

Cultural Diversity and the Arts in America:

Robert Garfias

Summary

The cultural diversity underlying the nation is something which has always been an important, if little recognized factor. As the demography of the country changes with ever increasing rapidity, the inability of our cultural and educational institutions to keep pace with these changes becomes increasingly apparent. Part of the difficulty we face in absorbing these diverse Americans into our image of what the nation should be, lies in the fact that the Western European veneer endorsed by our cultural and educational institutions has prevented a more open acceptance of other cultural values. Until now they have not been successful in accommodating the existing diversity and there is little indication that as this increases, they will serve us any better.

America's insistence on a narrow Western European cultural focus together with its long standing comfortable isolation from the culture of other nations has fostered a condition in which cross cultural outreach often stops with the discovery of elements in other cultures which reflect our own. As a consequence of all this, a wedge has been effectively driven between the nation's cultural and educational institutions and the growing number and diversity of those "other" Americans. Continued and increasing efforts to include Minorities on the staff, on the boards and in the audiences of the nation's cultural life have met with only very limited success. Efforts to reach out are supported with little consideration of how well they bring in. A great part of the difficulty lies in the dogged adherence to old inappropriate models. It will be impossible to bring about changes to meet the increased challenges, as long as we are unable to accept different cultural viewpoints as part of the solution.

Cultural diversity must be seen as the strength of this nation rather than as one its difficulties. Our cultural and educational institutions will have to do much less well-intentioned doing for the other Americans and much more doing with them if the effects of long years of indifference and hostility are now to be overcome.

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With each day we note steady changes in the demographic pattern of the United States. Increasingly the nature of these changes gives cause for concern and reflection on what actions now might help us adjust to the changing configuration which is the certain future of our country. The magnitude of the changing demographic pattern has meant that practically no aspect of our lives can remain untouched by it. In this picture the arts also stand at a critical juncture.

The old adage about America as the "melting pot" seemed to work for quite a while and in the minds of many, it is still the only viable solution to our condition and the one which rings truest to our concept of the American Dream. Close scrutiny at the cultural nooks and crannies of our nation reveals a cultural diversity of immense proportions lying just below the surface of the uniform facade of Holiday Inns and McDonalds'. The melting pot concept while not openly contested has been quietly subverted all along. Today the pace at which new cultural communities are experiencing growth is such that the idea that we can still melt them into a single cohesive, yet American entity seems impossible given our understanding of the process as it has worked until now.

America is, at its core, a nation rich, complex and diverse and in essence something quite different from the Western European framework which our cultural and educational institutions have imposed on it. Searching beyond the obvious Caribbean enclaves of the East Coast, the Mexican and Central American substructure of the West, the Vietnamese and Korean cities within cities of the West, now, also growing on the East, one finds a myriad of small communities, each proudly practicing and maintaining a strong sense of cultural identity. There are communities of Spanish Menorcan living in Northern Florida, old Spanish cultures in Northern Louisiana still practicing old 16th Century forms of Spanish poetry, thousands of Ukrainians in New York and Los Angeles still strongly maintaining Ukrainian language schools for their youth, and Basques scattered in great numbers throughout rural Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Utah and California, still regularly sending their children back to Spain in order to touch again upon their roots. There is a vast network of proud, silent Native Americans, today holding on to their traditions tenaciously as

ever in spite of our nation's long history of attempting to "civilize" them by destroying what it is they have been trying valiantly to preserve. The list is truly endless - there are Portuguese in New England, the Irish and Italians in Boston and New York; and then there is Hawaii, with Puerto Ricans, Okinawans, Native Hawaiians, Samoans, Portuguese, Mexicans, Japanese, Filipinos, Chinese and mainland tourists - each maintaining their own traditions and mixing them with others. The whole is a living example of the refusal of Americans to completely submerge their identity into one mass culture. The reality of America is a land covered with enclaves of all sizes throughout the country.

These are, by and large, not people who have chosen to defy the American dream. Instead of a deep sense of conviction, they are people who have decided that they can be as American as anyone else while at the same time proudly transmitting the best of what they remember on to the next generation. This is what civilization has really always been about. On this we all agree. The difficulty is in agreeing on who should best decide to civilize whom and how.

The smaller cultural communities quickly recognize that they must absorb and be absorbed, at least on the surface, if they are to survive in the new environment. What is difficult for many Americans to comprehend is that with the larger and in particular, the new waves of Latinos and Asians it is not unwillingness to accept this principle which is the obstacle. The immense and rapid response to the recent amnesty programs for undocumented workers is demonstration of their desire to cooperate and to join. It is instead that the sheer numbers mitigate against smooth absorption. Their own communities offer a bedrock of support to newcomers. When they arrive in large numbers these communities offer a comfortable alternative to striking out on one's own, an option so attractive and easy that it becomes virtually impossible for most to ever break out. Yet we blame these new Americans for what is perfectly natural. Americans attached to the military in Asia and in Europe rarely venture beyond the base and rarely make friends with local people unless this has been structured for them. Mainland tourists flood Hawaii all year long and yet few ever venture beyond the beaches and tourist sites and would be hard pressed to find a way of striking lasting friendships with the locals.

