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Carl F. Stover

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MEMORANDUM

TO: ANNE MURPHY
FROM: CARL F. STOVER
DATE: MARCH 12, 1976

CF Stover/gp

File
File memos to pg. directors

SUBJECT: YOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE TERMS "ARTS INSTITUTIONS" AND "CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS"

The term "arts institutions" is rarely heard in Endowment usage. Rather, the familiar phrase for the agency's areas of concern is "the arts and cultural institutions". Its scope is usefully ambiguous.

Strictly speaking, "arts institutions" includes all those professional organizations deliberately devoted to the cultivation, preservation and presentation of the arts--for example, symphony orchestras, choral groups, theatres, opera companies, ballet companies, conservatories and institutes, art museums, literature centers and magazines, folk and craft centers, and more. "Cultural institutions" is a broader term, adding such organizations as historical museums, science museums, and universities, among many others.

Generally, "the arts" encompasses everything that relates to the artistic content of human activity; "cultural" encompasses everything that relates to the artistic and intellectual content of human activity--or, even more broadly, everything that is "man-made".

"The arts and cultural institutions" is a pragmatic "term of art", more or less describing the Endowment's domain. Operationally, it comes down to embracing both more and less than "the arts" or "cultural", strictly construed. Its ambiguity preserves a practical flexibility in Endowment programming that is both desirable and necessary.

To legislate what is or is not "the arts" or "cultural" could be dangerous business. A case can be made, for example, that basic science is an art, that some forms of painting or sculpture are not art at all, or that all technology is art--and as now practiced, mostly bad art. There are limits to what the law may dare to proscribe!