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CULTURE-CONSCIOUSNESS:  
UNDERSTANDING THE ARTS OF OTHER CULTURES\*

Phase I: Who?

"Who is it that can tell me who I am?", cries King Lear.

The character in Samuel Beckett's play, Not I, of whom it is significant that only her mouth can be seen, recounts a stream of incidents which have occurred to her during her life. She appears to be engaged in a desperate but vain search for the essence of what she is. Yet each of the incidents could have failed to happen to her, or it might have happened differently. This seems to leave her with nothing essential, and therefore she despairs that she has no real identity. Hence the title of the play, Not I, for she finds it meaningless and profoundly disturbing to refer to herself in the first person. Francis Bacon is, I think, making a similar point in his painting An Accident of Being.

Beckett's character, by taking each characteristic separately, is led to a dualist view of the mind or self as distinct from the body and all that it does and happens to it. Descartes, the still very influential father of dualism, regarded the thinking self as quite distinct from any physical attribute. In that case the self becomes an extensionless point. As Beckett's character shows, it is extensionless because, on a dualist view, it is always possible to imagine the absence of any characteristic ascribed to the self, without any change in that essential self.

If none of the incidents or attributes which is or could be mentioned by Beckett's character applied to her, there could be no sense to the notion of her identity. With all these stripped away, nothing would be left. Yet it does not follow that if each aspect could have been different every aspect could have been different. Moreover, this is not simply a quantitative matter. Of some aspects it may be impossible to make sense of the supposition that one could be the same person without them. Of central significance are the language and cultural practices of the society in which one is brought up. For example, it would be difficult to make sense of the supposition that 'I' might be the same 'I' if I had been brought up in 7th century Mongolia.

Clearly the notion of a self which is logically unrelated to the actions, characteristics and environmental influences which can be

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ascribed to one, is misconceived. King Lear, having abdicated his throne, and with it all the appurtenances of pomp, power and deference paid to him, which substantially gave his sense of identity, is now treated with an indifference and discourtesy which radically disturbs his conception of himself. Hence his cry of confused anger, frustration and alarm: "Who is that can tell me who I am?"

The central point here is that the identity of a human being, and the character of his thoughts and feelings, cannot intelligibly be regarded as independent of his culture, by which I mean that inextricable amalgam of language, art forms, and other practices of his society. On the contrary, one's identity, and the character of one's mental experiences are substantially a construct out of those social practices.

### Phase 2: Autonomy

It is central to my case that the arts are inextricably bound up with the whole way of life of a society. Yet the prevalent tendency, among artists, arts educators, and philosophers of the arts, is to contend or imply that the arts are devalued if they are not regarded as completely autonomous. Oscar Wilde expresses this kind of view:

As long as a thing ... affects us in any way, either for pain or for pleasure, or appeals strongly to our sympathies, or is a vital part of the environment in which we live, it is outside the proper sphere of art. For to art's subject matter we should be more or less indifferent.

He concludes from such consideration that : "All art is quite useless".

Peter Brooke, the theatre director, has said: "Culture has never done anyone any good whatsoever", and "No work of art has ever made a better man". A similar conception seems to be implicit in Hirst's contention that 'the purpose of art is to aestheticise people'. A 'distinguished educational pundit' is quoted in The Observer (24 Jan. 1982) as saying: "The arts are marvellous, but moral they are not". Stravinsky contended that music by its very nature is incapable of expressing anything -- it is like sculpture cast in bronze (which of course, begs questions about the expressive possibilities of sculpture cast in bronze).

This contention that the arts are self-contained, and incapable of expressing anything about life outside the arts, is odd. It is reported that during the occupation of France in the last war, a German officer visited Picasso in Paris. Impressed by Guernica, which, of course, Picasso had painted as an expression of his revulsion at the bombing of the little Spanish town of that name by the German fascists, the officer pointed to the painting and asked: "Did you do that?". To which Picasso replied: "No, you did".

On reflection, it is difficult to make sense of autonomism. If the autonomist denies the relevance to the work of art of anything else in the life of society, his thesis can easily be shown to be incoherent. For example, it is absurd to suggest that knowledge of the French language is irrelevant to appreciating the meaning of Verlaine's poetry. Very often, at least, to understand works of art requires some comprehension of the socio-historical context in which they were created. For example, Chaucer's reference to the monk in the Prologue as "a manly man to been an abbot able" could not be recognised as satirical without some conception of the context of contemporary religious life.

