

THE ROLE OF THE NODAL PARTNERS IN *MEETING IN THE CAVE*.
A HISTORICAL-SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS.

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INTRODUCTION

Meeting in the Cave is a sevenfold meta-installation build upon 7 nodal points (Nodal Partners) placed in succession along a straight segment on the territory. The two endpoints of the segment, the Eye and the Cave meta-spaces, respectively hosting the livre d'artiste *Meetings with Remarkable Women – The Red Book*, and the opera *Cave 3.0*, namely the feminine and the masculine polarities of the work, or else the esoteric and the exoteric dimensions, or the Establishment and the Margin dyad, are correspondingly located in the city Centre and in the urban Periphery. The Eye and the Cave are in a two-way data exchange: the Eye, in a top-down energetic flow; the Cave, in a bottom-up stream, involving in their conversation the other transceivers 5 Nodal Partners on the intervening territory. From their interexchange and the visitors' interaction, springs forth the mesoteric membrane stretched across the area, giving rise to the collective intelligence of the community involved.

The area selected for the implementation of the artwork is New York City and involves 7 relevant cultural Nodal partners. The Eye is located in the city centre at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) on the 53rd Street in Midtown Manhattan; the Cave, in the urban periphery, at the Jane's Carousel in the Brooklyn Bridge Park. On the intervening area, starting from the city centre, the Rockefeller Center between the 48th and the 51st Streets; the Morgan Library and Museum in the Murray Hill neighborhood; the School of Visual Arts (SVA) in the Gramercy neighborhood, at the border of East Village and Midtown Manhattan; the Orpheum Theater on the Second Avenue in the East Village; and the Tenement Museum in Manhattan's Lower East Side.

This analysis is to assess the role and the input of each cultural institution in the fruition of the work. The findings will serve the formulation of a survey allowing the audience, stimulated by the same clips of the opera and images of the *Red Book*, to anonymously share their thoughts and feelings on the work. The data will provide input how diverse micro-demographics respond differently to the *same* cultural stimulus; how human subjects interact one another within an urban environment in the digital age; how in the digital age art can integrate different systems of representation in the perception of an artwork; the cultural impact of each institutions on the urban fabric; how partnership and collaboration among cultural institutions can advance the community's intelligence towards a higher-order of integration and performance. The findings will be published in a printed *White Book*, as well released outside the physical limits of the meta-installation via the web platforms and social media outlets of the project.

The goal is to sensitize relevant institutions on the effectiveness of culture as a driver for sustainable development, in contrast to the too often implementation of economic measures to advance the common good. *Meeting in the Cave* will be presented by the Spanda Foundation as the case study of the side-event *Awareness, Culture & Development in the Digital Age* in the occasion of the opening of the UN General Assembly on September 2020.

In the absence of other information obtainable by direct observation, the analysis of each Nodal Partner's potentialities and synergies with the project is conducted mainly on secondary sources on the base of two markers: a) the demographics of the neighbourhood on which the institution is located; and b) the activity and the services each of them offers on the territory. This choice of these two markers is enthused to the need to gain a deeper insight on the Partners' role in contributing to cultural change among their visitors and, to a broader extent, on their function in shaping up the collective intelligence of the involved community.

GENTRIFICATION AND THE CENTRE-PERIPHERY DICHOTOMY

A key element in *Meeting in the Cave* installation is the top-down/bottom-up flow between the Centre and the Periphery as the respective realms of the Establishment and the Margin.

The Nodal Partners spread on four large neighbourhoods: Midtown Manhattan; the East Village; the Lower East Side; and Brooklyn, properly fitting the distinction between periphery and centre, even though they have been subject to a process of gradual change since their installation which has partly altered their original nature, intensely in Brooklyn, Lower East Side and East Village, with the last two considered as one until the Sixties when the area underwent a progressive transformation and the Lower East Side's northwest part started to become a borough by

itself as the East Village (Mele, 2000). Changes ascribed to the gentrification dynamics, whereby wealthy and well-educated people — gentry — gradually relocated into a lower-class peripheral neighbourhood, turning it into a ‘cool’ area (Zukin, 2010: 88), usually accompanied by a rise in real estate values.

