

CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

“The problem of the 20th century,” W.E.B. Du Bois observed in 1900, “is the problem of the color line.” Nearly a hundred years later, it cannot be said that the color line has been erased. On the contrary, that single line has evolved into a veritable grid, delimiting all manner of race and ethnicity, language and religion, social status and sexual orientation. Americans have grown accustomed to drawing lines everywhere, with English-only laws, welfare limitations, “three-strikes-and-your-out” sanctions, and a spate of referenda targeting affirmative action, gay rights, and immigration all designed to set the record straight. To make things right again. As if things ever really were right, and as if drawing yet another line would actually serve that purpose in any case.

The arts have not been free of such controversies, which have manifested themselves in a variety of forms, for both good and ill. On the positive side of the ledger, generations of artists, from the Harlem Renaissance in the 20s through the Civil Rights era of the 60s up to the most recent work of the Urban Bush Women and the Nuyorican Poets have added immeasurably to our cultural legacy. At the same time, the arts community has long labored under a stubbornly persistent class system of its own, one that continues to haunt the field: the recognition, palpable even in our democratic protestations to the contrary, that the audience for the non-profit arts remains highly skewed, betraying a demographic profile that tends to be

older, wealthier, better educated, and whiter than a typical cross-section of the American public. Defenders of the field, understandably, point proudly to the progress that has been made in this regard—the 45 percent increase in the number of blacks who attended a live performance between 1982 and 1992, or the 64 percent increase in Asian, Latino, and Native attendance. But these figures, subsumed under categories that are largely class-based themselves, have as much to do with the cultural apartheid in which we began this century as they do with the cultural equality that, for all our efforts, remains as elusive as social, economic, and educational equality.

The difficult questions of equity and access, of opportunity and aspiration, are as critical to the future of American culture as they are to other aspects of American life. Although cultural equity and access were scheduled to be addressed at the final American Canvas forum in Miami, such issues, by their very nature, don't always wait for formal introductions. They initially came up in Columbus, not surprisingly, the very first stop on the American Canvas tour, and they literally boiled over in Los Angeles. The theme of that second meeting—How can the arts build and maintain the viability of a community's social infrastructure?—soon gave way to more pressing concerns, about race and class, inclusion and exclusion. Everything from the racial composition of the American Canvas panels themselves to the formality of the panelists' attire—"There's a cultural war going on," one audience member declared, "You don't dress up like this to fight a war!"—came up at various, often unscheduled, points during the two-day meeting. But it was Alberto Duron, Los Angeles attorney and cultural activist, who expressed the matter most succinctly.

"The arts can't help to ensure livable communities for tomorrow unless the arts establishment undergoes a wholesale overhaul," he flatly declared. "From the teachers, schools and student bodies in art schools, to the staffs at art museum and performing arts centers, and the gallery system, all these institutions must be opened up to the communities which they now claim to serve but don't."

Now claim to serve but don't: the phrase fairly crystallizes the bind in which the nonprofit arts often find themselves, as much the victims of their own institutional histories, and of the larger patterns of social and economic segregation, as they are complicit in these inequities. Duron, in any event, traced the arts community's recent woes, its political problems in general and its losses at the federal level in particular, to its failure to serve a larger public. "What's happened to public arts funding is in no small measure the fault of the arts institutions and the individuals

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who run them,” Duron asserted. “Critics in Congress and elsewhere would never have been able to galvanize large segments of the public if it were not for the vulnerability of the arts community brought on by its isolation and intransigence.” And until it addresses its own failings, Duron added, the arts community will be powerless to effect any real change in the larger society. Until arts institutions begin to forge closer ties with the communities around them, in other words, they will remain largely irrelevant, just so much costume jewelry on a body politic that has its mind on other, more pressing, concerns.

