

"Globalization and Diversity, UNESCO and Cultural-Policy Making: Imperatives for U.S. Arts and Culture Practitioners and Organizations"
January 10-11, 2005
Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C

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I stand before you as one whose entire adult life has been informed by a passion for the arts and an abiding respect for the craft of its practitioners. Having toiled in the field as a performer, actor, singer, musician and arts activist I am no stranger to the interaction between the artist and the public and private sectors of society. Thus I am gratified to be able to offer some comments on the task before this conference, on diversity and particularity of cultural expression, both nationally and globally.

The question before this panel "is culture a product like any other" calls for two answers: a simple yes and a complicated no. It is easy to assert that cultural goods and services are merely products like any others. After all, those who furnish the goods, either by creation or by dissemination, are involved in a process that is part of the marketplace. Whether employed by others or self-employed, the artists' work results in a product. Producers, managers, presenters, and the like, bring the goods of the creators to market. Hence these goods must be a product under any definition.

But it is the nature of the product that defies easy description. In the performing arts what is it that we deal with? Poetry, dialogue, music, movement, laughter, tears - diaphanous as gossamer and evanescent once the performance has ended. The very attitude of performers themselves militates against the idea that they might be 'workers' in the same sense as workers in other fields. Yet actors do

work for hire; have wages, fixed working hours, demonstrate discipline on the job, precision and teamwork. Perhaps their reluctance to consider themselves workers has to do with an iconoclastic mindset that places the actor in an individual shell. Even in the theatre individual artistic creation is a lonely process despite the dichotomy that the art form itself is collaborative.

Still, for the purpose of creating a protocol to address global and national guidelines in the cultural arena, we must consider arts and services as 'products', with certain exceptions in those areas where the definition is less than useful.

Before returning to points that deal with the draft document before us, allow me some general observations.

It is obvious that the greatest impact upon our society in the past decades has been the advent of the electronic media in all its manifestations, more specifically those that furnish arts and entertainment to people directly in their homes. But there are attendant problems regarding performers' rights in the areas of film, television, video and other forms of electronic conveyance of newer vintage.

How do we cope in a world where the purveyors of arts and entertainment band together in huge international ever more powerful conglomerates, out of reach for those of us who can only operate on a national level? What of intellectual property: who owns what rights? How do we make clear the difference between copyright and performers' rights? How do we assure authors that they are allies instead of competitors; that the performers' slice of the pie must come not from the authors' end but from the broadcasters' and presenters' pockets as a distinct and separate payment? How does one check the release of performances over the

Internet? Who pays? Internally, how do we engage those performers in the dialogue who seem to believe that it is alright to give away their work for free on the Internet as a publicity boon for them instead of the boondoggle it really is?

Inevitably, questions also arise related to the live arts as distinct from the media arts: Physical access for audiences to places of performance and psychological access to the live arts for audiences whose perceptions have been irrevocably shaped since early childhood by watching only filmed material and who, as a result, only rarely attend live performances? The state of the economy in many countries, whether rich or poor, has surely changed the face and nature of the live performance. For example, in the American theatre, the production of classical plays with huge casts and many set changes is today, without a doubt, severely limited by budgetary considerations. Similarly, opera and dance companies cannot subsist on ticket sales alone. Whether governmental support is able to absorb the huge financial demands of these endeavors probably varies from country to country but the pattern is clear. While a global recession has caused severe cutbacks in governmental support for the arts in most Western nations, there may be economic prosperity in others. Yet even in those countries such prosperity has failed to translate itself into a budgetary increase for arts support.

Other questions of access need answers as well: Access for the aged and handicapped, access for young audiences would make the performing arts a necessity rather than a sporadically enjoyed luxury. Then there is the problem of training young performers, of the numbers of people entering the profession and the ability of the field to absorb them. Still other questions concern the impact of the star system in the arts. Take opera as an example. This is an art form that calls for full stage productions with often lavish sets, a full orchestra, large casts of singers and

extras, a chorus and, in grand opera, a corps de ballet. On top of that it must have name conductors and highly paid stars to attract and keep an audience. This is a budgetary nightmare.

Then there are questions concerning the demographics of the audience (urban, suburban, educational levels, income brackets, etc.); questions of touring; questions regarding performance facilities and architectural designs for the future; on-stage and backstage conditions; health and retirement. Let us not forget also that we deal, more often than not, with a body of performers most of whom are either self-employed or -- more regrettably -- unemployed and seeking jobs. Many of us are therefore just as concerned with creating and developing job opportunities for unemployed professional performers as we are with servicing the needs of those already employed.

