

Culture and extreme poverty

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Speaking about cultural actions for people living in poverty and bringing together experts and researchers at a symposium on the topic is good news for the most disadvantaged families. This symposium could be a real opportunity for them, if we become clear on: what we have to know about the poorest members of society and the action that they expect from us.

Looking at culture in this way is nothing new. Over the last hundred years alone, many cultural actions have been undertaken involving the poor. These actions were supported by numerous popular education movements and above all by the Church. Just think of the people's universities and libraries, for example, which were abundant in deprived areas during certain periods. That was a remarkable attempt at achieving social justice and their history has been recounted in many books and papers. However, we also know that this large movement let many people slip through the net of our ideals.

Of course we cannot accuse the people behind these movements of having deliberately rejected the poorest members of society. They can be credited with understanding that all truly cultural action goes far beyond simply passing on knowledge. By sharing culture in the broadest sense of the term, they attempted to create a society of justice and fraternity in which everyone would help each other to understand the world around them, the bonds that united them and the means of coping with the failures of justice and fraternity.

We will never understand why humanity finds it so difficult to unite its members in order to achieve its democratic ideals of justice and fraternity. So far no community has managed to do so. Man is asked about this failure and it is man, and man alone, who can provide the answer as indicated with the simplicity - that is the key to its power - of the African proverb "Man is Man's remedy".

This means, primarily, that we must come to see all people as affected by this unity. This goes against the idea that on the one hand the poor want fraternity and justice and on the other the rich only look out for their own interests. It is this manner of thinking, this way of seeing humanity as divided up into classes which leads to the creation of ineradicable ghettos, far more so than the simple fact that families live in emergency housing camps or slums.

It is true that people do not recognise each other as having the same value. Some believe that they cannot assert themselves unless other people and groups are excluded and denigrated. It is a fact that, over the centuries, violence towards the poor has generated a climate of security, if not one of culture; it was a way of excluding those of our own kind we had come to consider as scapegoats since they embodied something society did not want to be yet from which it was not protected. Today, however, the fear of everything that we ourselves are not is no longer the same; we have come to realise that people can achieve more in their diversity.

Nowadays, we are also more aware that all important cultural action which is not based, to a certain extent, on uniting and bringing together people from all walks of life is doomed to failure, not only in terms of our current ideals, but also because a culture must represent everyone if it is to survive

within the context of globalisation. Any cultural action, therefore, which excludes the poor to too great an extent will fail in the end. This being said, our vision on sharing culture has not yet expanded enough to include the most disadvantaged in society.

Everything seems to be continuing as if we had rejected the idea that the Fourth World is worthy and capable of culture, that it is able to create its own knowledge and that it has a certain understanding of life and of the world, which may be fragile but could be of interest to others. Many people consider the Fourth World to be a void characterised by disinterest and an innate lack of intelligence and creativity. They think that the little amount these people do think is bad and that we can try to educate the Fourth World but it is simply too uncultivated for us even to consider sharing a culture with. In reality, the families of the Fourth World do have knowledge and thoughts about the world. Unfortunately, these are developed at the edge of a large movement which aims to understand the world and outside the schools of thought and the ideas that have shaped human culture.

A world of exclusion

The people of the Fourth World have been marginalised as a result of various kinds of exclusion. Allow me to name just a few: exclusion from family; exclusion from work; exclusion from citizenship; exclusion from history; exclusion from spirituality.

These exclusions seem typical of extreme poverty. They have, to a certain extent, 'deculturalised' extreme poverty and to our mind they indicate just how difficult any form of cultural action is in the Fourth World, both in the past and the present.

Exclusion from family

Let us talk about the family. The ATD Fourth World Movement began in the emergency housing camp in Noisy-le-Grand, where over 250 French families were sheltered. These families had been marginalised from society as a result of poverty and their integrity had been eroded in a multitude of different ways. The men and women in the camp were absolutely determined to live together as a family. This determination to be and to remain a family against all odds is a feeling typical of all people living in poverty. No matter how poor and alone they are, people seem to think about a family they could build up around themselves, a family which would make them part of the community.

