglessness of civic participation in undemocratic and authoritarian regimes, as seen for example in voter apathy.

The fourth reason may be *patriarchal socialisation mechanisms* that have survived the establishment of modern Arab nation states. As Hisham Sharabi observed in his book *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*, in such systems, much of one's livelihood, access to services and benefits, depend on personal, family, and factional ties, more than on egalitarian enjoyment of civic rights.

Lastly, in many cases people are not familiar with the codes conveyed by cultural operators. This is related to the content of the art provided or even to the outward appearance and social background of the cultural operator.

connaissent une croissance, à l'intérieur, la situation est différente. Le visiteur occasionnel d'une exposition, d'un concert, d'une bibliothèque, d'une librairie, d'une projection de film non commercial, d'une conférence ou d'un évènement peut remarquer le décalage important entre la composition du public (le plus souvent, adulte, et/ou classe moyenne, avec un pourcentage significatif d'expatriés) et celle de la population dans son ensemble: dans une région où 60% de la population a moins de 25 ans, le taux d'alphabétisation des adultes (15 ans et plus) est de 66% et le revenu national brut est de 2 241 \$ par personne. Cet essai présente cinq explications à cette situation: politiques, économiques, sociologiques, et intellectuelles, ainsi qu'un contexte théorique.

Diffusion et participation

Cet essai présente également des exemples détaillés d'activités culturelles inclusives récentes menées en Palestine, en Jordanie et au Liban. Les cas ne prétendent pas résoudre les problèmes économiques, éducatifs, et sociologiques des classes arabes « subalternes », mais ils ont en commun une approche basée sur la recherche et l'engagement avec de nouveaux publics. En outre, ce travail de diffusion coexiste avec un désir de s'engager dans une pratique expérimentale, intellectuellement rigoureuse et critique.

Lire l'intégralité de l'essai en anglais sur
<http://medreflection.eurocult.org>

As a result, the mainly secularised middle and upper class youth, socialised into activist models of cultural consumption, make up the bulk of the youth audience of independent Arab art production.

Outreach and Participation

The case study activities and programmes cited below that I undertook during my management of the Khalil Sakakini Cultural centre In Ramallah (1996-2005) do not presume to solve the economic, educational, intellectual and sociological problems of the subaltern Arab classes, but they all shared a deliberate approach based on seeking out and partnering in cultural work with new audiences, while engaging in an experimental, intellectually rigorous, and critical practice. The new challenge then became how to strip 'culture' of class indicators. Two activist approaches were specifically adopted: one consisted of bringing in the audience, and the second in following it, by de-territorialising our events.

Firstly, I tried developing a diverse audience by launching an outreach programme in 8 refugee camps and in public and private local schools, by bringing groups of school children to visit exhibitions, followed by art workshops. About 800 children participated every school year. The goals of the exercise were to expand their exposure and access—and also to elicit the interest of their parents—to the visual arts, which do not enjoy the same status as literature in Arab high culture, or the place which music occupies in popular Arab culture.

Secondly, we began offering a monthly public event specifically for children. These attracted a large and diverse public, and provided psycho-social relief during those violent days. One of the activities that brought in 200 children was the first public event held in Ramallah after the withdrawal of Israeli troops in April 2002. This was followed by an arts summer camp for children. The overwhelming majority of the parents had never come to the Sakakini before.

Thirdly, from 2003-2005 we organised a summer arts academy attracting university students from largely remote areas, offering exposure to contemporary visual arts debates and hands-on practice.

Lastly, in 2002 we began inviting out-of-town community college students who were studying in Ramallah, providing them with opportunities to

debate with a lecturer, an artist, or a performer. Later, this was developed into the second part of this outreach programme, whereby we would seek out audiences. Because of societal norms regarding the mobility of girls, we could not bring these young non-resident students to the Sakakini. A fully fledged outreach programme for hundreds of young school girls in four area refugee camps, as well as in rehabilitation and education centres for children at-risk (orphans, abused children, young offenders) was developed, including a programme of visits by local artists, actresses, film-makers, musicians, dancers, singers, visual artists and writers to the classes, to give a short performance or to animate an activity, followed by a presentation and debate. Later, the programme developed even further to include skill transfer workshops in arts and crafts, as well as writing and drama workshops, etc. Like children the world over, these girls were curious and eager to show off their talents and to acquire new skills in dance, drama, and song.

The objective of these programmes, beyond developing new audiences, was also to provide girls from underprivileged economic backgrounds, where asymmetrical gender norms often prevail, with avenues for self-expression and spaces for entertainment and debate that often led to questioning established gender roles and destinies.

« Read the full version of this essay on <http://medreflection.eurocult.org> »

A short monologue in a lengthy dialogue

By Basma El Husseiny



The other day, during and after the last meeting of the Euro-Mediterranean Reflection Group, I found myself wondering why it is that I feel uncomfortable every time I hear of a project or a programme which aims to 'promote intercultural dialogue'. Such a feeling is surely unjustified if you take into consideration that I, and most people like me (i.e. those who work in arts and culture in Arab countries and who are not associated with official organisations), do believe that people of different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds can not only communicate, but work together to achieve goals that concern humanity in general. Is it that my specific cultural background (Arab, African, underdeveloped and secular) is weighed down by distrust and disappointment? Distrust in the 'Other' that on the one hand is humane, open minded and compassionate and yet on the other hand freely elects governments that deploy troops armed with the most advanced devices to countries in our regions causing mass destruction and misery. And disappointment in ourselves as we repeatedly fail in our attempts to meaningfully contribute to the advancement of human knowledge and creativity and stumble in futile efforts to break away from social and political norms that are oppressive, exploitative and ethically devoid. Is it that my specific cultural background is in fact the reason why I, and many others, cannot believe or engage in 'intercultural dialogue', or to put the question differently: do I need to step outside my culture to be able to engage with people from other cultures?

Or else does this feeling of unease come from a simple and more mundane reason? Maybe it is because similar actions in the past have not resulted in improving intercultural understanding in any evident way. Take for example the actions that came after the Barcelona Process. Large well funded

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programmes were rushed on both sides of the Mediterranean, with non-governmental organisations here and there seizing the opportunity and designing activities that link directly to the wording of the official documents that came out of this Process. It might be too harsh to say that all this came to nothing, since there are always benefits that surpass the limitations of a collaborative project, but what has actually resulted from these projects? And, why are we now designing a new plan of action (and using millions of Euros), without looking back and analyzing what was achieved in the not too distant past?

But whatever the answer, if I follow this line of logic in my mind, it seems to me that what I find most uncomfortable about 'intercultural dialogue' is the fact that I (we) took no part in initiating it. Once again, the invitation comes from Europe (also known as the West and the North). Why didn't we think of it first? Are we not interested in communicating with other cultures? Do we know all that we need to know about them? Are we so immersed in our problems that we have lost the perspective of our culture being part of a universal dynamic? This is possibly true, but again I'm not fully convinced simply because as individuals: artists, intellectuals, cultural operators, etc., we are very interested in Europe. Most of us have a clear idea of what we want and expect to receive from Europe. Primarily, we want recognition. Being acknowledged as an artist or a writer in Europe not only brings fame there, but directly impacts on one's recognition back at home. Money is also something Europe can give us, since in our countries most independent artists and cultural operators struggle to survive with no access to public funding and there is no capacity for the private subsidy of culture in the national budgets. We also want knowledge produced or processed in Europe, especially technical knowledge in order to cope with

By Basma El Hussein

the relentless progress in artistic technology. So, without doubt, our passive role in 'intercultural dialogue' is hard to explain. Why do we sit still waiting to be invited to a dialogue we did not initiate, or take an active part in conceiving? My feeling is that there is only one reason: the absence of true mutuality. While we know exactly what we want from Europe, we don't have a clue as to what Europe wants from us. This might sound like a generalisation, but Europe seems to be too eager to give us all that we want and more and we sometimes struggle to cope with all that is offered; and hastily rush to change our working modes and our legal and political systems in order to be able to 'receive'. More importantly, we don't know what we can offer Europe. It is not sufficient to keep telling ourselves that in the past the Arabs produced knowledge that helped Europe, and the West in general, to build its civilisation, because if the past were enough to sustain the present and the future, we would be in a much better situation than we are now. The past was good enough for the past, but what about today and tomorrow: what can we offer? It is difficult to have a good relationship, when deep inside you feel that you have nothing to give to the other party in this relationship; am I right?

أظن أنه ما يزعجني أكثر في مفهوم "الحوار بين الثقافات" هو واقع أنني (أنا) لم نساهم في إطلاقه. ومجدداً، تأتي الدعوة من القارة الأوروبية (المعروفة أيضاً بالغرب والشمال). فلم لم نفكر في هذا الحوار أولاً؟ ألسنا مهتمين بالتواصل مع ثقافات أخرى؟ أنعلم كل ما يجدر بنا أن نعلمه عن هذه الثقافات؟ أترانا غرقى في مشاكلنا بحيث ما عدنا نعتبر ثقافتنا جزءاً من حركية عالمية؟ لعلّ هذا صحيح، لكن مرةً أخرى لست مقتنعة تماماً، لأننا وببساطة، كأفراد، أي كفنانين ومثقفين و و ناشطين ثقافيين... ألخ، نبدي اهتماماً كبيراً بأوروبا.

