

Arts and Community: A Discussion Paper



Prepared for the Canadian Conference of the Arts'
Forum on Arts and Community

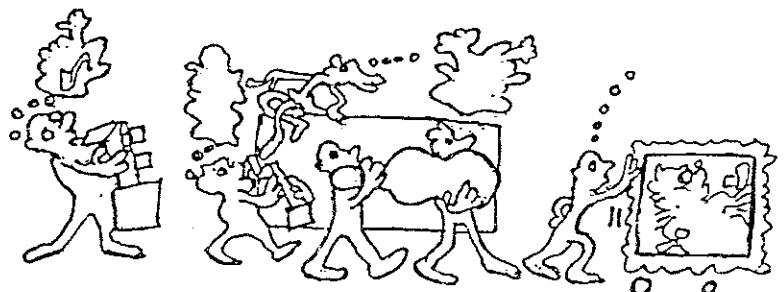
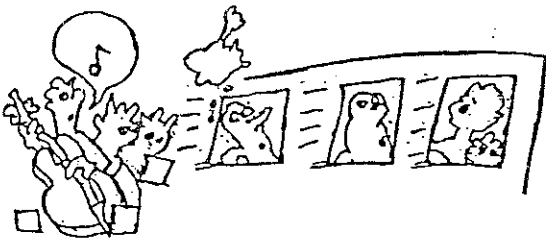
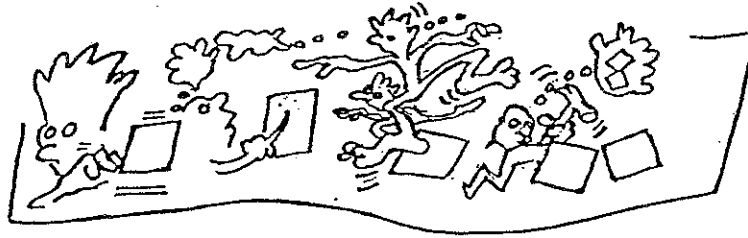
June 17, 1999

9:30 am - 4 pm

Council Chambers, Halifax Regional Municipality

1841 Argyle Street

Halifax, Nova Scotia



*"All our art is water drawn from the well of the people.
Let us give it back to them in a cup of gold so that
in
drinking of it they may recognize themselves."*

Federico Garcia Lorca

"All major modern problems are multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary, whether it be the environment, international affairs, crime and punishment, urban planning, transportation, or immigration. All demand a spectrum of considered reflection that goes far beyond an isolated, single-discipline approach. Most of these issues include a confrontation around basic values and demand a position on human rights, justice, equity and equality. This is the stuff of the arts.... Whereas knowledge appears to be fragmented, indeed competitive,... the arts at their best in our society complement and mutually celebrate community and connectedness." Walter Pitman, Learning the Arts, 1999

"In my language, there is no word for 'Art'. This is not because we are devoid of Art, but because Art is so powerfully integrated with all aspects of life, we are replete with it." Doreen Jensen, Gitksan artist and curator, Address at the opening of "Indigena: Perspectives of Indigenous Peoples on Five Hundred Years", Museum of Civilization, 1992.

"The first thing you have to teach someone [in theatre] is that there is an audience out there, and the audiences will leave if they're not included." Robert Lepage, quoted in The Globe and Mail, August 12, 1997.

"What does it mean to make art and to make conversation, not to people, not about people, but with people? With is our task in this century – inclusion, collaboration, working together – the very act of working with someone, and letting go of your ego, your personal control of the project, and allowing something larger to happen than you could have imagined." Peter Sellars, Address to the Assembly of British Columbia Arts Councils' Conference on Community Cultural Development, 1996

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What are the benefits the arts and culture bring to people and communities, and what are the most effective means for communicating them?

How can funders (public and private sector) encourage stronger linkages between the arts and communities?

Members of the Arts and Community Working Group

Selected References

A. What can we in the cultural community do to build bridges to a larger and more diverse public, and what can we learn from one another?

Are there concrete ways in which we can better value the continuum of artistic and cultural activities, including those practised by people in their personal lives?

How can community arts councils and other locally-oriented cultural groups help professional arts and cultural organizations build bridges to local communities?

How can the practice of community arts be further encouraged and developed, and what are its critical needs?

What can professional arts and cultural organizations learn from the practice of community arts?

What do you wish to add about this subject?

B. What are the benefits the arts and culture bring to communities, and what are the most effective means for communicating them?

Have you found that emphasizing/detailing the benefits of the arts and culture for people is the most effective advocacy method? Does it increase public awareness and appreciation? Are there better alternatives, and if so, what are they?

Are the public benefits of artistic and cultural activity cited in the paper the right ones? The most important? What ones are missing?

How can we best communicate these benefits?

Who are our natural allies in doing so? Which partnerships in the community are most valuable in disseminating information on the values of cultural expression and participation for people? What do you wish to add about this subject?

C. How can funders (public and private sector) encourage stronger linkages between the arts and communities?

What means are most appropriate to your community for encouraging stronger linkages over the long-term? What specific forms of encouragement would be effective in Halifax?

What roles would you foresee the private sector playing? The public sector?

In the development of a cultural policy for Halifax Regional Municipality, what should be the objectives? How should the municipality go about developing the policy? What are the elements the policy might contain? Are there components of a potential policy that could help build stronger connections between the professional cultural community and the public?

What do you wish to add about this subject?

D. What concrete measures to improve the relationships between the arts and the community would be most useful in Halifax?

What other observations do you wish to make from the perspective of your artistic and cultural interests and your community about the subject of arts and community?

In your view, what follow-up step(s) would it be most useful for the Canadian Conference of the Arts to take on arts and community issues?

ARTS AND COMMUNITY: A DISCUSSION PAPER

Introduction

In a recent survey, cultural organizations and members of their local community were asked to identify the three major barriers to attendance at arts and cultural events. The cultural organizations thought that the top barriers were the public's lack of awareness of the events, the organizations' limited budgets for market research and outreach, and inadequate media coverage. But the members of the public identified three entirely different barriers:

- cultural, ethnic or "class" separation (they didn't feel the fine or 'elite' arts belonged to them or they belonged to the arts);
- lack of direct contact and communication with artists and cultural organizations (they didn't know artists personally and hadn't been approached by cultural groups); and
- their own limited financial resources (they felt that cultural events were beyond their means).

In other words, there was a disconnect between the views of the professional cultural community and those of the broader public.¹

If these findings were to be reported in Halifax or other Canadian cities, we would probably not be surprised. Almost everyone involved with the arts and culture in Canada recognizes that the relationships between artists and the communities in which they live and work need to be improved and that better, deeper and wider connections between the professional cultural world and the public are urgently required. In fact, across the country many cultural organizations are attempting to engage a broader and more diverse audience and deepen their "belonging" to the community.

The cultural community in Canada is going through a period of upheaval and change, and much of this change, though originating in other developments - for example, in government cutbacks, the increasing cultural and ethnic diversity of the Canadian population, the global inundation of popular American culture, rapid technological development, and continuing economic uncertainty - has an impact on the relationship of the arts and culture to the broader public. Though almost everyone who works in the cultural field believes that stronger and more meaningful linkages are needed with the community, how to forge such links successfully is not easily determined, and some issues are in dispute. The terrain of arts and community is a relatively new environment for many of us in the cultural world, and it offers uncertainties and dangers as well as opportunities.