In the East Village, the process started in the Sixties with the gradual relocation of musician, artists, hippies and students attracted by cheap rents. The area became soon the centre of New York's counterculture and home to artistic movements, which triggered a rise of rents, which in turn drove the original local community to move to the Lower East Side (Hodges in Kenneth, 2010: 769-70). By the Eighties, the area started to attract not only artists and students but also immigrants from East Asia and South America. In the 2000s, it started to be considered one of the trendiest districts of Manhattan and eventually Brooklyn, once predominantly a black community is nowadays socially and ethnically more diverse (Zukin, 2010: 36). However, this progressive de-peripheralization does not imply an increased demographic flattening between the places and a loss of the original ‘essence’ since differences remain significant at the core.

The progressive gentrification of these three neighbourhoods turned them to be the centre of an ongoing process of change not equally reflected in Midtown Manhattan (McTiernan, 2008). Change starts always at the periphery, at the margin; the centre, the establishment tends to enforce the status quo.

The Nodal partners are thus placed on a demographics gradually fading from the multicultural, fluid and popular context to the economically, culturally and socially established, and vice-versa, with the main border on the southern part where Midtown edges the northern East village, in the 4th node, the medial axis of reflection in the Matrix.

THE NODAL CULTURAL PARTNERS

The order in which these institutions are here treated does not correspond to any intended logic of interaction among them throughout the project, given that their interexchange is expected to be a two-way flow and not to a single direction only.

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MoMA)

The first nodal partner here analyzed is the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) hosting the Eye meta-space, an area determined by half-squaring a circle of 6 meters exhibiting a copy of the numbered edition of the live d'artiste *Meetings with Remarkable Women*.

The MoMA, founded by Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, John D. Jr's wife, Lillie P. Bliss and Mary Quinn Sullivan (Meecham and Sullivan, 2013: 200) opened to the public in its original location in the Heckscher Building on the Fifth Avenue on November 7, 1929. In 1939, following John D. Rockefeller, Jr. donation of the site's land (Kert, 1993), it moved its activities to its current location on 53rd Street. Today, David Rockefeller, Jr and Sharon Percy Rockefeller seat in the Board of Trustees.

First among US museums to be exclusively devoted to modern and contemporary art and first in Manhattan to exhibit works of the European Modernism (Fitzgerald, 1966: 120), the museum is committed to “sharing the most thought-provoking modern and contemporary art” (Moma.org, “about us”).

Since 1983, when it doubled its gallery and added the auditorium, the Museum went through a gradual enlargement continuing today with the project of the Jane Nouvel's Hines building expansion adding 50,000 square feet of gallery space to be completed within 2019. In conjunction with the approval of this project, it was announced that it would shift the expositive approach from the division in disciplines to a chronological presentation of the collection. The expansion will include the realization of the Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Studio, a multimedia space dedicated to experimental expositions and live performances.

THE ROCKEFELLER CENTER

Rising on a site once owned by the Columbia University and then sold to John D. Rockefeller, Jr in 1928, the Rockefeller Center is a vast commercial complex of 19 buildings covering 89,000 square meters in Midtown Manhattan, commissioned by the Rockefeller family in 1931 and completed in 1939.

The complex was declared New York City landmark in 1985, and National Historic landmark two years later. The Center has an exclusive commercial function, as [at it] “you could do anything you wanted except sleep (no hotels), pray (no churches), or not to pay rent to” (Rockefeller Jr., in Okrent, 2004: 399). For its territorial impact, it is considered one of the greatest works of the Great Depression era, National Historic Landmark since 1987.