Coopération et financement culturels

By Sofiane Hadjadj

Dans le vaste champ de la géopolitique en Méditerranée, quels sont les enjeux réels du Nord au Sud ? Et du Sud au Nord ? Dans un contexte marqué par le terrorisme international, le radicalisme politico-religieux, les migrations humaines désespérées et la diplomatie sécuritaire, il se dessine, entre le Nord et le Sud, un rapport de force déséquilibré.

En apparence seulement. Deux postulats interviennent :

- Le Nord n'a pas besoin du Sud / Le Sud a *absolument* besoin du Nord ;
- Il y a trop de biens culturels au Nord / Pas assez de production culturelle au Sud.

Ceci au moment où la règle néo-libérale tend à investir tous les champs de la vie publique, au moment où les États sont fortement tentés de contrôler et de régir la sphère culturelle tout en s'en débarrassant au profit de sources dites « privées » de financement.

Les ressources font défaut et l'instrumentalisation guette ; l'incompréhension et le désespoir menacent. Partout, la tentation de contraindre les créateurs, de les limiter dans leur expression ou de les abandonner à leur sort monte en puissance.

Dans ces conditions, les questions de la coopération et du financement de la sphère culturelle deviennent essentielles. Il ne s'agit pas seulement de promouvoir un art, une culture surfant sur la vague des modes successives et conforme à nos attentes respectives, mais bien plutôt de faire en sorte que les créateurs de tous bords puissent traduire les imaginaires contradictoires de leur société et dessiner leur avenir, librement.

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من هذا المنطلق، تغدو أساسية مسألة التعاون والتمويل في المجال الثقافي. فالأمر لا يتعلق فقط بالنهوض بفنّ، أو بثقافة تخلق في فضاء الموضات المتتالية وتستجيب لتوقعاتنا الخاصة، إنما بالأحرى يتعلق الأمر بمحاولة بشكل ما تمكين المبدعين من كلّ حدب وصوب من ترجمة مواطن الخيال المتناقضة في مجتمعهم ومن رسم مستقبلهم بحرية.

Quelques points essentiels et de bon sens s'imposent alors :

- Permettre aux créateurs de poursuivre leur travail en toute indépendance, loin des interférences et des pressions diverses ;
- Développer les espaces de médiation culturelle ;
- Favoriser la mobilité des artistes et des œuvres ;
- Encourager les échanges et les collaborations artistiques ;
- Augmenter les fonds d'aide à la traduction du patrimoine littéraire mondial vers des langues tierces et, en retour, des littératures dites du Sud vers les langues occidentales.

Il paraît utile de rappeler que l'art, la littérature, le théâtre, le cinéma, etc. ne sont ni un luxe, ni un poids mort que l'on traîne, et encore moins un étendard ou un alibi que l'on brandit au gré des circonstances.

La culture doit demeurer un bien accessible à tous et en toutes circonstances.

En temps de paix comme en temps de guerre. Il s'agit aussi de montrer qu'il n'est pas de meilleur remède à la frilosité et au repli sur soi qu'un art partagé, qui pose comme préalable la nécessité d'une (re)connaissance de l'Autre.



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Reciprocal collaborative gestures

Of different voice - Of different eye

By Nat Muller

D'une voix différente, d'un œil différent : gestes réciproques de collaboration

« Moyen-Orient », « MOAN » (Moyen-Orient et Afrique du Nord), « Monde arabe », « Région méditerranéenne » : on utilise souvent des vocables qui regroupent, soit à des fins pratiques, soit pour des raisons idéologiques non dénuées d'un certain néo-orientalisme. Or, s'agissant d'une région qui échappe à toute catégorisation rigide, qu'elle soit géographique, religieuse, ethnique ou culturelle, on se demande comment établir une carte de la situation actuelle. Les collaborations artistiques ne devraient, d'abord et avant tout, pas être le fruit d'une forme atténuée de curiosité post-moderne, relativement abstraite (ou pas si abstraite), incitant à « connaître » l'Autre, et résultant souvent en un savoir mieux pour l'Autre, ou d'une

In her introductory essay “The Collaborative Turn” for the publication *Taking The Matter into Common Hands: On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices*, curator Maria Lind writes:

Often positive values such as loyalty, the ability to change, altruism and solidarity are baked into the concept of collaboration. At the same time, collaboration can stand for the opposite, for treachery and ethical irregularities. A collaborator can be a blackleg, a traitor, someone serving the enemy and who is therefore not trustworthy... That is why it is worth recalling that communication and collaboration can be just as efficient as smoke screens as they might be methods that generate generosity and solidarity. (p.29)¹

If these tensions are at play within the contemporary art world, then the same power dynamics are heightened in the field of cross-Mediterranean cooperation. When the region is variously clumped together as the “Middle East”, “MENA” (Middle East and North Africa), the “Arab world”, “Mediterranean rim” – either for practical purposes or for ideological reasons not completely devoid of neo-orientalist premises – the question arises as to how one is to map the state of affairs in a region that defies rigid geographical, religious, ethnic and cultural categorisation. Moreover, how can meaningful and horizontal artistic exchange on equal footing take place when scars from colonial pasts still mark the political and emotional landscape. How is such cooperation hindered when mutual projections and prejudices can taint perspectives, when technical and financial infrastructure, education and professionalisation and reciprocal mobility (the capacity of both parties to travel to one another’s countries) might hamper projects, when a convoluted

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relationship with the state might become a straightjacket for censorship, when freedoms are curtailed or other agendas pushed to the forefront.

Following these concerns, it is useful to recall Egyptian filmmaker Youssi Nasrallah's position, which advocates insight rather than mutual understanding. "Insight" forms a solid basis for artistic practice, while "mutual understanding" might steer the whole thing towards an exercise in semantics. Artistic collaborations should not proceed from some abstract (or concrete) post-modern curiosity to "know" the Other – which can result in one imagining knowing what's best for the Other – or an effort to alleviate post-colonial guilt. The motor for fruitful artistic collaborations ought to be the premise "that it has to result in something that would otherwise not take place; it simply has to make possible that which is otherwise impossible"² (p.29). In this sense, a fruitful collaboration should be able to safeguard the singularity and autonomy of the artistic project, not always strive for consensus, but in its own way allow for a different voice to speak and a different eye to see – a voice that is not necessarily speaking our tongue, an eye that does not necessarily share our vision.

In the past few years, Europe has seen quite a few exhibitions focusing on contemporary art from the "Middle East". The most well-known are Catherine David's project "Contemporary Arab Representations" (1998-2006, covering Beirut/Lebanon, Cairo/Egypt, Iraq); "DisORIENTation" (Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2003); "Images of the Middle East" (Copenhagen, 2006); "Arabise Me" (V&A, London, 2006), and "In Focus" curated by Predrag Pajdic (London, 2007), and Catherine David's recent "Di/Visions" (2007-2008). Like the large Balkan exhibitions held at the end of the 90's and at the beginning of the

forme atténuée de culpabilité post-coloniale. Une collaboration fructueuse devrait être capable de préserver la singularité et l'autonomie du projet artistique, de ne pas toujours s'évertuer à trouver un consensus mais permettre, à sa propre manière, que parle une voix différente et que voie un œil différent.

Ces dernières années, nous avons vu en Europe assez peu d'expositions d'art contemporain venant du « Moyen-Orient ». Comme les expositions consacrées aux Balkans à la fin des années 1990 et au début des années 2000, ces grandes expositions régionales ont vocation à faire découvrir au public la production artistique contemporaine du Moyen-Orient, et visent à apporter des éléments de contextualisation à travers des conférences, des

¹⁾ Lind, Maria. "The Collaborative Turn". *Taking The Matter into Common Hands: On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices*. Eds. Johanna Billing, Maria Lind, Lars Nilsson. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007. p.15-31.

