

"I SHOT AN ARROW INTO THE AIR..."

THE ARTS AS WEAPONS AGAINST POVERTY AND CRIME

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Inventories are double-edged swords. One can use them to advertise accumulated accomplishments, or to point to shortcomings and needs. What follows is an example of the more jaundiced approach. It represents a sober look at survey findings which, otherwise regarded, are unquestionably encouraging.

On my desk I have information about various pioneering experiments in the use of the arts (and more specifically, of the performing arts) to promote social change. This survey highlights enterprises that are engaged in the resocialization of predelinquent youths, but it also covers many other applied concerns of the arts. While the coverage is wide, it is neither exhaustive nor systematic. This means that one cannot use the data to reach summary conclusions, nor to infer trends. What I can do is scrutinize some of the individual projects our pollsters have encountered. I can classify these into types, and I can raise some questions about motives, objective and methods.

It is a symptom of our times that we experiment with unfamiliar roles. So it is with the muse donning overalls to participate in social engineering; and so it is with the social scientist-turned-critic who may inspect the results of her labors.

Most artists are accustomed to dealing with critics. They have learned to graciously accept praise, and to discount negative reactions as mani-

festations of perversity or insensitivity. And why not? Art, after all, is judged in accord with esthetic criteria, and these criteria are notoriously subjective.

Unfortunately, when the artist ventures into non-artistic endeavors, he faces non-artistic assessments; these can be more troublesome than conventional criticism, because they may pretend a basis in objective reality. I hasten to stress that I make no such claims. My views are personal, possibly influenced by my scientific upbringing, but no more than that. I speak as a voice from the audience, not as an expert. What I shall say will often be mere expression of taste.

To emphasize my subjectivity, I shall use heavy strokes of the brush. I shall convert portraits into caricatures, and shall exaggerate the features I find revealing. I shall even construct my own interview transcripts when the real data carry insufficient punch for my purposes. The result? If you will, an example of artistic license invoked as a reply in kind.

PEARLS BEFORE THE POOR

Probably the oldest approach to the applied use of the performing arts has been that of organizing expeditions of cultural enrichment into materially underprivileged enclaves. Each generation has sent its crumbs of cake among those who had no bread. Such conscience-salving enterprises have traditionally taken place with little regard for appropriateness of content or effectiveness of form. The premise that what is good for the goose must be a revelation for the gander has been (and is) a conceit that dies hard. To this day, stilted parlor comedies and cacophonous chamber music are shipped into ghettos with a warm glow of appeased zeal. No information is sought or obtained about the predictably cool reception accorded these experiments; negative

audience reaction is ascribed the same relevance as that of client objections to life-saving vaccines or to soul-saving religions. The merits of cultural enrichment appear to self-styled intellectual elites self-evident and obvious.

There is no point in dealing with traditional anachronistic forms of the street theater or the school play. Our concern must instead focus on variations of the trend that have aims beyond enlightenment, and that make efforts to relate presentations to the needs and dispositions of their audiences.

The following such variations are cases in point:

1. There is a movement that might be labelled the "Theater of Nostalgia." In this type of enterprise, ghosts of the past are revived for immigrants or other thinly acculturated individuals, with the hope that culture-conflicts can thus be ameliorated. Presumably, new identities can be elaborated by emphasizing the worth of former lives and times, and combining them with the demands of a new environment. There is also some presumed benefit in the effort that is involved in organizing neighborhood performances, and in group reactions to them. This type of activity is seen as a precedent for other kinds of collective action, such as neighborhood improvement drives.

Clearly, no such assets can be claimed for theater that merely romantically revives tarnished memories. It may be touching to view a Puerto Rican audience with tears in its eyes recall the songs of its native land, but there are no constructive social change implications here. In fact, this type of experience may be destructive, because it may idealize the past to the detriment of effective adjustment to the present. There is possible value to such an enterprise if it is based on community participation, so that performers can feel that they have valuable skills and experiences

in their cultural background. But if the creativity emanates from non-native sources (for instance, if an Anglo-American playwright puts together a "Puerto Rican show" on the basis of his extended tourist experience) not even this residual benefit remains.

2. There is a type of theatrical group that one could call "Feedback Cycle Theater," which still remains to be fully developed. In this type of street theater, material is collected from the prospective audience. This material--which ideally comprises significant life experiences--is then transmuted into standard theatrical form, and is presented on the stage. The aim of such an effort is to help people perceive their own fate with more clarity, as well as to expose them (in the most dramatic fashion) to the process of theater. The latter objective sounds like traditional culture-foisting, but it is nothing of the kind, since only the format or medium is introduced as new. The plot, content and message come from the audience, and should prove familiar and effective, provided no distortion has been introduced in transit from life to stage. (This possibility must be excluded through research.)