In recognition of the importance of this subject to communities and their artists and cultural organizations, the Canadian Conference of the Arts (CCA) launched "The Arts and Community" project. Its purpose is to encourage widespread reflection,

¹ Grantmakers in the Arts, Chicago, IL, Spring 1999.

debate and discussion in as many Canadian towns and cities as possible on practical means appropriate to those communities to broaden and deepen the relationships between the arts and the public.²

This discussion paper has been prepared in consultation with members of the cultural community to stimulate discussion at a day-long public forum on the arts and community to be held in Halifax on June 17, 1999, with Nova Scotian and Atlantic artists, representatives of arts and heritage organizations and cultural industries, educators, arts supporters, and municipal, provincial and federal workers involved in the arts and culture. Following the meeting, the paper will be revised to incorporate the major points raised by the Halifax participants, and it will be discussed again at a symposium on "Global Communities and Arts Communities" organized by the Edmonton Arts Council in Edmonton in October, 1999.

The CCA is indebted to its members and other interested Canadians who have been consulted in the course of developing this paper, particularly the members of the Arts and Community working group who met by telephone over the last two months to discuss the topic. Their names are listed at the conclusion of this paper. Collectively, the working group comprised artists and arts managers (including people working in both community-based practices and more traditional or "mainstream" organizations), funders from foundations and the public sector, university teachers who train artists and cultural workers and are involved in issues of cultural diversity and cultural democracy, and individuals interested in the development of municipal cultural policies.

As the reader will note, this paper is different from traditional CCA reports – deliberately so. It does not come with an established set of positions and recommendations; it is not meant to persuade but to elicit debate and discussion. Issues related to the arts and community are extremely diverse and complex, as are communities and their artists and cultural organizations, and the paper avoids singular answers and approaches. The intent is to provide an opportunity for the participants at the Halifax forum to bring their own perspectives and potential solutions to the subject.

The CCA is very grateful to The Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation and the Department of Canadian Heritage for their financial support for this project and to illustrator John Siemens for his illustrations for this paper on how he views art's impact on our lives (entitled "More" and "Less").

For participants interested in further investigation of "arts and community" topics, a selected list of references, both printed and Web-based, is provided at the conclusion of the paper.

² This project follows-up on the CCA's earlier report on "The Arts in Transition", which was based on extensive consultation across Canada and made 50 specific recommendations to build an environment conducive to the long-term sustainability of a healthy, dynamic and diverse arts sector. Many of the recommendations in the Arts in Transition report dealt with the need to improve and deepen the relationship of culture and the public. Canadian Conference of the Arts, *The Arts in Transition: Toward a Culture of Shared Resources: Building an Environment for the Long-Term Sustainability of the Arts in Canada*, 1997.

Historical Context

Somewhere along the line in Western societies – there seems to be no agreement about exactly when or how – artists and the public parted ways. Different scholars place the moment of this separation in different periods - the early Christian period, the Renaissance, the industrial revolution, the 19th century era of romanticism and “art for art’s sake”, and our own century with the birth of modernism.

Whatever the time or cause, we ceased to see the arts and culture as integral parts of the daily life of society. Artists were no longer regarded, as they are in Aboriginal societies around the world and many other cultures, as community leaders ensuring both the continuity and revitalization of culture but as outsiders to society, professionals and specialists no doubt, but not people directly useful to the life of the community. We ceased to perceive a link between our own music-making and art-making at home and what goes on in the concert hall and art gallery. Art and culture became things apart from ordinary life, and their “utility” was reduced to that of a commodity - an opportunity for investment, consumption, or spectatorship.

Yet the dislocation of art from society is by no means a universal reality. As we are increasingly learning from First Nations’ communities and communities which have immigrated to Canada from around the globe, there are many societies in which the arts and culture remain integral and essential elements of civic and communal life. The marginalization of the arts and culture – their separation from “real life” - is most pronounced in Western societies such as our own.

Even as recently as the 1940s, when the Massey-Lévesque commission toured Canada, undertaking their massive inquiry into the cultural health of the country,³ they found an enormous “hunger” among Canadians for every type of art and culture, and in most artistic fields an extraordinary flourishing of amateur activity. In its report, the commission frequently referred to the “voluntary organizations”, usually made up of unpaid volunteers, which animated and sustained cultural life in urban and rural areas. There were, it reports, “an astonishing number of amateur dramatic societies” (“many hundreds”) in the country, and many local music and choral societies led by interested amateurs performed and brought in touring musical events. The commission detected an especially “keen interest” among Canadians in the visual arts, particularly painting, and it estimated at 300,000 the number of “skilled amateurs” working in the crafts.

The problem in Canadian cultural life, according to the Massey report, was not a lack of enthusiasm among the Canadian public – on the contrary, one of its major refrains was that “voluntary organizations have advanced the arts to the limit of their resources”. The problem was on the professional side – it was virtually impossible for any professional artist to make even a modest living in Canada, and the country was woefully under supplied with permanent, professional-level cultural institutions, whether museums, galleries, libraries, archives or theatres and orchestras. It was to address the cause and improve the lot of the professional arts, heritage, and

³ Report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, 1949-1951.

humanities that the commission made its recommendations, including proposing that the federal government create a "Canada Council".

The Massey-Lévesque commission had been established in response to pressures from the cultural community, particularly the Federation of Canadian Artists, which submitted a brief in 1944 to the Turgeon Committee on (Post-War) Reconstruction and Re-establishment. The Federation, which was composed of many artists' associations, made two major proposals. The first was for a strengthened federal role in cultural affairs - a recommendation which ultimately became Massey's proposal for the Canada Council. The second major recommendation of the Federation, however, was a call for decentralized community cultural centres across the country, each equipped with a theatre, library, gallery and film facilities to provide artists and community groups with the tools and venues for exhibitions and performances. The centres would be devoted to adult art education, welcome amateurs as well as professionals, act as venues for travelling performances and exhibitions, and help build informed local and national audiences.⁴

Despite the enthusiasm of the Turgeon Committee for this idea, it did not make its way into the Massey-Lévesque report or our subsequent cultural history. As a number of people we consulted for this project pointed out, the failure to adopt the "counter-model" to the more centralized structure of a Canada Council had a profound effect on how our culture thereafter developed.

In the years following the royal commission report, it was principally the federal government which financed the growth and development of the arts and culture through the Canada Council, the National Museums, and other instruments. By the 1960s, most of the provinces were active in this field, eventually becoming very substantial contributors in their own right. Municipal cultural funding, which has been relatively late to develop in most parts of Canada, has shown impetus only in the last decade or so, though significantly it has increased almost 13% since 1991, while support from both federal and provincial sources has declined.⁵

The fact that development was led by the federal and subsequently provincial governments, combined with the royal commission's inattention to the decentralized model espoused by the Federation, has had significant influence. The Canada Council and the provinces have understandably emphasized "high-end" professional activity - the arts and culture at their (provincial, national and even international) best. Community-based cultural activity, whether undertaken by amateurs, semi-professionals or professionals, has occupied a far less prominent position in our cultural life. As one of our working group remarked, "The senior levels of government have essentially determined significance in the arts and culture."