Constituted of two parts, the original complex of 14 Art Deco buildings and the later complex of 5 International style buildings, the Center went through a series of acquisitions and changes of ownership in recent years. In July 1996, it became the property of a consortium of owners including Gianni Agnelli, Stavros Niarchos, Goldman Sachs and David Rockefeller. In 2000, the 14 original buildings were bought by the Tishman Speyer real estate group; and in 2014, the Rockefeller family re-settled its headquarters moving out of the Center's General Electric Building, then renamed Comcast.

The symbolic value of the Rockefeller Center surpasses well beyond its commercial nature. The annual ceremony of the Christmas Tree lighting in the Rockefeller Plaza marks the official beginning of the Christmas holidays for millions of New Yorkers.

THE MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

On 225 Madison Avenue, close to the Empire State Building and in the core of Midtown Manhattan, the Morgan Library and Museum is the fifth nodal partner of the project.

The original complex of the library, built between 1902 and 1906, was intended to host the private library and art collection of the American financier John Pierpont Morgan Sr. (1837-1913). The complex was designed by Charles McKim in the Italian Renaissance style, with the intent to reflect a majestic appearance on an intimate scale.

In 1924, when Pierpont's son J.P Morgan Jr. realized the cultural importance of his father's collection he opened the Library to the public to make content available to scholars and interested people.

Over time, the library went through a process of progressive enlargement that led to the most recent expansion in 2006 designed by the Italian architect Renzo Piano. The expansion increased the exhibition space, adding 75,000 square meters to the campus, and a new performance hall and other facilities for visitors (Withe et al., 2010; 281). Today, the Library is a large complex of buildings of different styles and periods covering half of the complex, its impact on the Midtown's territory cannot be overlooked.

In terms of local contribution, the Morgan Library and Museum offers a variety of services like a library, museum and concert hall, partly funded by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

Worth mentioning is the K-12 school program, which promotes the study of Science and Humanities through the direct observation of primary sources and the arts in the Morgan's collection. Furthermore, together with several classical music concerts, it offers workshops, lecture, meetings and discussion on art and literature, and family-programs granting free access to families.

Morgan's clear and noticeable commitment to the preservation and promulgation of culture regards the nature of the large collection preserved in its rooms. Despite its hugely diversified in time and thematics, it does, not surprisingly, include modern and American art, since the founders might have been probably driven by the desire to lay the basis of a grand cultural legacy (Kingsley, 2010: 31).

THE SCHOOL OF VISUAL ART (SVA)

In the Gramercy district, where Midtown Manhattan encounters the East Village, stands the School of Visual Art. Originally founded in 1947 by Silas H. Rhodes and Burne Hogarth as the Cartoonist and Illustrator School, the institution took its current name in 1956 and moved to its current address in 209 East 23rd Street in 1960. Twenty years later, the School opened its first International Studies Program in Tangier, Morocco; in 1983, the first Master in Fine Arts in painting, drawing and sculpture. Since 1969, it flanked its commitment to education with active participation in the artistic scene of New York City. In that year, the School's museum was opened, to offer a space for exhibitions that might not find expression elsewhere. In 2009, the SVA Theater opened, Designed by Milton Glaser, was intended as a multimedia facility and an open platform to conjugate art, education and culture. In 2013, the didactic offer was limited to undergraduate programs in Cartooning, Illustration, Advertising, Animation and Photography. Today the SVA is a top-ranked design college, with a variety of undergraduate and graduate art programs in Computer Arts, Design for Social Innovation, Digital Photography.

Part of its academic commitment, it organizes public events in its three galleries and theatre in New York City and offers several international programs in China, Greece, Italy, France, Spain and Turkey, among others.

Of relevance for the project: The SVA has a dual nature: on the one hand, as an academic institution it is active in the systematization of knowledge but, on the other, it remains open to the new and not yet canonized, giving voice to unrepresented artists and offering a dedicated space for its valorisation. This dual nature perfectly matches the School's location, exactly where the vibrant, multicultural and reactionary Manhattan meets the established and canonized Midtown.