We readily admit that the family is the wealth of the poor but the very presence of a family is far from guaranteed since everything conspires to destroy it. Their attachment to the family, however, is the proof, if proof were needed, of their wisdom. For poor people know all too well that without family their state of destitution would not even be considered by the well-to-do. They know from experience that by excluding them, denying them a permanent place to stay and placing their children in homes, the rich aim, either intentionally or unintentionally, to break up or indeed destroy the poor family.

The poorest members of society know what lies behind the constant pressure they are under to use contraception and have abortions. They know instinctively and from experience that the world around them thinks they should not have children, that families like theirs should not be allowed to exist and it would be better if they had never existed in the first place.

Exclusion from work

'Underclass' workers cannot consider themselves to be like other workers since they have no vocational qualifications whatsoever, their ability to work has been eroded by deprivation in all areas and they have been shifted from one form of employment to another and from one job to another. To save face, they say "I've done all sorts of jobs, I can put my hand to anything" but by doing so they cover up the reality of their situation conveyed in the phrase "36 jobs, 36 forms of destitution", which they have adopted as a slogan.

It is not just employers that are involved. The underclass know all about the refusal of skilled workers to work alongside someone who has not had the chance to learn to work and is therefore offensive to them - offensive too in terms of his language and apparent lack of feeling for workers' values and the workers' struggle. It is the very identity of the underclass worker that is at stake here.

I remember a road sweeper who did not dare eat in the canteen and instead ate alone in a corner at the back of a shed.

Exclusion from citizenship

Are we aware of the material, and even legal, situations that can prevent certain men and women from enjoying their rights as a citizen - even though they are not guilty of any crime? For example, people who are forced to move from one area to another without being able to acquire a fixed address which would entitle them to a voting card; or social welfare recipients who, under certain circumstances, are prevented from standing for elected office. And what about citizens who are unable to attend political or trade union meetings, to read and understand the agenda or to express their views in an appropriate manner?

The impact of this form of exclusion is felt to an even greater extent in what is not said, not admitted, not provided for them within this day-to-day democracy in their local lives - for example at the town hall or at school - where none of the under-class would ever dare voice their hopes or opinions for fear of being ridiculed, viewed in a poor light, deprived of the aid they depend on to live or sent back to do their menial jobs which are far from secure.

The poorest families - crushed under the weight of thousands of worries, humiliated by their inability to respond to futile situations, accused of being irresponsible and choosing to live the way they do, never treated as ordinary citizens - do not even dare class themselves as citizens.

Exclusion from history

The fourth form of exclusion which leads to cultural marginalisation is the virtual exclusion from being - and recognised as being - a part of other people's history.

The poorest members of society know deep down that the fight that they lead every single day is in actual fact the fight of humanity as a whole against extreme poverty and exclusion. They know that their fight is not just their fight but is actually the real challenge faced by all of humankind since any person will fall into irremediable poverty if deprived of means of communicating, acting and demonstrating their human capacities. Everybody is aware of this and protects themselves against it. Extreme poverty, therefore, has been an issue throughout the history of humanity. It occurs with greater intensity at regular intervals depending on the region and the economic situation, but nobody can deny that it is a permanent phenomenon. The human spirit has become intimately aware of this.

However, the most destitute are almost completely excluded from the history of societies, their existence is only mentioned from time to time in our accounts of the past. Do we dismiss them

through fear or do we really think that their lives are of no interest to us? Everything continues as if they did not possess a history of their own in the same way as the peasantry, the working class, the bourgeoisie and the nobility. Their history does exist, however, but since it is considered contemptible, nowhere is deemed suitable to record it. There is no place where the most destitute are able to express their courage to fight against all odds or their refusal to be reduced to the condition that they are forced to live in. There is no place where they can give an account of their struggle, which after all is the key struggle of humankind, to gain respect from those who have suppressed and excluded them throughout the ages. No people can hope to be understood if they cannot pass on their history with honour and if they themselves have a negative image of their history.

