

McLuhan's wit conceals the truth, which is that, since the means of communication have become so powerful and so expensive and the receivers so cheap, communication itself has turned into a one-way activity from a powerful center to passive peripheries.

APPEAL FOR CULTURAL EQUITY

by

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In our concern about the pollution of the biosphere we are overlooking what may be, in human terms, an even more serious problem. Man has a more indirect relation to nature than most other animals because his environmental tie is normally mediated by a cultural system. Since human adaptation has been largely cultural rather than biological, human sub-species are rather the product of shifts in learned culture patterns than in genetically inherited traits. It is the flexibility of these culture patterns — composed of technique, social organization, and communication — that has enabled the human species to flourish in every zone of the planet.

Man, the economist, has developed tools and techniques to exploit every environment. Man, the most sociable of animals, has proliferated endless schemes which nurture individuals from birth to old age. Man, the communicator, has improvised and elaborated system upon system of symboling to record, reinforce, and reify his inventions. Indeed, man's greatest achievement is in the sum of the lifestyles he has created to make this planet an agreeable and stimulating human habitat.

Today, this cultural variety lies under threat of extinction. A grey-out is in progress which, if it continues unchecked, will fill our human skies with the smog of the phoney and cut the families of men off from a vision of their own cultural constellations. A mismanaged, over-centralized electronic communication system is imposing a few standardized, mass-produced and cheapened cultures everywhere.

The danger inherent in the process is clear. Its folly, its unwanted waste is nowhere more evident than in the field of music. What is happening to the varied musics of mankind is symptomatic of the swift destruction of culture patterns all over the planet.

One can already sense the oppressive dullness and psychic distress of those areas where centralized music industries, exploiting the star system and controlling the communication system, put the local musician out of work and silence folk song, tribal ritual, local popular festivities and regional culture. It is ironic to note that during this century, when folklorists and musicologists were studying the varied traditions of the peoples of the earth, their rate of disappearance accelerated. This worries us all, but we have grown so accustomed to the dismal view of the carcasses of dead or dying cultures on the human landscape, that we have learned to dismiss this pollution of the human environment as inevitable, and even sensible, since it is

wrongly assumed that the weak and unfit among musics and cultures are eliminated in this way. The same rationale holds that war is a necessary evil, since it disposes of weaker nations and surplus populations.

Not only is such a doctrine anti-human; it is very bad science. It is false Darwinism applied to culture – especially to its expressive systems, such as music, language and art. Scientific study of cultures, notably of their languages and their musics, shows that all are equally expressive and equally communicative, even though they may symbolize technologies of different levels. In themselves these symbolic systems are equally valuable: first, because they enrich the lives of the culture or people who employ them and whose psychic balance is threatened when they are destroyed or impoverished; second, because each communicative system (whether verbal, visual, musical, or even culinary) holds important discoveries about the natural and human environment; and third, because each is a treasure of unknown potential, a collective creation in which some branch of the human species invested its genius across the centuries.

With the disappearance of each of these systems, the human species not only loses a way of viewing, thinking, and feeling but also a way of adjusting to some zone on the planet which fits it and makes it livable; not only that, but we throw away a system of interaction, of fantasy and symbolizing which, in the future, the human race may sorely need. The only way to halt this degradation of man's culture is to commit ourselves to the principle of cultural equity, as we have committed ourselves to the principles of political, social, and economic justice.

Here I fancy few would disagree. Thomas Jefferson was certainly thinking of cultural equity when he wrote in the Declaration of Independence "that all men are created equal and endowed with the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." A century and a half later, Lenin put laws protecting the autonomy of minority cultures into the Constitution of the USSR, as an important function of government. The result is that most of the non-European musics of the USSR seem to be in a flourishing state. In spite of this and other sincere efforts, however, the reduction in the world's total of musical languages and dialects continues at an accelerating and bewildering pace, and their eventual total disappearance is accepted as inevitable. In what follows I will point to ways in which we can oppose this gloomy course.

