

This text is written as an immediate response after being invited to the General Assembly on forms of imagination and thinking for Europe in Warsaw July 11, 2013. The text is dedicated to all in power with a special address to President José Manuel Barroso, the Cultural Committee and politicians in the field of cultural policies in all member states of the EU.

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The Politics of Art

Or

What do the Arts do in Relation to the Creation of a New Narrative for Europe?

We shit, spit, bleed and weep. We chat, argue, laugh and cry out loud. We provoke, activate, stimulate and initiate. We talk and we move. We communicate. We narrate. Why is the word being said? Why is the movement in motion? Why do we insist on action? These are questions about the transmission of language, the politics of listening and about the roles of representation in art. We move politically on an excursion in search of miracles.

We live in a benevolent welfare state that has fallen on hard times. Un-necessities spread out amongst all the worry and the glitter blinds you (spit). With all the sparkle you become myopic and your existence narrows down to trifles (shit). Europe is in a financial crisis. A large portion of the European population is on the dole, in a cultural void. Cultural policies are in a state of vacuum, most often with fuzzy leadership whose actions are based on a materialistic view, where art is seen as goods and products and the artist is steered toward usefulness and adaptation to the "creative economy" (bleed). The journey to the many mansions of power provides a host of opportunities for reflection on powerlessness and impotence. If we want a society with creative, innovative, strong citizens that are able to apply and utilize their voices and creativity, we need a belief in our common commitments (argue) (move). The dominating political philosophy puts art into the "icing-on-the-cake" box (weep). Is this what we want?

Culture is what we live, our common foundation, our societal contract. The arts are part of this culture. Through artistic expression we can both gauge and affect the state of our culture, creating our story (talk). Keep ignorant people on the hold! They can deprive us of the possibility of knowledge, of creativity and linguistic awareness that the qualitative experience of art can provide (cry out loud). They hinder the narration! We must turn the political hierarchy upside down and work for strong cultural policies, integrated into all political areas (communicate). I want to see policies that don't just put survival and material wellbeing in focus, but have a good cultural climate as its ultimate goal for a long-term sustainable development (initiate). A decent, humane attitude to people with plenty of room for curiosity and the creativity that makes it possible to support other market forces than those that blind you (laugh).

For that which we are after, we need policies that create possibilities for deeper artistic processes with an outlook that places us not only in Europe, but also in a global perspective (chat). Policies that create both understanding and legitimacy for art's specific power to

contribute to a good society where we can all live in awareness, creativity and empathy as seeing humans (stimulate). Art simply makes it more fun, more interesting and more challenging to live. Europe needs artists (activate). Art defies borders.

*Art is created **in the eyes of the beholder**.* Art is created in the instance when the onlooker affords the action such meaning that it is legitimized as art. It's not just there. Art authors itself in a void, in the space between the public and the private and it cannot excuse itself from its political, social, cultural or private context. The artwork articulates the self and puts the work within the framework of what the viewer is able to interpret. This ability, in turn, is dependent on the position our culture affords man as a body. Art doesn't exist in itself. It's created in the eyes of the beholder.

Suggestion: Enjoy and engage in artistic activities

*Art **queries the current state**.* We live a need for faith in the future based on curiosity and respect for who we are or who we long to be. Art contributes greatly to the knowledge about the uniqueness of being a human being with her senses intact. To make art a natural part of everyday life in the good society, policies are needed that deal not only with the broad cultural perspectives, but also with art's availability, credibility and topicality – as art. This demands forums where artistic narrations/presentations query the current state and generate insights into what would otherwise remain hidden. Artists create art and push it toward a widening of both cultural norms and formal regulations in society.

Suggestion: Support the development of artist driven forums

*Art **produces experience**.* Our bodies are archives for all they have lived, their memories and experiences of concrete meetings, events, historical heritages, cultural and philosophical attitudes. They are archives with many departments. An archive is a society's collection of documents. Our bodily collections have not found their material form. It is as we make our way through the midst of our memories and experiences that we make a leap and create new ones. Our bodily archives collect this in different layers of consciousness, that turn into action.

Suggestion: Invite artists to be part of the development of strategic culture policies and don't forget the young generation

*The arts **explore and experiment with the seemingly impossible**.* The risk you take when you engage in an advanced artistic process is experimenting with supposedly known facts. At times the work feels like a deadly threat to all we've taken for granted. Otherwise we just trod on, repeat ourselves and get lost in the ruins of established conventions that scream out what is proper. We cannot build our selves into a context that we're unable to reproduce. It demands a challenge, critical reflection as a trigger to give our resistance enough power to reformulate itself. Through those new voices we can envisage new spaces and opportunities to penetrate. We train to keep our senses alert, but also with our deeds help sharpen other people's vision.

Suggestion: Recognize artistic research and its impact on society on the same terms as scientific research

*The arts produce **common values**.* We need each other. It is a mutual dependency: policy/art/culture. It is not enough just to be good. Artists train. Artists do research. To develop the knowledge needed for good artistic activity we build networks and forums where

we can share, provoke, stimulate, narrate, present and perform. Many artists take part in networks and processes that contribute to a development of society. In different corners of Europe there are examples of artist driven forums aiming at offering artists a chance to develop and enable art that is topical, engaging and reflective. Artists develop knowledge and methods that open-mindedly bring us forward, push the development and nourish hope.