Given the impoverished condition of professional cultural activity and the lack of professional cultural institutions described in the Massey-Lévesque report, it was

⁴ This story is told by Dot Tuer, in "The Art of Nation Building: Constructing a 'Cultural Identity' for Post-war Canada", *Parallelogramme*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 1992; and D. Paul Schafer and André Fortier, *Review of Federal Policies for the Arts in Canada 1944-1988*, Canadian Conference of the Arts, 1988.

⁵ McClelland & Stewart, *Canadian Encyclopedia CD-ROM, "Arts, Heritage and Cultural Industries Funding"*, 1998.

probably inevitable that, over the last four to five decades of government intervention on behalf of the arts and culture, the primary efforts of the professional arts and culture community, reinforced by government programs, have been establishing ongoing cultural institutions, increasing the professionalism of the sector, and encouraging individual cultural excellence and artistic experimentation. No one can doubt that in all three respects Canadians have been remarkably successful.

But today we can recognize what we have lost through our relative neglect of the public and closer connections between artistic activity and the lives of communities.

Arts and the Public: Our Situation

Statistics Canada tells us that in recent years, despite an increase in the total Canadian population, audiences for Canadian non-profit arts and cultural organizations have levelled off or declined. In 1996-97, attendance at performing arts events had fallen almost 13% from two years earlier. Attendance at heritage institutions, though increasing in the last three years for which data are available (up through 1995-96), is still below the 1989-90 level.

This trend is not uniquely Canadian. Recent studies in the United States, Australia and several European countries have reported similar trends in the same time period. Further, in our country as elsewhere, the audience for publicly funded non-profit arts and cultural organizations continues to be disproportionately well-to-do, well-educated, urban, culturally homogenous, and older than average. In other words, the audience is too few and too narrow.⁶

And Yet . . . And Yet . . .

. . . almost every Canadian consumes the arts and culture every day, without necessarily identifying it as "art" or "culture".

- Daily or weekly, over 95% of Canadian adults listen to music on the radio, tapes or CDs, and 90% read newspapers and magazines.

⁶ Statistics Canada, "Performing Arts", The Daily, March 4, 1999; Statistics Canada, "Highlights of the 1995-96 Heritage Data", Focus on Culture, Spring 1998, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 5. Statistics Canada, Canada: A Portrait (1995), p. 71, reports that 58% of Canadians with household incomes over \$80,000 attended the performing arts in 1992, compared with only 28% of those with incomes between \$30,000-40,000. As to level of schooling, 41% of Canadians with at least some postsecondary education attend the performing arts, but only 19% of those without postsecondary education do so. Attendance at museums also rises with household income and education, according to an unpublished study, "Cultural Participation in Canada" by Iain McKellar, Statistics Canada. In late 1998, Statistics Canada carried out a new survey of the use of leisure time among Canadians which when published will update this information. The class bias, that is, the skew toward upper-income and better-educated audiences, is strikingly similar in other Western countries which have studied cultural participation.

- 70% attend a movie, play or concert and 47% use the public library at least several times a year. 51% attend at least one festival or fair annually.
- In 1993, Canadians participated in over 2 million adult education and training activities in culture-related fields plus an additional 1.5 million training activities for their own personal interest. In fact, enrolments in cultural subjects account for nearly half of all personal interest education taken by adults.
- Leaving aside people who make a living from art or are formally studying it, one of every three Canadian adults does craft activities such as pottery, woodcarving, weaving or jewellery-making. One in five (18%) plays a musical instrument, 16% take courses for pleasure, and 12% engage in painting, sculpting or drawing. Young people under 25, who are an elusive audience target for many non-profit arts and cultural organizations, are especially active in personal cultural activities; in addition to their avid interest in popular culture, they are the age group most likely to pursue individual art activities and play musical instruments.
- Each year the Canadian Improv Games – competitions for improvisational theatre for high school students – involve 12,000 students from 300 schools across the country.
- A recent study found that 79% of greater Vancouver's population participates in or attends arts activities.⁷

There is a rich tapestry of cultural activity among Canadians, ranging from being spectators at cultural events to taking in and enjoying popular commercial culture in its many manifestations, to participating personally in avocational activity and study in cultural fields. Just as everyone consumes food, though not every kind of food, everyone consumes art and culture, though not every kind. We are all involved in cultural activity in different ways every day of our lives. Considering how time-deficient most Canadians are these days, this level of activity in artistic and cultural experiences which are not obligatory and are undertaken voluntarily has to be considered extraordinary.⁸

But chances are we don't identify our personal experiences as art or culture. Canadians have not been surveyed about how they value their participatory arts activities, but studies in Australia and the United States show that the public defines "the arts" very narrowly, so narrowly as to exclude most of their own personal activities. Australians, for example, include ballet, plays and opera in the arts but exclude literature, crafts and photography. The Executive Director of Americans for

⁷ The time-use survey undertaken during Statistics Canada's 1992 General Social Survey is the principal source for most of these figures. See Statistics Canada, *Canada's Culture, Heritage and Identity: A Statistical Perspective*, 1995 and 1997 editions, catalogue 87-211; and Statistics Canada: *Canada: A Portrait* (1995), pp. 68-87.

⁸ At the time that the figures above were compiled (in the 1992 General Social Survey), nearly 45% of Canadian adults also reported that they were so time-deficient that they cut back on sleep in order to cope with all their obligations. A similar study of cultural participation was carried out in the United States in 1992. It established that 60% of adults had engaged in one or more avocational arts activities in the previous year and that personal participation in avocational arts exceeded the total attendance at "fine arts" events, a category which included classical music, opera, musicals, ballet, other dance, plays, jazz, and art museums.

the Arts, the national arts advocacy body in the United States, reports that "In our work...we found that there was not only a huge disconnect with people thinking that the arts were for the rich but that things that they often did in the arts themselves—whether it was Irish step dancing or wood carving or choral singing—were not thought of by them as being part of the arts."⁹

⁹ Robert Lynch, in *The Status and Future of Public Arts Funding*, Proceedings of the symposium presented by the Mid-America Arts Alliance, Saint Louis, MO, 1995, p. 63.

And Yet . . . And Yet . . .

... Imagine a world without art.

One of our Working Group members wrote the following letter, which helped inspire John Siemens' illustrations in this paper:

"Very much liked Tom's idea of an image which is then seen devoid of art. Taken to extremes, perhaps, several images in 'before and after' scenarios could effectively capture the notion of what the arts encompass in our lives, selves and environment and how distorted we would be in their absence:

A baby being told a story by its mother or father, with an image of brain/imagination development. Image of baby and caretaker without the story element, baby crying or blankly depicted.

A child at a museum --- a child in an empty room.