Let me deal first with the matter of inevitability. Most people believe that folk and tribal cultures thrive on isolation, and that when this isolation is invaded by modern communications and transport systems, these cultures inevitably disappear. This "ain't necessarily so".

Isolation can be as destructive of culture and musical development as it is of individual personality. We know of few primitive or folk cultures that have not been continuously in contact with a wide variety of other cultures. In fact, all local cultures are linked to their neighbors in large areal and regional sets. Moreover, those cultures in the past which grew at the crossroads of human migrations, or else at their terminal points, have usually been the richest. One thinks here for example of independent but cosmopolitan Athens, of the Central Valley of Mexico, of the Northwest coast of North America, the Indus Valley, the Sudan in Africa where black culture encountered Middle Eastern civilization across millenia – such a list would include most of the important generative culture centers of human

history. I say then that cultures do not and never have flourished in isolation, but have flowered in sites that guaranteed their independence and at the same time permitted unforced acceptance of external influences.

During most of man's history contact between peoples did not usually mean that one culture swallowed up or destroyed another. Even in the days of classical empire, vassal states were generally permitted to continue in their own lifestyle, so long as they paid tribute to the imperial center. The total destruction of cultures is largely a modern phenomenon, the consequence of *laissez-faire* mercantilism, insatiably seeking to market all its products, to blanket the world not only with its manufacture, but with its religion, its literature and music, its educational and communication systems.

Non-European peoples have been made to feel that they have to buy "the whole package", if they are to keep face before the world. Westerners have imposed their lifestyle on their fellow humans in the name of spreading civilization or, more lately, as an essential concomitant of the benefits of industry. We must reject this cannibalistic view of civilization, just as we must now find ways of curbing a runaway industrial system which is polluting the whole planet. Indeed, industrial and cultural pollution are two aspects of the same negative tendency.

Recent events show that we need now to plan a multi-culture, a world in which many civilizations, each with its own supporting systems of education and communication, can live. Until ten years ago, most Americans believed that their taxes supported a genuinely democratic educational system. Then came the black attack on the school system on the grounds that a Euro-American establishment was "brainwashing" them. Their first experience with integration brought a sharp realization of how different their orally transmitted culture was from what their children were being taught in the schools. Blacks saw that their heritage was strongly African, with a selective acceptance of European elements. American intellectuals learned that the educational system, in which they had such a large economic stake, is a system of indoctrination in the cultural achievements and techniques of Europe and the United States.

The administration of music in America is a prime example of how one cultural heritage maintains a monopoly. Ninety percent of the federal and local money spent on music goes to support one musical tradition – the symphonic, fine-art tradition. Public music education is still largely devoted to increasing skill in appreciation of this one music. Nowhere, for instance, does anyone teach the art of the Negro spiritual, America's deep song. When we "educate" a non-European, especially when we teach him Western music or art or dance, as if no other system existed or had such value, we are brainwashing him. The standard Western European system of music education, taken to other cultural settings, is a form of **aesthetic imperialism** that is as destructive of native musical autonomy as the takeover of political and economic power is destructive of native initiative.

Many intellectuals thus reject the melting-pot idea and are seeking ways out of the mess this brutal educational policy has created. What we must have is a flexible educational policy which allows the content of education, especially in the arts, to be adjusted to cultural borderlines. One question, to be presently discussed, is how to define these cultural borderlines and the differential structures they delimit. But first the effect of mass communication must be considered.

It is generally believed that modern communication systems must inevitably destroy all local cultures. This is because these systems have largely been used for the benefit of the center and not as two-way streets. Today, unchecked mass communication bullies and shouts humanity into silence and passivity. Artists everywhere are losing their local audiences, put out of countenance by the tireless electronic systems manipulated by the center.

The remedy lies in a policy of decentralization. Electronic communication is intrinsically multi-channelled. A properly administered electronic system could carry every expressive dialect and language that we know of, so that each one might have a local system at its disposal for its own spokesmen. Thus, modern communication technology could become the prime force in man's struggle for cultural equity and against the pollution of the human environment.