Exclusion from spirituality

The fifth and final form of exclusion that I mentioned is exclusion from spiritual life. This is probably the most serious and the most critical.

More than anybody else in the world, the poorest members of society know human weakness. Every day, they have to face employees, social workers and voluntary workers, all of whom have their own ideas, analyses and suggestions on how to respond to these peoples' immediate needs. Yet despite this, it is not at this level that the poor attempt to come into contact with them. What they see in these people is above all their ability to make contact with their own humanity and their ability to grasp everything that lies beyond the immediate problems, in other words life, death and, why not, God.

What do we know about their thoughts on God and on what comes 'after' life? What do we know about their knowledge of the spirituality of humanity? What do we know about their determination to live together or to look into what unites us? In their opinion, why are we here? For what God? For what ideology? For what truth? What do we know about their knowledge of this unfathomable mystery of mankind in its search for its entirety and its uniqueness? Why, on their behalf, do we accuse the world of all the evils without even knowing their thoughts? Why do we sometimes mobilise them against others without even knowing what they expect from those others? Do we not think that sharing these thoughts on the world and on God is as much a way of bringing about action as properly managing family benefits or granting poor-quality housing? Or do we really think that the poorest members of our society do not think and that they do not have a spiritual life? Unless this form of exclusion is overcome, any sort of cultural action will be futile since the spirituality of the poor reminds us that we are part of the same humanity. If we do not enter into this spirituality then it is useless speaking to them about culture.

Without culture there is no way to find oneself or forge links with others

All these forms of exclusion represent a considerable burden for the most disadvantaged families: they distance them from the very basis of any culture, from all means of creating it and from all places where they are able to experience or share culture. Without family people cannot pass anything on; without history they cannot develop their awareness; without work they cannot create; without citizenship they do not belong and without spirituality they can only dream of God. Without all this, they will still be people, but their way of being, thinking and living will not be the same as others. They will be what no person is destined to be: a recluse.

They will be people and will possess knowledge and even a culture, but this knowledge and this culture will be tarnished and crumbling and will not enable them to occupy a place in the world because they will always be aware of who their family is and where they came from. This knowledge will be worthless, even to themselves if - we can finally speak the word - 'knowledge' means power to participate in what others do and are.

The knowledge and thoughts of the poorest in society are all the more fragile because people whose ideas are never voiced and hence never heard are unable to consolidate their own beliefs. This makes them easy victims of all arbitrary powers. They will succumb to the ideas of others and will become slaves to these ideas ('scabs' as workers call them). They will be even less aware of their true identity than before and they will not be brothers or partners for others. With their poorly formed knowledge, their thoughts which are looked down upon, their way of living which is disapproved of, how can these people, these families become part of a culture of unity and of brotherhood, of which they dream in the depths of their loneliness? I would like to dwell on this question with you now for a few moments.

From shame to unity - The path to a new culture

What the most deprived members of society initially feel towards an environment or a society from which they are excluded is shame. Not shame in the face of so-called socioeconomic, educational or cultural standards but rather true humiliation at having spent 10 years of their lives in school and still being unable to read or write. Even beyond the humiliation of having failed in the eyes of others, there is the real humiliation of having been unable to master writing, of not having been able to internalise this magic world of letters and words and of therefore being kept at arm's length from the long history of the written word.

This feeling of mortification stays with them throughout their lives because the poorest people know that a person is only a person if they manage to master the ideas and concepts they were taught. This person will suffer the shame of having ten fingers and being unable to make use of them. They will be forced into doing invisible and impure work, work which will never enable them to attain the status of a recognised worker, work which will never offer them the opportunity to show their humanity alongside their fellow workers or with other people. This quest for humanity undertaken by the poorest in our society, which gives them a reason to live and which we have already discussed, brings us to three circles which should lead on from one another. Moving from one to the other seems to me to be the only incentive capable of leading them towards a universal culture, a culture in which they themselves would be the main players. Here, I am referring to shame, refusal and unity.

