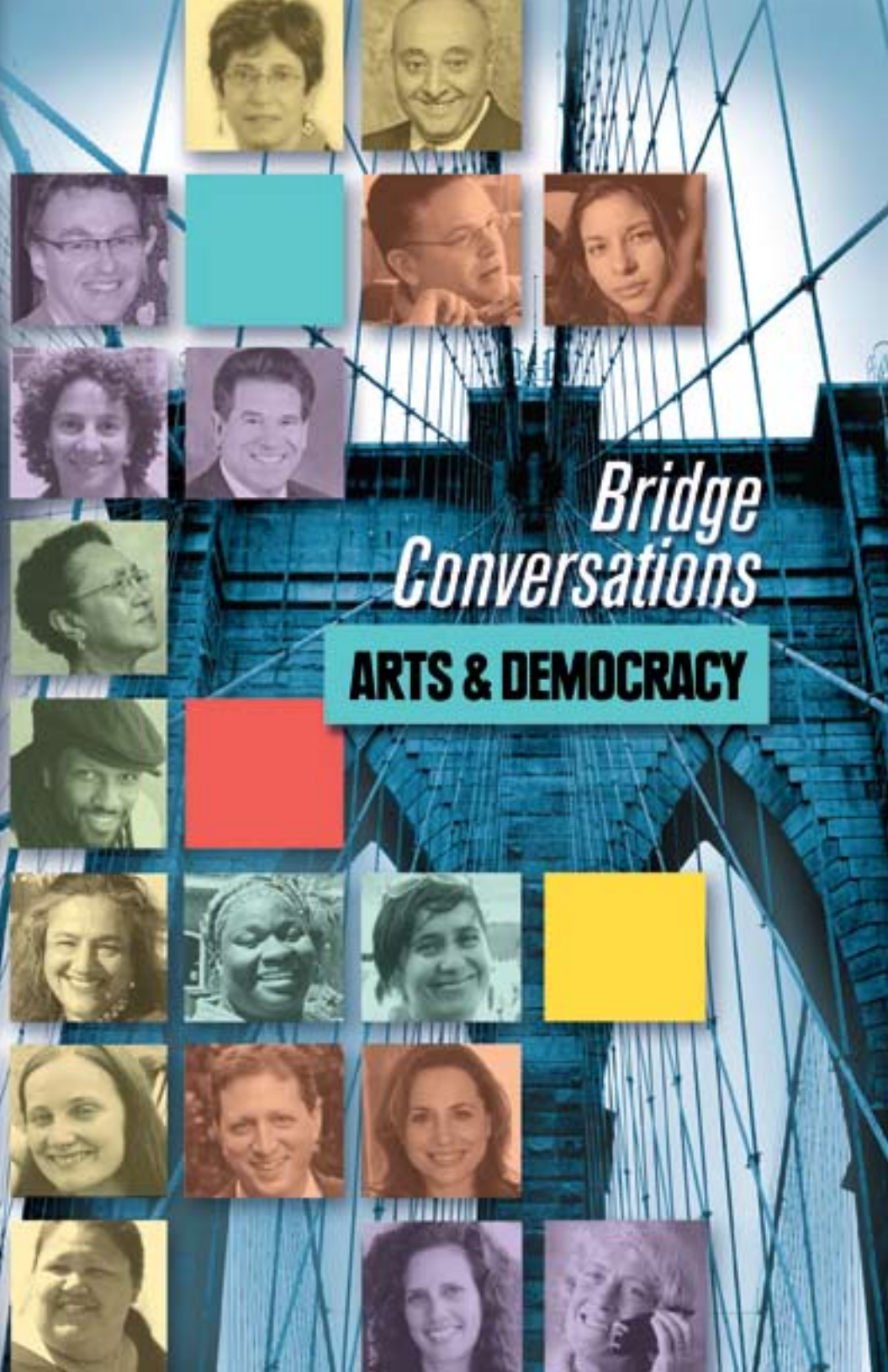






Bridge Conversations

ARTS & DEMOCRACY



Bridge Conversations

People Who Live and Work in Multiple Worlds



This book is dedicated to
the bridge builders and border crossers
who work every day
with integrity and imagination,
to create a better world.

To the vision and commitment of
Nayo Barbara Malcolm Watkins
(1939–2008)

We will carry the work forward.

Project director and editor: Caron Atlas
Project coordinator and editor: R. Lena Richardson
Project co-coordinator and coeditor: Jason Bulluck
Contributing editors: Kathie deNobriga
Linda Frye Burnham
Book and cover design: Kristin Reed
Bridge photo: © 2011 Kristin Reed
Copy editors: Anne Canzonetti
Mary Byers
Printer: Full Circle Color

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge, and are inspired by, all the extraordinary people who contributed their stories to this publication.