The need to establish community is indeed very strong. When the Hmong refugees as well as the Cambodians and Laos were first admitted into the United States they were systematically scattered

throughout the country from Hawaii to Maine. Gradually networks of communication were established and subsequently there began a steady migration and re settlement to Southern California. What has now occurred however, is that the Vietnamese, Korean, Iranian and Latino communities in Southern California, for example, have become so large as to be virtually impermeable to entry by outsiders and as difficult for insiders to find a way out. This has been the cause of considerable frustration because now that the arts in America has decided to roll out the welcome mat to all these other Americans, they still seem unwilling to venture forth.

The reasons are complex, but in essence for these new immigrants, the environment has initially appeared very hostile. At almost every furtive foray into the larger unknown territory, their initial perception has been further reinforced. Everything they see around them appears to reject who they are. The contrast between the comfortable support of their community and the hostility and lack of acceptance on the outside makes all but the very necessary excursion into the exterior uninviting. Our concert halls, museums and galleries which for us represent an aspect of our lives which we deeply cherish and need, reflect for these large communities of immigrants, even more pointedly, the very same hostility and unwelcomeness which they experience when they must venture out. Here, even more so, our art institutions seem to say that "you must belong here to enter" and "you must know what you are doing here". For these new immigrants and a good number of other diverse ethnic groups in America there is little or no incentive to meet this challenge. To them our open doors appear as tightly shut as ever. The apparent hostility of our arts institutions to the non initiated is, most unfortunately, something vividly clear to those outside and at the same time something unimaginable to those working within the institutional network structure.

While for quite some time now, an impression of exclusivity and elitism has not been the intention of our arts organizations, nevertheless, they have been and continue to be viewed very much in that light. Why this is so is in part due to misperceptions about the manner in which we view the arts and in the concomitant difficulty which this imposes on our ability to understand the other point of view. What we have been doing in our education system and in our support of the arts is saying that those value which we hold to be good are truly and innately good, in and of themselves. Those other traditions which you have brought with you are quaint, exotic or political. You have to appreciate our stuff if you really want to understand "art". We have institutionally been treating the arts

of the diverse populations of the country as something other than art. One need only look at the manner in which these traditions are regarded in the hierarchy of national, state and local arts funding and in our arts education endeavors. While all the diverse ducks seem to be lined up in the National Endowment for the Arts report on Arts in Education, ***Toward Civilization***, and in spite of great conscious effort to avoid it, to someone who comes from one of these other traditions, the distinct tone of cultural condescension is pervasive.(1)

I do not wish to imply that there has been evil work afoot. Our efforts in regards to the wider dissemination of the arts and in recognizing the diversity of cultures which is our country have been genuine. All the more reason why our failure to achieve our goal continues to be so frustrating. While in the past we may have had very narrow definitions of who should enter our concert halls, now we recognize that the doors must genuinely be open to all if the arts as we have thought of them until now survive. But after years and years of telling people that what they do does not quite fit in with the accepted idea of what is art, now that the doors are open, there is no inclination to participate. There is little inclination to enter even as a result of our most thoughtful efforts to reach out and invite these heretofore neglected audiences.

It seems to be a paradox rising out of conflicting cultural values. In such cases the obstacle arises not out of the refusal of a person holding one set of values to accept those of another. Rather it lies in those blinders which one's culture naturally imposes on each individual within it and as a consequence, the inability to perceive a different set of values even when they are confronted with them face to face. There is a practice which I refer to as the "American Chopstick" syndrome, which I believe exemplifies the condition. On countless occasions in Japanese restaurants in the United States I have watched non-Japanese carefully open the little packet of eating sticks, or chopsticks and begin shaving them one against the other. I have even seen a father dutifully and carefully showing his children how this should be done before eating. What is interesting is that this is something which Japanese never would do. Supposedly the American reaction to such knowledge would be to ask, "Don't they mind getting wood splinters in their mouths?" It is difficult to see what is wrong with the question given the fundamental assumption that if you put freshly splintered wood into your mouth you are apt to get splinters. Is there any other way to see this?

Let us look at it from the background of Japanese tradition. There was a famous master in ancient Japan who was thought of as a kind of combined Emily Post and samurai of table manners. One night he came home rather late and sat alone to enjoy a bowl of 'chazuke', a very simple homey dish consisting of rice, pickles over which tea is poured, making it into a kind of soup. The master sat down, picked up his sticks and quickly finished the soup-like dish with rapid strokes of the sticks and then left the room. He was all the while being secretly observed by one of his servants. When the master had gone the servant went to the table and was astounded to find that even while thinking he was unobserved and enjoying a very simple home dish, one that would never be eaten in public, the master's sticks were hardly wet at all. Only the very tips had touched the liquid. In the Japanese system of etiquette only the very tip of the sticks should touch the food. Ideally, no part of the sticks should ever touch the mouth at all.