As you see, the scope of our concerns is vast and the effort to deal with the problems could be daunting if not defeating.

Under items referred to in Article 1 entitled "Objectives" and later under 12 (d), we continue to grapple with a delicate issue that is especially poignant today as we witness daily eruptions of hostilities between nations and ethnic or religious groups. We are committed to international cooperation and, as a consequence, to cultural exchange and the free movement of artists between countries. At the same time we are committed to a preservation of national identities, of artistic, cultural and linguistic integrity within our respective communities. How to maintain the equilibrium between these two notions, diversity on the one hand and preservation of uniquely national particularity on the other, is surely one of our more important tasks. In the light of daily events, it has been said that nationalism is the plague and

scourge of our time. Violent and ultra-nationalist movements most surely are. But the desire in most countries not to be overwhelmed by the cultures of stronger and richer nations is understandable and must be confronted with sanity and wisdom. I am afraid that, knowingly or unwittingly, we in the United States have added to the Big Brother Syndrome. Fraternal relationships formed between performers' guilds in the United States and those in other countries, especially the English-speaking ones, have helped a good deal toward creating goodwill and cooperation where not too long ago there was anger and mistrust. But we need to be very careful that we are not in danger of splitting apart alliances that have been so successfully nurtured.

I stand here before you as the head of an umbrella organization under whose roof you will find the unions and guilds of performing artists in the United States, including the Screen Actors Guild, the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, Actors' Equity, the American Guild of Musical Artists, among others. I would like to stress the importance of unions in general and our field in particular. There is a demonstrable connection between union concerns and most national and global movements. Labor unions have been the most important agents for social justice in the Western world and in the United States in particular. Unions have played a vital role in originating the national debate in the political battlefield to create a safety net of minimum wage and social programs. We must also stress that unions are elemental to American democracy, integrating women and men regardless of ethnicity, religion or color. Unions are places where working people exercise leadership, solve problems, negotiate and learn political skills. Unions are neither expendable nor disposable.

To cite just one example, during the dark times of racial segregation in this country, Actors' Equity was solely responsible to end the practice, once and for all, of racially segregated seating at the National Theatre, just a few blocks from here. That took a

strike and a call for boycott, the most effective weapons a labor union has at its disposal.

Most important, the unions in our field are not just about wages and working conditions. We are about respect for our art, our craft and our sense of mission. Our unions and guilds are governed by performers who care deeply and passionately about the product of their labor and about the dignity and welfare of their colleagues. What is true for unions is equally pressing in most other elements of society. Nationally and globally, there is an urgent need for young leadership involvement. Tomorrow's world is going to be theirs; they'd better start owning it now. But they cannot do it in isolation sitting at their computers, sending and receiving e-mail; their physical presence is necessary for a commitment. As a political commentator once said "Decisions are made by those who show up."

Let me urge you, in future deliberations on cultural policy, to make a place at the UNESCO table for representation by national performers' unions and guilds, whenever appropriate and practicable. I believe we do have a creative contribution to make. I would also urge you to maintain and strengthen the connection with the international performers' organizations, the Fédération Internationale des Acteurs (FIA) and the Fédération Internationale des Musiciens (FIM). I am aware that these organizations have consultative status with UNESCO as NGOs; their work and their experience is surely of great value to what UNESCO aims to achieve in the field.

In this connection let me remind you that a prior UNESCO Convention adopted in Belgrade in 1980 and entitled "Status of the Artist" specifically calls for consultation with artists, artists' representatives, guilds and unions. When the present draft convention is adopted it will be useful to cross-reference it with the

"Status of the Artist" document; you will find that they complement each other in many aspects.

Let me refer you to a couple of areas in the draft document that in my view call for further elaboration and finessing.

Under sec II, article 6 "Cultural Capital" under 'customs and traditions' I would welcome a mention of ethnic folk craft, folk music and dance.

I see a problem with possible misreadings or misinterpretations of Sec III, Article 6, 2(c). It speaks of public financial aid by State Parties determining the nature, amount and beneficiaries of such aid. Sadly, in our experience the amount often ends up determining the nature of the cultural offering. At the risk of seeming overly sensitive, this seems to call for some hortatory admonition regarding possible abuses.

If all arts support were left to the private and corporate sector, the tendency would be more and more to support only the established arts institutions and shy away from the esoteric, the bold, the experimental. Virtually all the support would go to the already accepted and readily acceptable. What then happens to artists who are fashioned not by yesterday's experience but by tomorrow's dreams? In the United States the decision makers in the past were not bureaucrats but artists and arts people who were not guided by any considerations but their consciences alone. Their task was to identify artistic excellence or the potential for it. No pressure was involved, either political or evangelical.