We deeply appreciate the support of the Nathan Cummings Foundation, Open Society Foundations, and National Endowment for the Arts. The Bridge Conversations began as a collaborative project of the Arts & Democracy Project and the Community Arts Network. Nineteen of the conversations were originally published in 2008 on the Community Arts Network website.

The conversation, "Breaking Out of a Bifurcated World," took place at the 2010 Grantmakers in the Arts conference, organized with the Seventh Generation Fund. It was originally published in Grantmakers in the Arts *Reader*, vol. 22, Spring 2011, and included the word cloud featured in the introduction of this collection. The word cloud was designed by Warren Wilkins Design, Seattle.

Arts & Democracy Project is a sponsored project of State Voices.

© 2011 Arts & Democracy Project. All rights reserved.
Contributing authors and artists retain copyright on their individual pieces included in this collection.

ISBN: 978-0-615-53235-6

Bridge Conversations

People Who Live and Work in Multiple Worlds
is a publication of the **ARTS & DEMOCRACY PROJECT**

ARTS & DEMOCRACY PROJECT builds the momentum of a growing movement that links arts and culture, participatory democracy, and social justice. Our work is based on the creative power of arts and culture as a catalyst for action—especially among people who have been traditionally disenfranchised. Our programs link the national and the local, reflecting the belief that social change, policymaking, and field building are best grounded in the nuanced and dynamic contexts of community practice. We support cultural organizing and cross-sector collaborations; raise the visibility of transformative work; cross-pollinate cultural practitioners with activists, organizers, and policymakers; and create spaces for reflection such as these Bridge Conversations.

intro	<i>Something Else Is Possible</i> Caron Atlas on transformative spaces and meaningful lives	9
1	<i>Activating the Creativity of Community Development</i> Jeremy Liu and Gayle Isa talk about the spaces 'in between'	13
2	<i>Aesthetics and Mathematics of Social Change</i> Dee Davis and Michelle Miller discuss the art of strategic communications.....	19
3	<i>Anthropology as Social Activism</i> Alaka Wali and R. Lena Richardson on drumming circles, sustainable conservation, and valuing difference	25
4	<i>Breaking Out of a Bifurcated World</i> A conversation at the Grantmakers in the Arts conference about the powerfully transformative and at times, painfully fragmented practice of philanthropy.....	33
5	<i>Connecting Action and Academia in California's Central Valley</i> Isao Fujimoto and Tim Marema on the power of 'edgewalking'.....	43
6	<i>Creating with a Sense of Strategic Practice</i> Maribel Alvarez and Jason Bulluck on paying attention to the 'little stuff', engaging in critical discourse, and understanding how power can be shaken up.....	47
7	<i>Creating Transformative Spaces</i> Harriet Barlow and Kathy Engel talk about The Commons and crossing borders.....	55
8	<i>Crossing the Borders of Culture and Politics</i> Paul Chin and Vanessa Whang talk about animating a Latin American Idea in the U.S.....	61
9	<i>Direct and Indirect Approaches to Community Change</i> Littlelobe and SouthWest Organizing Project talk about finding a relationship between community-engaged arts and organizing.....	67
10	<i>Finding Common Language Between Artists and Community Organizers</i> The second Bridge Conversation between Littlelobe and SouthWest Organizing Project about their ongoing collaboration.....	75
11	<i>Incarceration, Fatherhood, and Artmaking</i> Carol Fennelly and Ayo Ngozi on artmaking with fathers and children in federal and state prisons.....	81
12	<i>Innovative Approaches to Linking Nonprofit and For-profit Models</i> Ruby Lerner and Adam Huttler on entrepreneurial arts service organizations.....	87