“Large segments of the community,” Duron complained, “are ignored or showcased on a once-in-a-decade cycle. Community advisory groups are generally expected to be rubber stamps for institutional plans. Innovative ideas from these groups are generally ignored or quashed as uneconomical or outside of the institution’s purview.” In particular, Duron expressed grave reservations about the “Mexico: Thirty Centuries of Splendor” exhibition of 1990, typical of the touring “blockbuster” shows that steamroll through a city, drawing large crowds and stimulating vast sums of tourist expenditures, but otherwise doing little for local art and artists. And in this particular case, according to Duron, the sizable local Chicano community felt not only excluded from the event, but unnecessarily “exoticized” as well. “When it appeared in New York,” Duron recalled, “the exhibition was highlighted as something foreign—‘Come see something exotic’—and for the over three million Mexican-Americans who live in Los Angeles, we didn’t want to be considered as something exotic.”

The problem, Duron made clear, was not so much with the local venue for the exhibition (the Los Angeles County Museum of Art), as it was with the sponsorship of the Mexican government, whose diplomatic agenda had little to do with local interests and concerns. “As we kept telling them,” Duron noted, “‘After the carnival is over, we’re going to be left behind here, and we’re the ones who have to live with the consequences of you putting us forth as something exotic and strange and alien.’ And that’s exactly what we’re trying to fight—the notion that we’re somehow alien to this culture and this community.”

As a result, the local arts community in Los Angeles rallied around an arts festival of its own, one that demonstrated, in reflecting the true diversity of the community and admitting participation from all sides, what a well-orchestrated arts event can really mean to a community. Spread over four months in 1991 and presented in a wide range of venues throughout the Los Angeles metropolitan area, the Artes de Mexico Festival attracted some 500,000 people to more than 230 visual

arts, dance, theater, music, and poetry events. “Two years in the planning,” Duron explained, “Artes was conceived as an opportunity for the entire Chicano artistic community to participate in a community-wide festival...” Festival organizers attempted to tap the rich vein of Chicano culture that had gone largely unnoticed by the area’s major arts institutions over the previous 25 years. “We were continually amazed at the high level of applicants wishing to become a part of the festival,” Duron recalled. “...The artistic community—all of it—felt a sense of ownership and pride in being able to participate freely and without arbitrary constraints. The community responded by enthusiastically receiving the works and sharing in that same sense of ownership and pride.”

“...THOSE NEW AUDIENCES THAT WE ALL TALK ABOUT AND CRAVE”

Duron’s complaints, while timely, are unfortunately not new. They reflect long-standing concerns regarding the nonprofit arts’ institutional relations with their communities, concerns that have troubled arts administrators for years. Over a decade ago, for example, at the aptly titled “Challenge of Change” conference in New York, the issue was addressed by Ruby Lerner, among others. “If we honestly assess our organizations,” Lerner told the gathering of theater and dance professionals in 1986, “we must conclude that their role is not integral to the lives of our communities; they are not true centers of our communities.” Lerner, who had recently left the position of executive director of Alternate ROOTS (Regional Organization of Theaters South), was questioning, in effect, the degree to which the “Gotham City Ballet” or the “Metropolitan Philharmonic” have any real connections to either of those cities, beyond the use of their names. “What we have cultivated to date,” Lerner suggested, “some of us more successfully than others, are relationships with individuals of relative wealth (audiences and boards), dead individuals of wealth (foundations), and the business community.”

That audience-board-funder triumvirate has traditionally been a precariously narrow slice of American society, and the source of much consternation among an arts community that is determined to extend its reach beyond the aging audience base of traditional arts supporters. And yet financially speaking, at least, the arts community has long been sustained by its ties to institutional wealth and elite audiences. “These relationships,” Lerner added, before asking the final, ironic question that continues to puzzle arts administrators to this day, “are motivated by our very real monetary needs. But I wonder if our close alignment with this small

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Square dancing at the Bethel Youth Fiddle Camp in Pennsylvania
is one example of keeping folk traditions alive.

but powerful sector of the community may have limited and skewed what our organizations might become—in fact, may have been partly responsible for keeping away from our doors those new audiences that we all talk about and crave.”¹