THE ORPHEUM THEATER

Passing from the Lower East Side to the East Village neighbourhood, we find the next nodal partner of the project: the Off-Broadway Orpheum Theater on the Second Avenue. Built in 1904, this small 299 seats theatre is connected to the massive immigration in the area during the 19th and 20th century where artists from Austria and Hungary used to perform. Converted into a cinema in the Twenties, part of the Jewish Rialto, the Yiddish theatre district, it was re-converted to a theatre in 1958, housing significant musical productions, *Little Mary Sunshine* (1959), *Little Shop of Horrors* (1982). Today it is home to the New York production of *Stomp* therein performed since 1994. Its artistic valence is amplified by its location

Since the Sixties, the East Village, started to be destination of artists and musicians who forged the New York's counterculture, also known as the birthplace of punk-rock In 1966, hosted Andy Warhol and the *Velvet Underground*, from 1967 to 1971, the *Grateful Dead* and *The Allman Brothers Band* performed in what was known as the Electric Circus. In 1968, the rock producer Bill Graham opened the Fillmore East venue, better known as The Church of Rock n' Roll, where major rock bands where *The Jimi Hendrix Experience*, *Cream*, *Led Zeppelin*, *Pink Floyd*, and *The Who* performed.

In addition to this artistic heritage, The East Village has always been an area of protests and 'reaction' to the establishment, which contributed to its image of 'authenticity'. Today it attracts people interested in its arts, intellectual and radical past (Zukin, 2010: 120-1).

THE TENEMENT MUSEUM ON URBAN IMMIGRATION HISTORY

The Tenement Museum on Urban Immigration History is situated at 103 Orchard Street, in the Lower East Side. Founded by Ruth J. Abram and Anita Jacobson in 1988, it is located in two historical buildings initially residence for immigrants from more than 20 countries, now recreating the apartments and businesses facilities of the ex-inhabitants, recognizing the historical relevance of migrant's challenging reality, settled in crowded tenements with living conditions far from ideal. One of these tenements was built at 97 Orchard Street by Lukas Glockner, a German immigrant, and went through a series of modifications until 1935, when the landlord evicted all the residents and closed the apartments, leaving practicable only the storefronts at the stoop-level. No further changes were made until the Museum took over the administration of the building in 1988, with apartments still untouched, exposing the leaving conditions of their inhabitants. It emerged the history of people who challenged leaving and working conditions they believed to be unfair, creating a common vision of improvement and fighting for its actuation. A history particularly relevant today, when the rights and responsibilities of newcomers are pressing issues on the current American political agenda (Russel-Ciardi, 2008: 43).

The purpose of the museum is pursued through different services and activities. Its mission to promote tolerance, offers a historical perspective on the different migrant and immigrant experiences along the Lower East Side between the 19th and 21st centuries, when the neighbourhood experienced a bulk of immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe, Russia and other groups who established homogeneous communities (Hodges in Jackson et al. 2010: 769-770).

The Museum offers several programs aimed at raising the audience's awareness on these topics. Two deserve to be noted: the Professional Development, with workshops for teachers, focused on commerce, industrialization, cultural adaptation, and discrimination, aiming to suggest professionals' innovative ways to introduce students to these fields. The other, the Shared Journeys, features English workshops for adult speakers of other languages, in the form of guided tours of 97 Orchard Street dwelling. It combines English teaching of critical engagement with civic issues, helping students to set their immigration experience within a broader historical context. Promoting civic engagement among people traditionally perceived at the margins of society, and stressing the importance of sharing experiences, the program democratizes the museum, transforming it in a democracy-building institution where visitors come to exchange and learn from each other (Russel-Ciardi, 2008: 52).

THE JANE'S CAROUSEL

The neighbourhood that will accommodate the masculine polarity with the opera *Cave 3.0* in its geodesic venue, is the area facing the Jane's Carousel at the Brooklyn Bridge Park.

The Jane's Carousel is a superb example of popular art featuring 48 carved horses attributed to Frank Carretta e John Zalar, originally manufactured by the Philadelphia Toboggan Company in 1922, now placed in a pavilion in the setting of the Brooklyn Bridge Park.