All cultures need their share of the air time electronic communication can afford. When country folk or tribal peoples hear or view their own traditions in the big media, projected with the authority generally reserved for the output of large urban centers, and when they hear their traditions taught to their own children, something magical occurs. They see that their expressive style is as good as that of others, and, if they have equal communicational facilities, they will continue it. On my last field trip to the West Indies, I took along two huge stereo loudspeakers and, in every village where I worked, I put on a thunderous three-dimensional concert of the music of the place that I had recorded. The audiences were simply transported with pleasure. In one island, the principal yearly people's festival, discontinued for a decade, was revived the next year in all its richness.

The flowering of black orchestral music in New Orleans came because the black musicians found steady, high-paying jobs and prestige in the amusement district and thus had time to reorchestrate African style and then record this local music for export to the whole world.

The origin of the so-called "Nashville sound" is another case in point. Nashville was once the sleepy capital of the state of Tennessee in the United States. In the 1920s a Nashville radio station began to broadcast the music of the nearby Appalachian mountains between advertising announcements. These particular local audiences bought products so enthusiastically that other Southern radio stations followed suit by employing local musicians. This provided the economic base for the development of a vigorous modern Southern rural musical tradition. Today it has several indigenous forms of orchestration which match the storied folk orchestras of Spain and Central Europe in virtuosity. Nashville has become the music capital of the U.S. because the once scorned style it purveys — reedy-voiced solo ballads accompanied by string instruments — has always been a favored style of the majority of white working-class Americans. This extraordinary event was taking place while most American intellectuals were bewailing the demise of American folk music. The reason that this tradition survived was that talented local performers got time on the air to broadcast it to local and regional audiences.

Nashville and other such new folk culture capitals are, at present, exceptions and accidents, but it is our responsibility to create others. By giving every culture its equal time on the air and its equal local weight in the education systems, we can bring about similar results around the world. Instant communication systems and recording devices, in fact, make it possible for the oral traditions to reach their

audience, to establish their libraries and museums, and to preserve and record their songs, tales, and dramas directly in sound and vision without writing and printing them in another medium. Over a loudspeaker the counterpoint of the Mbuti pygmies is just as effective as a choir singing Bach. Thus neither contact nor rapid communication need inevitably destroy local traditions. The question is one of decentralization. We must overcome our own cultural myopia and see to it that the unwritten, nonverbal traditions have the status and the space they deserve.

Another harmful idea from the recent European past which must be dealt with holds that there is something desirable about a national music — a music that corresponds to a political entity called a nation. In fact, state-supported national musics have generally stifled musical creativity rather than fostered it. It is true that professional urban musicians have invented and elaborated a marching music, a salon music, a theatre music, and various popular song types which please the managing classes and keep the urban working class happy. Yet the price has been the death of the far more varied music-making of regional localities. Italy, a country I know well, has, in almost every valley, a local musical dialect of enormous interest, largely unknown to the rest of the country. These myriads of song traditions are being drowned by a well-intended national communications system which, in the name of national unity, broadcasts only the fine art and popular music of the large cities. Cut off from its roots, Italian pop music, of course, becomes every day more and more dependent on Tin Pan Alley.

These sturdy local musics of Italy, some centuries old, need their own local radio stations as well as financial support for their own artists — jobs in the schools as music teachers, for example. Each local music needs its own institutional support so that each one may continue to produce a music that can add richness to its life as well as to the national and world communities.

Nations do not generate music. They can only consume it. Indeed, our new system of national consumption of music via national communications systems is depriving the musical creator of the thing he needs most, next to money — a local, tribal or regional audience that he can sing directly for. I think it may be stated flatly that most creative developments in art have been the product of small communities or small independent coterie within large entities — like the Mighty Five in Russia, like the small Creole jazz combos of New Orleans.