Unfortunately, we in the United States now face the spectre of "safe" arts grants as opposed to "unsafe" ones. Art is not about that which is safe. Alongside the

traditional it is about the uncharted, the unconventional. It does not seek to be guided by the formulas of yesterday's successes.

If you ask me whether the standards for publicly funded art should be different from those applied to privately funded art. In my view the answer is no. There are no different criteria for artistic excellence, subjective though the evaluation may be from critic to critic or from spectator to spectator.

In addition, there is the question of art either promoting certain values or, as it was put, to insure that art will "prevent insults to the values of particular groups". Obviously, there is no way for anything at all to ever be created in art which would not be regarded as an insult by one group or another. This held true for ?Huckleberry Finn? as well as for Michelangelo's "Last Judgment" in the Sistine Chapel; even ?The Diary of Anne Frank? was banned by an elected school board in Texas. The question here is not one of offensiveness to groups but of obscenity within the meaning of the law.

Further, in subparagraph 6(d), non-profit organizations should be called upon to stimulate not only the entrepreneurial spirit, as it states, but the creative spirit as well. The two are linked and apply to organizations just as they do to individuals.

Within the sections dealing with definitions there needs to be specific reference to dance as a distinct and separate discipline. Too often is dance subsumed to come under 'music' or 'theatre', if mentioned at all.

It seems to me that the draft document also needs specific language relating to women in the cultural field: women performers whose work opportunities and

range of roles are limited by stereotyping; and women underrepresented in decision making positions, such as directors, producers, orchestra conductors, etc.

As a final comment let me say this: The satellites whirring overhead have turned us into a global village. Surely it is up to us to make sure that artists' rights are safeguarded in a world that is rapidly becoming the sole province of the technocrats. In this atmosphere of chrome, steel and computer chips we should not allow ourselves to be infected by the cold and impersonal ways that characterize so much of our world today. We must never lose the fire, the enthusiasm and the plain human touch that has always been the hallmark of our work and our thinking.

The very language of the draft document presents another problem. Its emphasis on 'goods and services' and the global interchange of culture employs prosaic, legalistic terms throughout. In some ways this is understandable since its authors were lawyers, trade experts and government officials. I daresay very few artists were involved in the task of giving the document shape and form. But I beg you to consider that this cannot merely be a trade agreement. When speaking of culture and the arts it is necessary, alongside of the pragmatic language of officialdom, to employ the language of culture and the arts. The terms we use must evoke the notion that culture, far from being an ordinary 'product', is at the very core of how we define a nation, its texture, its fiber, its *raison d'être*, its soul.

My colleagues and I speak not only for artists but as artists. Whenever I raise my voice in the name of performers before supporters or opponents, I insist on respect both for the arts and the artists and make the point that censorship is an impermissible exercise in a democracy claiming to be free. Our function as artists is not only to please, to soothe, to pacify but also to ruffle feathers. We often present

plays, films, poems or songs which are critical of society and thus point the way toward a world which is better than what we have. That has to presume that artists can be at odds with the society in which they live and can put their eloquence to use in order to further the dream of a better humankind. Such criticism invariably stings and may give rise to a desire to muzzle the artist.

Lest I be misunderstood on this point let me emphasize that seeking to cure social ills is not the primary purpose of the artist's work although it may be a by-product of it. Art carries its own demands and fashions its own imperatives. The actor is not intended to be the bearer of a message and theatre, film or TV are not meant to do what a pamphlet would do better. Drama represents a distillation of ideas not of ideologies. There may be comment inherent in an author's work and in the actor's interpretation. If the audience is moved toward new thoughts as a result of our work, fine. That process may not happen while we perform but long after the curtain has come down.

But, we are neither educators nor preachers nor social workers. We are performers. We dance, we sing, we make grownups laugh and children clap their hands. While we sometimes draw the audience into a heightened awareness of their lives, we just as often make them forget the day and lighten the burden.

I keep reminding opponents of support for the arts who are guided by some religious fundamentalist fervor that they themselves owe their very concept of saints, angels and perhaps of divinity itself to some painter, sculptor, composer, playwright or filmmaker who planted images in their minds and memory. Other opponents may be guided by political agendas in which they find the arts a convenient whipping boy. To them I reiterate this: No one retains a vivid memory of

what battle was won or lost, who fought it, who won it or who lost it, unless there is a painting, a song, a play or a film which speaks of it. And we, the artists, are a people's laughter, a people's tears and, ultimately, a people's memory.