This point about language is of enormous significance, since to understand a language requires an understanding of social context. In brief, to understand a poem is to understand a language, which is to understand a culture.

Equally, the meaning of at least very many non-verbal works of art depends upon social context to such an extent that it is unintelligible to regard such cultural setting as 'external'. For example, Picasso frequently includes hints of bull-fights, and the effect of surrealist painting, such as that of Magritte and Dali, relies upon the recognition of strident juxtaposition of objects in bizarre contexts, and upon disturbing perspectives and situations. Kinetic art often employs illusion, and surprises the spectator because of the expectations he brings to it.

Some pieces of music incorporate allusions to others, or to birdsong, or to the noise of battle. In some jazz improvisations the soloist inserts snatches of melodies with certain associations -- often for humorous effect. The humour obviously could not be understood by anyone unacquainted with the melodies. Much Indian classical dance is largely an expression of certain religious or spiritual conceptions of life. Balinese dance, I gather, almost is a way of life. Martha Graham's Appalachian Spring, and Robert Cohan's Cell are two of the many obvious examples of ways in which dance in Western society relates to its social context. There are numerous other examples of ways in which artistic meaning is inseparable from cultural context.

Consequently, it is difficult to understand what the autonomist is claiming. His thesis is as unclear or incoherent as the suggestion that one should consider the meaning of a sentence in isolation from the rest of language and life.

### Phase 3: Translation?

This central point about the relation to a whole cultural setting raises a question of profound significance which is commonly overlooked and oversimplified, sometimes with damaging consequences. The question may

be starkly posed by asking to what extent it may be justified to refer to the activities of other cultures as art. On a recent visit to Australia I was taken deep into the bush to see what is called the 'Art Gallery' of aboriginal rock painting. It was of great interest, but could what I saw legitimately be called 'art'? There is obviously some overlap with what we call 'art', but the differences may have been so great that it may be highly misleading to use the same term. We should need to understand the place of that activity in that aboriginal society in order to determine to what extent it could legitimately be called 'art'. Given the age of these coloured marks, and the considerable differences from our society, it is highly questionable whether what I saw on the rock can be regarded unambiguously as art.

A friend in a dance department of an American university is an anthropologist not, she insists, of dance, but of human movement. What she understands as dance is largely derived from Western culture. On encountering an activity in a different culture which superficially resembled dance in ours, one would need carefully to investigate the language and social practices of that society before one could adequately consider whether 'dance' were an appropriate term for it.

Notoriously, the concepts of one culture have been carelessly applied to others. Because of a failure to try to understand the different criteria of other societies there has been a tendency to depreciate them. Wittgenstein remarked that Fraser's anthropological explanations were cruder and more primitive than the societies he called crude and primitive. And Freud said that it was unnecessary to examine other cultures, since to understand them one needed only to consider the behaviour of young children in Western society.

That kind of arrogant oversimplicity is not so common, now, although it persists in some quarters. But a different manifestation of it is quite common. For example, after speaking on a similar topic at a recent conference, I was approached by a community arts officer in a multicultural inner London area, who dismissed this philosophical issue as irrelevant. There is, she peremptorily asserted, no problem in recognising the arts of other cultures -- one can easily see that there are different forms of art, dance, drama, etc. She could see no problem about the aboriginal art gallery. Of course it is art, she asserted.

With respect, she seemed to me a classic example of the laziness and irresponsibility of dogmatic certainty. The irony was that she felt that I was in some way devaluing or patronising the activities of other cultures in being so hesitant about referring to them as art. Yet it was she who was revealing a lack of respect for those cultures. For she is in fact carelessly imposing, in a myopic and chauvinistic way, our concepts on the activities of other cultures, without taking the trouble to consider to what extent this is justified. Ironically, it is she who is arrogant and patronising, in assuming that one is in some way elevating the activities of other cultures by regarding them as art. For this is to impose our concepts and values on a different culture.

I began this phase of my argument by saying that such oversimple imposition of alien values can have damaging consequences. Let me illustrate. Balinese dance is, in crucial respects, very different from Western dance. That situation, regrettably, may be changing. A former Deputy Director of UNESCO told me of the pride of a Balinese Minister of Culture at the improved artistic standards as a result of the influx of Western visitors, who enthusiastically applaud the dancers, and request repeat performances of parts of the dance they particularly enjoy. But traditional Balinese dance is not applauded, and it is not put on in performances. It has, I am told, no recognisable beginning and end. People join in, and drop out for a rest. The dances are, or were, central to a whole way of life. One regards with horror the destruction implied in this notion of "improved artistic standards".