Real musicians, real composers, need real people to listen to them, and this means people who understand and share the musical language that they are using. It seems reasonable, therefore, that if the human race is to have a rich and varied musical future, we must encourage the development of as many local musics as possible. **This means money, time on the air, and time in the classroom.**

Furthermore, we need a way of defining musical style territories and thus providing a clear, existential rationale for their continued development. The extant systems of music notations are unsuitable for these purposes because (a) they require long periods of training; (b) none seems to be successful in producing either a classification of world song or an explanation of the connections between song style and social style; and (c) these systems reflect the musical concerns of the culture from which they come, omitting qualities important in other musical languages. Western European notation is highly efficient for recording melodies that use Western European interval types and poly-voiced styles that employ a vertical concept of

harmony. Where these are not the main material of a musical tradition, Western notation often distorts the music.

The problem calls for a culturally sensitive way of describing music. During the past decade, a system of speedily analyzing and comparing musical performances cross-culturally has been developed in the anthropology department at Columbia University. The system is called Cantometrics, a word which means the measure of song or song as a measure. The measures comprising Cantometrics are those that were found, in actual practice, to sort out the main styles of the whole of human song. On each one raters can record their agreement as to whether a single trait of performance – noisy voice or forceful accent, for instance – is markedly and constantly present, moderately so, or little heard in a recording. The 37 rating scales of Cantometrics give a wholistic overview of song performance: (a) the social organization of the performing group, including solo or leader dominance; (b) its musical organization, scoring level of vocal blend and the prominence of unison or of multiparted tonal and rhythmic organization; (c) textual elaboration; (d) melodic elaboration in terms of length and number of segments and features of ornamentation; (e) dynamics; (f) voice qualities.

More than 4,000 recorded examples from 350 cultures from every culture area were judged in this way. The computer assembled profiles of style from these 350 outlines, compared them, and clustered them into families, thus mapping world culture areas. It appears that ten plus regional song traditions account for a majority of world song styles. These regional style traditions are linked by close ties of similarity into 4 supra-continental style horizons (see the table below).

<p>1. Circum-Pacific Siberian North American Indian Central and South American Indian</p>	<p>2. Tropical (African) African Gatherer Black African</p>
<p>3. Oceanic Proto-Melanesian Malayo-Polynesian</p>	<p>4. Eurasian Central Asian Old High Culture European</p>

Song style traditions

1. The *Circum-Pacific* stylistic horizon embraces the exotic singing of tribal Siberia, the extraordinarily homogenous musical tradition of the Indians of North America, the multi-modal styles of Central and South America, and the remarkable aboriginal musics of Australia and New Guinea. The discovery of a continuum of musical style around the whole Pacific alongside of a similarly unified dance tradition seems to represent a human distribution out of Siberia dating back 15 millenia or more. Ethnomusicologists and other students of the arts should take heart from this finding for it means that expressive systems are not the inconsequential surface of culture, but its most solid and enduring spine.

2. The highly contrastive *Tropical* style horizon includes the Pygmies and Bushmen along with the whole of black Africa, the large Negro population in America, parts of tribal India and Polynesia. Here is another continuity of music and dance, a set of basic patterns spread across a gigantic theatre of human development. The

prime characteristic is collectivity, enhanced by choral and orchestral polyrhythms and polyphonies that add excitement to group-oriented performances.

3. In the *Oceanic* region, Proto-Melanesian style is most strongly related to the primordial counterpoint of the African Gatherers, while that of the Malayo-Polynesian is allied to the Tropical family, and in its Malay aspect, strongly influenced by the musics of East Asia.

4. *Eurasian*. This zone is dominated by the solo accompanied bardic style which links the entire world of ancient civilization, in both its agricultural and pastoral branches, from the Fertile Crescent east to Japan and west to Morocco and Andalusia. Today, the performance style of Europe and America, one of its sub-provinces, threatens all the other stylistic traditions, by imposing its entire musical tradition (from solo song style and dance to the symphony) through the agency of centralized communications systems.