3. We also see what we might label the "Exemplification Theater," where the identity and composition of the acting troupe is the factor that becomes crucial. The intention here is for the audience to be constructively affected by virtue of the fact that the actors are who they are, because they play the parts they do, and because they play them with each other. What goes on in the footlights is--presumably--a lesson of what is possible for those who watch in the shadow. In the glare of the light--it is argued--integration comes alive through ethnically mixed performances; the essential humanity of man emerges when roles are played with no regard for racial identity, and--in the simplest case--a dramatized success story can widen the horizon of the identifying spectator. The assumption is, for instance,

that a Negro actor portraying an established citizen can increase hope and ambition in the typical young Negro. In this form, the premise is probably unrealistic; role models can probably be effective motivators, but they must first be adopted. The make-belief suffers from the fact that it can remain just that--and it is of course most likely that it will.

In another context, however, the probability of identification can be increased, and its operation can be verified. This effort, however, takes us out of the realm of the "street theater" and into the area of the "problem solving theater."

REHEARSALS FOR CHANGE

In the no-man's lands bordering on the arts lie a variety of enterprises that are neither fish nor fowl, and that sometimes combine the liabilities of both. To illustrate, it may be helpful to examine an unfair hypothetical group interview excerpt:

I: Ladies and gentlemen, we are delighted that you were able to meet with us as a group, because we feel that you people are involved in parallel efforts. I wonder whether we could start by each introducing our parent organization. I represent Eavesdroppers, Inc., a research project. How about you, Mabel?

R1: I am a field representative for the Anti-Neurosis League. We put on plays that help people see how sick they may be. I know that sounds like we promote business for psychotherapists, but we don't. Although we encourage people to seek help, our main concern is that they view themselves accurately. They may then be able to work out their own problems, or...

R3: Commit suicide?

R1: I resent that. We believe that honest self-perceptions lead to improved adjustment. It sounds like you think people ought to remain sick.

- I: Could we defer detailed discussions? Let's hear about your group, Lefty.
- R2: Well, actually, I don't see that we have anything in common with Mabel's outfit. Ours is a play, which has been running off Broadway for a couple of months. It's called "My Years with the Queers" and deals with homosexuality and murder in prison. It's an autobiographical account. After each performance, we have a panel, and we discuss prison problems with the audience. The composition of our panels is actually cute. Last week, for instance, we had the local director of the FBI, and a fellow from the "Ten Most Wanted Criminals" list; the guy was arrested later in the evening, but we had a good session.
- I: Thanks, Lefty. How about you, Reverend Jones?
- R3: Our aim is to bring religion to life, if you know what I mean. We run bible study sessions in which we stage serious ethical dilemmas in improvisational skits. Yesterday, for instance, we did a thing called "Turning the Other Knife," a modern-day Sermon on the Mount, delivered by a Black Nationalist. After the skits, we sit down and draw out the theological implications.
- R4: That sounds like a gasser. By the way, my name is Miss Hackfleisch, and I'm a playwright. I have this touring play about the benefits of vocational training. We run it for groups of potential drop-outs, and we stop half-way through, and let them improvise the end. When they have all come on stage and told us how they'd quit school and become pimps, we run the rest of the show, showing them how that sort of thing leads to the gallows.
- R1: I think I'm beginning to see what we may all have in common. I suppose every one of us tries to involve audiences in the solution of some problem. And we all seem to use theater to dramatize ideas. Am I right?

Such are indeed the objectives shared by the group of enterprises we may label the "problem-solving theater." Also shared, however, are various common problems. For one, with uncontrolled audience response, feedback sessions often degenerate into adolescent giggling and labored circumlocutions. The audience may leave irritated or amused, but not really constructively concerned with the problems acted out for them. And even at best, no more can be expected than thoughtful commentary. One skit or

presentation--no matter how powerful--cannot occasion deeply motivated self-examinations or honest problem-solving efforts. It may function as a preliminary catalyst for change, and even this presupposes an unusually receptive audience and a presentation tailor-made for them.

This last remark is intended to imply that "problem solving" plays run the risk of being both bad theater and inappropriate change stimuli. It is doubtful that impact can be achieved by "canned" plots, which tend to be suffused with an air of implausibility. Unguided improvisations circumvent this objection, but they tend to be esthetically unsatisfying; further, they can easily focus on idiosyncratic or tangential concerns.