In this story we have an example of two totally different sets of logical expectations which conflict with each other. The American Chopstick behavior is embarrassing for Japanese to watch and while perhaps not quite as offensive as walking into a Japanese home with one's shoes on, it does carry the implication that what has been offered to the guest was thought to be unclean or unsuitable. To act on that supposition and openly prepare the offered eating utensils by shaving them is to make the insult explicit. While the conscious gestures of welcome which the arts have been making to these other Americans have not, one supposes, been as potentially offensive, they have not, on the other hand been widely affective for a variety of reasons, many stemming from differences in the initial cultural vantage point.

Even the some of best attempts to get it right often go awry. For a Chicano growing up in California, it was difficult hearing one's name regularly mispronounced. One finally gives up and learns to accept it that way upon noticing that all the place names in California are routinely mispronounced and that in Texas they are mispronounced differently. One realizes that this is the way it is done here. But then one cannot suppress a wince when hearing reference to "tostados" instead of "tostadas", or California place names like "Mission Viejo" instead of "Mision Vieja". One notices, particularly in California, the strong desire to take on the Latin flair while being blind to the presence and the condition of the Latinos actually living and working there. In some cases the nature of the misunderstanding runs deep. It has become very trendy and even glib to refer to something or somebody as "macho". While in no way

attempting to defend the Latin concept of the ideal male, in Spanish the concept is described in the expression, "*el macho es un hombre feo, fuerte y formal*". Here the word 'feo' carries the meaning not so much of homely, or ugly as simply not pretty. The rest of the saying says that the macho is also strong and polite. The inherent implication is that power must be balanced by courtesy and restraint and this something quite different from the rather brutish chauvinist image which the current American misusage implies.

Even for those individuals who are vigorously committed to see change come about, the potential for blunders and pitfalls must often seem daunting. Many, many, however, are content to blunder on and to insist that their particular cultural solution is the one which must be required of everyone. The examples of common cultural misunderstandings which I gave here were not intended to serve as a kind of cross-cultural trivia test. The cited examples are, small, and in the larger picture, relatively unimportant ones even though they occur daily. I do not suggest that we should each now be required to learn a new set of cultural dos and don'ts.

Large cultural misunderstandings lie at the base of much of the institutional thinking in America and it is in these areas of mis-communication that the greatest danger to our future lies. The only effective way to eliminate or to avoid these misunderstandings is to be certain that individuals who can serve as spokespersons for these different cultures are seated around the table when plans are being discussed. This does not mean only seeking out only those who already have adopted to and reflect mainstream cultural values. Having the right folks around the table is, however, only the first step. There must also be a willingness to hear what they are saying and this usually requires much, much more than just hearing the words.

Many in the arts have labored long and hard to find means of reaching out to these previously overlooked audiences. Many have done so out of a genuine sense of good will and a conviction that this is, indeed, very much the right thing to do. All the more frustrating now when such efforts seem to meet with little positive effect and in addition, are being criticized by funding agencies and the public as well. Solutions are needed right now and yet none which appear viable seem to be available. Often it is pointed out that the staffing and the make up of the governing boards of the major arts institutions do not reflect the diversity of the population. It is difficult to find a reasonable argument against

correcting this omission. Recently, a series of reports from San Francisco have shown that the circle of dominant arts organizations in the city have virtually no diversity on their boards, and little on their senior administrative staffs.(2) However, while much in these reports is undeniable, San Francisco is in no way unique in this regard - the same criticism could be leveled at every major city in the country.

Seeking diversity in support staffing is one matter in which much more can be accomplished. While it may be that in attempting to seek diverse staffs, all will be clamoring to hire the same few qualified people, there are more qualified people out there than most realize and it is about time that this important imbalance be corrected. The matter of getting diversity in boards of directors for arts institutions is quite another thing. There is a very specific culture with particular expectations for board members of arts organizations. In most organizations the board's primary function is to raise money for the institution. While this may seem obvious, it may not necessarily be self-evident for people coming from minority communities. They have not, most likely, been exposed to the expected ethic and as a consequence it may be difficult to find people interested in participating in this activity. The private club atmosphere of most such boards may also act as an alienating factor, as well.