²⁾ *ibid*

débats et des projections de films. Mais elles se distinguent nettement des expositions consacrées aux Balkans dans la mesure où, dans le monde de l'après 11 septembre, les enjeux de perception et de représentation sont plus cruciaux et plus lourdement chargés. Alors que ces projets ont des mérites incontestables, leurs insuffisances sont présentes dans leur importance et leur point de départ mêmes. On apporte à l'Europe l'art de la région, avec un point de départ ou un regard conditionné, si l'on veut qui est celui de *l'altérité*. On constate aussi un intérêt accru pour le Liban de l'après-guerre (de 2006). C'est vrai, Beyrouth émerge fortement depuis quelques années sur la carte artistique régionale et internationale. Pourtant, on peine à se défaire de l'impression que le spectacle du conflit a rendu les zones de guerre ou d'après-guerre attrayantes et fascinantes pour les acteurs culturels européens, et que les partenaires européens s'engouffrent trop facilement dans des projets, ou sautent allègrement d'un conflit à un autre. Ce sentiment soulève des questions cruciales quant à la durabilité et à l'avenir à long terme de tels partenariats. De l'autre côté du spectre, il y a des biennales et des foires d'art, qui opèrent davantage dans un discours internationaliste sur l'art. Le format des biennales et des foires est tel que, dans et par elles-mêmes, elles deviennent un nouveau lieu pour l'art, enfermé dans les cadres d'exposition de la biennale, et sans lien nécessaire avec leur environnement contextuel. Au niveau local, rares sont les

Millennium, these large regional exhibitions serve to introduce the public to contemporary artistic production from the region, and aim to contextualise the work through lectures, debates, and film screenings. Unlike the Balkan exhibitions, though, is the reality of the post-9/11 world. With xenophobia and islamophobia steadily on the rise, the perceptual and representational stakes are higher and more charged.

While these projects have their merits, their very scale and points of departure encapsulate their flaws. Too big and comprehensive to make a strong artistic statement, they homogenise the region's cultural production rather than representing its diversity. In addition, heavily curated exhibitions are easily perceived to be representative of artistic production of a particular scene, whilst in fact they merely show a selection, dependent on the curator's personal contacts and tastes. Intentional or not, one by-product of a "representative" approach is the creation of a canon. In the context of collaboration, this means some cultural actors, disciplines and artists are privileged, while others are neglected.

These are not collaborative exhibitions. The gesture is unilateral, not reciprocal. Art from the region is brought to Europe and the point of departure – the pre-conditioned gaze, if you like – is one of Otherness. Often particular topics are stressed, such as the position of women, (the lack of) democracy, and Islamic iconography. Such shows can thus institutionalise what they aim to critique, and become neo-orientalist bazaars, where the goods become indistinguishable because they are all exotic. Such exhibitions do not necessarily reinforce individual subject positions, but tend to erase individuality in favour of an "Arab" or "Middle Eastern" collective identity. Perhaps these exhibitions are a necessary evil, yet if we want to lay out conditions for working together, we have to look beyond identitarian markers of ethnicity, politics and geography.

On the other side of the spectrum there are ventures operating more within an international art discourse, such as the Istanbul Biennial (TR), the Sharjah Biennial (UAE) – held since 1993 it has risen to international acclaim since 2005, under direction of Jerusalem-based curator Jack Persekian – and Art Dubai – launched in 2007 as the Gulf's first contemporary art fair, including galleries from the Middle East, Asia, Europe, North and South America, North Africa and Australia. Of lesser fame, but deserving a mention, are the Cairo Biennial and Ramallah's Riwaq Biennial. The biennial and art fair format is

such that, in and of themselves, they become a new locus for art enclosed within the biennial exhibition grounds, not necessarily relating to their incidental geographical context. This is the so-called biennial bubble effect: by definition globalised art events catering to a steady stream of international art travellers. However, one cannot deny that increased exposure of artists from MENA worldwide, and the fact that Istanbul, Sharjah and Dubai host these events, has an impact.³

Locality and situatedness also entails constraints. In the art world, and in cross-Mediterranean collaborations in particular, there have been many projects trying to grapple with the dynamics of space and territory. This is not unsurprising in a time and region where territory is so contested – whether under occupation, torn by war, exploited for resources, gentrified, zoned or commodified. Motley crews of artists, architects, urbanists and critical thinkers have become the new cartographers of the real, taking rural areas, cities, public spaces (or the lack thereof), active citizenship, and urban crisis as subjects. The German-Palestinian-Israeli partnership “Liminal Spaces”⁴ (2006-2007) provides one example. In approaching the hard realities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by “examining notions of urban spaces, borders, mental and physical segregation, cultural territories and the possibilities of art within political frameworks” the project has literally taken the fieldtrip as fieldwork. Israeli, Palestinian and international artists, academics and activists took part in two such trips – one in 2006, focusing on the area around the separation wall (Qalandia, Jerusalem, Ramallah), another in 2007, focusing on the mixed cities within the Israeli Green Line (Lod, Ramle, Jaffa). Apart from “generat[ing] active participation of the art sector in developing modes of expression against the political status quo of occupation, dehumanization and oppression”⁵ this project also raises interesting questions on the position of art vis-à-vis activism and politics. Exclusive because of the limited number of participants, these projects are important for the production of new critical discourses generated in their aftermath.

The Italian Cultural Lab aMAZE⁶, has for years been active in researching the socio-politics of territory, flows of migration and the intricacies of Mediterranean urban centres in various projects with partners in Turkey, Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Egypt and Cyprus. Their latest project, “Communities & Territories/ Beirut” (November 2007), in collaboration with the American University in Beirut, Heinrich Böll Foundation and CLAC (Haret Hreik) was mainly directed towards young artists and students, setting out to

projets qui s'efforcent de saisir les dynamiques spatiales et territoriales. Ce qui n'est pas sans surprendre à une période et dans une région où l'on se bat autant pour le territoire, qu'il soit occupé, déchiré par la guerre, exploité pour ses ressources, « gentrifié », divisé ou marchandisé. Dans ces projets, et du fait même du nombre limité de participants, la production de discours nouveaux et critiques, et leurs répercussions sont d'une importance extrême.

Abstraction faite des réserves critiques, les collaborations sont d'abord et avant tout un geste sinon un acte de réciprocité.

³ The scope of this article does not allow me the space to elaborate, yet the impact and significance of a magazine like *Bidoun* deserves a mention. Founded in 2004 by German-Palestinian Alia Rayyan and American-Iranian Lisa Farjam, *Bidoun* has over the years become a very important resource and discursive platform tying arts and cultural in the Middle East to wider debates within contemporary art. With contributors and editors across the globe, they cater to an audience that goes well beyond the Anglophone, cosmopolitan, diasporic Middle East. In format as in content *Bidoun* is challenging, and has – yes! – become a printed space for various surprising collaborations. Cfr. www.bidoun.com

⁴ Cfr. <http://www.liminalspaces.org>

⁵ Cfr. http://liminalspaces.org/?page_id=50/

⁶ Cfr. <http://www.amaze.it/>

examine how public space is made and used in a city like Beirut, by means of art, architecture and culture. This project is not unlike the “Unbuilt Beirut” project, conducted by 3 Dutch partners Archis, Partizan Publik, Pearl Foundation and Lebanon’s Studio Beirut. It addressed a similar audience but was more geared to Beirut’s reconstruction and visions for the future after Israel’s summer 2006 war on Lebanon. With all respect to the well-intentioned organisers, one does have to wonder at the heightened interest in Lebanon after the 2006 summer war. True, Beirut has been prominent on the regional and international art radar in the past few years, due to visionary artists like Akram Zaatari, Tony Chakar, Lamia Joreige, Walid Raad, Khalil Joreige & Joanna Hadjithomas, Nadine Touma, and the efforts of the Lebanese Association of Plastic Arts Ashkal Alwan⁷, directed by Christine Tohme. In particular the Home Works forum (2002, 2003, 2005), has become an event of international stature, whilst keeping local interests close to heart. Still, I find it hard to shake the impression that the spectacle of war has made (post-)war zones sexy and intriguing to European cultural actors, and that European partners jump into projects too easily, or hopscotch from one conflict zone to the other.

This raises urgent questions about sustainability and long-term partnerships. Indeed, real reconstruction, and genuine vested interest, starts once the media attention has waned. Funders bear responsibility here, too. Although badly needed, it may be unwise to hastily and uncritically funnel finances towards projects producing “war art”. Reflection on trauma takes time, and forcing an immediate creative response does not necessarily produce interesting content. For over a decade, Lebanese artists have been dealing with the ghosts of previous wars, stubborn to excavate personal and collective memory, to share narratives that are like sediment in the rubble of destroyed buildings. A cautious and investigative relationship with the medium is expressed in this work. However, Beirut has only recently become a hotspot. Palestinian artists are naturally dealing with the politics of dispossession, the hardships of occupation, issues of national identity and their desire for a Palestinian homeland. But a 60 year-old conflict is old news, which may be why we don’t see a mass invasion of international curators into Palestine.