European music is organized around performance ideas which seem to date back to the roots of European history and are no more sophisticated than the basic patterns found in the *Circum-Pacific* and *Tropical* worlds. **Europeans must ask themselves whether they can justify the imposition of the expressive performance style of their hunting ancestors upon the peoples of the rest of the globe.** The fact that the music of Europe and America is backed up by industry, science, air power and the electronic communications systems does not, I assert, make its songs and dances more appropriate to the entire human future. In accordance with the principle of cultural equity, the other regions, the *Tropical*, the *Circum-Pacific*, and the *Oceanic* and neglected parts in the *Eurasian* area, should share between them about three-fourths of the total budget of money and time and care humanity has to give. All music, everywhere, needs time, money, and concern in order to live.

The solid knowledge that each of these great regional traditions has a different approach to expressive problems, and therefore different ways of growing, makes the first step of planning for the human cultural future easier. When each of the giant style regions is subjected to multi-factor analysis on its own — that is, when the musical profiles of its representative cultures are compared — we find a set of about 50 cultural territories that match in an amazing way those already known to anthropologists and ethnographers. From this finding we can draw two important conclusions for the defense of mankind's musical heritage. First, it is now clear that culture and song styles change together, that expressive style is firmly rooted in areal culture developments, and that it can be thought of in relation to the general cultural questions of areas.

Second, this parsimonious classification of musical styles into areas makes planning for the cultural administrator — the defender of the principle of cultural equity — far easier. Each of these style areas has clearcut geographical boundaries and thus a general environmental character and distinctive socioeconomic problems. The people within these areas can see themselves as carriers of a certain expressive tradition and, sensing their genuine kinship with other cultures of the territory, can begin to develop the base lines for the local civilizations that are needed to protect their often underprivileged and undervalued cultures. These discoveries compensate somewhat for the recent tendency of folklorists and anthropologists to emphasize the distinctions between neighboring and similar tribes and localities to the extent that neither natives nor experts could develop practical cultural politics. Local or

tribal folkstyles should receive money, time, and space, but as representatives of the large, manageable regional traditions.

The mapping of the generative loci of human song is made far more significant by the discovery that each one has nourished a performance style which matches its social structure. Our survey had drawn on the codified information of ethnography about political and economic systems, social mores and many other features of culture from a representative sample of our song cultures; thus we could study the ways that society and song varied together cross-culturally. Our finding, backed by strong statistical evidence, is that a framework of performance traits varies directly with a framework of social traits, as follows:

1. The information load of singing increases with socioeconomic complexity.
2. Complexity of ornament and orchestral organization increases with social stratification.
3. Choral vocal blend increases with community solidarity.
4. Vocal tension increases with the severity of the sexual mores.
5. Use of polyphony increases with male/female complementarity.

These five main hypotheses make it possible to predict the general character of song style from knowledge of the social structure and vice versa. Knowing that musical structure mirrors and symbolizes productivity, stratification, solidarity, sexual restraint, and sexual complementarity gives music a clear-cut function. It symbolizes the basic adaptive social plan of a society. Thus it operates as a feedback loop, reinforcing the sense of identity in members of a culture by presenting them, in abstract and formal terms, a sort of audible collage of their life style. People are vociferous in defense of their musical preferences, probably because they hear in a song performance the pattern in terms of which they live and relate to others in their culture.

In studying several hundreds of these performance profiles from as many cultures, the workers on the Cantometrics project were struck by the purity and integrity of each of these style models, no matter how "civilized" or "savage" its source. Every branch of the human species, in adjusting to its environment and its technological framework, has created expressive systems which delicately reflect its tempo, its style of social interaction, its productive system and the moods which they produce.