When well meaning organizations find it virtually impossible to identify minorities who are willing to serve on their boards, the funding agencies tell them that they know there are many wealthy Blacks, Asians and Latinos in their community and they simply have not been successful or have not worked hard enough. While it may be true that some organizations have no idea even where to begin to locate minority board members, the idea that there are many out waiting to be invited is patently absurd. There are, in fact a few who probably fit the bill nicely, but being a prominent member of a minority community makes one highly visible in a community where there are very few others to deflect the burden of responsibility. As a result these few are asked to do everything for their own community as well as to represent their community to groups outside. That one of these people who undoubtedly is already serving organizations in their community which deal with poverty, drug problems, poor education, voter registration, and poor medical services, should also be inclined to join the elite board of most any arts organizations is highly unlikely. To expect it is naive, but to demand it is a reflection of ignorance of existing reality.

While research may identify minority group members who fit the bill in all respects, personal inclinations and finances alike, identifying them alone does not ensure success in diversifying the boards. Attempting to solve the problem of diversity in the arts by relying only on changing the staff configuration and with getting minorities on the governing boards is dangerous because it deflects energy and concern away from the real problem - how to find ways of making the paying audience proportionately reflect the diversity in the population.

Out of acute necessity projects and proposals intended to serve as outreach to new audiences are proposed and funded. Unfortunately, too often these projects consist of attempting to reach these audiences by means of the most expedient, convenient and inexpensive modification of the traditional programming. This rarely succeeds. It is usually a case of the wrong solution, the inappropriate incentive offered in too small a dosage to do any good anyway. It does little good to offer concert programs and museum exhibits which focus on the targeted cultures if there has been little or no thought to providing a radically new incentive for these people to ever consider crossing over into new and seemingly hostile territory.

Yet, funding agencies continue to fund outreach programs on the basis of plans and expectations when there is little measure of their end results. So a museum is given support for an exhibit of works by a minority artist, but he was most likely selected on the basis of judgment of experts outside his community and not surprisingly, the exhibitions draws no one from the local community. It is not the artist who has failed. He has learned what it takes to succeed and the fact that he was selected for exhibition is tangible evidence of his success. Inviting a single artist into the mainstream does not, in and of itself, open the door to the entire community. It is the museum board and its director who, by focussing only on programming, and on the basis of their own, unexamined biases, entered into the project with the wrong expectations.

Given the present structure of our arts institutions, it is difficult to see how it could ever be otherwise. All the best attempts to achieve diversity seemed doomed to failure because the very inability to look squarely at the problem is locked into the structure of the organizations themselves. Diversity is routinely and regularly sought on panels as part of the review process for government agencies, state, local and federal. Perhaps not with equal success they are also sought on the boards and committees of arts

organizations. But the arts structure seeks these people out in an attempt to satisfy the need for diverse representation on the board or committee, rather than to seek diverse opinions. As a result, minorities are often chosen because their backgrounds match the expectations of those already in the structure rather than because they represent another point of view. Such individuals, those who have achieved recognition because of their contributions in their field are valuable but they alone cannot be expected to change the pattern.

All of this becomes something of a circular problem. It is much like attempting to resolve one of the basic dilemmas in the arts today, namely that television has supplanted for many Americans, a more direct experience in the arts. In recognizing this as a major problem, it must also follow that television itself must figure in the solution. Yet, how do we program television in order to tell people to switch off the set and turn to doing something more creative. Likewise, when existing arts organizations attempt to face the issue of cultural diversity, their view, based as a matter of course, on their own inbred perspective, blocks from view those solutions which lie beyond it.

For example, the inherent value of the arts is, 'prima facie', something understood by all to be self evident. Further, given the first premise, it is expected that the arts be supported in great measure by local philanthropy. The patterns for achieving support and recognition are well established and accepted. In order to succeed in the arts, one must adopt this model in order to thrive or even survive. Many minority based arts organizations have done just this. They have established governing boards based as best they can on the dominant model, and have pursued state, local and federal funding and wherever possible although rarely with much success, they have sought private philanthropy.

Private philanthropy does not work well in solving problems of inequitable access in the arts. In spite of all rhetoric to the contrary, private charitable giving on the part of corporate organizations, large and small, is a form of government supported private advertising. Business will not, nor should they want to support arts endeavors where they see no benefit in the association. Yet minority organizations are constantly being chided to seek the private sector for support in order to decrease dependency on the public funds. To expect that the multinationals, the major American corporations and the Fortune Five Hundred should wish to have their good will advertising take the form of

support for struggling minority organizations is naive. Recently, in Orange County the struggling Black Actor's Theater in attempting to seek private support was criticized because they stated in a printed flyer that previous requests for corporate support received responses such as: "We are already committed to the South Coast Repertory and the Orange County Performing Arts Center, and we feel this support serves the Black community." (3). Can it really be that these corporate supporters have not noted the almost total absence of Blacks, or any other Minorities in the audience at the regular performances of the South Coast Repertory Theater or at the Orange County Performing Arts Center?

