

Cultural Decay Can Hardly Go Further

By Theodore Dalrymple

On France's sordid Olympic spectacle



The opening ceremony of the 2012 London Olympics was bad enough, with the nation joyfully celebrating its decline into sub-mediocrity and bureaucratic incompetence, where people wait two years for routine surgeries. The ceremony this weekend in Paris was far worse. It could have been designed by the propaganda department of Islamic State.

Apart from the generalized vulgarity of it, by comparison with which King Farouk had the taste of Lorenzo the Magnificent, the parody of the Last Supper by transvestites and others would have been more than enough to convince any Islamist that the West was a fruit ripe for the plucking, and many an ordinary Muslim that Islam, at least, should not, and probably could not, descend to *this*. Cultural decay can hardly go further.

The ceremony's artistic director, Thomas Jolly, surprised by

the criticism of his production, doubtless because he lives in a cultural bubble, said that it was intended to be a celebration of diversity, inclusion, and tolerance (you know the drill). "I want this ceremony to include everyone," he said. "We must all celebrate this diversity." (Note the declension of what he *wanted* to what people *must* do and feel.) Jolly also noted that France has no law against blasphemy—which is true—and that he wanted to demonstrate and celebrate the nation's freedom and devotion to rights.

This goes to show that public messaging should not be left to members of the modern artistic elite, due to their limited capacity for connected thought. It apparently escaped Jolly's notice that more people in France had just voted for the *Rassemblement National* than for any other political party. How were *they* to be included, let alone celebrated, in his ceremony?

Nor is it true that France is a complete haven of freedom of speech. It is a crime there to deny the Holocaust or the Armenian genocide, or to write or broadcast racist commentary—or commentary deemed racist, which is not always the same thing. Whether these laws should exist is beside the point; they do exist. Freedom of speech is thus circumscribed in practice.

Jolly made no distinction between freedom and the rightfulness of exercising it in any way whatever, in any circumstances whatever. I agree that no laws against blasphemy should exist and that if someone wanted to put on a shallow, adolescent, sniggering show like his in a theater, and could find people to attend it, he should not be prevented from doing so. But what is acceptable for a private theater is not always suitable for public display, especially one that stands as a quasi-official representation of the whole nation. There are distinctions to be made and discrimination to be exercised.

The cowardice of the whole ceremony was evident. Suppose Jolly

had proposed to represent the Kaaba surrounded by prancing transvestite worshippers, or Muhammad himself dressed as a woman? Would he have been allowed to do so on the grounds that in France, all is permitted? And does he suppose that the difference would have gone unremarked by Islamists, and Muslims in general?

Being an ideological multiculturalist, he is unable to think about how others might think or feel because others must think or feel as he does. To adopt Dostoyevsky's dictum in *The Possessed*: starting from absolute diversity, I arrive at absolute uniformity.

First published in [City Journal](#)