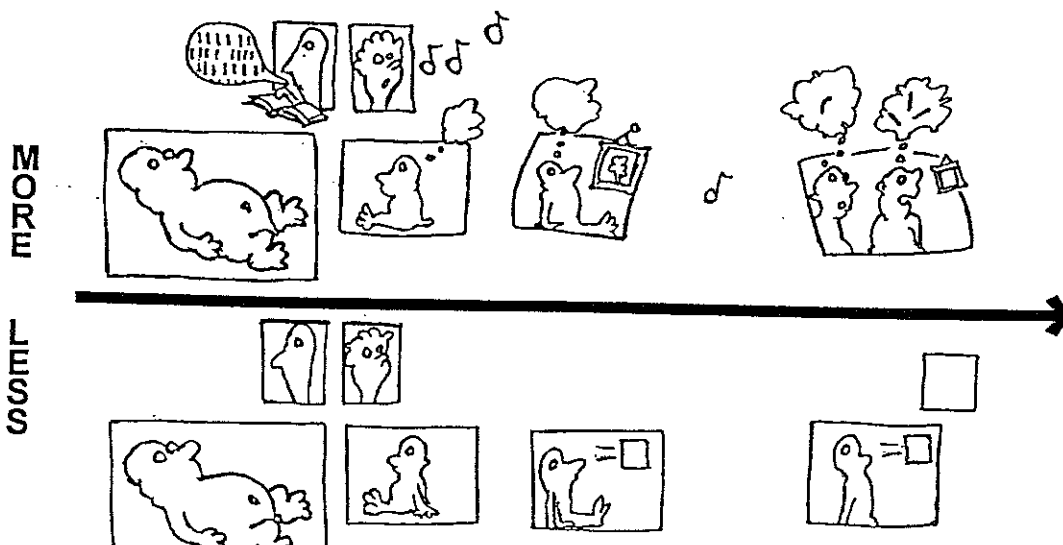
Young adult in a play on a stage with the full regalia, before an audience; a young adult clearly watching people as an uninvolved outsider.

Elderly women making a quilt with all the different decisions of colour, fabric, design involved in that; a group of elderly women sitting in chairs in a room with no décor, dozing or looking out of a window.

Perhaps these illustrate the connective tissue created by the arts in our everyday lives, as well as how we develop as 'community' or as alienated citizens."

So the Questions Remain . . .

If Canadians are so extraordinarily active in the arts and culture broadly defined, why then is the audience for the non-profit, publicly funded sector of the arts and culture levelling off or declining, and why is it so skewed by class, education, and income? Is this an entrenched problem that cannot be changed? If art and culture are indeed all around us, infused in our lives and our very environment, why do so many people regard them as alien, as something other? Why don't people value their own participatory activities as art? Have the arts come to be defined as limited



to "fine arts" events funded by arts councils at which people are spectators but not participants? Why is it such an up-hill battle for most cultural institutions in Canada to attract a larger and (socially, economically and culturally) more diverse audience?

What responsibility do we, as the cultural community, bear for these developments? In our concern over the last four to five decades to build our cultural institutions and a fully professional cultural sector, have we neglected art's relationship with the community? Are we better at putting art and culture in front of people than encouraging interactions with it? If so, how can we change, and what changes are required? Beyond improved marketing strategies, what transformations are required in our cultural institutions?

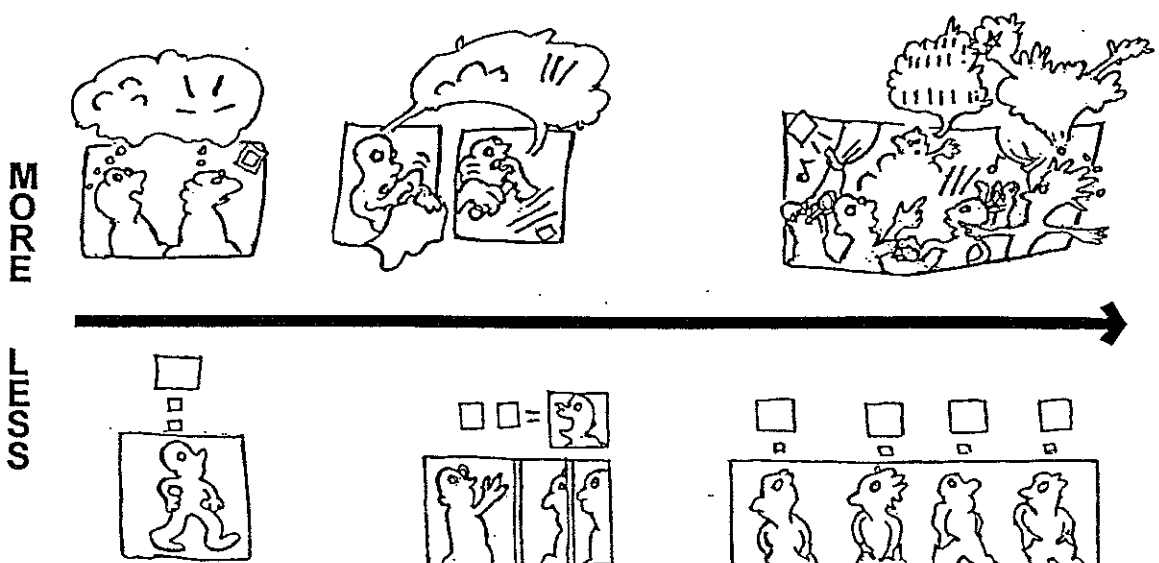
And can we bridge the gap within the cultural community itself between the so-called "high arts" and mainstream institutions on the one hand and artists and cultural groups who work closely with communities (especially in community-based practice and the schools) on the other? Can we bridge the gap inside some established cultural organizations where education and community outreach activities are regarded as interruptions of, or departures from, the pursuit of cultural excellence?

Given that we in the cultural community tend to discuss cultural issues in terms of the needs of the professional cultural world, can we begin to convey the real benefits cultural expression and participation bring to people and communities in language that is concrete and meaningful? What roles should governments play in encouraging broader public participation in the arts?

In other words, what will it take to close the rifts, repair the disconnects - the disconnects between the professional cultural world and communities and the disconnects between artists working in different ways, with different relationships to communities?

Can it be done?

Can we leave it undone?



Some Answers. . . And More Questions

We posed a number of questions to people we consulted on this topic which can be summed up as follows:

- What can we in the cultural community do to build bridges to a larger and more diverse public, and what can we learn from one another?
- What are the benefits the arts and culture bring to people and communities, and what are the most effective means for communicating them?
- How can funders (public and private sector) encourage stronger linkages between the arts and communities?

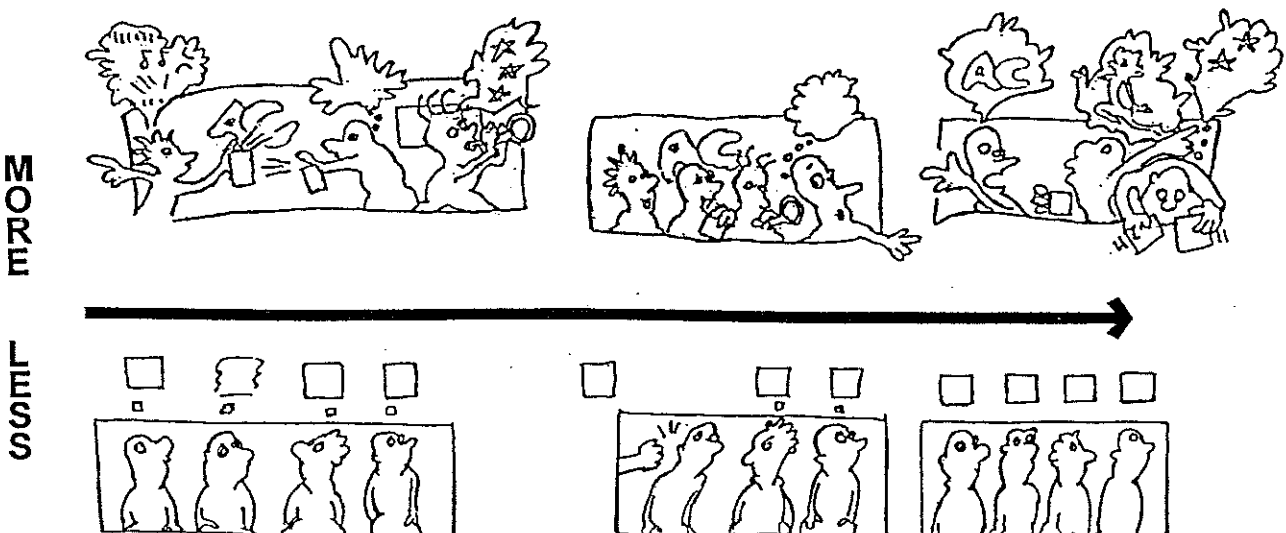
We heard a wide mix of answers to these questions, and in the course of providing answers, people raised even more questions. The following are some of the views, proposals, and queries most frequently expressed during our consultations. Each section concludes with some pointed questions.