The barriers that Lerner describes are subtle ones, and they don’t show up very often in the lists of reasons survey respondents give for not attending arts events more often (where “not enough time” for city dwellers and “too far to go” for rural Americans are most likely to be cited). These barriers, moreover, are rooted in larger socio-economic factors—poverty, segregation, and illiteracy among them—that arts organizations alone are powerless to change. But that doesn’t mean that growing numbers of them aren’t trying. In a mountain-to-Mohammed shift that has no precedent in American culture (outside of wartime mobilization, perhaps), heretofore mainstream arts organizations have turned to a variety of social-

¹ *The Challenge of Change: Papers and Presentations from the 15th National Conference* (New York: FEDAPT, 1987) 112.

service and community-outreach programs. In the process, the distance between the arts institution and the settlement house, once situated on opposite sides of the tracks and even further apart philosophically, has shrunk considerably. Both are determined to prove their usefulness. Arts organizations have undergone this transformation, moreover, not only as a means of reaching “those new audiences that we all talk about and crave,” as Lerner expressed it, but also, quite simply, as a means of survival.

“THE ARTS HAVE TO GO TO OTHER PLACES...”

Raising the issue of survival is not to suggest, as some critics have, that arts organizations have seized upon community activism for the same reason that Willie Sutton robbed banks—because that’s where the money is. It is undeniable that funders, in the private sector especially, are increasingly looking for social justification for the grants they make. Everyone—grantors and grantees alike—are interested in reaching more people. “A theme for the future is to really decentralize what we are doing,” explained Aldolfo Nodal, general manager of the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, at the American Canvas forum in his city, “...making sure that it goes out everywhere.... The arts have to go to other places.... We are starting to use some of the infrastructure that’s already there, like the library system, the educational system...the police department....” Such nonarts agencies (and there are many more that could be added) are increasingly seen as the natural allies of the nonprofit arts community in its efforts to counter the exclusivity that Duron, Lerner, and others have cited.

“I would argue,” writes William E. Strickland, Jr., executive director of the Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild in Pittsburgh, “that the arts are a legitimate province of the many; that the best chance we have to rebuild broad based support for the arts and address the substantial social ills confronting our nation, is to recognize the arts have everything to do with daily life and with all people in every community in our nation.” Ironically, the arts community could learn a lot in this regard, Strickland suggests, from some of the smaller cultural tributaries, indigenous and immigrant alike, that the mainstream institutions have tended to overlook in the past. “The traditions of Native American, Appalachian White, African American and Hispanic cultures,” he points out, “clearly illustrate the close relationship that culture plays in daily life. Craft, dancing, storytelling and song are intrinsic ele-

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ments of life within these ethnic groups. I believe the arts have a special opportunity to go beyond ‘art for arts sake’ and embrace the reality of art for life’s sake.”²

Clearly, much has changed in the ten years since Lerner, who now directs the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers, raised the issue. Many more arts organizations—looking and acting less like the traditional institutional structures to which Lerner was referring in 1986—have established roots that are beginning to spread more evenly throughout the communities in which they operate. They are accomplishing this in a number of ways—if not, in fact, by expanding their traditional audience base, then by inserting the arts into a variety of social and civic contexts well beyond the aesthetic realm to which the arts community has traditionally confined itself.

Perhaps it’s simply a matter of historical timing: social activism among artists ran high in the 1930s and the 1960s, when economic and political events, along with general social unrest, proved to be stimulating influences. And the 1990s, while not nearly as turbulent as these earlier periods, offer plenty of targets for the socially-minded artist, especially as the public sector retreats from its erstwhile social responsibilities, leaving in tatters that “safety net” that many Americans had once taken for granted. It’s too early to assess the new cultural activism of the 1990s (although that hasn’t prevented some critics from laying the decline of western civilization at the door of arts organizations that work with the poor and the afflicted), but the movement in general seems less political and more utilitarian than its earlier incarnations. Again, without doubting for an instant the sincerity of arts organizations that endeavor to contribute to the social welfare, there is also more than a trace of desperation—the recognition that ours is not a society that places a sufficiently high value on the arts to support them for their aesthetic contributions alone—in some of the arts activism of the 90s.