The first circle is withdrawal into shame: the shame of a group of people living in conditions in which they themselves must find their own solutions. This shame seems to be inescapable. Yet it creates a second circle around families which is larger than the first since it leads the families towards the world around them. This is the circle of their refusal to live in this condition and their determination to fight both for themselves and for others. We may say that this fight is futile, yet the refusal shown by the poorest people in society at least bears witness to their awareness of the abnormal character of their condition. If the exclusions they are subject to, the poverty of their culture and their shame fences them in, their awareness on the other hand cannot be restricted. But awareness does not equal knowledge. Exclusion cannot be overcome without the means to act. The awareness of the most deprived members of society needs to come together with the awareness of other people who also refuse to be excluded. Hence the third circle, to which the first and second circles naturally lead: the circle of unity and solidarity, whose door is never closed because deep down all people refuse to be excluded. It is this refusal which, in principle, makes people part of a community and part of a culture.

Allow me to say one more thing about these circles of shame, refusal and, finally, agreement and unity which, in a sequence perfectly mirroring that of nature and human destiny, can give rise to a real universal culture of the refusal of extreme poverty.

A culture of shame, in the margins of the right to culture

The shame of the poorest in society places them in the margins of the right to culture and it completes the vicious circle: the shame of being excluded from cultural means distances them even further from us and when a person's life has no continuity and prevents them from belonging to a community, they are unable to benefit from culture. But we cannot forget that this discontinuity of existence becomes, paradoxically, a continuous experience which becomes lodged in these people's memories.

This can be illustrated by the story of Patricia's family. This eight-year old girl exclaimed out of the blue during a cultural meeting 1: "My great, great, great grandmother lived in a slum!" Here, we have a demonstration of awareness of a historical continuity in the mind of this child whose family's life, however, is characterised by discontinuity.

We know that this family lost their accommodation many times and that, as a result, the father of the family was obliged to change his job each time and also had to endure long periods of unemployment. Moving from one place to another and placing children in homes obviously leads to instability at school, since establishing friendships proves to be impossible. Above all, the link with what has been learnt at school becomes especially tenuous and the same goes for parents whose grasp of experiences becomes less solid and instructive of the past. Any plans in life become illusory because plans require experience, knowledge and long-term resources. We know all too well from our own experiences how difficult it is to fulfil our destiny when regularly ostracised from our family and forced out of our traditional surroundings.

This lack of continuity turns the world of the poor into an environment which is constantly on the move and is highly unstable, an environment in which these people are unable to create and unable to make a future for themselves. Excluded from the law, the most disadvantaged in society become increasingly firmly fixed outside the law as a result of this discontinuity, which forces them to come up with immediate and personal answers to life. These answers overcome the problems of the present without building a future. Consequently, they are answers that are in some sense outside culture, made up of the little scraps of culture that they can keep hold of in their eternally chaotic existence.

The people in the Fourth World are also well aware of the fact that they cannot build anything stable and promising for their family as long as they are denied fundamental rights: education, work, housing and income. As a result of the fickleness of their lives, which makes the people themselves seem fickle, the Fourth World constantly tells us that it is pointless trying to talk about access to culture without speaking about access to fundamental existential security.

We must constantly refer back to the five exclusions we spoke about before. Human culture is the result of a slow process of understanding and construction of the five realities of human life, from which families in the Fourth World are excluded. Currently, these realities are the right to work, the right to family, the right to citizenship, the right to history and the right to spirituality.

These rights, which form the basis of Human Rights, lead to a situation to which people have been aspiring for years: the situation whereby they can live in a community in dignity and fully independently. This independence is the proof of individual and collective freedom, which is indivisible from the dignity to which all people aspire. The situation experienced by the Fourth World clearly shows that if these rights are not recognised, people are unable to be fully fledged cultural entities. What we are less aware of perhaps is that this situation leads to a feeling of shame which takes a hold of these people to such an extent that they are not just closed off within their

own environment but also closed off within themselves. They therefore become permanently excluded from culture.