The crucial point is that one should be very careful not to assume that cultural practices which bear some immediate resemblance to practices in our culture are the same, and can have the same values applied to them.

At the recent Olympic Games Congress I was engaged in a symposium with an American professor who, as a counter-example to my argument that sport is not art, appealed to a martial art such as classical Judo. But that we call it a martial art does not show that it is an art form in the sense required. Worse, for its status as a supposed counter-example, it is questionable whether classical Judo can be regarded as a sport. Traditionally Judo is much more deeply embedded into Japanese culture than are sporting activities in ours. It is significant that, by contrast with sports, those who want to gain a deep understanding of classical Judo often feel impelled to learn Japanese, and to spend some time in Japan to appreciate Judo's place in the life of society.

This is not to suggest that sports are autonomous. But they are not as deeply imbedded into a culture as its art forms. For example, games such as rugby, field hockey, tennis and soccer, which originated in Britain, have been adopted relatively easily and successfully by widely disparate cultures. Indeed, too successfully for our comfort, since France beats us at rugby, India beats us at field hockey, the West Indies trounce us at cricket, and just about everyone beats us at tennis and soccer. By contrast, it is much more difficult to understand and participate in the art forms of very different cultures precisely because they are much more deeply imbedded. Think, for instance, of the hopeless failure of the Beatles a few years ago, to learn the Indian sitar, and use it in their music.

So what is Judo? An art form or a sport? That is a misleading question. In its classical form, while it may have some relation to both, it is also significantly different from either. When Western practitioners engage in Judo as a sport, there is an important sense in which they are thereby engaging in a different activity.

This example, and the previous one of Balinese dance, raise serious questions about the extent to which, if at all, an art form can survive transplanting to a very different cultural context. I am thinking for instance, of Indian classical dance in Bradford or New York -- Psalm 137: "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

The same point applies, of course, to language. Once, on a flight, I talked with a very interesting and sensitive Philippino gentleman. Because of the pervasive influence of American culture on his own, much has to be written in English, and he experiences frequent frustration because of translation difficulties. Ideas which seem fresh and original in his language usually seem stale and bland in English. I suggested that perhaps this was because they then became different ideas.

A Rabbi illustrated a lecture to expose common misconceptions about Judaism by non-Jews by writing on a blackboard the sentence: "Judaism is a religion". Apparently there is no present tense, as we have it, in Hebrew, so he erased "is". There is no indefinite article, so he erased "a". Judaism is not conceived of as a religion, so that term was erased. And, since it is a whole way of life, there is no concept of "Judaism".

#### Phase 4: Understanding

The preceding discussion underlines my thesis that individual thoughts and feelings are largely logically dependent upon social practices such as language and art forms. I cannot, purely privately, conjure up what the term 'art' means, and its criteria of value. Among other problems, that would render unintelligible any notion of learning from or understanding the arts. A grasp of the concept of art is given by an understanding of the practice in a particular culture. This emphasises that artistic meaning and value must be objective in some sense, but also that such objectivity is relative to the culture which gives the art its life. No account of meaning and value in art can be given on a subjective basis: yet to conceive of objectivity as universal is to impose one standard incoherently across a very diverse range of forms, and thus distort and devalue the huge heterogeneity of possibilities of human experience and expression.

This leads me to a principal theme of my paper, which is to ask how it is possible to understand the arts of other cultures. The salient points can be brought into focus in a dialogue between the two opposed positions of Realism (or Absolutism), and Relativism. Relativism (usually related to autonomism) is the currently popular view. But we need to take realism much more seriously than is usually done.

The realist emphasises that works such as those of J.M.W. Turner, Bach and Shakespeare unquestionably are works of art, no matter what may be said by anyone from another culture. Anyone who did deny this would thereby reveal his ignorance of the concept of art. Thus it is through one's own cultural tradition that one is able to grasp what art really is. There is no sense in the notion of adopting a logically 'free' position, detached from all artistic preconceptions, in order to appraise the merits of other supposed artistic traditions. Such a notion is as unintelligible as the suggestion of seeing through someone else's eyes. D.H. Lawrence remarked that he was not free, any more than a rooted tree is free. He recognised that his modes of thought

and feeling were uniquely rooted in his own cultural heritage, and these gave the possibility even of criticising the society in which he had his roots.