David and Jane Walentas bought the carousel at the Idora Park's auction in 1984 and brought it to New York with the idea to place it in Brooklyn (DeLuca, 2012: 1). After a restoration lasted 22 years masterly carried out by Mrs Walentas herself, the carousel was renamed Jane's Carousel and initially displayed in a storefront on Water Street (*ibid*). Since the place was too small to allow visitors, it was moved in its current location in Brooklyn Bridge Park and opened to the public on September 16, 2011. There, David Walentas, a prominent Brooklyn developer with a key role in the creation of what became the Brooklyn Bridge Park and the DUMBO neighbourhood financed the construction of a 26-foot-high acrylic pavilion designed by the architect Jean Nouvelle to host and protect the artefact.

The project was a long-term one, the planning started after the Port Authority decided to sell the piers that constitute the area of the park in 1984. In 1985, the no-profit Friends of Fulton Ferry Landing organization was established to create a park in the area. However, the Memorandum of Understanding in which the New York State and the city agreed to develop and operate the project was signed only in 2002 and, two years later, the assignment was given to the landscape architecture firm Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, Inc. which started the works on January 28, 2008, involving different sections of the park.

The core concept of Van Valkenburgh's was to accept the original commercial and industrial imprinting of the place, avoiding recreating an untouched primal landscape. The result was a one-of-a-kind park where industrial metropolitan elements meet and integrated into the natural landscapes, with zones of biodiversity where flora, fauna and people thrive (Amelar, 2011). Today, the Brooklyn Bridge Park is where children and visitors watch and ride a gorgeous example of popular art.

CONCLUSIONS

This analysis aimed to evaluate the relevance and potentialities of each of the 7 Nodal Partners in the *Meeting in the Cave* meta-installation. The findings confirmed both the strength of the partnership choice and the positive outcome of their participation in the project.

The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), worldly recognized as a reference point for modern and contemporary art, is the place that preserves and shares of what once was uncoded and now is recognized. The MoMA is one of the most influential museums of modern and contemporary art in the world. In this sense, this partner is doubtless the best location to host the Eye polarity and to exhibit the *Meeting with Remarkable Women* livre d'artiste.

The Rockefeller Center, a commercial complex considered the largest private building project ever undertaken in modern times, is at the same time a symbol of global high-finance and a national landmark in the hearts of New Yorkers with great potentialities to attract people from the entire city.

The Morgan Library and Museum, for the heritage of its founders and the classical nature of its collection, embodies all the characteristics of an institution that contributes to the systematization of knowledge and the consolidation of a specific cultural identity of the American establishment.

The School of Visual Art (SVA), with its dual commitment in systematizing knowledge and granting a voice to yet unrecognized forms of art. In this perspective, it embodies all the characteristics of a tensorial membrane where the esoteric and the exoteric natures of the two polarities meet, giving life to a mesoteric consciousness. This finds further confirmation in the SVA location right on the border between Midtown and the East Village.

The Orpheum Theater, once a multicultural theatre and now home to important artistic productions, perfectly reflects the history of the East Village neighbourhood: originally a multiethnic poor district gradually turned into the cradle of New York's counterculture. This Nodal Partner has great potentialities in attracting an audience particularly sensitive to the new, vibrant and 'reactionary'.

The Tenement Museum, as one-of-a-kind museum offering a direct observation of immigrants' living conditions, has proved to be extremely active with its programs in sensitizing and improving the awareness of both locals and newcomers about the issues of citizens' rights and duties. The museum's activities suggest that this nodal partner involves both native and multicultural audiences in different active capacities, with a double role in the promotion of development and change.

Finally, the Jane's Carousel hosting the masculine polarity of the Cave meta-space highlights the presence of duality in both the institution and its location. As the carousel is dual in being a popular attraction and a striking example of popular art, the Brooklyn Bridge Park is at the same time a peripheral place of aggregation and a successful revaluation project where the industrial metropolis merges with nature potentially exerting a relevant influence on the expected audience.

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