This new pragmatism accepts the need to “translate” the value of the arts into more general civic, social, and educational terms that will be more readily understood, by the general public and by their elected officials alike. That theme was especially prominent at the American Canvas forum in Rock Hill, which provided a handy lexicon for the artist or arts administrator desiring to speak the new

² Quoted in Grady Hillman, *Artists in the Community: Training Artists to Work in Alternative Settings* (Washington, DC, Americans for the Arts: 1996) 4.

language of arts activism in America. For Ben Boozer, executive director of the South Carolina Downtown Development Association, the key term was economic development, and the role that the arts play therein.

“The arts are like seeds planted in our community.
With minimal attention, the seeds will grow. But with
nurturing, they will grow and bear fruit for the whole
community.”

MICHAEL HIGHTOWER, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

The role that culture plays in the local economy is likely to become more prevalent as basic, bottom-line considerations continue to capture the nation’s imagination. Betty Jo Rhea, the mayor of Rock Hill, spoke more generally of the quality-of-life factor, and the contributions of the arts in making a city more attractive, both to the general public as well as to the business community. William Simms, president of Transamerica Reinsurance and former chairman of the Charlotte/Mecklenburg Arts & Science Council referred to as a city’s “feel-good element that makes people want to be there, makes businesses want to relocate there, encourages business to grow.” A number of panelists, meanwhile, stressed the educational aspects of the arts, both formally, as an essential ingredient in the basic K-12 curriculum, as well as more generally in the need to serve the cultural interests of all Americans. Kathy deNobriga, executive director of Alternate ROOTS, put the entire matter more bluntly: we need to find a way to translate what is “obvious to us—the importance of the arts—into terms that politicians will understand.”

“WE MUST FIND THE LINE ITEMS...THE DOLLAR SIGNS...”

Questions of vocabulary aside, the real issue, according to Syd Blackmarr, president of the Georgia Assembly of Community Arts Agencies, is as much where these conversations take place as it is precisely how they are couched. Long accustomed to

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talking among themselves, the arts community must now begin to carry its conversations beyond its own narrow borders, Blackmarr insisted, getting more involved in civic affairs, for example, by joining planning boards and other “tables of power.”

“It is time for those who know the power of the arts,” Blackmarr urged, “to become members of the school board, the city and county commission, the planning and zoning commission, the housing authority, the merchants association, the library board.” The point is not simply to underscore the relevance of the arts to these various civic concerns, but to tap the public funds that flow through these channels, some of which might be used for the arts. “We must insist that when roads, sewers, prisons, libraries and schools are planned and funded,” Blackmar explained, “that the arts are also planned and funded. We must find the line items, the budget categories, the dollar signs in all of these local sources; and then insist that the arts receive their fair share as a vital and essential element of commerce, education, community identity, cohesiveness and development. Traditional funding sources should encourage and reward unique collaborations between the arts and every possible community partnership which leads to growth of the true spirit of community.”

Mary Ann Mears, a Baltimore-based sculptor and a member of the Maryland State Arts Council, cited a number of agencies in the public sector—the Departments of Commerce, Housing and Urban Development, and the Small Business Administration in particular—that warranted input from artists. At the Columbus forum, Anna White of Young Audiences of Indiana had made very much the same point concerning the need to expand opportunities for the arts to play a larger role in community affairs. “Artists, arts administrators and those who support the arts can no longer exist in isolation,” White insisted. “It is time to bring to the table various segments of the community—religious, philanthropic, civic, business and the arts in a way that will utilize the creative thinking and energy that is the basis of all artistic endeavor, to join in the endeavor to reform our schools, to rejuvenate our neighborhoods and to re-instill in our people a sense of civic responsibility and pride.”

There was much talk at the several American Canvas meetings about the extent to which the arts community often operates in relative isolation, off in a corner somewhere, away from those tables where the key decisions are made. “Sometimes you can’t always expect the people to come to our table,” concluded choreographer Lula Washington at the Los Angeles forum. “We have to go to their table.”