The case for realism is impressive. But the relativist points out that there are unquestionably other cultures with their different artistic concepts. The realist dismisses these as, at best inferior, primitive attempts at art, rather as he considers witchcraft to be a primitive striving towards real science. The realist takes it that it is by means of one's own culture that one has come to grasp the true nature of art. It is, of course, such conviction, usually implicit, which has led, in science and anthropology, as well as morality, religion and the arts, to patronising colonialist characterisations of other societies as 'primitive' and 'superstitious'.

The relativist acknowledges that understanding of the nature of reality is given with the conceptions of a culture, but since there are different cultures, there are, he insists, different conceptions of reality, and therefore of art. The art of each culture can be recognised and evaluated only in its own terms; it cannot be externally criticised; it is as worthy of respect as any other; the ascription of primitiveness reveals simply the prejudice of the ascriber. In order to appreciate the art of other cultures, one has to accept and employ its internal criteria, not apply the criteria of one's own external culture.

The verdict, at this stage, looks as if it will be overwhelmingly in favour of the relativist, and this is the currently popular view. However, this way of thinking too easily overlooks the important insights of realism. For the relativist fails to recognise that in even characterising an activity of another culture as 'art', he inevitably has to apply the concept of art which he has. That is, in calling it 'art' he is applying his concept of art. He assumes that other cultures are all equally available and comprehensible. Yet that makes no sense. For instance, in order to comprehend reality in the terms of a particular culture one must already be able to speak its language and understand its conception of the world. That is, it makes no sense to suppose that one can simply choose to see reality in terms of another culture; it is rather that those possibilities of comprehending what counts as reality are presented to one in terms of a culture only as one learns its language and acquires its concepts. Similarly, one cannot choose to adopt the artistic criteria of another culture; it is rather that those criteria are presented to one in coming to grasp the character of its arts.

One does not so much explicitly learn artistic criteria as assimilate them by growing up in a culture. Kant, in a quotation I often use, says: "The light dove, cleaving the air in her free flight, and feeling its resistance, might imagine that her flight would be still easier in empty space". Yet the resistant air, so far from restricting freedom to fly, is precisely what gives the possibility of freedom to fly. Similarly, without the artistic criteria given by one's own cultural heritage one could have no grasp of any art. It makes no sense to suppose that one could choose what counts as art,



and good art, since one is inevitably applying artistic criteria even in considering something as a possible candidate for art. Thus the relativist is in the self-defeating position of having to presuppose precisely what he is opposing. He denies any limitation to what he can recognise as art of other cultures by their standards, yet he is inevitably, implicitly, helping himself to a certain conception from his own culture, of what counts as an art form. An extreme relativist (and the limiting case of relativism is subjectivism) once said in a lecture on the philosophy of the arts that in view of the enormous cross-cultural and even intra-cultural differences, it is obviously impossible to delimit art in any way, and thus anything can be art. He was surprised, afterwards, when I expressed disappointment that he had not discussed shoe-cleaning and after-shave lotions. The point, if I may be boring enough to state it, is that to give a lecture on the arts, whatever the relativist may say, inevitably does carry certain limitations on what will be discussed. And he relies on those limitations, despite his denials, since they give sense to the term 'art'. In short, if he were right, he could not even announce the topic of his lecture. Similarly, in even attempting to consider the arts of other cultures, one must have some conception of the kinds of activities one is looking for. I have already indicated that we must be very cautious in this respect.

Now although this is an unfairly concise account of realism and relativism, it does, I hope, capture the salient features of the opposing positions. Moreover, it should be emphasised that these positions are usually implicit presuppositions rather than explicit assertions.

It should be noticed that, despite their conflict, the realist and the relativist share an underlying presupposition which generates the conflict. The realist correctly contends that it is senseless to suppose that we can simply choose to understand anything as art, since what determines our calling it 'art' is what kind of thing it really is. The relativist correctly insists that what can count as art depends upon human conceptions given with a culture, and assumes that therefore these conceptions can be adopted at will.

The shared presupposition is that if there is no single correct conception of what can count as art, then we can choose what counts as art. This is parallel to the supposition that if there is no single definitive meaning of a work of art within a culture, then any interpretation is equally valid. Both are analogous to the common assumption that if there is no ultimate principle, such as a religious one, by which a moral judgement can be justified, then moral judgements are merely arbitrary, in the sense that ultimately they can be decided only by tossing a coin. In short, the relativist is right to insist that different cultures give different conceptions, but wrong to assume that they are equally available and valuable. The realist is right to reject as incoherent such a notion of equal availability and value, since what counts as art and artistic value depends upon what the object really is, and what its characteristics really are. But he is wrong to assume that there is only one correct conception of art and value.