It may be that private sector support in Orange County believes that diversity is the responsibility of the prominent organizations, themselves and not of their financial supporters. The matter of final outcomes for tax deductible charitable giving is something which would seem to need re-examination. As it stands now, there is little chance that Minority organizations can expect help from the larger corporations while these institutions continue to support the prominent organizations regardless of their track record in addressing the issue of diversity in their audiences. If on the other hand minority organizations are expected to find philanthropists within their own communities, this reflects a fantastic view of the basic pattern of distribution of wealth in America. What little wealth there is has been tapped out by a clearly prioritized list of acute needs in which the arts have, as yet, not even begun to figure.

In the very pattern of recognition of major contributions in the arts we follow a Eurocentric pattern. We recognize the contributions of important artists as unusual and as though they were almost mad geniuses rather than an accepted and cohesive element of the entire society. We tend to single out and separate where in other cultures this might not be appropriate. The governments of both Japan and Korea have a system of national recognition award called "intangible cultural properties". It is the tradition, the artist himself, as well as all those who taught him and came before him and the cultural context which supports him which are all recognized. When we apply our model to other cultures we do find artists whose work is worthy of recognition, but they are artists who have been attempting to use our model to establish themselves. In the end, in attempting to penetrate the other culture we may have ventured no farther than finding our own reflections.

Even such mammoth undertakings such as the upcoming Los Angeles Festival seem destined to fall short of what they might have accomplished because they are based on a view of ethnic Los Angeles as an "other" Los Angeles. In its planning and structure it is being done to the "ethnics" of Los Angeles, or for them, like a benevolent neo-colonialism, rather than with them and from their own perspective. Japanese business will support the bringing of the "all girl" Takarazuka Review, a Japanese pop musical review which, in Japan, is attended almost exclusively by pre-adolescent girls, because this is what many people in Japan believe is the only thing Americans will want to see. They are convinced that anything more Japanese would not be "understood". In the end The Los Angeles Festival will probably be seen as a success, because it will have been large and because so many distinguished names will have been associated with it. Like so many other such gestures, they are conceived by individuals who attempt to speak for people of whom they have little understanding. In channeling of the resources and energies for such a venture, what they will have done is to usurp the voice of those for whom they claim to speak. To ethnic Los Angeles the message will be clear. Their participation even in their own culture is not required. The performances will, in the end, be viewed and reviewed largely by the usual elite who will believe that they have participated in something from the "others" in Los Angeles without noticing that the "others" were significantly not there.

Many large and well meaning outreach efforts are, in fact, being aimed precisely where they might, in the long run, do the most good, that is, in the public schools. Yet here also, the effort, well intended and generated out of a deep conviction often only run with a minimum of cooperation from the schools themselves. Furthermore because of its dependence on minimal financial support much of this effort effectively reaches too few and too infrequently to substantively change cultural patterns or to foster a sense of ownership in these arts. In order to be effective in changing the pattern of attitudes about the dominant culture and to develop a sense of long term interest in the arts, young people must be saturated by exposure. Then, upon becoming adults they might someday venture of their own volition into our palaces of culture. Short of regular routine exposure to the arts, they will grow up knowing only that these things exist, but they will not have any sense that these arts are anything more than cultural institutions which they learned about in school, much like the political institutions they also learned about.

Another aspect so often ignored, is that when groups are sent out to the schools where Minority children are in attendance and the artists on the stage do not reflect the diversity of the students for whom the performance has been held, the message is clear look, but don't touch - this is not really for the likes of you. While many well meaning individuals, bristle at the suggestion that this should be a factor which diminishes the effectiveness of what they are trying to do, such individuals are simply blind to the depth and pervasiveness of the alienation which most minority children feel in this country.

There are profound political implications of significance in all of this which take the matter beyond the realm of simply "doing the right thing". Arts organizations, like institutions of higher education, are increasingly coming under scrutiny for their failure to represent the diversity of the communities which they serve. The use of public monies without which no arts institution can today survive means that compliance becomes a matter of law. Increasingly arts institutions and funding agencies alike are being questioned about how well they are serving the representative constituency. While most politicians do not wish to openly provoke the wrath and fervor of arts support groups, nonetheless their current political vantage point seems clear. Arts institutions are increasingly dependent on larger amounts of both private and public support while at the same time audiences are not growing commensurately. Furthermore these audiences, however small, show little if any indication that the "other" Americans are buying tickets and walking in the front door.

In California, to take an example where this difficulty seems very clear, a recent Department of Finance report indicates that in a brief thirty years time the population of California will be something like 16 million Anglos, 14.9 Million Latinos, 2 Million Blacks and 5 Million Asians and others.(4) Along with this goes the fact that a larger proportion of the Anglo population will be retired. It does not take a great deal of imagination to visualize the volatility of such a situation. Furthermore, if Minorities, now the largest segment of the population have been allowed to feel that the arts, until now organized around and supported by public and private philanthropy, are not theirs, then it must follow that the pressure to change the pattern of public support for the arts will only grow. Were it based purely on socially conscious altruism, private sector support might remain independent of such a shift in population. However, such altruism tends to enjoy public recognition and as the public changes, it would seem that corporate

philanthropy would be invested where it would make the most sound business sense.