What can we in the cultural community do to build bridges to a larger and more diverse public, and what can we learn from one another?

- ***Valuing the continuum of artistic and cultural activities:***

One answer frequently mentioned by those we consulted was to bring down some of the barriers we ourselves have created. The working group said we need to re-establish the continuum that runs the gamut from amateur and avocational arts activities to the fully professional, expanding our definition of art and culture to include what happens in peoples' homes and private lives. In valuing all of the arts, the group included honouring community-arts practice, school-based artistic activity, and the education, outreach and community liaison functions of cultural institutions as important and essential activities.

But at the same time, the working group made it very clear that in its concern for improved linkages with communities, it did not want to create other ghettos. "In breaking down walls," one member said, "we don't want to build another room around community art." Artistic and cultural practices without overt community



linkages and social purposes must continue to be valued and respected. The entire continuum of arts and culture needs to be honoured. The emphasis in this paper on community-based practice and other means of connecting with communities therefore is due to the fact that these have hitherto been relatively neglected cultural practices, not because of a preference for them above and beyond other artistic and cultural activities.

- ***Using community arts councils as bridges to local communities:***

Some respondents stressed that, where community arts councils exist, they can be very valuable bridges to the local community. One example close at hand in Halifax is the Annapolis Region Community Arts Council. Like many community arts councils, its mandate includes fostering an appreciation and understanding of the arts through community-oriented programs and the initiation of creative opportunities. The director of the council pointed out to us the importance of continuity and perseverance: "It has taken ARCAC 15 years of educating, including, and inviting the general public to ARCAC events, to see that our artists send their the kids to local schools, buy groceries, go to doctors, get their cars fixed, just like anyone else." As a member of our working group noted, the more that artists are visible participants in the (non-arts) life of their neighbourhoods and communities, the better.

- ***Participation and Spectatorship:***

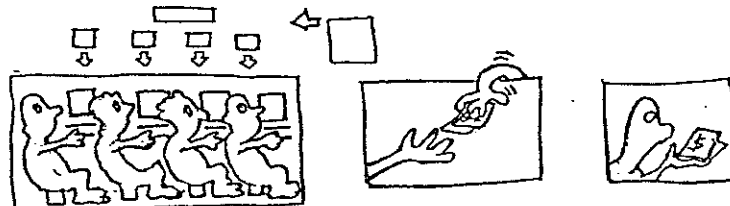
The issues of participation and spectatorship emerged frequently in our consultations. One can be a spectator or a participant in the arts (or both at different times and places). Most people suggested that, for a full cultural life, both are needed. Artist Ann Mortifee, the chair of the British Columbia Arts Council, recently stated that "a new paradigm is emerging – a revitalization paradigm. People no longer want to simply watch the arts; they want to participate. There is a hunger for community, a hunger for creative gatherings, a hunger to perform. We see it in the exploding numbers of choruses and artistic circles around the province. The result is a grass roots spiritual resurgence not unlike the ecological movement."¹⁰ If Ms. Mortifee is right, the question is how to support and encourage this resurgence, and what concrete tools are needed to do so.

¹⁰ British Columbia Arts Council, News, Spring 1999, p. 1.

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• **Community Arts and Community Cultural Development:**

We spent some time in our working group on the subject of community art and community cultural development. We wanted to encourage the further development of community arts in Canada and to consider its relationship to "mainstream" culture, specifically how the principles and practices involved in community arts can contribute to the efforts of cultural organizations to engage larger and more diverse publics.

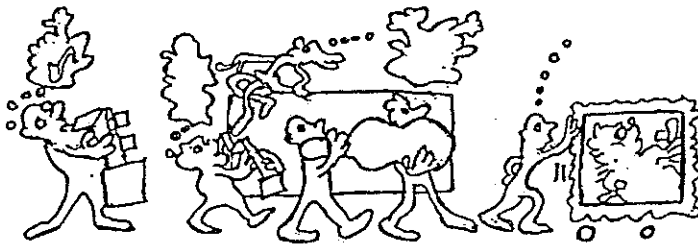
The Ontario Arts Council's workbook on community arts defines it as "a collaborative creative process" between an artist and a community, "a collective method of art-making... as much about process as about the artistic product or outcome". While there are many varieties of community art practice, it is distinguished from other forms of art-making by 1) the co-creative relationship between artist and community; 2) a focus on process as an essential tool for mutually-beneficial results; and 3) the active participation of community members in the creative process.¹¹

Our working group, which included community arts practitioners, suggested that a community arts activity typically has some or all of the following characteristics:

- It "desegregates" the community group, rising above divisions of class, gender, generation, ethnicity, etc.
- It creates a social bond between participants.
- It tends to blur the distinction between artist and non-artist, participant and spectator: through interaction, all partners become participants.
- Its effect on a community can be transformative - as the community recognizes its own creative abilities and reflects its identity, it is given voice. Many (though not all) of the communities involved in these projects are disadvantaged or disempowered. The community-based project helps build the capacity of the community to take positive charge of its destiny.
- It is based on an inclusive model (one working group member characterized this as an "open door" as opposed to "curated" model).

¹¹ Ontario Arts Council, "Community Arts Workbook...another Vital Link," 1998, p. 7.

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- It often uses as its site a public space, which is creatively reimagined by the project.