The "problem theater" does appear to be an ingenious advance over situations in which identification and self-revaluations are naively expected in passive audiences. But at the present stage of experimentation, the postulated improvements do not seem to be achieved. Deeper and more controlled audience involvement, both in production and feedback, is probably the most promising direction of innovation. And systematic evaluation of impact (both immediate and long-term) seems essential.

THE THEATER AS GADFLY

Another approach to the use of performing arts as instruments of change is the experimental social problems street theater. Here the aim is to promote psychological crises in audience members by bringing them face to face with perception-changing, complacency-shattering, self-examination-inducing material. To put the matter more accurately, the unsupported hope is that what the performers regard as thought-provoking should be perceived as such and positively reacted to. In reality, both of these objectives are difficult to realize, and they must circumvent powerful psychological obstacles.

To point up some of the problems, we may approach a hypothetical thespian enterprise, the Culture City Misantroupe. We shall assume an impolite interviewer, and pretend to record the following imaginary interview excerpt:

- I: Your idea, then is to attack the more complacent people in your audience?
- R: Not the people themselves, actually--only their ideas.
- I: Isn't that sort of thing a low-level, slimy, stupid and grossly unfair stunt to pull?
- R: Jesus, I knew this "study" was a farce! I'm leaving, man. Where is my hat?
- I: Hold on, I was honestly kidding! But as you can see, you yourself find it impossible to divorce an attack on your ideas from a personal affront. What makes you think your audience can draw a distinction of that kind?

The realization that an aggressive and direct ideological confrontation is usually not promotive of change, but that it instead tends to harden existing attitudes and to create personal resentment, is important in assessing the impact of a social problems-oriented experimental theater. This fact **is considered** in the operation of only some groups, which thereby increase their chance of being (at least) heard. One such group is the Guerrilla Theater of Los Angeles. This troupe aims at a catalytic role in relation to the attitudes and beliefs of its public. It avoids explicit and "angry" presentations which could produce resentment; its preferred format is to stage ambiguous "happenings." With these, however, the group encounters a new difficulty, which is related to the unstructured nature of the neutralized message. True, the audience is not antagonized, but to what extent is attention directed at relevant premises? To what extent has one avoided the danger of providing a field day for all manner of projections?

More important, it is almost inevitable that novelty of the format itself becomes an object of attention. The dominant impression left with the audience by unusual theater may be one of surprise, puzzlement and confusion, with the immediate reaction being of a "Gad, did you see that?" character, and the aftermath taking the form of an "I-saw-the-craziest-thing-the-other-day" recollection. The Guerrilla Theater provides testimony along this line. The spectators to a silent meditation staged by the group are reported to have "wondered what they were doing, asked why they were meditating, who they were, etc." There is an obvious effort by the audience to supply meaning to their experience, but no indication that the desired connotations are attached to the performance.

Whereas the artist (and only the artist) can judge the achievement of his artistic ends, he cannot (in his role as artist) support claims to non-artistic gains. Psychological impact is not a question of esthetics or quality of production, but a problem of audience perception, thinking, evaluation and response. To the extent to which a performing arts troupe admits to a desire to affect the values and beliefs of its audience, it implicitly raises questions about the extent to which it achieves this purpose--and these questions can only be answered through audience surveys. Moreover, such surveys are useless if conducted as a separate enterprise. If a troupe merely permits a survey of its audience, it in fact demands that energy and money be arbitrarily expended. What is required is the type of working relationship in which survey results are related to experimentation in performance, so that variables in the presentation can be systematically tracked to changes in audience reaction. Clearly, this type of relationship presupposes that survey results must be considered

in elaborating the form and content of artistic presentations.

But audience reaction is not the only research area in the social problems-oriented theater. Other facts must be obtained in response to questions posed within the theatrical enterprises themselves. To what extent do statements of principles deviate from the content of the messages that is in fact embodied in a group's productions? To what extent are self-descriptions accurate? To what extent does a group really know its audience? For illustration, we return to our imaginary interview:

- R: All of us in the Misantroupe are convinced of the need for basic changes in the structure of our soul-enslaving, money-grubbing society. The troupe's work is aimed at communicating the need for this revolution to our audience, and we want to do this job in the form of entertaining spectacles.
- I: You may not like this question, but would you say that your performances are tendentious or frankly propagandistic?
- R: Hoo, boy! There you go, being offensive again. The fact of the matter is--and I don't expect you to understand this--that we have no axe to grind. On the contrary, we attack sacred cows, and we undermine premises. We don't sell anything. In fact, it may be confusing to some people, because the apparent point of our message today invariably becomes the butt of our ridicule tomorrow.
- I: I infer from what you say that your group tries to critically examine every side of the social problems you deal with.
- R: Right you are. Now, for example, we are opposed to the war in Vietnam, but we have just put on a play in which we ridicule futile efforts by the institutionalized peace movement--we expose these people for the Establishment tools they have become.
- I: Do you have a play showing the possibility of a constructive negotiated settlement promoted by the current administration?
- R: Are you crazy? Now, look here...