A culture of refusal, a culture of dignity

Although the experience of extreme poverty is one of shame, poverty cannot undermine the awareness of its victims. "I want people to help us to understand why these things happen. Why people who have nothing are rejected by others?" exclaimed a father during a forum on 'The underclass and the reality of work'. This question, shows us that extreme poverty calls for questions to be asked - for questions are the gateway - not questions on our culture, but questions on a culture that is being challenged and renewed.

The poorest members of society develop their awareness, not so much by making comparisons with wealth but rather by refusing to be excluded. This refusal is the sign of their determination to understand both what they experience themselves and the world around them and it is expressed in the resolve never to allow themselves to be totally oppressed by the ugliness of their surroundings and in the resolve to find and constantly create a refuge from the dullness of the world around them. This refusal is the refusal to be bogged down and drained of their strength: "You have to get a grip on yourself" is a phrase often heard in the inner cities. Likewise, after the film on their struggle to be re-housed, the families in Stains said "We'll have to show that we're up to it". This is also the refusal to allow themselves to be ruined by the bad reputation that they are stuck with. This refusal is not an adaptation to external standards - rather it is an expression of the awareness of what people and their organisations must be at heart.

The families in the Fourth World know that children cannot learn if they are rejected by others. For this reason, we have always seen children from the Fourth World well dressed at the start of the school year. The poorest in society sense that nobody will be accepted amongst their fellows if they are unable to face up to their destiny as responsible individuals. They know that, although the law may help to free people from their dependence, they need to be able to understand this right and to respond to it by assuming their responsibilities if they want to live independently. Hidden behind such intuition - because the people of the Fourth World are people with intuition - lies an insight into human nature and the history of mankind.

Although it is true that at one point in its existence, the West placed the poor under the protection of God, it is also true that, subsequently, the poor have been forced to work to prove their worth. This approach is open to criticism if work becomes an absolute value that replaces the inalienable value possessed by all God's children. But, in spite of everything, could this perhaps not be seen as an attempt to transfer the intuition that future societies based on the rule of law would only be able to survive if each and every individual agreed to take on certain responsibilities?

The extremely poor have this power of intuition, so to say that they refuse to work is an insult to them. More than any other group of people, these people hunger for responsibility. But they also know better than anyone else that to be able to assume responsibilities people need access to resources and to be entitled to use them. As a result of being denied access, they have paid dearly for the evolution of our societies. Armed with their experience, they show us that our culture has confused people and work; people who have rights and responsibilities on the one hand and who are obliged to work hard on the other.

Is it not the aim of any position of power over the world to enable people to develop freely by allowing them to understand both their relationship to the real world and their relationship to the rest of humankind? In any case, it is in the basis of this view that we have planned the cultural

actions launched in different countries throughout the world over the last 28 years; their starting point is invariably a blanket refusal to accept extreme poverty, which destroys the human spirit.

A culture of unity and solidarity

The people of the Fourth World are trapped between a world which has failed to defeat extreme poverty and a world which refuses to believe that it still exists, a world of contradictions and quests of which the Fourth World bears the burden. The Fourth World knows this. It also knows that it cannot overcome this ongoing exclusion unaided. It knows that it needs the help of others, but it also knows, or rather senses that, without it, there would be no harmony in the world.

It knows that the rest of the world has little patience with it. This can be demonstrated by all the projects and programmes that have been started, stopped and restarted and which have never led to the eradication of extreme poverty. And Heaven knows there have been many of them. The Fourth World knows that the discontinuity of its own life, which we were discussing before, is reflected in the discontinuity of the commitments that society makes in its regard. It knows that the continuity displayed by society towards the Fourth World is largely the continuity of developing theories on its condition, much more so than that of pursuing joint action or attempting to show solidarity between people. The Fourth World knows all this but nevertheless it still lives in hope and in the determination that this will change, that the meeting between these two groups will take place and that fraternity will triumph in the end.