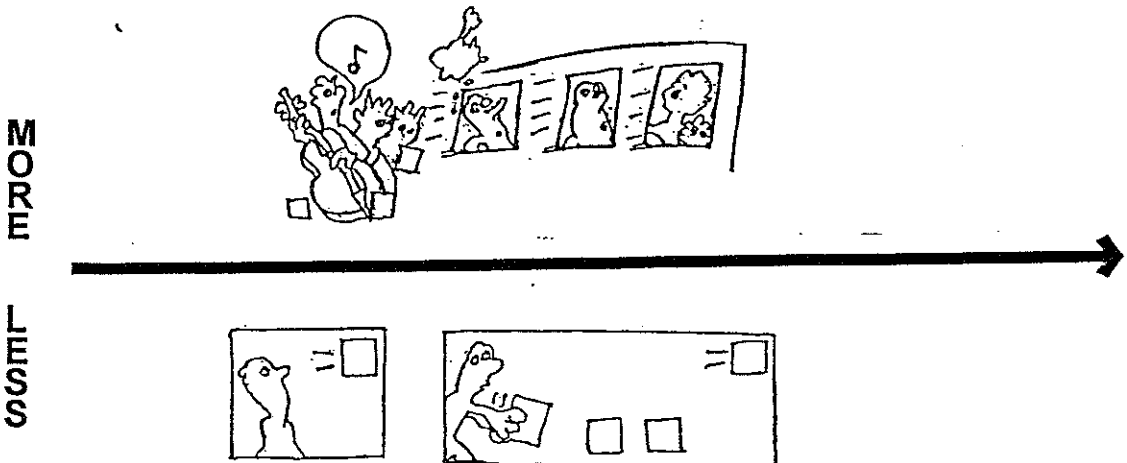
The Assembly of British Columbia Arts Councils, which has substantial experience with community cultural development, describes the outcomes in "everyday life and everyday benefits" this way:

"When we participate in creative activity the experience is different from consuming someone else's creative work. We start thinking and feeling about art in new ways. Artists gain from community engagement too. Instead of working in isolation, artists work in partnership. This can change the way art is made, the kind of art that is produced, and the support art activity receives from other citizens."¹²

The Australia Council for the Arts has a 20-year history as a funder of community arts and community cultural development. A recent report entitled "Creating Social Capital: A Case Study of the Long-Term Benefits from Community-Based Arts Funding" reported on an evaluation of community-based arts projects which the Council had funded. The projects delivered substantial benefits in social, educational, artistic and economic terms. Some of the major benefits were as follows:

- Eight out of ten people surveyed reported that the projects had increased their appreciation of the arts.
- 50% had become more active supporters and greater consumers of the arts.
- Over 90% found that the projects delivered valuable social outcomes, including the establishment of supportive community networks, development of community pride, and increased public awareness of community issues.
- Two-thirds reported an improved understanding of different cultures and lifestyles.

¹² Assembly of British Columbia Arts Councils, "Community Cultural Development: Our Position", 1998.



- Over 80% reported a decrease in social isolation in the community. ¹³

What can we in the cultural community do to build bridges to a larger and more diverse public, and what can we learn from one another?

Are there concrete ways in which we can better value the continuum of artistic and cultural activities, including those practised by people in their personal lives?

How can community arts councils and other locally-oriented cultural groups help professional arts and cultural organizations build bridges to local communities?

How can the practice of community arts be further encouraged and developed, and what are its critical needs?

What can professional arts and cultural organizations learn from the practice of community arts?

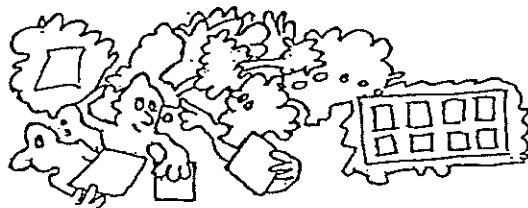
What do you wish to add about this subject?

What are the benefits the arts and culture bring to communities, and what are the most effective means for communicating them?

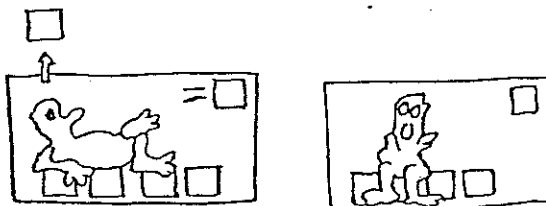
If there was one point virtually everyone we talked with about this project stressed, it is that it is incumbent on the cultural community to define the "public interest" involved in the arts and culture, that is, to articulate the concrete benefits that cultural expression and participation bring to people and communities. Unless we in the cultural community can do this convincingly, most people believe, we will

¹³ The Laidlaw Foundation is providing support for the formal evaluation of The Artists and Communities projects funded in British Columbia, Ontario, and Newfoundland by partnerships that include the Canada Council for the Arts, provincial arts councils and foundations. Though the evaluation is not yet available, preliminary information indicates that it identifies strong and solid social, artistic, and economic outcomes from the funded projects.

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continue to be seen as a special interest group concerned only with our own well-being.

The working group recognized that there is a lack of shared understanding and language between the cultural community and the public about how the arts and culture serve society. They were strongly convinced that repositioning arts advocacy in terms of societal benefits was demanded. In their view, we have overstressed the economic impact of the arts and culture, which never got to the heart of the matter and is now a tired argument. The public interest in the arts and culture, they believe, is the core of the issue.¹⁴ A recent municipal study, the St. John's (Newfoundland) Arts Community Strategy, identifies as its very first goal fostering "an appreciation of the real contribution the arts make to society."¹⁵

The benefits to people and communities:

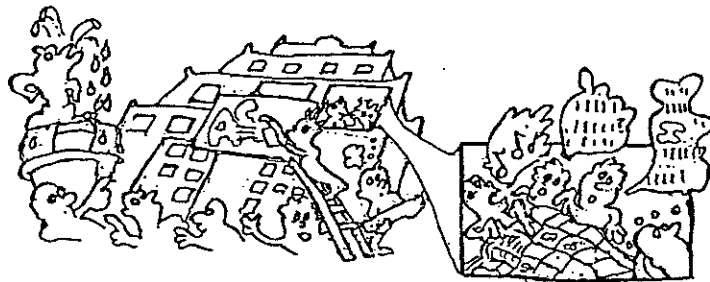
What are the benefits cultural expression and participation bring to people? Based on our consultations, here are some elements of an answer:

- The value of arts education is now firmly established in academic research. Some of the most important information comes from a benchmark study by Dr. James Catterall of longitudinal data collected by the U.S. Department of Education on 25,000 American students whose education and performance were tracked over several years from 1988 on. Dr. Catterall's analysis of the data shows that involvement in the arts in a student's early years is strongly and unequivocally linked to 1) higher academic performance in subsequent school years, 2) increased scores on standardized tests, 3) greater community participation by the students and their greater belief in its importance, 4) lower school dropout rates, and 5) increased self-esteem. Furthermore, these benefits occur irrespective of the student's socio-economic status. Among economically disadvantaged students, those with a high degree of early arts involvement had a dropout rate 45% lower than those with little arts

¹⁴ This point of view is being widely expressed in a number of countries. The Australia Council for the Arts, alarmed that a national election poll showed that the arts and culture did not rate a mention among more than 20 important issues identified by Australian voters, has launched an advocacy campaign expressly devoted to increasing public appreciation of the benefits of the arts. In recent years, several major reports have stressed the same theme: the National Endowment for the Arts, American Canvas (1997); the Council of Europe, In From the Margins (1996); and the Canadian Conference of the Arts, Arts in Transition: Toward a Culture of Shared Resources (1997).

¹⁵ St. John's Arts Community Strategy, 1999.