"...THE FASTEST GROWING PROGRAM...OF LOCAL ARTS AGENCIES"

To the extent that this artist-as-citizen vision is being realized today, it's happening at the level of local government, especially within the universe of local arts agencies (LAAs), which are increasingly turning to the kind of "communitarian," civic concerns that lend themselves to collective action. A recent study of LAAs in the nation's 50 largest cities, in fact, reveals a universal acceptance of the premise that the arts can and must play a direct role in community affairs. "Using the arts to address community development issues," the report notes, "...continues to be the fastest growing program and service area of local arts agencies. 100 percent of LAAs in the 50 largest U.S. cities use the arts to address community development issues, an increase from 88 percent in 1994 and approximately 20 percent in 1986."³

In addition to the traditional activities undertaken by LAAs (cultural programming, grantmaking, services to artists and arts organizations, and community cultural planning), growing numbers of them, often in partnership with the arts organizations they support, are venturing into a broad range of community-based activities. In 1996, fully two-thirds of the 50 largest LAAs addressed five or more of the issues listed below:⁴

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ISSUES	% OF LAAS INVOLVED
Cultural/Racial Awareness	93%
Youth at Risk	88%
Economic Development	76%
Crime Prevention	63%
Illiteracy	56%
AIDS	51%
Environment	51%
Substance Abuse	46%
Housing	44%
Teen Pregnancy	41%
Homelessness	34%

³ National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies, "United States Urban Arts Federation: A Report on the Arts Councils in the 50 Largest U.S. Cities," June 1996, 7.

⁴ National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies, "United States Urban Arts Federation" 7.

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Equally important, LAAs are increasingly working with other community organizations and agencies in order to undertake these activities. All but one of the 50 largest LAAs reported involvement with one or more of the partnerships listed below:⁵

COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS	% OF LAAS INVOLVED
Neighborhood/community organizations	81%
School districts	76%
Parks and recreation department	73%
Convention or visitor's bureau	56%
Economic development department	51%
Chamber of Commerce	44%
Housing	39%
Social service departments	39%
Library	37%
Law enforcement	27%
Other	12%

Perhaps most notably for the nonprofit arts, a sector that must have despaired of ever again seeing economic charts that didn't slope downward, the record of local government support for the 50 largest LAAs is refreshingly upbeat—a total 35.3 increase since 1990. Although only a tiny fraction of the nearly four thousand LAAs across the land, those 50 largest LAAs represent a healthy slice—32 percent—of local arts funding overall. Equally important, while budgets elsewhere wither, support for the arts at the local level shows surprising strength.

Americans for the Arts (AFA), having changed its name from the National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies after merging with the American Council on the Arts last year, continues to lead the way in helping arts organizations integrate their activities into community affairs. AFA's Institute for Community Development and the Arts, now in its third year of operation, serves as a clearinghouse of information and ideas in this area, having examined more than 650 community arts programs nationwide in its first year of operation alone, with a goal of researching and documenting a thousand programs in the institute's "Arts Answers Database."

⁵ National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies, "United States Urban Arts Federation" 9.

In its commitment to sharing information as broadly as possible, the institute has published a number of important studies, including *Building America's Communities: A Compendium of Arts and Community Development Programs*; *Resource Development Handbook: Untapped Public Funding for the Arts*; *Working Relationships: The Arts, Education and Community Development*; *The Arts Build Communities: A Training Handbook on Arts Programming and Public Housing*; and *Artists in the Community: Training Artists to Work in Alternative Settings*. Collectively, these several studies represent an invaluable guide to the integration of the arts into civic and community affairs, at once tapping the expertise of those in the field who have long worked in these areas, as well as pointing the way to future directions that are likely to be increasingly important to the arts.