Thus if we were asked to decide between realism and relativism we should be wise to decline to take sides, for while each indicates a correct insight missed by the other, it also contains a serious misconception.

The crucial point is that other concepts of art are available, not by choice, but only to the extent that it is possible to come to understand other cultures. Wittgenstein remarked: "If a lion could talk we could not understand him". The point is one I brought out earlier, that a language, like art, cannot be understood in isolation from a whole way of life.

There is a warning implicit in my thesis of a danger in eclecticism in the arts, in that, since art is deeply embedded in a whole cultural context, to try to understand various art forms from diverse cultures may incur the penalty of inability to appreciate any art in depth. A visitor, hearing that Picasso had completed a painting in half an hour, expressed surprise that it had taken so short a time. Picasso replied that in fact it had taken sixty-four years. He was referring, of course, to far more than the attainment of technical expertise. The tale was told when I was an undergraduate of an American visitor to a Cambridge college who, impressed by the quality of the lawns, asked a gardener how it was achieved. The gardener replied: "It's quite easy, sir, you just sow the seeds, then, when the grass grows, cut, roll and weed it for two or three hundred years".

In a very interesting paper, from which I gained much understanding of the issues, Ralph Smith<sup>1</sup> refers to the "exegetical multi-culturalist", who never has a profound encounter with any art form, and merely indulges in a shallow re-circulation of preconceived notions. Such people, by insulating themselves against ideological shock, as Kaufmann puts it, are rather like travellers who stay at the Hilton wherever they go. These exegetical multi-culturalists proliferate at international conferences, where they pontificate from an apparently impressive, but actually superficial, acquaintance with many cultures, and consequent genuine appreciation of none. A feeling of sympathy is insufficient, and indeed may lead to superficial sentimentality. Understanding requires a far more sensitive and objective interaction with a whole culture.

There is a more immediate danger in eclecticism. There is a current well-intentioned tendency in the U.K., especially in inner city areas with a large proportion of diverse ethnic groups, to introduce children and students to a wide range of arts and social practices from diverse cultures. Given the relation of my thesis to personal identity, does this not incur the serious danger, at least to some extent, of shallowness of personality?

### Phase 5: Culture-consciousness

The crucial matter towards which my argument is directed is that it is the consciousness of other cultures which allows us more fully to appreciate our own, and to extend our understanding of rationality and humanity, by imaginatively entering into the activities of other societies which have some significant relation to art in ours. If we can identify an activity as art, then we can set it critically beside our art, and ours beside it, even though some aspects of criticism may be inappropriate. The contribution of education, or of engagement with the arts of other cultures, is to stimulate a process of dialectical interaction. That is, one's very conception of art and artistic value is given by one's own culture, and it is obviously a necessary condition for a conscious, even if not explicitly articulated, dialogue with the arts of other cultures, since without it one could have no conception of what counts as art in any culture. Yet with an open mind, and willingness to learn, one can extend and enrich one's artistic conceptions in an encounter with another culture. One explores, with humility, the relevant activities of another culture, in terms of one's own artistic conceptions. But the other side of the dialectic is that the new conception may modify one's own, and thus the terms of the exploration. Each side may have a progressively critical and enriching effect on the other.

As I argued earlier, this conceptual extension cannot intelligibly be regarded as limited to an autonomous set of activities called 'the arts', but extends widely and deeply into fundamental human concerns. Thus one's concepts will be widened of what counts as rationality, value, and humanity. To formulate the dialectic more broadly, coming to understand alien art forms involves developing a consciousness of a different culture, which in turn involves extending one's conception of the character of one's own thoughts and feelings, and thus, in an important sense, of one's own identity.

To quote Ralph Smith: "Art in Bali is one of the means by which all aspects of personal life are stylised to a point where anything characteristic of the individual, of the self behind the mask or the person behind the facade presented to the world, is intentionally obliterated. As Geertz writes: "It is dramatis personae, not actors, that in the proper sense really exist. Physically men come and go ... but the masks they wear, the stages they occupy, the parts they play ... and, most importantly, the spectacle they mount, remain and comprise not the facade but the existence of things, not least the self ..."

As Ralph Smith says, it is difficult to imagine a more striking contrast to the Western ideal which, by contrast with the notion of the negation of self, emphasises individuality, standing out against the anonymous mass. To quote: "Balinese conceptions of personal identity, or rather lack of them, are too far removed from Western sentiment to have any significance in our search for self-definition". I don't quite agree with that, since it seems to me that to achieve an understanding of such a conception might give us a standpoint for a fundamental reappraisal of the Western conception of human life, with its emphasis on individuality.