Critical reservations aside, collaboration is first and foremost a gesture – if not an act – of reciprocity. Unfortunately, in the era of Fortress Europe, such reciprocity is rare, and hospitality is not always returned. In past years, international artists have had the opportunity to travel and make temporary

⁷ Cf. <http://www.ashkalalwan.org/>

"بتعبير مختلف، بنظرة مختلفة: بوادر تبادلية تعاونية"

غالباً ما يشار إلى المنطقة بتسميات مثل "الشرق الأوسط" و "الشرق الأوسط وشمال إفريقيا" و "حوض البحر الأبيض المتوسط" و "العالم العربي"، سواء لأغراض عمليّة أو لأسباب إيديولوجيّة لا تخلو تماماً من تهكم مستشرق حديث. فالسؤال الذي يُطرح هو كيف يُمكن في منطقة لا تقبل أي تصنيف جغرافي وديني وإثني وثقافي قاس تحديد الظروف السائدة. بادئ ذي بدء، يجب على أعمال التعاون الفنيّة ألا تُحتد بدافع تخفيف فضول تجرّيدي (أو تجرّيدي نوعاً ما) خاص بما بعد الحدّاتة ولمجرد معرفة الآخر، و الذي غالباً ما يؤدي إلى المعرفة بشكل أفضل من أجل أو محل هذا الآخر، أو بدافع التخفيف من إحساس ما بعد استعماري بالذنب، إذ على التعاون المُثمر أن يتمكّن من صون تفرّد المشروع الفنيّ واستقلاليّته، وألا يسعى دائماً إلى تحقيق الإجماع بل يسمح بطريقته الخاصة بتعبير الآخر عن رأيه ووجهة نظره.

لقد شهدت أوروبا في السنوات القليلة الماضية تنظيم عدد كبير من المعارض التي تُعنى بالفنّ المعاصر من "الشرق الأوسط". وعلى غرار المعارض البلقانية الكبيرة التي نُظمت في أواخر التسعينيات وفي مطلع الألفية، تهدف هذه المعارض الإقليمية الكبيرة إلى تعريف الجمهور على الإنتاج الفنيّ المُعاصر القادم من الشرق الأوسط، وتسعى إلى وضع النشاطات في سياقها الصحيح عن طريق المحاضرات والمناقشات وعروض الأفلام. غير أنّه خلافاً تماماً عن المعارض البلقانية فقد أدت أحداث 11 أيلول/سبتمبر، إلى ازدياد نسبة الإدراك والتصوير و التي أصبحت مشحونة أكثر. ففي حين تتمتع هذه المشاريع حتماً بميزات كثيرة، فإنّ بساطة حجمها ومصدرها يظهران أهمّ عيوبها. فالمنتجات الفنيّة القادمة من المنطقة تُحضر إلى أوروبا ويُعتبر مصدرها، أو النظرة المكوّنة لها مسبقاً، -إذا شئتم- نظرة الآخر المختلفة.

كما نشهد اهتماماً متزايداً بفترة ما بعد حرب العام 2006 التي جرت في لبنان. فقد ظهرت بيروت في السنوات القليلة الماضية بشكل قويّ على الساحة الفنيّة الإقليمية والدولية. غير أنّه يصعب إزالة الانطباع السائد بأنّ مشهد الحرب قد جعل من المناطق التي استهدفت إبان الحرب مغربة ومثيرة بالنسبة للناشطين الثقافيين الأوروبيين وبأنّ الشركاء الأوروبيين يتهاقنون على المشاريع بسهولة كبيرة أو بالأحرى ينتقلون بسرعة من منطقة صراع إلى أخرى، مما يطرح أسئلة ملحّة حول مواضيع الشراكات الطويلة الأمد والمستدامة.

من جهة أخرى، هناك المعارض وبناليات الفنّ المعاصر التي تشغّل أكثر في إطار مستوى دولي للخطاب الفنيّ. فالأسلوب المعتمد في هذه المعارض، يجعلها وبعدها ذاتها، مكاناً جديداً للفنّ مغلقاً ضمن أرضياتها ولا يرتبط بالضرورة بمحيطه السياقي.

أمّا على الصعيد المحلي، فهناك عدد لا بأس به من المشاريع التي تحاول جاهدة التحكم في حركات الفضاء وأرضيته. وهذا ليس بغير مفاجيء في وقت ومنطقة حيث نجد تنازاً كبيراً على الأراضي سواء بسبب الاحتلال أو حرب ممزقة أو استغلال لمواردها أو مُبرجتها أو بسبب تقسيمها إلى مناطق. وضمن هذه المشاريع الحصرية - لأنها مقصورة على عدد محدود من المشاركين- يعد إنتاج مقالات جديدة وانتقادية إضافة إلى تأثيراتها عاملاً مهماً جداً.

يجب طرح التحفظات الانتقادية جانباً، بحيث يصبح التعاون هو في المقام الأول بادرة -إن لم يكن بالأحرى فعلاً- قائمة على المعاملة بالمثل.

homes through residency programmes in the region. Cairo's Townhouse Gallery, Amman's Makhan House of Expression and Darat al Funun, Jerusalem's Al Mamal Foundation, Istanbul's Platform Garanti and Santral Istanbul, Zico House in Beirut, and the International Artist Workshop (sponsored by Triangle Arts and held in Aley, Lebanon in 2004 and Shatana, Jordan in 2007) all provide prominent examples.

Residency programmes are integral to exchanging ideas, producing contextual and site-specific work, and finding peers with whom to work. There seems to be a great imbalance in mobility, however. There is a great deal of movement East, but very little West. Europe's closed-door policy and rigid immigration regulations are stifling fruitful cultural exchange. To my knowledge, Switzerland's Pro Helvetia is one of the few bodies actively and specifically offering residency opportunities to artists from the Middle East. It is my hope that other countries will follow suit, so that European cultural production can be quizzed too, and momentarily produced with a different eye, expressed with a different voice.

Make art in basements a question of choice

By Nevenka Koprivšek



The idea that interesting art can only be created in poor conditions, damp cellars and conflict zones has long passed its 'sell by date'. Already in the early 80s, the long lack of proper conditions for years on end in South East Europe caused artists to develop strategies for survival and positive subversions. Artists such as the Betontanc Company made their breakthrough with their work in the basement of a secondary school; Dragan Zivadinov started his projects in private apartments and even in non gravity space. Despite this, however, many artists and audiences are still deprived of access to contemporary arts, especially in the Mediterranean region and in South East Europe, where I work. This could be due to lack of understanding, fear of modernity or simply to too much isolation. It could also be due to lack of means or to the corruption sometimes found with local funding. Whatever the reason, the artistic needs that remain unfulfilled have increased the level of frustration and mistrust. Together with the urgency to recognise the role of contemporary arts as an investment in the future, this has led to different initiatives and coalitions between cultural operators on local and international levels in their search for dialogue with national and transnational authorities for infrastructural improvements. In some countries, like Slovenia, this has led to concrete solutions, such as the conversion of historical and industrial zones into spaces for contemporary creation. For example: Metelkova – a former military complex converted into a cultural district combining the traditional museums with alternative culture; Stara elektrarna – an old power plant converted into a performing arts space; Kino Siska – a movie theatre about to become a youth centre for rock music and dance; Rog factory – a bike factory to be turned into a public-private space in a couple of years time combining visual arts, artists in residence and a kind of social entertainment centre. Most

S tatement

L'évolution de l'art contemporain, souvent en parallèle avec les nouvelles technologies, a entraîné non seulement un autre type de production artistique mais aussi d'autres modes de production dans la culture, avec notamment une mutation du secteur public, le développement du secteur indépendant et un renforcement du rôle de la société civile, à qui les espaces publics appartiennent aussi. C'est seulement quand cette mutation sera achevée que nous pourrons parler de pluralisme culturel. Alors seulement, la cave ou l'exode relèveront du libre choix et non de la nécessité.

of these initiatives were successful because of good cooperation between the stakeholders. Sometimes the tactics employed to ensure success involved a certain amount of rioting and occupation, sometimes success came about through research and long years of negotiation. Although the situation is far from ideal and remains fragile and vulnerable, we can say that it has already changed the cultural landscape in Ljubljana and that we can observe an important social impact on the local environment. The development of contemporary art, often together with new technology, has led not only to a different kind of art production, but also to different modes of production in culture, including the reform of the public sector, the development of the independent sector and a stronger role for civil society, to whom the public spaces also belong. Only when the above has taken place can we really talk about cultural pluralism. Only then will art in basements or under open sky become a question of personal choice and not of necessity.

