

GROUP SEVEN

Leader: **Max Wyman** (Canada)

Members: **Mathias Bizimana** (Canada), **Sangeeta Isvaran** (India/France) (last 2 days), **Jose Sasportes** (Portugal), **Mano de Souza** (Brazil/England), **Christy Taylor** (USA), **Marketta Viitala** (Finland), **Corinna Vogel** (Germany).

The prime interest of this group was dance – almost all were dance historians, teachers or dancers. However, while dance frequently provided a reference-point, the discussion ranged widely across arts disciplines, cultural theories and philosophical positions.

Rather than discuss the various papers in minute detail, the group chose to discuss the issues in general terms, and was thus able to cover a great deal of ground over the period of the conference. A lengthy discussion of the personal, social and therapeutic benefits of cultural activity in the schools occupied much of the first session. The group went on to the need for the re-valuation of art in society (not merely in the school system) and discussed various successful and not-so-successful initiatives in making art and culture part of everyday life. What became very clear is the difference between a Western and an Asian approach to art – in India, for instance, it is unnecessary to tell children they should look at art, because it is all around them and already part of life.

Not everyone was clear what was meant by arts education, and it was agreed that it would be useful to see the term from three directions – education *in* art (art history, theory, etc), education *for* art (training in performance), and education *through* art (fostering the development of the whole person through engagement with cultural activity). The third of these definitions seemed to be the one most appropriate for this conference.

Considerable discussion arose around the idea of the value of art as a social service - giving the disadvantaged a voice, engaged theatre, etc. – and its value in developing respect for different cultures and the family of man. The thorny question of appropriation of other cultures was raised (beware, we were warned, of representation of one culture by another – caricature is not the real thing). And the group discussed one of the central challenges of cultural change: how can you represent a culture that is closely connected to an original geographic space in a space that has shaped an entirely different culture?

Why, the group asked, is art so important in education and with immigrants and refugees? Among the answers: Because it has infinite flexibility as an expressive tool; because it is passion-driven; because it puts us in touch with the intuitive; because it offers a means of understanding other points of view without being confrontational; because it allows the individual to respond in his own way; because it helps people overcome blockages to understanding; because it reinforces universal values of solidarity and cooperation.

The group came to no firm conclusions, and did not expect to. Art, it was stressed, is not universal; it is common to all, but it is manifest in many different ways, and has different significance in different societies.