In all of this the established arts organizations apparently fail to see that the light at the end of the tunnel may be a train coming their way. All seem so enmeshed in the struggle to keep their own particular institutions afloat that at each attempt to deal with the bigger picture they fall back on their own established values. The belief in absolute values is so strong that the arts world generally behaves as if everything would be alright were they only able to reach these other people. Once in the door they too would certainly be convinced of the innately superiority of the European tradition. What seems impossible for the Eurocentric arts establishment in America to accept is that one set of values is as good and as arbitrary as another.

This is not at all to say that which set of values we subscribe to does not matter. A set of values agreed upon by general consensus becomes a unifying culture and a basis for communication and cooperation. What has occurred however, is that the arts establishment has begun to behave as though their values, and as they define them, are inviolable, and as such, their belief begins to resemble religious doctrine. Missionary work has as yet yielded few converts from beyond the walls of the citadel. It now also seems doubtful that the sword will do much better. Perhaps when there has been a shift of power things will look different.

There are many indications that this condition in the established arts tradition is not new in the United States. Outside of the European immigrants to this country, there has been little notable adoption by established newcomers to the mainstream arts traditions. One notes, in particular that among long established third and fourth generation communities in America such as those of the Japanese and Chinese, the proportionately small number attending performances of mainstream arts organizations and serving on their boards is noticeable. It may well be true that until now, they may not have been actively sought after. Nonetheless, there is no denying that many individuals of these two groups have achieved the type of social and economic stability which many other Minorities in America would wish to emulate. There is no reason to believe that upon achieving similar socio-economic stability, the other Minority groups in America will behave differently. From the evidence it would seem that the Japanese and Chinese mode of adjusting to the opportunities of life in the United States strongly indicates that a positive and participatory role in

the arts among the next Minority groups to become established is very unlikely.

Speculating on all of this seems, at first, to suggest that only those who came to America with a European cultural background will ever grow into a role of support for the Western European arts. This, however, cannot be so. Were it true, it would become impossible to explain why some of the most important interpreters in the European music tradition are today coming from Japan and Korea. No, clearly it is something we are doing right here.

In my view it is the original American dream gone wrong which lies at the source of the difficulty. Everyone, left to his own resources tends naturally, to reject the foreign and cling to the familiar. Through the process of education and experience what we accept and even seek out is gradually expanded. Perhaps it is the very size of our country which has had a part in it, but it seems that the now long established American isolationist attitude combined with the belief that we are, indeed, a melting pot society has led us to a place where we are in danger of no longer being able to see ourselves as we are. To continue in this course, it would seem, can only lead toward an increasingly fragmented society.

I believe that much of the problem, although let me hastily add, not the fault, lies in our system of education. For a moment, however, let me draw on the educational system in general as a parallel to the immediate difficulty facing the arts. At all levels of education we are facing difficulties in ensuring that the minority population of the country receives an adequate education. As a matter of conscious choice we have tended to avoid the firm imposition of fixed national standards of education and have left much to the states and to local school districts. Beyond the natural discrepancies which occur because of differences in the affluence of different communities and consequently the ability of some districts to provide educational opportunities equal to those of the most affluent districts, there is the difficulty of having some portion of the educational goals of an institution determined on the basis of local experience.

The fact is that educational experiences for our youth are not alike which makes it extremely difficult to move a diverse population up through the higher levels of education and on to the possibility of increased upward social mobility. Yet, it is our institutions of elementary and secondary education which continue to play a most important role in defining for us what is to be our culture. While increased preparedness of

Minorities for higher education continues to be a serious problem in the nation, what happens in institutions of higher education begins to affect and reflect the situation in the arts in America.

As the level of specialization increases moving from secondary to the college level, so does a great deal more subjectivity in the process of evaluation. The process of more or less subjective evaluation applies not only to entering and ongoing students, but to the evaluation of the faculty by the faculty and the determination of which disciplines shall be taught in the institutions and how. Minorities have a very difficult time in institutions of higher education, not only because of poor preparedness, but also because whatever they bring with them in terms of a cross cultural perspective, rather than being viewed as a positive contribution to the process, is regarded a handicap.

In order to preserve the quality of highly specialized education, colleges and universities have had to be conservative. Now they are being asked to be inclusive but the only processes available to them are orthodox, fastidious and exclusive. The problem becomes particularly acute in the arts and the humanities, those two groups of disciplines dealing largely in aesthetic and artistic values. While these may appear to be trying to model themselves on the pattern of the more "objective" natural and physical sciences, it is difficult to find institutions of higher education, even among the most illustrious, which do not subscribe to absolute and culturally biased values. In the university context where the primary goal is the pursuit of knowledge, certainly a position which recognizes the relativity of cultural values would be more reasonable. "Italian literature is greater than Spanish literature." "Bach is more significant than Buxtehude." Such statements transposed to a thousand subjects regularly ring through the halls of ivy. Such statements are not so much untrue, for in truth they become true to those who believe them. But just who is determining these values? What makes it such a clear unquestionable truth that all of those who know and prefer Spanish literature to Italian are wrong? Bach could not have been the more significant composer had he lived in the time of Buxtehude, a composer who lived before Bach's time. While it may seem unnecessarily churlish to take such a position, the damage done by our inability to recognize the subjectivity of our value system permeates much of our lives and while higher education is not exclusively to blame, it too is a reflection of the same difficulty.