More than camels and sand

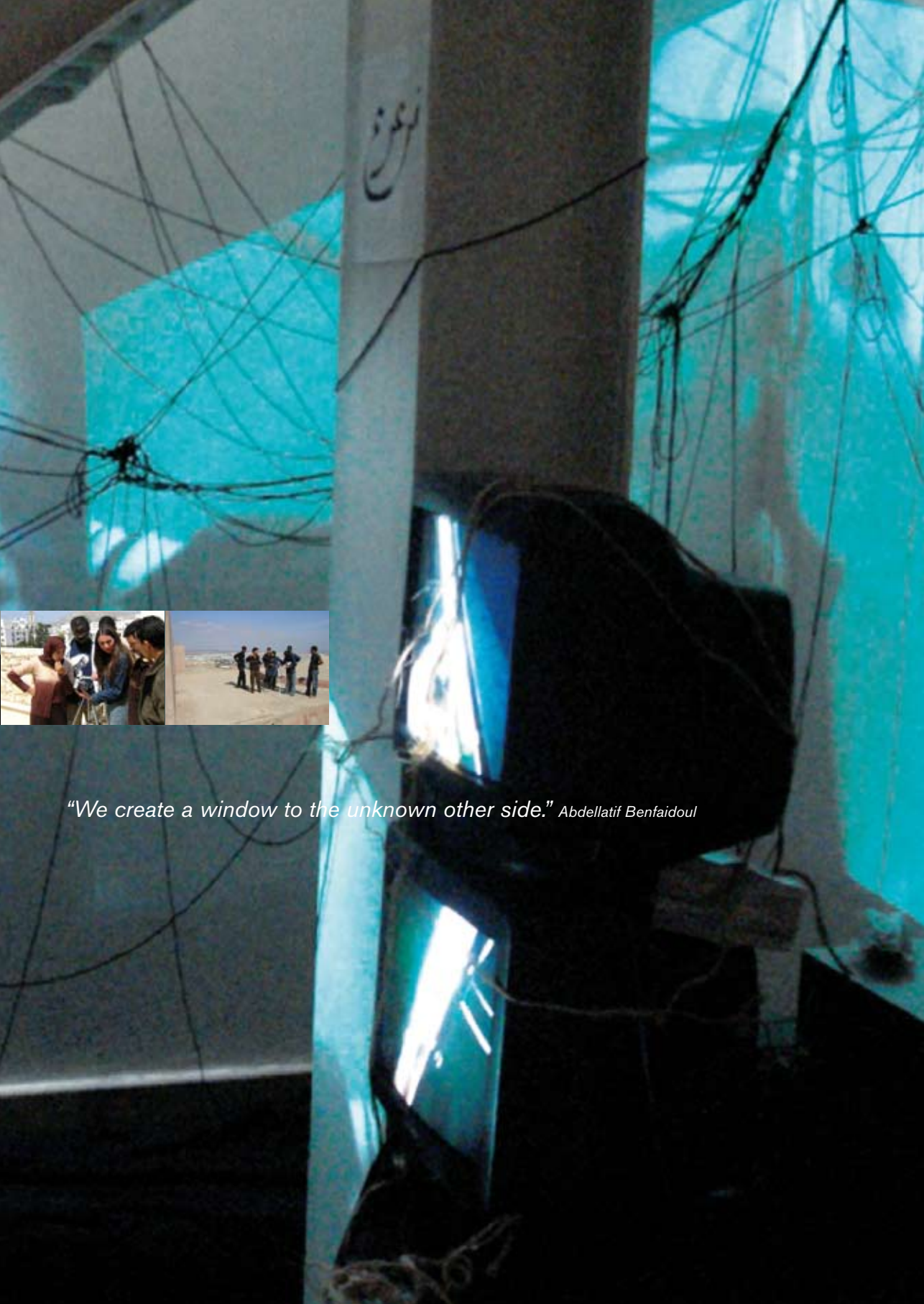
"What the Arab world needs today is a new language and new media to create a new image, to question Arab identity. Show this in the West and they will understand there is more to the contemporary Arab than camels and sand." Abdellatif Benfaidoul

Moroccan video artists and film makers Abdelaziz Taleb (1973) and Abdellatif Benfaidoul (1974) have known each other since they were young. Both grew up in the Moroccan coastal city of Agadir, both went on to pursue a career in visual arts, both ended up living and working in Europe, Taleb in Germany, Benfaidoul in the Netherlands. In 2002 they set up Videokaravaan, a nomadic arts project aimed to diversify the Western perspective of art from the Arab world, as well as to stimulate makers in the South to create images in which they recognise themselves. Key words: dialogue and exchange.

In 2004 and 2006, the Videokaravaan made pit stops in the Moroccan coastal city of Agadir, to organise two Media Art workshops. In both workshops, around fifteen young participants, aged between 21 and 30, male and female, from different ethnic backgrounds, created a number of short films and video installations, expressing their views on reality. The videos have been shown at European film festivals, surprising audiences with the existence of a vibrant scene of new media artists in the Arab world.

The ECF supported Videokaravaan with two grants in 2004 and 2005. For a more detailed portrait of the Videokaravaan, see <http://medreflection.eurocult.org>





نور



"We create a window to the unknown other side." Abdellatif Benfaïdoul

Bright spots

By Odile Chenal

The context of cultural cooperation in the Mediterranean region might well be described as politically 'leaden', and cultural exchange between Europe and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean region often seems to remain at the level of rituals and events that do no more than scratch the surface of things.

And yet if one looks more closely at the state of affairs in the realm of contemporary cultural creativity, one can observe instances of movement, of effervescence: 'bright spots'.

- on the initiative of artists and cultural managers from North Africa and the Middle East, independent spaces for art have proliferated, along with professional platforms and regional cultural networks;
- the contemporary art scene in the region has begun to generate considerable interest among European cultural

Les fossés semblent se creuser, les changements sont ténus : c'est dans un contexte politique que l'on pourrait qualifier de « plombé » que se pratique la coopération culturelle transméditerranéenne.

Les discours des grands acteurs internationaux se construisent sur les termes d'opposition et de conflit plus qu'ils ne les dépassent. La ligne de fracture qui part d'Israël et de Palestine continue à diviser le monde selon des tracés politiques qui n'ont parfois qu'un rapport abstrait avec la situation réelle des populations locales. Les régimes autoritaires des pays du Maghreb et du Moyen-Orient n'offrent ici et là que de timides signes d'ouverture, tandis que les divisions politico-religieuses se renforcent à l'intérieur des sociétés elles-mêmes. Le contexte politique général semble devoir maintenir une grande partie des échanges culturels entre l'Europe et les régions de la Méditerranée méridionale et orientale au niveau de rituels et d'événements sans retombées en profondeur.

Pourtant, si l'on y regarde de plus près et si l'on s'intéresse au champ particulier de la création contemporaine, on observe depuis quelques années déjà des mouvements, des effervescences, des passages : des lueurs d'espoir, « *bright spots* », pour reprendre la belle expression de Laila Hourani.

Qu'est ce qui bouge ?

- Tout d'abord, les opérateurs culturels et les artistes d'Afrique du Nord et du Moyen-Orient. À l'initiative d'artistes et d'entrepreneurs culturels (qui sont souvent les deux à la fois !), les espaces artistiques indépendants se sont multipliés en quelques années, de même que les plateformes

3

chapter

professionnelles et les réseaux culturels régionaux. Les acteurs artistiques de la région participent de façon beaucoup plus fréquente aux événements artistiques internationaux, et leurs homologues européens se tournent vers eux avec un intérêt croissant.

Pour ceux qui doivent chaque jour surmonter tant d'obstacles, affronter les bureaucraties, pour ceux qui prennent des risques politiques, et parfois même physiques, le changement ne semble sans doute pas rapide. Mais le travail des entrepreneurs artistiques, de ceux qui voyagent inlassablement autour et de part et d'autre de la Méditerranée, porte ses fruits. Souvent, d'ailleurs, avec le soutien de collègues, réseaux et financeurs européens et internationaux.

- Car il est clair que, depuis quelques années, l'intérêt des opérateurs culturels européens, privés et publics, pour la scène artistique contemporaine des pays arabes et de Turquie a connu une progression sensible.

En toile de fond de cette ouverture, l'intérêt pour l'art n'est sûrement pas seul à l'œuvre. Conséquences du 11 septembre, terrorisme international, tensions sociales en Europe autour des communautés immigrées, mais aussi solidarités et approches en termes de développement se mêlent à un certain « post-orientalisme » et à la recherche de nouveaux souffles artistiques. On peut donc s'interroger sur cet « intérêt » mais, quelles qu'en soient les raisons, il suscite des échanges, libère quelques ressources et ouvre des espaces de (re) connaissance mutuelle. Les partenaires européens arrivent, certes avec leurs agendas, leurs programmes, leur volonté de faire du « dialogue interculturel », leur connaissance souvent insuffisante du terrain, mais enfin, ils viennent.

operators, even if this interest is not always purely artistically motivated;

- the programmes of the European Union, which have up to now had little impact in the field of contemporary creativity, have nevertheless created frames for cooperation.

In this context, what can be done by European partners?

- **New geographies:** it is necessary to reinvent the flow of cultural exchange, so that this does not remain only dominated by old colonial lines of force, migratory movements, and the frameworks set in place by the European Union's programmes. Exchange between the Mediterranean region and the Balkans should be stimulated – these two regions have many experiences in common and there are possibilities for artistic synergy – as well as between

Central Europe and the East in general, and also between the Middle East and North Africa.

- **Capacity building:** this is an expression whose potency generally centres on developing the capacity of ... other people! But intercultural cooperation cannot take place without nurturing the capacities of the partners on both sides, from the North as well as the South of the Mediterranean; artists, cultural managers, journalists and funders.
- **Cultural policies:** In the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue, cultural policies are something of a taboo. But one should nevertheless try to better identify and use all the possibilities to influence these policies. The first priority is to promote studies on these policies, and to seek in the cultural field – as well as beyond – those independent and public actors with whom the debate on cultural policy could be opened up.