Culture is creation, encounters between people, the product of exchange between people. It is deeply rooted in the history of mankind. It is the very history of mankind, shaped and forged together. It is the very negation of the idea that there need to be scapegoats in order to move forward and that some people are fated to be the standard refuse of humanity.

However, if people want to overcome these false theories concerning necessary scapegoats or humanity's refuse, then they have to meet these people living in extreme poverty and get involved with them. They need to train themselves and we need to train ourselves as regards contact with these people, the awareness that they themselves have of the situation and their refusal. We must discover the price that the Fourth World pays for its attempt to enable its children to live in different conditions.

Strengthened by this meeting, we will be able to imagine what is possible along with the Fourth World, to create with it and to share the established ideals and therefore a lasting universal culture of unity.

A new policy on culture

The points of view offered to us by the poorest in society do more than simply prompt us to create cultural activities involving the extreme poor. They also broaden our horizons as regards a genuine cultural policy, which would be based on four principles:

- The right to culture must be fulfilled at the same time as the rights to the most basic material securities i.e. shelter, health and income.
- This right must be fulfilled at the same time as the strict right to education, professional training and employment.
- The right to culture must be based primarily on the right of everybody to express and consolidate their own knowledge, experiences and thoughts.
- It is on the basis of the recognition of a group's personal history and identity that all forms of access to culture in the surrounding environment can be promoted.

In concrete terms we have realised that this policy is definitely not about 'distributing culture' to 350,000 extremely poor French families who are deprived of this right but rather, above all else, the aim must be to enable any group of people to recognise them-selves as subjects of culture and as people of culture and also to enable society as a whole to recognise the fact that its poorest members have the right to culture, that they are capable of being subjects of culture and that their contribution is vital for everyone.

In fact, conducted in this way, cultural action is essential. It allows the issue of human exclusion to be addressed in a more radical way than the issue of access to the right to housing, work, resources and health. One could think that access to these other rights is automatically guaranteed once the right to culture has been recognised. Passing on cultural heritage involves integrating those who benefit from it in this heritage itself, of which they will become heirs. It also involves creating a single, shared history where everyone has their own unique identity but at the same time is determined to forge a common destiny between all those who have created this heritage. Nothing is more difficult to accept for those with a wealth of knowledge, because in order to accept this, they must also recognise the fact that the poorest in society create culture in the same way as others. If this fact is recognised, the first step to take would be to create places where people can express themselves: all kinds of meeting places where Fourth World families, children, young people and adults could pool their ideas, consider issues in greater depth and develop their creativity together with people from all other backgrounds. These places, such as the Fourth World people's universities² or the cultural meetings created by ATD Fourth World, must be places where the underclass and other citizens can share their experiences of life. They should prompt the creation of new relations between individuals and therefore the creation of a new culture.

The second step for any form of cultural action involving the extreme poor would be to enable all people to understand the world and the history that is unfolding around them so that they can become both subjects and actors of culture. It is with this aim in mind that people in the Fourth World constantly seek to establish a place for themselves in their surroundings, but so far this has not met with success. To finally succeed, they need to understand how they can be the subject of thoughts and events in the world and what already makes them citizens in the same way as others within one and the same history.

We have already said that under current conditions this is impossible. Extreme poverty actually para-lyses people's intellectual faculties and restricts their vision of society, whereas any sort of creation or any plans in life are founded on constantly evolving knowledge. The development and the gradual unfurling of spiritual potential is hence an inalienable right for all people.

Intellectual capacities, knowledge and general culture are a key. Employment must become the driving force. Knowledge is the key to accessing a job, the job in turn then becomes the driving force behind mental capacities, knowledge and the development of culture. It is as a result of this that they acquire the opportunity to take control of the world around them and of their rights. Taking control of a right means playing a part in a story and becoming responsible for it.