Suggestion: Invest in creative bureaucracy and modernize the systems of financial support of the arts labelled as budgetary allocation instead of subsidies

Art provokes. Active and radical cultural policies welcome criticism and provocation, they highlight and make available art as an indispensable stimulus of curiosity, wellbeing, cultural and societal development. They enable arenas needed for this. They make it possible for us to live in the conviction that we cannot know what will happen, but we are prepared. Art is an integral part of society's survival strategy!

Suggestion: Create public forums that embrace also uncomfortable and critical expressions

Art becomes political action. The arts rely on a broader definition of the concept of language, that what we do not say may convey as much meaning as what we express in words. Out of this insight respect for our fellow human beings comes into being and we become not only better at expressing our selves but also at listening and participating, abilities needed in a democratic society. Questioning the present is a prerequisite for development. Artists develop art and push it towards a widening of cultural norms and the formal set of rules employed in our society. It is not good enough to focus on policies of grants and money hand-outs.

Development doesn't always translate into national currency or Euros. A good strategy for cultural policies must translate into actions as an expression of the mature view that means seeing the value of building culture together, seeing the value in everything from cooking, study circles, football and handicraft to the most advanced and experimental in the groundbreaking art world. We share everyday life and individual exclusiveness. We know that living comes with a cost. We must make use of the multiculturalism, the complexity and diversity. Cultural identity is the foundation of a developed self-image. Our thoughts and experiences bring us forward to new insights, innovation and new positions vis-à-vis the present. We take action!

Suggestion: Turn the political hierarchy upside down and let culture policies infiltrate all other political areas

Art stimulates the will. We set limits to the moment in order to keep our focus trained on it. We put up boundaries around the time we want to defend and break down others that surround what we are attracted to. We stretch things out, reject them, blow them up and resist them but we also manage to find those moments that are capable of containing eternity, passion and the splendour that inspires the obstinate grubbing used in our search. Composing a life, a painting or a dance demands the same tools. It demands an approach to life, to politics, ethics, aesthetics, skills... and it demands a great amount of will.

Suggestion: Speak up for the arts on every opportunity you could possibly think of

Art sharpens our senses. Art demands participation and reaction. At times it offers peace and a moment of reflection, at times it demands activity by provocation, confrontation - "scream in your ear". Art helps to develop both an individual and societal sense of self. Through art we continue to develop society and our culture. Artists are trained to handle creativity, critical thought, reflection and articulation. We sharpen our senses.

Suggestion: Invest in higher education in the arts

The arts develop **knowledge**. There must be accessibility to art, credibility and a belief in art as an integral part of our cultural consciousness at all levels, a force for good and a strong field of knowledge – a knowledge that must be tried, retried and given new nourishment. Art is a significant factor in knowledge development with particular emphasis on the ability of man to communicate with his own species. Artistic research questions and queries the current state of affairs in a way that generates new thoughts and a creativity that leads to new insights about that which would otherwise remain hidden. When artists follow the lead given by the latest research, then the audience too, will be able to encounter something active, something that functions. A story, a narration, an object, a process... An encounter charged with expectation that has to do with what is vital, what has to be done. Positive challenges, having things demanded of us, being seen, being free to make use of ourselves, being moved and being free to touch, to come in contact with the kind of things we never believed we could ever get close to. Surprise!

Suggestion: Create a proper infrastructure with good funding for artistic research

The arts stimulate **the encounter**. We have to make everything on offer available and we have to be willing to get close. We have to want the encounter. We have to trust the movement. Out of trust comes the readiness to let oneself be carried away, transported both by dreams and intellectual stimulation and so move into the arena of the unconscious or out into entirely new worlds of experience. That is when the encounter comes into being, when mind meets mind and body meets body and our creativity is really made use of. We all become co-creators of meaning, of significance. We assign values; we give opinions, we think. We look at what happens in different ways. We create different meanings and assign different values to various goals. In this way we become more clearly defined to each other and can go on to reach a dialogue.

Suggestion. Enjoy every opportunity to engage in artistic activities

We are many to work for a change. Let's do it!

Efva Lilja

P.S. In case you need it - I give you my manifesto, written a few years ago to be comforting in times of doubt:

"Change a habit and avoid convention. Stop indifference from catching a hold. Push away slowing resistance and open up for enjoyment free from perversion. Stir up and mess up. Create new rites around that which must be protected so that goodness and love are again recognisable. View art as immaterial pleasure or materialised madness, the alphabet of outrage paired with lust and profound intimacy. A dissection of reality down to its smallest particles, reunited in entirely new entities dipped in love. The encounter with art should be like coming home or finding an exciting, challenging place where anything can happen. A place where we want to remain, amidst all the incomprehensible, to be present, listening, narrating..."

In this text I, in parts, quote myself from some earlier writings on cultural policies to be found at www.efvalilja.se