The point is not, of course, that it is incumbent on a social problems-centered performing group to expound every position on every issue. What can be demanded of it is that it have an accurate conception of where it stands, and where its audience stands. It may be expected to try to define the range within which audience response and dialogue is possible. As long as some premises are presented as given and guiding, these must be frankly faced and exposed to view. If this is not done, a presumed confrontation can become a pep rally, and an allegedly searching inquiry can degenerate into a competition of dogmas. No change takes place where fellow-believers are fortified and the remainder of the audience reacts to the message as alien.

There is also little hope of impact when the audience is either irrelevant, or misclassified. Pungent critiques may be levelled at amused children, or at light-headed tourists out for a somnolient Sunday stroll in the sun. On the other hand, primitive morality plays can be wasted on sophisticated professionals, who are merely interested in what appears to them immaturely off-beat. On the whole, neither a conception of the public as a massed army of brainwashed bourgeois, nor as a select handful with wondrous insight and exquisite sensitivity (the most cherished positive and negative caricatures of audiences) permit meaningful and realistic levels of discourse.

THE PROFESSIONAL NEGRO AND THE NEGRO PROFESSIONAL

Not all Negro performing arts groups are engaged in producing change. To argue that a theatrical enterprise is in the social change business because it is composed of Negroes is equivalent to asserting that acting done by children is promotive of youth, that women in the theater nurture feminism, or that every all-White company represents a reactionary effort by the ruling oligarchy to perpetuate itself.

To qualify for inclusion in the social change movement, a group must aim at audience impact or at transformation of individual participants. And it must do so beyond the base level of developing actors or offering routine theatrical experiences to conventional audiences.

Two types of Negro enterprises represent a more or less radical departure from this common base. The more moderate of the two schools embodies the effort to promote a New Negro Image. This type of activity sometimes suffers from the fact that there is no clear image of the Image involved: different playwrights working for the same company may have different conceptions of the New Negro, and these differences may be appreciable. The question is sometimes resolved by arguing that every representation of Negroes as whole individuals (as opposed to stereotypes) accomplishes the function. And so it may--although the proof of the pudding requires audience reaction studies. We already know that prejudiced individuals in the laboratory show themselves impervious to attack by case study (they are every willing to grant exceptions); we also have reason to suspect that self-stereotyping among Negroes needs a stronger antidote than positive characterizations of individual Negroes on the stage. And in all fairness, we must ask ourselves whether we have a clear enough conception of the nature of the enemy. It seems as doubtful that the public's view of the Negro is conditioned by "Gone With the Wind" as it is to assume that the contemporary Indian is feared as a potential scalper. And if the problem lies in the absence of the Negro from mass media presentations (as has been suggested), to what extent can this omission be countered by presenting Negro actors in all-Negro settings? Would this sort of presentation not act (by virtue of its compartmentalization) as a psychological reinforcer of the status quo? Whatever the situation, it seems plausible to assume that

the moderate Negro theater--perhaps more than other performing arts change-oriented ventures--stands in need of partnership with social change research, to aid in defining its function and assessing its impact.

The more militant version of Negro social change-related theater aims at instilling anti-White sentiment and at promoting nationalist concerns among Negroes. The Black House, for instance, declares that "our purpose is to revolutionize the national consciousness of our people, the 22-million so-called American Negroes--original owners of the planet earth. We want self-knowledge, self-defense, and self-government--by any means necessary." The repertory company defines its social context as "the white racist government of America" which is "morally, mentally, physically, financially" non-supportive. The Black House statement even declares "our independence from the United States of America." In this connection, the organization's goal is put forward as "the national liberation of our people from the rule of the White Devils."