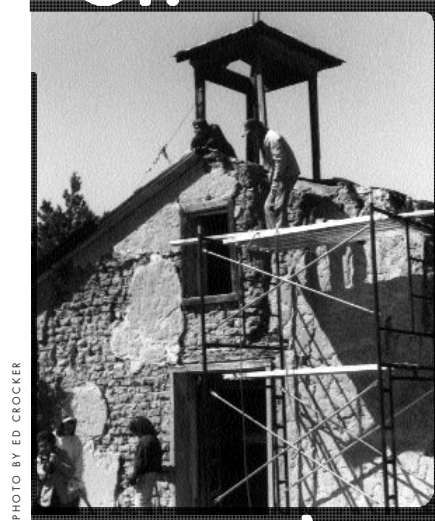
Among those new directions is an effort to reclaim and expand the shrinking “public space” for civic dialogue in this country, where a broad range of social and cultural issues—including the future of the nonprofit arts—can be discussed in an environment tainted neither by the hypocrisy of partisan politics nor the triviality of the mass media. Thus AFA is undertaking, in conjunction with the Ford Foundation, a project entitled “Expanding the Civic Role of the Arts: The Arts and Civic Dialogue.” Having assembled a diverse team of advisors and engaged the services of the noted theater performer Anna Deavere Smith, the project is off to a promising start.

“...THE SOURCE OF A POSITIVE, LASTING IMPRESSION...”

While there are no one-size-fits-all models for the integration of the arts into community life, two areas in particular—urban revitalization and cultural tourism—are especially popular right now, and both were the subject of much attention at the American Canvas forums. In many respects, of course, revitalization and tourism are simply two sides of the same coin: as cities become more “livable” and more attractive, they’ll prove increasingly alluring to tourists, whose expenditures, in turn, will help revitalize cities. As mutually reinforcing pieces of the same puzzle, moreover, both urban revitalization and cultural tourism invite the participation of arts organizations. The arts can come to these particular “tables,” in other words, confident that they won’t be turned away.

“The tourism industry and the arts community,” observed Ilene D. Kamsler of the Colorado Hotel and Lodging Association at the American Canvas forum in

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CORNERSTONES Community Partnership is an initiative in New Mexico that helps people plan and restore historic adobe churches, including this one in the town of Pajarito.

San Antonio, “share in a unique symbiotic relationship that unfortunately is not clearly recognized by either entity. As ‘cultural tourism’ becomes more institutionalized, tourist destinations rely on the promotion of indigenous culture and arts to attract visitors.” Speaking on behalf of the tourism industry at the Columbus forum, Michael J. Wilson, president of the Greater Cincinnati Convention and Visitors Bureau, offered some insight into the keenly competitive nature of his field, and the pivotal role the arts can play in that competition: “As one can well imagine, the marketing of destinations all across the country is an extremely competitive industry; and to remain successful, one must aggressively promote those features and attributes that create an advantage over the competition. To that extent, the arts represent a tremendous asset to these sales efforts, recognizing that all forms of art—creative, performing, musical, architectural, etcetera —contribute to the essence and unique-

ness of each of our communities. In many cases a destination's image, perception, or identity is largely based upon some aspect of the arts in that respective area."

"In cities where the arts flourish," Wilson continued, "there is a distinct understanding and appreciation of their contribution to the community's quality of life and economic vitality. This understanding fosters civic participation—not as an obligation, but as a matter of choice." As an example of this cultural and civic synergy, Wilson cited his own city of Cincinnati, where the new downtown Aronoff Center for the Arts "was completed as a result of investments made by the state of Ohio, local corporations, and area-wide individuals. This arts center has played an essential role in revitalizing much of our downtown area with investments in new businesses, increased spending, and steady activity that brings people back to the downtown for entertainment purposes."

A recent study conducted by the Travel Industry Association of America substantiates Wilson's views. As America's favorite tourist attractions, museums ranked third (behind shopping and outdoor activities) and cultural events ranked sixth (trailing beaches and parks), well ahead of sports, gambling, nightlife, and amusement parks.⁶ "To those of us directly involved in destination marketing," Wilson concluded, "it remains clear that the arts, and all they embody, are an essential ingredient in the mix of features that accentuate a community's uniqueness as a visitor destination. They are often the source of a positive, lasting impression that attracts visitors back to our cities time and time again."