For example, when families living in inner city housing estates have been allowed to recount together the story of their fight for the right to be a family and their right to accommodation, when they have understood the challenges of speaking about their identity and beliefs together in public, they have also felt motivated to take control of the present-day story, their political and social life and the collective life of their estate.

Creating places where the poorest in society can express themselves and meet with people from other backgrounds, and introducing ways of understanding what the world outside thinks and what happens there - to these two steps it is necessary to add a third, that of grouping everybody together in a joint project. A living culture is always a fight for the ideals that everyone respects despite their differences. How can a culture for tomorrow not be a culture of refusal of exclusion, a culture of meeting and fraternity between different people, starting with the poorest members of society and based on what they have to say on all matters regarding man and God?

A step towards unity obviously involves organising events and festivals in significant places, with open access for everyone, starting with those who, up until now, only moved about to flee from a crisis or because they were forced to.

Art, knowledge and modernity for those with the least

Do we need to go into detail about an action to which we are all invited and where every gesture, no matter how small, becomes significant when it is inspired by the principles that we have developed this evening?

Children and parents must be allowed access to the arts and to various forms of cultural expression which people have created over the centuries and which constitute a common heritage. Thus, the poorest in society have the right to receive visits from theatre groups which organise activities in the most excluded areas. They have the right to play *Antigone* or *Iphigénie* for example, as they did in 1966 in the mud of the emergency housing camp in Noisy-le-Grand. This event marked a beginning of theatrical expression in the Fourth World, something which expanded well beyond the edges of the housing camp.

Artists such as painters, sculptors and musicians and people in the noble professions, such as blacksmiths, carpenters, locksmiths and gardeners, are urgently needed to share their knowledge with the poorest members of society in the places where these people live. In return, these artists and workers urgently need to be taught the strength of refusal which turns the very poorest into people who can stand on their own two feet.

As an example, I will refer to the historic fresco painted in May 1984 in the 13th arrondissement of Paris entitled "*Pieds humides et Gagne-Petit*" (Wet feet and low earners). This fresco not only enabled the Fourth World to rediscover a part of its history, but also to enter the world of theatrical expression and to experiment with certain professions by mounting a show itself. Over 200 people from the Fourth World met to tell their story with dignity, pride and honour.

We must also and above all create the means of introducing literature into the most disadvantaged areas. We must increase the number of cultural meetings, street libraries and mobile libraries in these places and also organise public performances focusing on the written word. All this must be done without ever forgetting that computers are also a cultural tool and that in the Fourth World they have turned out to be an extraordinary way of getting people interested in reading and writing.

I will always remember a ten-year-old child who was extremely introverted at school. But at the cultural meeting organised by the Movement on his estate, he was dynamic and full of energy. One day in his class he had the opportunity to speak about this cultural meeting where all the children on the estate spent hours reading and telling each other stories and where those who did know taught those who did not. Just through his manner of speaking, he showed that, for him, the cultural meeting was this place of books, discovery, expression and a place where people came together to share knowledge.

The cultural meeting is not just a sideline alongside other community development action. The cultural meeting plays a central role in liberating an entire people! And much more than books are offered and passed on. The cultural meeting is a place where a whole society can show its commitment and where society finally accepts its responsibilities and says: through this underclass child, all of the people around him will now know what I know.

Poor people have the right to have such places at the heart of the community itself and at the centre of their history, a history that these people cannot build alone and which requires commitment from all of us. Setting up, recognising and financing such actions is the sign that a society wants to offer its best to the poorest of its members. It is also the sign that it believes that the Fourth World can offer its best in return.

Our best finally shared: is this not the solution to the problem of exclusion that we are all searching for? Our best is the certainty that one day, humanity will no longer need to use the poor as a scapegoat nor will it offend it by considering it as humanity's refuse. When this day comes, the poorest in our societies will be able to live their history without shame, they will be able to refuse what we refuse, confident in the knowledge that we will no longer formulate our thoughts or create our culture without them.

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