It seems clear that no basis for productive dialogue exists between this type of enterprise and a non-Negro audience. The social change function must lie in the relationship between such groups and Negro participants or Negro audiences. The object of the effort would be to promote and sustain feelings of alienation in these client populations. This aim can be pursued in both retrospective and prospective terms:

- I: Your group, Blackwash Enterprises, draws on the work of several playwrights, doesn't it?
- R: Yes, Whitey. As you might gather, their views differ to some extent. Our moderate wing, for instance, advocates setting up an independent Black state, not necessarily calling for any harm to you people. I don't belong to that wing.
- I: Yes. Now, what would one of your typical productions be about? What sort of plays do you put on?
- R: We have a variety of formats. One of our biggest hits, for instance, was a musical about the Watts revolution,

called "Firedance." We are currently producing a spectacular, which is a sort of history of the Afro-American. It starts out on a slave ship, with people being tortured and starved to death, goes through a couple of scenes with slave auctions and lynchings, and works up to the usual rat-infested, slumroom scene. It ends with a look into the future--white pullman porters, Black cops beating up white kids, white unemployment in Black industries--that sort of thing. Our audience loves it.

I: What would you say is the message they get out of it?

R: They'll see Whitey for what he is--a murdering, lying, inferior animal. And they'll learn to see themselves accurately. In other words, they'll know that the Black man is brave, gifted and noble, and that he is destined to rule the world.

This type of message is usually sufficiently explicit so that its comprehension by the audience constitutes no problem. Questions do arise, however, about what audiences accept and adopt, and what they do about it. We can speculate that at least one prevalent reaction to Black Theater performances would be catharsis, since the productions involved are a species of morality play, in which the audience can identify with forces of obvious merit, arrayed against obvious evil. This type of experience is clearly productive of enhanced well-being, although it is not necessarily conducive to a more accurate perception of complex social realities.

Without arguing the merits of the Black Theater's indictment of white society or of the revolutionary formula proposed for coping with the diagnosed condition, it must be noted that the structure of the message leaves little room for reactions other than endorsement or rejection. Every member of the audience is defined as a "brother," and if he does not accept all the connotations of this term, he must conceive of himself as a traitor to his people and as an agent of the opposition. It would be expected, as a result, that the more militant members of the audience would gain in resolu-

tion (as well as in their tendency to adhere in closed-minded fashion to simplistic premises), whereas other segments of the group would have to see themselves rejected. This would be the case because the premises of their reality worlds would not be accommodated in the dichotomous universe of Black separatism or supremacy.

Be that as it may, there is certainly a clear case against outside support of Black Theater ventures. This holds not so much because the Black Theater advocates biting the hand that could feed it, but because the sectarian nature of the enterprise aims at a rigid prespecification and circumscription of perspective, and at an all-or-none conception of change. This type of theater is undesirable because it molds minds instead of permitting them to participate and explore; because it capitalizes on despair to create an illusion, and because it claims exclusive legitimacy for arbitrary premises; because it breeds contempt for other avenues of change; because it imposes caricatures that impede realistic appraisal and responsive action. It must ultimately be adjudged self-defeating, because it can modify the self-concept and view of destiny of its audience in a direction that ultimately leads to profound disillusionment in a non-cooperative, disconfirming world.

GUESTS ON MOUNT OLYMPUS

Another enterprise of dubious import is the self-styled artistic venture which accepts culturally underprivileged persons as spectators into a setting in which the participants uncompromisingly pursue "artistic excellence," to the exclusion of involvement by non-initiated outsiders. This type of relationship usually takes the following form:

- I: Your group, the Olympus Guild, has actually been in existence for some time, hasn't it?
- R: Yes, it has, boy. We were constituted several years ago as a workshop in which established young artists could experiment creatively with new forms of artistic expression. Recently we were fortunate to receive a federal subsidy, in return for which our participating artists conduct classes of the kind you are interested in.
- I: This money pays for work with underprivileged youngsters?
- R: That isn't exactly the way we look at it. We see the money as a means of putting our artists on salary, so that they can do creative work full time. Then, without compromising our primary purpose, we let young people from the community explore our various media.
- I: How are these young people involved with you?
- R: Well, we run classes, let them watch our experimental theater, and use clay in our pottery shop. We explain electronic music to them, and stuff like that.
- I: Are you concerned with developing these young people as artists?
- R: In exceptional cases. Remember that our primary goal is...
- I: Artistic excellence. Which makes me curious as to how you justify support by agencies interested in social change?
- R: I don't like the way you put that, young man. We feel that the government can do nothing wiser than subsidize creativity. And we don't think that art can develop with strings attached--such as social work goals, or philistine demands for some sort of production. Our artists won't submit to that sort of thing.

What is not obvious is that the refusal to "submit" is not a corollary of the artistic enterprise, but an expression of unwillingness to compromise self-centered concerns by combining them with social involvement. Rubrics like "censorship", "strings" and "outside demands" are meaningless when they are used to refer to services that are openly contracted for. It

sounds just as hollow to claim "strings" in this context as for a professor to claim that his scholarship is compromised by the obligation to teach, or for a reporter to declare himself a literary prostitute because he labors to transmit information to the public.