But as the American Canvas participants were quick to point out, it is not simply the tourist population that benefits from vibrant cultural districts. The local residents are also well served by these developments, too, a fact that Victoria Hamilton, executive director of San Diego's Commission for Arts and Culture, underscored at the Los Angeles forum. "Local arts agencies have become community change agents," Hamilton asserted,

by using the arts as a community development tool. By partnering with artists and arts organizations local arts agencies have contributed to the vitality of a city. The development of these public/private partnerships have proven to be a cost-effective way to meet the challenges facing urban America on many levels. Investment in culture has brought tremendous

⁶ Edwin McDowell, "Tourists Respond To Lure of Culture," *New York Times* 24 Apr. 1997: D1.

economic benefit to American cities. There is no other city contracted service that collectively impacts business, tourism, the development of livable communities and the quality of life for citizens.

"...A SITUATION WHERE WE CANNOT SUCCEED"

That belief in the power of art to change communities is not one necessarily shared by the majority of Americans, however. Arts organizations cannot afford to assume that their community-development efforts will prove any more popular than, say, the arts events they produce, in which public non-participation rates in seven distinct areas range anywhere from 73 percent to 96 percent.⁷ In a 1994 survey of public confidence levels in various public and private institutions, "arts, culture, and humanities organizations" did not fare particularly well. Less than a third of those surveyed (29.3 percent) expressed either "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in these organizations, which finished thirteenth out of 23 institutional categories (thirteenth out of only 19 categories when those inveterate doormats, political and governmental organizations, are excluded from the list). Twelve percent of the people surveyed were simply unaware of what cultural organizations do, apparently, in either their arts- or their community-related activities.⁸

Nor can arts organizations afford to assume that in their new role as "catalysts for change and renewal," they'll be any more successful than the failed (and/or curtailed) public-sector social-service programs that saddled the arts—among other sectors—with the burden of becoming social problem-solvers in the first place. When the arts find themselves valued primarily for their purely utilitarian aspects, many observers become troubled.

"All of a sudden," as Ruby Lerner has expressed it, "the arts are valuable if they can solve social problems, and of course, God knows we couldn't solve social problems in the social arena, but now it's expected that in the cultural arena we'll be able to solve all these problems—'and, by the way, we won't be able to give you many resources to do this.' So, I think this is completely unrealistic, and it is setting us up to fail..." Some organizations, Lerner concedes, are well suited (if not equally well supported) to continue their work in the social arena, but she sees trouble ahead for other organizations, caught up in the communitarian spirit of the

⁷ *Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, 1982-1992.*

⁸ Virginia Hodgkinson, Murray Weitzman, and the Gallup Organization, Inc., *Giving & Volunteering in the United States: 1994 Edition* (Washington, DC: The Independent Sector, 1994).

times, or simply running out of other options, that turn to social work as a means of staying afloat. “The organizations that have a history of doing that work should be well supported,” she believes, “much better supported than they’ve been historically, to do that work. But I think that for organizations that have not been doing that work, to twist themselves around now into some shape so that they can do that work—maybe not even very well—is self-defeating. I have a lot of reservations about that... We’re putting ourselves into a situation where we cannot succeed.”

It would be a mistake to assume, however, (which Lerner would be the first to acknowledge), that the arts world cleaves neatly between those organizations that venture into the “real world,” determined to fight crime, poverty, racism, and substance abuse, and those that remain behind, tending solely to the vineyards of aesthetics. As Phyllis Brzozowska reminded us at the Columbus forum, sounding a theme that echoed through each of the subsequent regional forums, the connection between art and “everyday life” is a vital one: “...There are so many ways that art is in our everyday life,” explained Brzozowska, whose Dayton Stories Project aims to bring the art of storytelling to bear on local concerns. “It is not just on the concert stage and in the theater in a way that you have to pay money for, although those are wonderful. But it is when people connect with the art in their everyday life that they can really value the art we put up on the stage....”