The sources of agony and conflict, present in all cultures, are voiced in these musical systems and compensated for. Each one is a plan for collective action and for compensatory expressivity which has the character of an ideal solution to a special adaptive problem. Man's history can be seen, then, not as a succession of failures, of botched jobs, but as a series of acts of profound creativity, each one of which produces an idealized model for human interaction that is preserved in art. Moreover, this series of ideal models, portrayed in the musical style of the world's populations, points the way out of the dilemma with which false Darwinism threatens the future of culture.

We are impelled to a defense of the musics of the world as socially valuable because:

1. They serve as the human baseline for receiving and reshaping new ideas and

new technologies to the varied lifestyles and environmental adaptations of world culture;

2. They perpetuate values in human systems which are only indirectly connected with level of productivity, and they give women and men — old and young — a sense of worth;

3. They form a reservoir of well-tested lifestyles out of which the species can construct the varied and flexible multi-cultural civilizations of the future; since they are living symbol systems, they have growth potentials of their own. As such they are the testing grounds for the social and expressive outcomes of human progress.

Human adjustment to socioeconomic change is usually painfilled and unpredictable. There thus arise explosive and puzzling confrontations between artists and the politics they serve, which are detrimental to the development of both art and society. Recent history in both the socialist and capitalist worlds is witness to this. The serious artist, in order to deal with the feelings of his audience, must not only react to the technical and physical achievements of his society, but to the burdens each system places on its members, to the shifts and imbalances it produces in human relations, to its eccentricities and its sorrows. The artist, in spite of the wishes of the state, deals with the sometimes precarious balance between the differentiative and integrative, the masculine and feminine factors in cultures. In other words, it seems clear that a major function of all art is to act as a link between the politico-economy, the social relations that arise to support it, and the consequent emotional growth of culture.

Each stage of human culture is thus productive of a unique set of social and aesthetic solutions to man's problems of social adjustment. Practical men, especially if they have an engineering degree, often regard these expressive systems as doomed and valueless. Yet, wherever the principle of cultural equity is applied so that these worrisome musical systems are given a chance to grow, they can rise again.

I cite a few examples known to me: the renaissance of Rumanian panpipe music when the new Socialist regime gave the last master of the panpipe a chair in music at the Rumanian Academy of Music; the revival of the five-string banjo in my own country, when I induced a talented young man named Peter Seeger to take up its popularization as his life's work; the magnificent recrudescence of the many-faceted carnival in Trinidad as a result of the work of a devoted committee of folklorists backed by the Premier. These and many other instances that might be cited from America and elsewhere show that any of the folk traditions can revive and can nourish important values if given proper administrative care.

But, it is argued, as the world is industrialized, folk and tribal culture must go down the drain. This view holds that all cultures must be industrialized and that this means the end of cultural variety. Industry, however, is not an absolute good. Recently we have learned that industry can destroy the natural environment if it is not regulated. Now everywhere man is moving to manage it and to keep his planet green and livable. We can and must control industry's threat to the human imagination and to the human variety. With the aid of atomic energy and computerization, productivity is increasing so rapidly that industry may not be needed in every country of the globe. There can be zones where people can lead other than industrialized lives and produce other goods. Moreover, man can dissociate the rational procedures of industry from the particular social and aesthetic patterns

that accompanied its Western origin. Japan is such a case. There, industry has been altered to suit a cultural tradition, rather than to obliterate it. Now that we have a grasp on mankind's cultural range and zones of culture, we can – following the Japanese precedent – adapt industrial progress to local and regional lifestyles rather than the other way around. Now that we understand the relation between technical advances and human relations and expressivity we can better plan a future in which artists and politicians can work together. In such a future, as the function of the artists becomes better understood, the principle of cultural equity will guarantee that culture and art can grow in many directions.

European-Americans are called “pigs” and “honkeys” by other groups, because they feel that Euro-Americans, in preempting most of the air time and the classroom time for their own cultural concerns, have taken up an unfair share of the communication space. A more rational and equitable solution must be found. If we are to halt the progress of cultural pollution, planetary cultural equity must become a universal principle.