Should we now return to Japan and teach people the proper way to prepare their eating sticks before partaking a meal? In Japan there is a saying that for the people who live on one side of Mt. Fuji, the view from the other side never looks right. In higher education in the arts and humanities we are behaving as though Mt. Fuji has no other side or that the other side is only a poorer understood approximation of what the mountain should resemble. When these other cultural views are dealt with in higher education, they most often are treated in alternative courses not fully integrated in to the mainstream of the curriculum. There are exceptions but these are very, very few.

This should not be construed as an argument for getting rid of French and German literature and substituting Japanese and Tibetan literature. The European tradition does bind this society together and it is fitting and appropriate that exposure to it should form a central core of our educational system just as eventual mastery of the English language should be. It is the viewing of these other aesthetic systems as secondary and "other" which causes the difficulty. To deal with the world outside as quaint and exotic, or of less importance than that which those in power know and love, in this day and age is misguided at best. To continue in the institutionalization of such a position can only lead to even greater problems for the nation. As long as we hang onto a system of absolute values, the cultural heritage of the "other" Americans will be seen as of less stature and importance. To continue in this system of single values in higher education is to relegate the culture of the other Americans to another category, one akin to social problems. In fact, in higher education the situation is generally much worse. Cultural traditions other than the European seem not even to exist at any level other than an after thought, so far are they from even being marginal to the general curriculum.

This would be merely an absurd posture were it not for the fact that the same attitude is being reflected without serious question in the arts institutions of the country. As the diversity of the population increases, and the posture appears to remain constant, the message seems clear. You can only enter if you leave your own culture behind. It would not seem unreasonable given such conditions and attitudes to wonder why one should bother to try.

In our education system, elementary and higher education, there is a need for several steps to take place. For one the arts need to be reintroduced - not merely talking about the arts and developing art appreciation, but "doing" art.

One of the reasons that the arts are more generally valued, supported and participated in by the general population in Europe and Japan is that there has been from the elementary school level, much more active participation in the performance and the execution of the arts. Upon such a basis one can later intellectualize. Without the basis of first hand practical experience no matter how limited, theory and history of the arts and arts appreciation are meaningless. In this same context however, all the arts and their cultures must be talked about in equal terms, although certainly not in equal strength or coverage for to expect this is impossible. This point is a difficult one to grasp, particularly for those already in the mainstream arts world. It is not enough merely to list the cultures of the "other" Americans as well as those of the rest of the world as part of a litany of "other" arts. To do so suggests an invidious kind of cultural comparison. Although this was not intended the presence of such a tone, in my view, substantially detracts from the otherwise great importance of NEA's *Toward Civilization*.(5). Even unconsciously such an attitude only heightens the schism which exists between the elite culture and the cultures of all others but it also tends to further the general cultural isolation of which America is currently suffering.

Fear or disinterest in the foreign is something which lies deep in this country, Chinese and Mexican restaurants in small town America notwithstanding. One has only to note the regularity with which traditional musics from all parts of the world are performed for large audiences in Europe and Japan and how much a part of the regular cultural fare this programming constitutes to be keenly aware of how rare, isolated and relatively small such performances are in the United States. That the United States has had such difficulty in accepting, respecting or appreciating the great cultural diversity which constitutes our small planet suggests that it may yet be a long time before it can come to grips with its internal diversity.

The answer must lie in a very different approach to the way in which culture is transmitted in our schools. At the present, all the best intentions notwithstanding, subjects touching on cultural and aesthetic values are taught largely by educators with virtually no cross-cultural experience themselves. In this condition, Americans with non-European roots will continue to feel that they must reject their heritage before they can succeed. It is the fundamental rejection of them and their culture which makes it different and particularly difficult for those from non-European traditions. Before they can enter our society they

are being asked to make a choice about which tradition they choose to follow, or about how much of each one they might prefer to retain. It is the severity of the contrast between cultures which make the compromises asked of these Americans of non Western European origin so difficult.

The arts organizations seem destined to continue hammering away with the same single set of values while at the same time talking about cultural pluralism. It is difficult to see how the Eurocentric value system will ever accommodate any other cultural perspective by such means. The cross cultural perspective needs also to be introduced in the funding and programming of the arts and therefore must be incorporated into all aspects of the arts institutions in America. This is very different from simply having diverse representatives on panels and boards. It requires hearing what these people who have differing cultural perspectives have to say.

