

Keynote Madeline Ritter at the online conference of the Creative Europe Desk „Looking Ahead – New Opportunities and Visions within EU Funding for Culture after Covid-19“, October 8th, 2020

WINGS OF INNOVATION – CREATING THROUGH TRUST AND TOGETHERNESS

I want to propose an idea. It touches on a few core issues that I would like to get you excited about: trust, responsibility, and the fact that when trust and responsibility come together, they give us wings to fly.

Trust. The idea is this: What if politicians and artists trusted each other?

Most often, the relationship between governments and the cultural sector is characterised by obligation rather than by a bond of trust. From the perspective of the cultural sector, politicians are expected to deliver: “I make art and you need to provide funding.”

From the perspective of the politicians, artists need to make a claim: “Yes, you may collect some money, but first you need to fill in the correct application documents and be selected for funding by a jury.”

An alternative vision is proposed by the famous economist and social psychologist Shoshana Zuboff. She says that individuals have huge economic value because they are prepared to pay for things that will make their lives better. But in order to understand what individual consumers want, you need to get close to them, join them in their personal spaces, and gain their trust.

When such a relationship of trust has been established, existential questions arise. People are concerned about social security, about economic independence, and about access to education for themselves and their families. The same is true for artists and creatives. We all look for *lifelong learning* and *lifelong earning*.

The past months have shown very clearly just how existential these concerns are. Depending on where in Europe you were living when the pandemic hit, you may have received financial support as an artist – or not! It wasn't a question of trust, but of luck.

For politicians and artists to work together effectively, they need to build trust. It must be a two-way relationship. In Disney's Jungle Book, the snake Kaa, while entwining little Mowgli, sings to him: "Trusssst in me, just in me ..."

But it doesn't work like that. You can't demand that someone trust you. Rather, trust is created when we open up. When we communicate. When we allow things to happen. We have to abandon the idea that intervention leads to transformation. Real transformation needs to come from within, through a process of "intravention". But this movement is self-directed, and cannot be forced.

Another way to imagine a relationship of trust is as a shared space of self-efficacy, which is our belief in our ability to achieve what we set out to do. Without it, any transformation process will fail.

It helps to understand each other's perspective. Putting ourselves in others' shoes is a valuable exercise, particularly in this current situation. Different people's reactions to the restrictions imposed by our governments to curb the spread of the coronavirus are testing our sense of empathy. Even in my own family, which usually stands united, rifts have opened up. Opposing beliefs and points of views are colliding, and there is conflict.

But perhaps this is exactly where we need to practice. Trust takes practice.

When a bond of trust has been established, extraordinary things can happen. At the beginning of the pandemic, our chancellor Angela Merkel directly addressed artists in Germany. It was the first speech of its kind in her term of office, and probably the first of its kind by any German chancellor. In her message she asked artists to trust her. It was followed shortly afterwards by an announcement of substantial support.

On the initiative of Monika Grütters, the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, various departments and cultural ministries have been working closely with representatives of the cultural sector to create rescue programmes worth hundreds of millions of euros. Right now, the team of my own non-profit organisation is working with

two other dance organisations to deliver a 20-million-euro special funding programme for dance in Germany.

It is a new experience for us, but very heartening to see a field of mutual trust and responsibility unfolding around us.

The philosopher and psychiatrist Karl Jaspers once said – I paraphrase – that by accepting personal responsibility, a person accepts that everything, him or herself included, will continually change.

Let's have a look at: innovation. The mantra of European cultural policy.

Shoshana Zuboff is sceptical about innovation. She says: "When all people can talk about is innovation, it is a sure sign of decline. Only things that are worn out and that don't work properly anymore need to be fixed, restored, or innovated. Innovation therefore seeks to repair systems that are no longer useful. Systems can only do so much." She believes that real change happens through mutation, as in the example of gain-of-function mutations in genetics. One altered gene gains a new molecular function, which causes the entire system to change.

What is the equivalent of such a gene in our cultural ecosystem? The smallest entity in the system, which nevertheless has a huge impact on the whole?

It is the individual artist – the dancer, the singer, the musician. During the pandemic it became apparent that individual artists are the weakest links in our cultural funding system. When their livelihoods are at risk, the art and culture we all love dies – everywhere, all over the world.

Many European countries launched new funding programmes – often scholarship programmes that in the past had been designed to help young people just starting out on their career path. But this path doesn't end at 30. And it is not only people in the cultural sector who are trying to find their way.

Joseph Beuys believed that a society's capital is not its money, but the creativity of its citizens. Growth depends on every person being able to develop their creative energies freely. In his last interview, he said: "Every human being is a sun king. The palace that we have to conquer first, and then learn to live in, is our own head."

What if there was a scholarship for every productive person in Europe, whether they be a singer, a nurse, or an IT specialist? We could call it "Wings of Innovation".

Real change requires free agents, or “free radicals”, on all levels of society. A programme such as “Wings of Innovation” could offer people the chance to step out of their normal working lives for a while and give them space to develop new ideas. Instead of demanding efficiency and constant optimisation, the “Wings of Innovation” idea understands the potentials of undirected, joyful forms of learning. It is how we all discovered the world when we were children. What if..., what if we could, at least for a while, follow every impulse, and just explore where our curiosity leads us?

The University of Fine Arts in Hamburg is already testing a similar idea. This winter semester, it is offering three people a scholarship for doing nothing. The project is part of the exhibition “School of Inconsequentiality: Practicing a Different Kind of Life” by Friedrich von Borries.

An inspiring idea that inspires trust.

What are we waiting for?!