True, the social change enterprise as such is not an artistic enterprise; it lies, rather, in the realm of human relations. Social change is initiated through meaningful human contacts, and the arts are merely one vehicle or one set of content transmitted in such contact. But the production of content is not dependent on social insularity. Moreover, the producer's relationship to objects he produces (or to the process of production) is not intrinsically compromised because he cultivates relationships to significant persons--such as disadvantaged youth, social workers, government agencies, or audiences. To postulate this type of contamination is to make an autobiographical statement depicting specialization, vulnerability, or bankruptcy.

Moreover, it is imperative that semantic slights of hand not be invoked in connection with the working relationship between sponsors and clients. A government agency is not a Medici, donating money for individual self-development; it is, rather, an organization with a prescribed function and mission, which usually has to do with the clientele reached by subsidized services. Agencies not only have the right but the obligation to insist that their funds be used for the function to which they are assigned. To perceive this interest as a form of censorship is legitimate only if monitoring takes place in excess; if objection occurs in principle, it represents a confession of disinterest or impotence, and therefore justifies the withdrawal of support.

LIFE, THE LABORATORY

If social psychologists were limited to enunciating one principle to guide would-be social changers, the formula would read, "involve your clients." This dictum derives from both research and thought. In research, diverse manipulations have taught us that even encrusted and cherished attitudes can be modified, provided that the persons who hold them learn through successes and failures that old premises hamper them while new assumptions help create a more satisfying life.

Psychological theory has come face to face with the model of the rational man. We have rediscovered the fact that the average person resents and resists manipulation, and that he prides himself in his humble role as the master of his own fate. We have concluded that a person tends to change when he resolves that he should, and after he decides on the results he wants to achieve. We find that other people proceed in accord with our prescriptions only if they are impelled to do so by their own objectives and if they are so guided by their own perspectives on life.

From this picture, we do not conclude that we must stand by and wait until life presents other people with chance demonstrations of their potential. We know that even if horses cannot be made to drink, much can be achieved by bringing them to water, or--even better--carrying water to them. Life can be arranged to furnish increased opportunities for discovery and enticements to exploration.

But what bearing does this poetic statement have on a survey of the performing arts? A great deal, once we recall that nowhere other than in the arts do we have a sandbox replication of life, an opportunity to create meaningful and constructive life experiences in effigy. But this result is not automatic. If the object of our interventions is to furnish "life" ex-

periences, the accent must be on "living." The person to be changed must not be merely involved as a spectator, but as a fully participating human being--in the same sense in which he has been involved in those situations that have shaped the values, attitudes and habits that we wish to discourage or extinguish.

However, the fact of participation is not enough; it only insures contact and does not guarantee constructive contact, or socially relevant contact, or personally enriching contact. When we find a performing arts venture in which clients creatively participate, we must study it with special care, because it is in this type of enterprise that potential impact can be expected, and because it is the nature of this impact that marks the difference between progress, regress and waste.

THE ASPHALT STAGE

The greatest possible participation in the performing arts is found in those rare instances in which the arts are by-products of social movements--in which art originates spontaneously with groups that strive to solve social problems. Here the arts can express deeply felt aspirations; they can provide channels for articulation of objectives, and they can communicate the purposes and premises of otherwise invisible people to an otherwise unconcerned public.

This is almost the purest utilization of the arts in the service of social change. The arts here function not only to promote change, but to express and embody it. A work of art can become an allegorical summary of a trend; it can become a myth of injustice and remedy. The artist responds to a deficit in our society; he can use art to direct attention to the problem, and to prescribe and rehearse solutions to it. Moreover,

these solutions stand a better chance of being valid and attractive than those we might propose, because they are compatible with the assumptions of the people most immediately involved in their implementation.

Such is largely the case with El Teatro Campesino, for instance. This theatrical group operated as an organ of the Delano grape strike, which was a social movement of Mexican-American migratory workers. The actors were all farm workers, and their material mirrored--both in form and content--the concerns of their group; it vividly depicted its difficulties and its urgent desire for a better life. Audiences seemed drawn into productions because they could closely identify with the message. The theater acted as an incentive to membership, and as an entertaining and flexible expression of the concerns of those who were already members. El Teatro Campesino also proved successful in conveying the aims of the movement to outsiders--again, by virtue of the plausibly authentic form of its presentation, reinforced by the fact that the actors were the very persons whose lives were being staged.