Samir Kassir hints at the 'nascent integration of the Arab cultural domain into the global mosaic' as one of the perspectives to overcome the current crisis. This integration is the responsibility of and in the interest of all the actors who make up this mosaic!

- Le Partenariat euroméditerranéen – et notamment son troisième volet, le volet culturel et humain – a peu d'impact sur le domaine de la création contemporaine. La plupart des critiques qui lui sont adressées sont justifiées : orientation surtout bilatérale, manque d'adaptation aux besoins des acteurs de la société civile, priorité donnée au patrimoine par rapport à la création.... Mais le cadre est là et - même s'il reste un outil institutionnel pour acteurs institutionnels - il peut et doit être débattu, investi et utilisé autant que faire se peut ; non sans un certain succès, comme le montrent certaines retombées positives de ses programmes concernant les jeunes par exemple.

La Fondation Anna Lindh pour le Dialogues des Peuples et des Cultures illustre bien, elle aussi, cette situation. Enchâssée dans ses logiques institutionnelles et intergouvernementales, cette Fondation cherche toujours ses marques, et les acteurs culturels de la coopération transméditerranéenne n'ont pas encore senti les effets de son existence. Et pourtant, certains des réseaux qui y sont associés, certains des projets qui y sont soutenus offrent autant de petites ouvertures à investir et à élargir. Travail de longue haleine mais responsabilité - aussi - des acteurs civils.

Partenaires européens: pistes de travail

Le Groupe de réflexion de la Fondation européenne de la Culture a souhaité discuter le contexte de la création artistique contemporaine de manière ouverte. Au cours des débats, de nombreuses pistes de travail ont été tracées. Je souhaite revenir ici sur trois d'entre elles.

Nouvelles géographies

Il faut traverser la Méditerranée dans tous les sens. Le flux des échanges reste encore largement dominé par les tracés coloniaux, les mouvements de migrations et les cadres définis par l'Union européenne. À ne pas s'aventurer hors de ces voies, on risque de rester figés dans les mêmes face-à-face, prisonniers de frontières mentales et politiques définies par des cartographies du passé, et de se priver de la créativité offerte par de nouveaux itinéraires. Une large partie des Balkans est aussi méditerranéenne - on a tendance à l'oublier ! - et les artistes et acteurs culturels de cette région ont de multiples terrains de rencontres avec leurs homologues du Sud de la Méditerranée. Que ce soit le rôle de l'État, l'absence de cadre politique stable pour la

culture, la survie des organisations indépendantes, le difficile changement des institutions culturelles ou encore le grand écart entre public local et reconnaissance internationale, les domaines de reconnaissance mutuelle et les potentiels de synergies artistiques entre ces régions sont nombreux, et inexploités. Il faut les encourager et les faciliter !

Par ailleurs, la coopération culturelle de part et d'autre de la Méditerranée n'est pas l'affaire des seuls riverains: les participants aux débats ont souvent exprimé un vif intérêt pour le développement d'échanges, d'expériences et de projets artistiques avec leurs partenaires de toute l'Europe centrale et orientale.

Enfin, toujours dans la géographie des échanges, il est grand temps de stimuler davantage la mobilité du Nord vers le Sud de la Méditerranée (cf. projet de placement transméditerranéen par exemple) ou celle, souvent si difficile, entre les pays du Maghreb et du Moyen-Orient eux-mêmes.

Capacity building

La formule - l'équivalent français n'a pas le même impact - semble magique.

De fait, chacun y met son propre contenu qui concerne généralement le développement de la capacitédes autres !

Pourtant, la coopération est un travail à double sens : elle ne peut se pratiquer sans développer **de part et d'autre** la compétence interculturelle des porteurs de projets, et aussi celle des producteurs, critiques d'art et, bien sûr, des financeurs. Les échanges se font dans un contexte d'inégalités politiques et économiques, et cet apprentissage mutuel ne sera efficace que si l'on prend en compte les contextes respectifs, si les différences, y compris esthétiques, font l'objet de débats et de négociations.

Le développement des capacités passe par des formations au sens traditionnel du terme. Il passe aussi par l'apprentissage informel. Temps de préparation ou d'évaluation mutuelle des projets, espaces non institutionnels de débat, rencontres entre artistes, critiques d'art, acteurs publics ou privés de la coopération transméditerranéenne : les financeurs doivent soutenir ces moments et ces espaces d'apprentissage interculturel. Ici, le foisonnement des initiatives ne doit pas faire peur, au contraire ! Il est bon que les échanges se multiplient, quand bien même cela générerait une certaine confusion dans un premier temps. Deux conditions toutefois : que ces rencontres s'ouvrent continuellement à de nouvelles voix, au-delà de celle des « gate keepers », et que l'on recherche, au préalable, les conditions d'un débat véritablement ouvert.

Politiques culturelles

Dans le dialogue transméditerranéen, la politique culturelle constitue un tabou. On ne l'évoque pas, ou peu, comme si cela n'avait guère de sens dans le contexte politique actuel, comme si l'on n'osait pas. On ne sait pas grand-chose des politiques culturelles des pays arabes ; mais elles existent, ne serait-ce qu'officiellement . Il faudrait commencer par soutenir les études sur ces politiques et aussi sur les politiques culturelles locales, souvent plus accessibles. Ainsi, d'ailleurs, que les études sur la situation générale de la création et de la diffusion culturelle : que sait-on d'un marché de l'art contemporain en évolution rapide ou des industries culturelles émergentes ? Que sait-on de l'impact des festivals, et de leurs publics ?

On sait combien il est difficile d'obtenir des données, quand celles-ci existent. Mais l'exemple d'autres régions d'Europe le montre : c'est lorsqu'ils pourront avoir quelques clés en mains que les acteurs culturels du monde arabe pourront commencer à initier, débattre, influencer les politiques culturelles à différents niveaux. Il y a là une nécessité d'investissement à long terme : financement et publication des recherches, formation de jeunes chercheurs, création de modules universitaires... Un investissement pour lequel l'Union européenne, les fondations arabes et européennes, y compris la Fondation Anna Lindh, pourraient donner un bel exemple de partenariat public/privé.

Ce ne sont là que quelques pistes de travail. Nos débats en ont suggéré de nombreuses autres, et bien d'autres encore existent dans ce champ culturel en mouvement. Dans son remarquable ouvrage *Considérations sur le malheur arabe*¹, Samir Kassir concluait un tableau plutôt sombre de la situation du monde arabe par quelques perspectives encourageantes, notamment grâce à la coopération culturelle : « À la dynamisation de la circulation des idées et des biens culturels dans le monde arabe, malgré la persistance de considérables entraves, s'ajoutent les effets d'un phénomène pratiquement concomitant : un début d'intégration du champ culturel arabe dans la mosaïque mondiale ».

Poursuivre et intensifier l'intégration, c'est la responsabilité, et l'intérêt, de **tous** les acteurs de la mosaïque !

¹) Samir Kassir, *Considérations sur le malheur arabe*, Actes Sud, 2004.

جوانب مشرقة

يُمارس التعاون الثقافي المتوسطي حاليًا ضمن إطار سياسي مشحون بالتوترات ويبدو أنه يقتصر على طقوس عمل متوقعة وسطحية في الغالب. غير أنه إن راقبنا عن كثب مجال الإبداع الفني المعاصر، وجدنا فيه نشاطات قائمة لا بل "جوانب مشرقة" ألا وهي:

- لقد حرك الناشطون الثقافيون في المنطقة الكثير من الأمور خلال السنوات الأخيرة من خلال إنشاء فضاءات فنية مستقلة وشبكات إقليمية، الخ...
- يهتم الناشطون الثقافيون الأوروبيون أكثر فأكثر بالإبداع الفني المعاصر في العالم العربي، حتى لو لم تكن دائما أسباب هذا الاهتمام فنية محضة.
- لا تؤثر برامج الاتحاد الأوروبي سوى قليلا على الإبداع المعاصر، لكنها مع ذلك تنظم بنيات عمل المجال الثقافي المتوسطي.