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involvement.¹⁶

- Research has also demonstrated that studying and participating in the arts at an early age increases the capacity for learning itself. The arts enhance skills such as problem solving, creativity, self-discipline, critical thinking, recognition and respect for differences, understanding of the self and others, and communicative abilities. Children who regularly participate in arts classes in school develop the ability to communicate their ideas and feelings in constructive ways. Artistic experiences also consolidate skills in organizing and teamwork.¹⁷
- The skills involved in arts processes (perceptual, creative, communicative, critical and collaborative) can be useful in strengthening communities. One scholar identifies five key characteristics of a successful community: abundant social capital (cultural opportunities and facilities, safety, health care, sociability); strong connections with the outside world; a willingness to welcome and integrate newcomers; the ability to innovate; and the capacity to collaborate.¹⁸ Most of these characteristics can be developed through cultural participation.
- As a vehicle for increasing civic participation, the arts and culture can help overcome passivity and a sense of alienation and anomie. By encouraging citizens to express themselves, the arts can help revitalize communities and provide a sense of identity, cohesion, pride, responsibility and power.

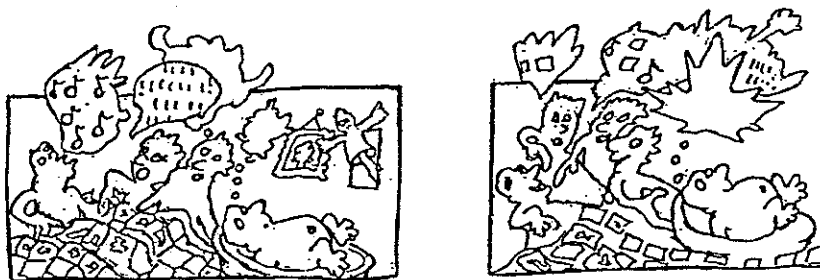
As one of our working group mentioned, reemphasizing the role of culture for people and communities may also encourage a rebalancing of corporate purposes.

¹⁶ Dr. James S. Catterall, "Involvement in the Arts and Success in Secondary School", Americans for the Arts Monographs, Vol. 1, No. 9.

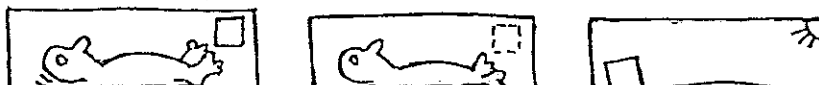
¹⁷ Ontario Arts Council, Making the Case for Arts Education, 1997; and The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, "Art at the Core of Learning", <http://www.pcah.gov>. Arts education also increases the likelihood of later arts involvement. The U.S. study on participation in the arts examined the relationships between arts education in youth and one's later involvement with the arts as consumer, creator and performer. The strongest predictor of arts creation in later life was arts education as a young person. Those with the most arts education were also the highest consumers of art in later life. Indeed, arts education had a much stronger impact on consumption than did overall educational attainment. It must be noted, however, that the higher the socio-economic status of those surveyed, the more arts education they had received. (From "Effects of Arts Education on Participation in the Arts," Research Division Report #36, National Endowment for the Arts, <http://arts.endow.gov/pu>).

¹⁸ Rosabeth Moss Kanter, World Class, Thriving Locally in the Global Economy, Simon and Schuster, 1995.

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Corporations are losing their philanthropic purpose, devoting more of their arts and community support to sponsorships and marketing. That may be an appropriate response if the arts and culture are primarily conceived as economic engines, but if their essential public purposes are to develop people and communities, philanthropy is the more appropriate orientation for the business community.

- ***Communicating These Benefits:***

In considering how best to communicate the public benefits of artistic and cultural expression, people we consulted believed it important to find community venues and events at which these points can be made clearly and simply. One of our working group members stressed the desirability of finding at least one influential local community member willing to introduce arts groups to important business and community groups. She also emphasized the desirability of culture being represented in as many local decision-making places as possible, including the municipal economic development agency.

What are the benefits the arts and culture bring to communities, and what are the most effective means for communicating them?

Have you found that emphasizing/detailing the benefits of the arts and culture for people is the most effective advocacy method? Does it increase public awareness and appreciation? Are there better alternatives, and if so, what are they?

Are the public benefits of artistic and cultural activity cited above the right ones? The most important? What ones are missing?

How can we best communicate these benefits?

Who are our natural allies in doing so? Which partnerships in the community are most valuable in disseminating information on the values of cultural expression and participation for people?

What do you wish to add about this subject?

How can funders (public and private sector) encourage stronger linkages between the arts and communities?

Our working group observed that, though the current impetus in government support for culture is at the municipal level and there is an important role for municipalities to play in encouraging stronger linkages between culture and the broader community, all levels of government need to develop policies and programs which are effective in the long-term in encouraging greater links between cultural organizations and their communities.

While municipalities in many provinces have been handicapped by senior levels of government which have handed down increased responsibility with fewer resources, their interest in cultural programs and policies deserves support. At the municipal level, cultural policy is well-situated to encourage better relations between the cultural constituency and the general public and a sense of culture as important to everyone in their daily lives.¹⁹

Some of the suggestions we received were as follows:

• ***Developing a Community Profile:***

Municipalities interested in developing cultural policies may need to begin by taking the pulse of the community and developing a community profile, including artistic and cultural interests and needs, an inventory of available cultural resources and identification of missing ones. As one of our working group members wrote, in developing a cultural plan for a community, the participants should include

"all of the resources that exist in the community – not just the traditional arts organizations, but the libraries, heritage groups, urban conservation and planning groups, as well as those concerned with 'healthy cities', the environment, and those committed to helping reduce violence in our communities. All of these and more should be part of the equation. All of these could probably come to share a vision for your community so that it can flourish - and they will recognize the value of the arts and the artists."²⁰

• ***Composition of Public Sector Panels:***

In a few jurisdictions in Canada, there have been recent disputes over the use of people who are not arts professionals in adjudicating competitions for public funds in the arts. Though the controversy so far as been limited to Alberta (where community review committees assess applications for lottery funds) and Ontario (where the Ontario Arts Council has begun involving some "lay people" as members of panels adjudicating grants to arts organizations and the Ontario Trillium

¹⁹ Those interested in developing municipal cultural policies should consult the website of the Quebec-based organization Les Arts et La Ville -

<http://www.arts-ville.org>. This organization encourages municipalities in their cultural policy and planning development. Currently some 60 Quebec municipalities have adopted cultural policies to guide their actions in the arts and culture.

²⁰ John Hobday, Address to the Assembly of BC Arts Councils, "Arts councils in the 90s – Part of the problem or part of the solution?", 1991.

Foundation is using community committees for lottery disbursements), the issue has been sufficiently divisive and important that the working group spent some time discussing it.

The group recognized that the opposition expressed by some in the cultural community about the inclusion of “lay people” has its basis in a legitimate concern that arts funding could be politicized and community members used as a stalking horse for controlling (and eliminating) grants for work that provokes dissent and offends a (mythical or real) “community standard” or is simply cutting-edge. Artists and cultural workers have waged long, hard-won battles for “peer assessment” (the use of artists and other practising professionals in the field or discipline as adjudicators) and similarly long battles to be acknowledged as professionals with distinct skills and expertise. Both factors explain much of the distress caused by the inclusion of people without background and training as professionals in the arts.

But there are also, the working group pointed out, potential advantages to the inclusion of some well-informed lay people working alongside arts professionals on arts council panels for organizational grants. Experience gathered in other grant programs is instructive. For example, grant programs for community arts and for First Nations’ arts typically include panellists from the “community”. In the case of the former, these are usually people with previous experience as community arts board members or organizers of community cultural events. In the case of First Nations’ programs, they are “culture keepers” – elders, tribal leaders and others whose traditional role as protector of the culture is an integral part of First Nations’ society and highly respected. In both cases, the inclusion of the “community perspective” has deeply enriched the adjudication process.