But not every artistic enterprise originating with indigenous groups has these same attributes. Some groups, for instance, are relatively unconcerned with solving social problems. Their activities take the form of discharging accumulated aggression or expressing hatred. If theater becomes a vehicle for such feelings, audiences are drawn into an almost perversely sadistic trap, in which they pay to see themselves castigated. Social change is retarded rather than facilitated. This occurs, for instance, when actors derive satisfaction because they can insult audiences whom they despise, and when they do not intend positive ulterior results.

It is of course a welcome sight to view members of a Negro fighting gang participate in filming or theatrical productions in lieu of rumbles. However, when the content and intent of such efforts remains antisocial, it is difficult to argue that the magnitude of the resocialization is sufficient to merit support. This is particularly true when statements descriptive of artistic objectives make it obvious that art is here regarded as an effective tactical weapon, operating in the service of bigger and better gang activity.

A few inconsequential transpositions in such statements bring us to a hypothetical interview in a suburban setting. Our subject is the notorious "Five Fingers" Caruso, at one time heavily involved in organized crime, and now manager of the Syndicate Playhouse:

- R: ...You can take off his blindfold now. He don't know where he is.
- I: Thank you. Now, may I ask a couple of questions about your group, the Mafia Players?
- R: Shoot, if you'll pardon a family joke.
- I: Yes. First, can you tell me how your parent organization became interested in the theater?
- R: Frankly, fella, the original reason was loot, moola, if you know what I mean. We thought a play might be a way to raise funds--and boy, were we right! You should see the yokels fall over themselves to see our boys on stage. We are booked solid every night for the next two months.
- I: That's really great. You sound so happy about it, I'd suspect you have reasons other than money.
- R: You're a smart boy, you know that? We could use you. But you're right, money is the least of it. In fact, I sometimes suspect we'd keep on even if we ran in the red. For one, this is a great way to interpret Sicilian culture to the American people. We like to tell it like it is. You know, about unemployment, discrimination, and whatnot.

T: One of your associates on the way over said that your aim is to secure Sicilian Power. What did he mean by that?

R: I'll deal with that boy later! On the other hand, I suppose it's no secret that we expect nothing but trouble from the corrupt American power structure, so we have decided to advance the goals of our people by pooling resources and organizing. You'll note that our play is called "The Coming Sicilian Revolt." Prophetic, if you know what I mean.

I: Some people might say it sounds ominous.

R: Watch it, bambino! Anyhow, you'll note that since we started our playhouse, we have been doing a great job discouraging gangland killings, which is why we are funded by the Department of Justice. Of course, we aren't doing it for them. We have decided that all this violence is distracting. We need to keep our eyes on the meatball, if you know what I mean. And that's what our play is all about.

PARTNERS IN CREATION

The claim that one can train lions is more ambitious than the advertised ability to affect the behavior of animals in general. Similarly, when a performing arts group tells us that it can resocialize delinquents or pre-delinquents, this is a more impressive claim than that of the group which pretends some less specific impact on society. Greater differentiation of the objective increases its vulnerability. The tests of survival become more stringent, and the successes divide more sharply from the failures.

One way in which the pretense to being a resocializing agent can become ludicrous is if the clients who are serviced never do appear on delinquency prediction tables. We can tell nothing about a group surrounding itself with innocuous (if confused) middle class youths, or with herds of nursery school children. The population invited into the arts must qualify on personality or demographic indices as blatant candidates for a life in prison. We set up this requirement, because attitudes and dispositions that lead to criminality also tend to be involved (as obstacles)

in the task of resocialization. A person who may achieve immediate rapport with the sons of the wealthy, may stand a good chance of being lynched by predelinquent adolescents.

The results of resocialization efforts must also specifically include changes in personal orientation, although it would be tempting to chalk up as successes any individuals temporarily kept off the streets. No matter how deep a client's involvement in artistic activity, there is no necessary impact. We can record clear instances of dedicated thespians who head out of the theater and proceed to participate in a mugging on the first old lady in sight. Such is not the stuff success is made of.

Even granted such reservations, there are several enterprises that can present evidence of great potential in the area of resocialization. These organizations, by and large, share the following characteristics:

First (and most importantly) these organizations offer genuine dedicated participation in creative artistic achievement. Their clients are usually provided with technical instruction designed to give them the tools of the artistic trade. They are also slowly and seductively involved (by such means as improvisational games) into a sense of their own potential as creative individuals. They learn that they are able to use some medium to give expression to original ideas. They are then permitted a free hand in creating some product of their own design, with whatever assistance they spontaneously request. This type of strategy seems relevant in that it leads to an enhancement of self-esteem, creates a sense of purpose, and brings an increased awareness of a capacity for sustained constructive effort. It can incidentally also lead to a decrease in the tendency to stereotype any and all adults as repressive authoritarian antagonists.