في هذا السياق، ما هي مجالات العمل الممكنة بالنسبة للشركاء الأوروبيين؟

- **الأبعاد الجغرافية الجديدة:** ينبغي أن يخلق من جديد مسار التبادلات الثقافية الحاصلة في بلاد البحر الأبيض المتوسط وأن لا يتم فقط اتباع الطرق التي رسمها التاريخ الاستعماري وحركة الهجرة وإطارات العمل التي وضعها الاتحاد الأوروبي. ففي الواقع، يجدر تشجيع التبادلات بين العالم العربي وبلاد البلقان، إذ لدى هاتان المنطقتان قدر كبير من الخبرات والتعاون ليتقاسمناه، هذا فضلا عن تشجيع التبادلات مع أوروبا الوسطى والشرقية بشكل عام وتسهيل التنقل الفني بين الشرق الأوسط وإفريقيا الشمالية.
- **بناء القدرات:** إنها صيغة غالباً ما نفسرها على أنها تطوير لقدرات ... "الغير". غير أن التعلم الثقافي مسألة تعني كل الشركاء سواء في شمال البحر الأبيض المتوسط أو في جنوبه، هذا فضلا عن الفنانين والقيمين على الشؤون الثقافية والصحافيين الثقافيين والممولين.
- **السياسات الثقافية:** تشكل موضوعاً شبه محرم في الشراكات الأوروبية المتوسطية. لكن ينبغي محاولة التأثير في السياسات الموجودة ولو شكلياً. وهذا يبدأ عن طريق تشجيع البحث والباحثين في المجال الثقافي وفي إشراك الناشطين المستقلين. كلما سحنت الفرصة. بالناشطين المنتمين للقطاع العمومي وذلك بغية فتح النقاش حول السياسات الثقافية الواجب تطبيقها.

لقد كان سمير قصير يطرح مسألة "دمج المجال الثقافي العربي في الفسيفساء العالمية" كإحدى وجهات النظر لخروج العالم العربي من أزيمته. وهذا الدمج من مسؤولية ومصحة كل الفاعلين في هذه الفسيفساء.

La Méditerranée: un tissu de traduction

By Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes



En Méditerranée, le désir de coopération se trouve écartelé entre les logiques identitaires, aux effets dévastateurs, et celles du marché où, mondialisation oblige, les plus offrants sont toujours les gagnants. La crainte implicite d'une « re-colonisation » pèse encore, amplifiée par les rapports de force consécutifs aux inégalités d'accès aux savoirs et aux savoir-faire. Le « dialogue des cultures », expression peu heureuse et dont on connaît les fonctions d'antidote à la « guerre contre le terrorisme », contribue à l'enlèvement. *L'aggiornamento* est urgent.

Longtemps, on a négligé la diversité des langues, des imaginaires, des modes de représentation et la nécessité de les mettre en traduction sur la durée. Dans un monde largement dominé par les images, souvent instrumentalisées, et marqué par une simplification caricaturale du discours dans les médias de masse, les langues s'appauvrissent, les vocabulaires se rétrécissent, les représentations de soi et des autres deviennent à leur tour des peaux de chagrin. Les concepts que l'on croit mondialisés recouvrent en fait des interprétations hétérogènes, voire contradictoires des réalités. Les savoirs se racornissent. Les malentendus prospèrent.

Au-delà de la différence des langues et des religions, la diversité culturelle inclut la pluralité des mémoires et des histoires, la variété des modes de construction du lien social, les divers modes d'inscription dans le paysage, les différences socio-économiques, les cultures politiques. Elle imprègne les sociétés, car chacune est nécessairement plurielle, hétérogène, conflictuelle, toujours travaillée par les processus de négociation et de traduction.

Traduire, c'est affronter les différences entre les cultures et en leur sein, c'est lever les malentendus, se dégager des logiques d'assignation. C'est contribuer à la richesse des imaginaires et des langues. La traduction doit être au cœur des liens en Méditerranée, car elle conduit à revaloriser les

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Translation involves dealing with differences between, and within, cultures. It means dissipating misunderstandings, and breaking free from logics of assignment. It means contributing to the wealth of conceptualisations and languages. Translation needs to be at the heart of links within the Mediterranean region, facilitating the foregrounding of languages in their profundity and complexity, their diversity and depth of field. It can contribute directly to equality in the conditions of exchange, and **a liberation** of knowledge. But beyond that, it can bring people face to face with differences and "untranslatabilities" that should not be concealed. An enlarged vision of translation may thus give rise to new and more intense forms of interaction in artistic, intellectual and social activity.

langues, leur richesse et leur complexité, leur diversité et leur profondeur de champ. Elle contribue très directement aux conditions d'égalité de l'échange et à **une libération** des savoirs. Mais, au-delà, elle permet de se confronter aux différents et aux intraduisibles, qu'il ne s'agit pas de masquer. Une vision élargie de la traduction incitera donc à de nouvelles formes, plus approfondies, d'interaction dans les domaines artistiques, intellectuels et sociaux. La Méditerranée doit devenir, dans les dix ans qui viennent, *un tissu de traduction*.





Online

The ECF has created an online dossier, in which it has collected various documents and interesting material on cross-Mediterranean cooperation in the contemporary arts and culture. Visit the website and explore the dossier!

Agenda & Results

Here you can read the meeting reports of each of the six Mediterranean Reflection Group meetings held in Amsterdam (2), Algiers, Ljubljana, Amman, and Alexandria.

Sharing

In partnership with the online magazine and network Babelmed, we present five inspiring interviews with cultural operators from across the Mediterranean, who share their experience in collaborating with European partners. Discover the interviews with an Egyptian film director, a Lebanese theatre maker, the secretary-general of *Damascus, Cultural Capital of the Arab World 2008*, an Egyptian film and documentary maker, and an Algerian publisher.

Dossier

Spot on!

We have put a spotlight on two collaboration projects across the Mediterranean, where artists and producers reveal their ambitions, challenges, and what drives them in their work. Read the portraits of the *Arabise Me* project in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and the *Videokaravaan* project by two Moroccan video artists and film makers.

Essays

Read the in-depth essay on the phenomenon of small-sized arts audiences in the Mediterranean and Arab world, and a paper on the landscape of the contemporary arts scene in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Inside-Insight Blog

Explore the weblog, compiled by aMAZElab in Milan, with personal encounters and experiences in the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation project *Atlante Mediterraneo*.

And what next?

The Mediterranean reflection process has so far highlighted a number of issues, which no single follow-up project could possibly address. In view of this, the ECF and some partners have decided to begin by analysing one recurring issue from the reflection process: the contrast between a) the growing interest among many European cultural practitioners to explore and cooperate with the Southern Mediterranean and b) the significant lack of insight into and knowledge of the context of cultural practice in the region.

There is, to be sure, enough common ground in the cultural practice throughout Europe and the Southern Mediterranean to justify this approach. But there exist also important differences touching on the political, socio-economic and artistic contexts in each region. In order to cooperate in the running of projects and programmes, cultural operators from both sides have to become more aware of the reality and the respective differences in each other's professional lives. And cultural operators from Europe especially, should invest in increasing

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their understanding of the contexts in which their colleagues in North Africa, the Middle East and Turkey live and work.

For this reason the ECF is currently initiating a cross-Mediterranean placement programme. This placement scheme will give young European cultural operators the possibility of living and working for a short period in the context of Southern Mediterranean cultural practice. It is intended to provide a learning experience, which could act as a springboard to further collaboration and exchange in the Euro-Mediterranean region. It will also give the host organisation the opportunity to open another window onto artistic life in the Southern Mediterranean. The aim is for both sides to further develop the common ground for cross-Mediterranean projects in the future.

The year 2008 will see the first pilot phase of this placement project which will be followed by a fully developed project in the years to come.

More information? Please keep an eye on our website:

www.eurocult.org.



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More than a message in a bottle

By Gottfried Wagner

Plus qu'un message dans une bouteille

Ce petit livre sur la coopération culturelle transméditerranéenne peut apparaître comme un message de plus dans une bouteille. Mais ce n'est pas la première « communication » rédigée avec le soutien de la Fondation européenne de la Culture. Traverser les eaux qui séparent l'Europe de l'Afrique du Nord et du Moyen-Orient fait partie de la mission culturelle de l'ECF depuis de nombreuses années. Depuis les années 1990, nous avons lancé le vaste projet de traduction et d'édition « Mémoires de la Méditerranée », qui diffuse les écrits d'auteurs arabophones dans toute l'Europe, dans de nombreuses langues ; nous avons mené des projets d'analyse tels que « Diagnostic » ; nous avons attribué de nombreuses subventions et aides à la mobilité à des artistes et à des opérateurs culturels dans la région ; facilité les projets médiatiques d'écrivains, de réalisateurs et de jeunes et, tout récemment, de communautés vivant en Israël et en Palestine, de part et d'autre du mur ; nous avons travaillé avec des journalistes au Maroc. Le résultat de tout ceci va bien au-delà de simples messages dans des bouteilles.

Nous sommes convaincus que, pour contrebalancer les rumeurs alarmistes de nos propres sociétés, nous devons susciter la curiosité. Pour avancer en ce sens, les histoires et les images d'artistes peuvent être des graines fertiles si elles sont semées comme il faut, dans un sol bien préparé. Pensée critique et création contemporaine peuvent

This small book on cross-Mediterranean cultural cooperation may at first glance appear to be just another 'message in a bottle'. However, it is not the first communiqué drawn up with the support of the European Cultural Foundation. Crossing the waters between Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and Turkey has been part of the cultural mission of the ECF for many years and especially since the 1990s when we succeeded in launching a number of important projects. Among these is the large translation and publishing project called 'Mémoires de la Méditerranée', which aimed to make authors writing in Arabic better known through translations into many European languages. We have also run analytical projects, such as 'Diagnosis'; provided support for and given numerous mobility grants to artists and cultural operators in the region and we have facilitated the media projects of writers, film makers and young people. More recently, we have supported art along the wall which divides the communities in Israel and Palestine. All this has resulted in much more than just a message in a bottle.