Funding agencies need to look well beyond the good intentions outlined in multicultural proposals and begin looking with scrutiny at the outcomes. There is no point in funding multicultural outreach projects of any kind, be they small museum exhibits or city festivals on the scale of the Olympics if they do not reach in significant numbers the target populations. Funding agencies need also to look at communities and how they are being served.

It is not enough to provide funding in the name of cultural diversity for an ethnic community organization if that organization cannot be expected to broadly reach its own community. Such organizations do still need support for many reasons. They should be supported because they are smaller, because the corporations will not generally support them adequately, and precisely because they are competing on exactly those terms already established as the rules of the game by the larger and much more well established behemoth cultural institutions. But supporting these small multicultural arts organizations should not alone be thought of as the solution to the problem of the imbalance of support in the arts. We cannot think that the problem is being solved simply because we are now supporting so many ethnic organizations in some area. We need to look past our own reflections and into the communities themselves to see how well the arts are serving them. We need to get to know our own diverse community almost as would an anthropologist observing another culture. We must leave many prejudices and preconceptions behind if we are going to see what is really there.

To many the idea that we should be concerned about art for the masses may seem like heresy, so antithetical is it to the manner in which we are accustomed to thinking of the arts. We need not turn ourselves into a socialist state, however, in order to become aware and concerned about where our resources are going. Unless we substantially modify the manner in which we think about the arts in this country and how and to whom we provide support, we cannot do other than to continue down the road of providing ever increasing resources to organizations whose audiences, both because of the changing demography and the weakening of arts education, are continually dwindling to a point at which the large majority are paying for the enrichment of the very small elite.

Reeducation offers the only real solution to all of these dilemmas. How else can we begin to change and expand the general idea of what is good and beautiful. But before even the slow process of education can begin to have its effect we need to reassess what our own past has really done. As Rick Siminson and Scott Walker have said, "As the world becomes more of a single economic entity, there is a corresponding need for all citizens to have not only a fundamental understanding of their own culture (in part to conserve it), but also a knowledge of the cultures of the rest of the world.(6) The systematic destruction and devaluation of the cultures of non Europeans must stop because rather than blend us all into the melting pot, all that it has really accomplished is to drive a wedge between segments of the population. Now that the Non European segment is growing ever larger, the utter folly of well-intentioned intellectuals like William Bennett and E. D. Hirsch who support a re-emphasis on Western civilization over all others seems clear. This emphasis has not, until now, succeeded in any large measure and there is little indication that the future will be any different.

These are abortive attempts to save the ship before all is lost, but I fear, it was lost long before. On the contrary, years of denial and ignorance about the traditional culture and values of the other Americans has resulted only in a hardened line, and eventually, indifference on the part of many of those we are now attempting to reach. It has also left us unprepared to meet the challenge. In a recent New York Times article, a professor of humanities at the University of Virginia said, in response to he proposed new curriculum which has been expanded beyond Western civilization, "We know how to put things in the Western tradition in context, but most of us don't have the slightest idea what the contexts of

Indian music, Japanese poetry and Indian philosophy are".(7). Even the best intentions do not better prepare us to meet the challenge. Against this pattern of change and response to it, the "cultural literacy" movement seems little more than a backlash against the clear reality of the changing demographic and cultural pattern which is now our country, a movement that will offer no help in the problem which now faces the nation. It is time to recognize that, to appropriate a phrase from James Baldwin in **Notes of a Native Son**, America is white no longer, and it will never be white again.

FOOTNOTES

1. **Towards Civilization**. A Report on Arts Education. Washington, D.C. National Endowment for the Arts, 1988.

2. 'San Francisco's Prominent Arts Organizations: Why Aren't They Equal Opportunity Employers?' Unpublished Report by Jeff J. Jones. March 25, 1988 and 'Institutionalized Discrimination In San Francisco's Arts Funding Patterns.' Unpublished Report by Jeff Jones and Russell T. Cramer. April 20, 1989.

3. **Los Angeles Times**, Orange County Edition. Saturday, June 10, 1989. Part V, Page 1 and 11. 'Is it Racial Bias? Flyer's Author Raises Possibility.' Jan Herman, Times Staff Writer.

4. 'Projected Total Population for California by Race/Ethnicity July 1, 1970 to July 1, 2020.' State of California. Department of Finance. Population Research Unit. **Report 88** P-4.

5. **Towards Civilization**. op.cit.

6. Rick Siminon and Scott Walker. "Introduction". **Multi-cultural Literacy**. The Graywolf Annual Five: Opening of the American Mind. Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 1988.

7. "Ibn Batuta and Sitar Challenging Columbus and Piano in Schools", by Joseph Berger. **New York Times**. A1 and B6. Wednesday, April 12. 1989.

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