Second, the successful resocialization experiment tends to include exercises in cooperation and communal activity. Typically, youthful

clients are given responsibility for the organization of their group, including the scheduling of activities and the handling of deviations from group rules. Team projects emphasize shared purpose and divided effort. Arguments and discussions draw attention to inter-personal reactions, increase sensitivity to the needs of others, and teach the desirability of constructive compromise. The effect of this kind of strategy is especially striking when clients are adolescents, who are in any case strongly attuned to peer opinion and influence.

Third, any successful socialization experiment in the arts tends to include the opportunity to perform, or to bring artistic products to the public. The client-artist is typically called upon to explain his efforts to people, and he is faced with many reactions, which usually range from strong criticism to strong acclaim. These experiences lead to more accurate and balanced self-appraisals, to increased self-confidence, to wider social horizons, and to a more positive Weltanschauung.

Last, one finds that successful pioneering activities in the arts tend to center around a leader of stature, with certain reliably charismatic qualities. An outstandingly competent artist and a wise, warm human being typically provides a model of the kind that is especially important to young people who lack any experience with significant adults. Identification with such a model can breed a desire for excellence, an appreciation of rectitude in conduct, and a striving for mutuality in love.

JUNIOR PARTNERSHIPS, ETC.

The criteria for success in delinquency resocialization are sufficiently stringent to exclude a variety of well-intentioned approximations. We could review these abortive partial efforts, but this is unnecessary because they

represent identifiable departures from the picture of full and meaningful participation we have outlined.

Two hypothetical interview excerpts may suffice to convey the flavor of the sort of information one tends to obtain from more or less obvious failures in this area:

- I: What can you tell me about the Yahoo Act involvement in the performing arts?
- R: Ours is a large scale effort to try to get some work motivation into underprivileged kids. We run workshops in filming, film strip production, painting, pottery, theater, ballet, figure skating, bookbinding, fingerpainting, cutting and pasting, cartooning, landscape architecture, magic, circus barking...
- I: May I interrupt at this point? You mentioned work motivation, and this sounds like the sort of thing we are interested in.
- R: Well, sir, we pay our youths to come in and work, and some of them actually do. We try very hard with the others, but it's a tough haul.
- I: I suppose it must be. Can you tell me more about your art-related workshops? What do you do in them?
- R: Well, we figured the kids might as well be useful. So we have them do stuff for which our organization has some need. Like, you are using an ashtray there that was made by our pottery kids. And that pillow you are sitting on comes from our creative needle work class. All the literature I just gave you was designed and printed...
- I: Yes, but about the procedure--how are these workshops run?
- R: I wish you'd stop interrupting me, buster, I've a tough enough time remembering my script as it is. Now, if I understand your question, the answer is simple: We give our foreman a project. He is a professional, and knows exactly what needs to be done. So he plots it out, and divides the tasks, and tells the kids what to do. Some of them do it, and we figure this puts them in line for the sort of experience they'll have some day out there on the job.

This type of enterprise offers no task involvement, no creative outlet, no inter-personal experience of consequence, no role models, no responsibility, no source of self-esteem, and no real opportunity. It is able to secure the physical presence of clients only by means of external incentives; it permits clients who already possess stable habits to display them, but it makes no impact on others. Such a group is, in the last analysis, only a step above the bottom of the success scale, typified by the following:

R: Actually, friend, you came to the wrong outfit. It's true we have been operating here for some time, but there isn't much doing.

I: You mean, you have no staff or funds?

R: Naw, fellow, we got staff to burn. Right now I have two dance teachers, two directors and three painters standing out there waiting for someone to come in off the street. In the meantime, they are teaching each other, and that gets boring.

I: What do you think is the problem here?

R: I haven't the foggiest idea, really. We have gotten some little girls in, but we are interested in hard core delinquent boys, and they don't show up. A couple of weeks ago, I had some cops drag in a couple of dozen, and here they sat through the classes and heckled, but they never came back. I'm kind of glad, in a way, because two of my teachers got sort of nervous there.

This sort of saga is the least publicized and most instructive of the various types of accounts we have the opportunity to review. Other experiments hold no more appeal; however, they survive; other ventures make no more impact; but they disguise the fact. The honest failure is revealing, because it does not possess the ingenuity to deal with quasi-clients; it does not draw on the resources to purchase mock-allegiance, and it does not invoke substitute-objectives in support of its substitute-claims. In short, here is the prototype of the impotence that the typical performing arts project does its level best to disguise.