We believe that to counteract the alarmist tendency in our respective societies we have to begin by triggering people's curiosity. The stories and images which artists can provide could act as powerful seeds to help us in this endeavour, if sown properly and on well-prepared ground. Critical thinking and contemporary creative works can do miracles, if individuals find the backing they need, including civic structures of

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collaboration. And we believe that cross-Mediterranean collaboration is just as much a European topic as is the topic of East-West cooperation. We are working against the emerging new divide between those Europeans who advocate the latter (i.e. the Eastern dimension), and those who advocate the former (the Southern dimension).

Therefore we have tried to balance the Eastern enlargement of the EU in 2004 (we have been very much involved in its cultural dimension) with specific and increased activities in and with the 'South'. We have been engaged in the first ever EU sponsored agency for trans-Mediterranean cooperation, the Anna Lindh Foundation, although we have our doubts that 'message bottles' can be lifted by intergovernmental tankers, which move desperately slowly, and which can be brought to a halt by the veto of one of the states involved, some of which, as we all know, are not fully developed democracies.

Art and artists can turn 'cultural' minefields into spaces of communication and lively debate. The only condition is to ensure that outdated thought patterns and frozen assumptions regarding the 'Other' are no longer dominant. This can be done by helping imaginative people from both sides to engage in a genuine dialogue which goes beyond the representational exchange of the déjà-vu.

Concluding this small publication, we reflect again on the role

faire des miracles si les individus trouvent le soutien dont ils ont besoin, et notamment des structures civiles de collaboration. Et nous sommes convaincus que la coopération transméditerranéenne est un dossier européen au même titre que la coopération Est-Ouest. Nous travaillons contre les Européens qui prônent l'une (par exemple la dimension orientale), et contre ceux qui prônent l'autre (la dimension méridionale).

Nous avons donc tenté d'équilibrer l'élargissement de l'UE à l'Est en 2004 - notre engagement dans la dimension culturelle de celui-ci ayant été très important - par des activités spécifiques et accrues au « Sud » et avec lui. Nous nous sommes engagés dans la première structure de coopération culturelle transméditerranéenne jamais financée par l'UE, la Fondation Anna Lindh, malgré nos doutes quant à la possibilité de faire convoyer ces « bouteilles à la mer » par des vaisseaux intergouvernementaux aux mouvements d'une lenteur déplorable, et susceptibles d'être bloqués par le veto de l'un des États impliqués car, comme nous le savons, tous ne sont pas des démocraties développées.

L'art et les artistes peuvent transformer des champs de mines « culturels » en espaces de communication et de débat vivant. Seul préalable : briser la glace des préjugés. Or, les modèles anciens cèdent lorsque des personnes imaginatives s'engagent dans un dialogue véritable qui va au-delà de l'échange formel de déjà-vu.

Mais que signifie ceci dans le contexte politique européen, où les pays du MOAN n'ont aucune

perspective d'intégration à l'UE, mais sont touchés par la politique européenne de voisinage ? Cette question est-elle trop vaste pour le travail de réflexion d'une fondation indépendante telle que la Fondation européenne de la Culture ?

Non. Posée en termes assez simples, notre recommandation est la suivante : intégrer la culture et la coopération culturelle à la politique de voisinage de l'UE, pour toutes les raisons que nous avons tenté de montrer dans cette petite publication ; avoir conscience de l'importance de la circulation de l'art et des artistes par-delà les frontières, et fournir des instruments significatifs pour favoriser la « mobilité » ; utiliser, lorsque nous nous adressons à ces régions voisines, des instruments souples, non bureaucratiques, pour la coopération bilatérale, régionale ou transrégionale.

Oui. De nouveau, en termes simples : nous pouvons démontrer l'importance des arts et de la culture s'agissant d'instaurer une relation plus équilibrée et réciproque, mais nous sommes tout à fait conscients de la portée marginale de ce propos au regard de grands dossiers tels que la paix, la sécurité, l'énergie, les migrations, les intérêts géostratégiques ; nous admettons que se contenter d'écouter les artistes (ce que nous pensons avoir réussi à faire) ne suffit pas : nous reconnaissons qu'il nous faut traduire notre message dans le langage des planificateurs aux commandes dans les sphères politiques et financières.

L'ECF a commencé à exercer sa réflexion dans et avec les Balkans, et initié une coalition pour un « Fonds d'incitation culturelle pour les Balkans » ; nous avons poursuivi ce processus avec un groupe de réflexion dédié à la Méditerranée qui, nous l'espérons, entraînera des investissements partagés pour la mobilité ; notre Board et notre Advisory Council se sont réunis à Istanbul en 2007, signe clair d'une stratégie européenne d'inclusion culturelle ; et nous avons déjà publié notre première série de rapports sur l'Europe de l'Est. Nos messages sont clairs : l'enjeu va au-delà du « matériel ». La culture compte ! Nous avons le souci actif de contribuer à une politique culturelle européenne et à une pratique plus partagée de la coopération transnationale, et nous nous soucions des politiques et des pratiques culturelles vis-à-vis de nos voisins.

of culture in the context of European politics, where MENA countries have no perspective of EU integration but are part of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The issues raised by the reflection exercise on the preceding pages invite both a positive and a negative conclusion.

On the positive side, we have confirmed the importance of integrating culture and cultural cooperation into the EU Neighbourhood Policy. We thus recommend to all sides involved to be aware of the value of circulation of the arts and artists across these boundaries, to provide significant instruments for 'mobility' and to use flexible, non-bureaucratic instruments for bilateral, regional and cross-regional cooperation with people from the regions included in the Policy.

On the negative side, despite the clear evidence for the importance of arts and culture in creating a more equal and mutually enriching relationship, we are all very much aware of the marginal scope of this endeavour compared to the larger issues of peace, security, energy, migration and geo-strategic interests. This booklet has further substantiated our claim that it is not enough just to listen to the artists – a task in which we think the ECF has succeeded. In our advocacy work we have to reach well beyond our belief in the importance of culture. We thus accept the relative value of the present exercise and confirm the need to translate our message into the language of the planners who move in the political and financial headquarters.

Conscious of this vocation the ECF has pursued its task with conviction and perseverance. The beginning was the reflection exercise in and with the Balkans and the instigation of the coalition for a 'Cultural Incentive Fund for the Balkans'. This was followed by a Mediterranean Reflection Group, which will hopefully lead to shared investment in mobility. In 2007 our Board and Advisory Council gathered in Istanbul as a clear signal for a new culturally inclusive European strategy, and we have already published our first set of reports on Eastern Europe. Our message is clear: culture matters! As the present publication testifies, we are concerned – actively – with contributing to a European cultural policy and more shared practice of trans-national cooperation, and our aim is to promote cultural policies and practices which include all our neighbours.

قد يبدو هذا الكتيّب عن التعاون الثقافي في المتوسط كأنه مجرد رسالة أخرى في فارورة من زجاج. غير أنّ هذه "الرسالة" ليست الأولى التي تم إعدادها بدعم من المؤسسة الأوروبية للثقافة. فقد شكّل تقريب المسافات ما بين أوروبا وإفريقيا الشمالية والشرق الأوسط جزءاً من المهمة الثقافية للمؤسسة الألفية الذكر لسنوات عديدة. ونحن نؤمن بأنّه بهدف إيقاف الضوضاء المثيرة للمخاوف في مجتمعاتنا، علينا البدء بإثارة الفضول. ويمكن أن تشكل قصص الفنانين وصورهم بذوراً فعالة تساعدنا في سعيينا هذا، وذلك إن بُذرت بشكل صحيح وعلى أرضية مهينة جيّداً. كما أنه بوسع الفكر النقدي والإبداع إنجاز المعجزات شرط أن يجد الأفراد الدعم الذي يحتاجونه، بما في ذلك البنى الأساسية المدنية للتعاون. وإنا مهتمّون، وبشكل ناشط، بالمساهمة في وضع سياسة ثقافية أوروبية وفي قيام ممارسة أكبر للتعاون المشترك بين الأمم. ونبدي اهتماماً أيضاً بالسياسات والممارسات الثقافية تجاه جيراننا.

In July 2006 the ECF and its partners initiated a process of reflection on cultural cooperation between Europe and the Southern Mediterranean. We always tend to regard cooperation from our own perspective, but not much time is dedicated to understanding the partnership context from the perspective of the 'other'.

This publication presents the fruits of our reflection on how cultural cooperation between Europe and the Southern Mediterranean has actually taken shape, what it means for those concerned, and whether we are still asking ourselves the right questions.