Providing that the “lay people” invited to participate in adjudicating cultural organizations are indeed well-informed, with good judgement and a substantial history of involvement with and support for the arts and culture, bringing in the community perspective may demystify the grant process, make new allies, and help educate community leaders about the value of the arts and the rigour and integrity of the granting process.

- ***Artists as Animators:***

A number of people we consulted suggested that governments and private funders should encourage the use of artists as animators in communities and neighbourhoods. The artist-as-animator has some similarities to an artist-in-residence but usually has a more active, generating role in helping the community determine and meet its own cultural needs. In many community animation projects, an artist-organizer uses both artistic and organizing skills to help the members of a community discover and express their cultural identities and take charge of their cultural development.

One arts administrator wrote us suggesting a variety of purposes that can be served by an animator or a local cultural facility, depending on the community’s needs:

“What role does a cultural facility or community arts leader play in sparking

relationships between professional artists and the community over time? Building studio and teaching space in the arts facility makes special linkages possible. What role do facilities play in providing learning opportunities and performances? Can the structure of the building promote linkages between artists and audience? Do multi-use sports, recreation and arts facilities work?"

- ***Support for Cultural Activities in the Public Realm:***

The working group proposed that, given the interest and congeniality of venues or spaces outside traditional cultural institutions, funders (both public and private) should be encouraged to support cultural events in the "public realm", to attract wider publics and raise consciousness of the arts.

- ***Awards for Community Cultural Collaborations:***

The working group also proposed that awards for significant contributions to the community through the arts and culture be provided. Like the Portia White Award in Nova Scotia, such honours would raise awareness of the value of cultural projects. Ideally, the awards would jointly celebrate the artist/cultural organization and the community group with which it collaborated, and the award presentation would be a community celebration. Sponsoring such awards might be of special interest to community arts councils, community foundations, and municipal governments.

How can funders (public and private sector) encourage stronger linkages between the arts and communities?

What means are most appropriate to your community for encouraging stronger linkages over the long-term? What specific forms of encouragement would be effective in Halifax?

What roles would you foresee the private sector playing? The public sector?

In the development of a cultural policy for Halifax Regional Municipality, what should be the objectives? How should the municipality go about developing the policy? What are the elements the policy might contain? Are there components of a potential policy that could help build stronger connections between the professional cultural community and the public?

What do you wish to add about this subject?

What other observations do you wish to make from the perspective of your artistic and cultural interests and your community about the subject of arts and community?

In your view, what follow-up step(s) would it be most useful for the Canadian Conference of the Arts to take on arts and community issues?

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- Art in the Public Interest: <http://www.artswire.org>
- Pomegranate Center: <http://www.pomegranate.org>
- Resilient Communities: <http://www.resilientcommunities.org>
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- The Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation Urban Issues Program: <http://www.web.net/urban/>
- Council of Europe, "Culture and Neighbourhoods", The Europe of cultural cooperation: <http://culture.coe.fr/cit/eng/>
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- The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, "Gaining the Arts Advantage", "Art at the Core of Learning", <http://www.pcah.gov>
- University of Toronto, Scarborough campus, Arts Administration program, The Arts in a Pluralist Society Project: <http://citd.scar.utoronto.ca/APS>
- The Pew Charitable Trusts Culture Program White Paper: <http://www.pewtrusts.com...Initiative>

HALIFAX FORUM: PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Project Description

The Canadian Conference of the Arts has launched a project called "The Arts and Community". Its purpose is to stimulate widespread discussion in Canadian towns and cities about concrete means appropriate to local communities for broadening and deepening the relationships between the arts and the public. "The Arts and Community" is financially supported by The Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation and the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Through consultations with Canadians involved in this issue, the CCA has developed this discussion paper as the starting point for a public policy forum on June 17, 1999, in Halifax. A report on the Halifax meeting will be published in July 1999. The subject will also be presented and discussed at a symposium on "Global Communities and Arts Communities" organized by the Edmonton Arts Council in Edmonton in October 1999. The CCA is hopeful that other municipalities will take up our invitation to adopt the subject as a starting point for their public consultations, given its vast importance to both communities and artists and cultural organizations. Identifying concrete actions to improve the relationship with the public is a task best-suited to local communities and their artists and cultural groups. Ideally, this project should lead to a more intensive and more extensive process of consultation across the country.

Background

As the enormous current interest in the subject of the arts and communities in Canada and abroad suggests, we are increasingly recognizing that creative expression and participation are powerful means of building healthy and resilient communities, from neighbourhoods to nations. It is equally clear that increased public understanding and appreciation are necessary and desirable for artists and arts organizations. It seems evident that both society and the arts can benefit from active public participation and involvement in the arts: communities by becoming more confident, creative, and self-determining, with a stronger sense of common ownership, responsibility and pride, and artists by having more dynamic and engaged audiences and supporters.

On the Canadian cultural scene, there are many current developments which bear on the relationship of the arts and the public:

- an increased emphasis on outreach and audience development by most cultural organizations and many public sector funders, while at the same time government cutbacks have necessitated both increased admission and ticket prices for cultural events, thus decreasing accessibility among middle- and lower-income people and the young, and increased reliance on corporate support, which reinforces the "elite" image of cultural organizations;
- increased efforts by heritage and arts organizations to engage culturally-specific publics, through among other means cross-cultural programming, community-based projects, community collaboration on programming initiatives, etc.;

- innovative partnerships between arts organizations and community-based organizations outside the arts, and an increased interest among some Canadian foundations in the role of the arts in building successful communities;
- a heightened emphasis among professional artists on community arts practice and art as a catalyst for community growth and development;
- a growing belief that arts advocacy should emphasize the value of the arts to society;
- increasing burn-out among volunteers who, especially in small towns and rural areas, are often the backbone of cultural organizations and events;
- increasing interest at the municipal level in developing cultural policies and integrating the arts in urban planning; and
- increased recognition of the importance of the arts of First Nations and other culturally diverse Canadian communities - communities in which the arts are not marginalized but an integral part of the life of the society.

The subject of "the arts and community" is complex and often controversial. There are few accepted ground rules about how to go about improving relationships between the arts and the public or reconciling social and artistic objectives. Most arts advocacy efforts have not succeeded in bridging the gap between "professional arts interests" and the "general public" and tend to be dismissed as "special interest" efforts. Surveys have shown that Canadians have a very high degree of engagement with the arts in their personal lives - ranging from creating and performing as avocational activities to taking arts-related courses - but this does not necessarily translate into attending arts events. Though there is increasing interaction among artists identifying themselves variously as "community-based", "education-based" or "professional" (and some artists work in all three spheres at different times), far more mutual understanding is needed. Indeed, though interest in community arts practices is growing, they remain mysterious to many artists. Some arts professionals in fact recoil from discussion of "community" believing that it signifies selling-out their fundamental artistic goals.

By undertaking a thoughtful consideration of the complex issues involved in "the arts and community", the CCA hopes to stimulate discussion in communities about concrete means appropriate to those communities to increase linkages between the arts and the public.

Questions for Discussion in Halifax

The following questions will form the agenda for the Halifax forum. These issues are discussed in detail in the attached discussion paper.