On one more substantial point I disagree with Ralph Smith, who contends that because of the extraordinary difficulties of trying to understand the inner nature of an alien culture, multi-cultural education in any significant sense cannot be attempted by the young student, but is possible only for someone with a mature grasp of his own culture. In one sense, it is obviously true that one cannot engage in multi-cultural education, where this involves a fruitful dialectic between two cultures, when one has an inadequate grasp of one of them, namely one's own. Yet in another sense, it is often the case that, for instance, a very young child can learn a foreign language more easily and naturally than an adult with a far better grasp of his own language. The same is true of the arts, in that someone without a mature grasp of the arts of his own culture could immerse himself in an art form of another culture; he could engage successfully in it, whether as creator or appreciator.

But the most important point here is that understanding cannot be achieved by the superficial relativist, or exegetical multi-culturalist. It requires a genuine entering into an alien art form, and thus an alien culture, by a demanding effort of conceptual dialectic. And by that I emphatically do not mean that it is a matter of the intellect and not of feeling. I am exasperatingly often misunderstood on this matter. That absurd polarity between feeling and reason, very common though it remains, is radically misconceived and does the arts a grave and damaging disservice. It was precisely to counter that serious confusion that I wrote my recently published book Feeling and Reason in the Arts<sup>2</sup>. For that conviction of the gulf between feeling and reason dies hard -- or rather, as we see from the continued popular appeal of subjectivist theorists such as Robert Witkin, and many more, the assumption of the gulf between feeling and reason, so far from dying hard has not yet caught a terminal disease.

My central point is that it is precisely a mark of genuinely entering into a conceptual dialectic with an alien art and culture that, so far from staying in the security of an emotion-aseptic Hilton, one puts oneself at risk, by opening oneself to the possibility of fundamental emotional disturbance.

This makes great demands on the imagination, in extending the capacity for open-mindedness, since one's ways of thinking and feeling have to be continually extended in order to enter into and understand those of other traditions. There is nothing to be gained but distortion, here as in many other areas of human experience, from the comfortable imprisonment of certainty. This striving for the misguided comfort of certainty is manifest in the craving of our age for quantification, even in the arts. It is a symptom of the sickness of society. As Simone Weil puts it: "for men burdened with a fatigue (of the soul) that makes any effort of attention painful, it is a relief to contemplate the unproblematic clarity of figures".

It will, I hope, be clear that an important part of this imaginative open-mindedness will be revealed by one's hesitation about referring to activities in other cultures as 'art'. In this respect, although I have used the term for simplicity, this qualification applies to much that I have said in this paper.

It should be mentioned too, that these considerations apply not only to understanding other cultures, but to understanding one's own at different historical periods. As one eminent historian has put it, understanding history is like learning a foreign language. (A recent radio programme considered the question: "How can we listen to Bach's music as he listened to it?")

I have said that one puts oneself, in the deepest sense, at risk. It is worth noting how deep that risk may be. The greatest and most profound works of art are inseparably related to concepts of the meaning of life. Hence, at this level, art, morality, religion are inextricably interwoven. This emphasises again just how deeply embedded in a culture are its arts, and, commensurately, how very difficult it is seriously and sincerely to enter into an understanding of the arts of another culture, as opposed to the superficial inoculation against any involvement indulged in by the egocentric culture-connoisseur.

The risk is that one's fundamental way of thinking and feeling may be changed irremediably. In an important sense, one may become a different person. That is the risk. But the reward is an unpredictable adventure into an extension of conceptual and emotional horizons. For the enlarged concept of art will inevitably involve an extension of understanding of rationality, moral values, the meaning of life, and the enormous, exciting heterogeneity of what it is to be a human being.

"Who is it that can tell me who I am?"

No account of who one is can be remotely adequate which does not give a central place to the character of one's thoughts and feelings given by culturally derived concepts. And those thoughts and feelings, and thus who I am, can be extended and refined in a significant sense, by a serious, sensitive and profound encounter with the art forms of other cultures.

To stimulate culture-consciousness -- that, I submit, is our crucial task as educators in a situation of cultural diversity.

David Best  
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NOTES

1. Ralph A. Smith, Forms of multi-cultural education in the arts, Journal of Multi-cultural and Cross-cultural Research in Art Education, 1, Number 1, Fall 1983.
2. David Best, Feeling and Reason in the Arts. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1985.