13	<i>Interweave of Culture and Ecology</i> Ken Wilson and Caron Atlas talk about cultural context and creative philanthropy.....	93
14	<i>Listening to the Stories Underneath the Work We Do</i> Paula Allen and R. Lena Richardson talk about traditional arts and culture as resources for Native community health	101
15	<i>Multifaceted Art of Community Planning</i> Ron Shiffman and Anusha Venkataraman consider the intersections of organizing, creative practice, and community-based development.....	109
16	<i>New Paradigms of Artful Change</i> Dudley Cocke, Peter Pennekamp, and Craig McGarvey discuss whether art can be as powerful a vehicle for change as it can be a bastion for maintaining the status quo.....	117
17	<i>Organic and Traditional Bridging</i> Francisco Guajardo and Edyael Casaperalta on intentionality, consciousness, and creating new opportunities	123
18	<i>Planning the Revolution over Collards</i> Tufara Waller Muhammad and Javiera Benavente talk about arts and culture in Southern organizing and the danger of putting the spotlight on individuals.....	129
19	<i>Politics and Humanity</i> Mark Ritchie and Caron Atlas talk about balancing work and life.....	137
20	<i>Power of Art to Move People</i> Ismael Ahmed and Anan Ameri discuss the extraordinary model of the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS).....	143
21	<i>Spiritual Core of Indigenous Social Justice</i> Tia Oros Peters and Vanessa Whang talk about maintaining your vision and integrity in rooms of power	151
22	<i>Tensions and Synergies of Being Strategic and Creative</i> Brad Lander and Esther Robinson discuss organizing and art, anthropological listening, and whether being holistic is important.....	159
23	<i>Theater and Banned Cultural Expression in Belarus</i> freeDimensional talks with the Belarus Free Theatre	167
24	<i>Who Will Carry the Work Forward?</i> An intergenerational conversation at the State of the Nation Festival and a tribute to Nayo Watkins	173
bios		185



*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

Intro

***Transformative spaces and
meaningful lives***

In one of the Bridge Conversations that follow, artist Pepón Osorio quotes his mother as saying, "I just want to live in a fair world, FAIR." I'm not always sure about what it takes to get us to that fair world, but I do know that some of the most powerful change happens in the intersections of generations, cultures, sectors, and geographies. Collected here are stories about these intersections and the people who make them. They are strategic artists and creative organizers, activist anthropologists and poetic politicians, loving family members. All are a part of believing that something else is possible. Foundations and squatters who bring their communities to life. People who may not always be visible (or even want to be visible), but who are there. Listen with curiosity and compassion.

[illegible]

When the Art & Democracy Project started in 2005 we talked to artists and activists across the country about their work for social justice and what was needed for it to succeed. We wanted to identify the values and the vision for organizing that is facilitative and transformative. We asked a diverse

group of bridge people to talk with one another. We weren't sure if anyone would respond; after all, we had asked some of the busiest people we know. To our surprise, everyone we asked agreed, and others, learning about the project, wanted to be included. These conversations gave a group of action-oriented people a moment to take a breath and reflect with someone they admired.

19

While we started by focusing primarily on people's work, we soon found that the journey to an integrated perspective includes people's personal lives—how they grow up, how they connect cultures and worldviews, and how they balance their personal life and work. “Bringing your full self to your work” became a complementary, and at times, painful theme. For some people having an integrated life is the continuation of a long tradition; for others it is the start of something new.

Immediately the participants complicated our initial premise of “bridging” in wonderful ways. Some people embraced the term but made it richer by focusing on the bridge itself, and not just what it was connect-

ing. This happened in my conversation with Ken Wilson (the pilot conversation). When I worked with Ken on an arts and culture session for the Environmental Grant-makers retreat, he had inspired our colleagues

to take creative risks while I bumped into boundaries. I wanted to learn how he connected culture and ecology so gracefully, so I asked if we could talk about bridging. He immediately complicated the inquiry:

*...the space in the middle is actually
a space, a place in and of itself.
It's not a place going to anything. It is
a place to be and become all at once.*

“Let's get squarely into the topic, and not live in a bifurcated world. In other words, instead of thinking of a world in which topics are siloed, with occasional linking bridges, let's move to a world where we recognize that the richest things happen in the connections.”

Others preferred to use completely different terms: tunneling, shape-shifting, squatting, weaving, trespassing, and edgewalking, to name a few, and draw on their particular meanings, histories, and contexts. Many of them evoked concepts and images of the spaces at the intersection and “in between.” For example, amalia deloney speaks of the Nahuatl term *nepantla* that “the space in the middle is actually a space, a place in and of itself. It's not a place going to anything. It is a place to be and become all at once.” Jeremy Liu describes the interstitial spaces between two types of environments or ecologies, rich in diversity and often having the most species. Ken Wilson describes the river as a life force that unites people rather than dividing them, and Brad Lander shares Marcel Mauss's image of being on a train platform with 600 other people around you, and appreciating the 600 particular consciousnesses and very different experiences of that exact same moment.

The conversations consider who is making the connections and the nature of the bridging. In “Organic and Traditional Bridging,” Francisco Guajardo distinguishes between those who bridge through institutions and those who connect through the “organic reservoir of knowledge they possess.” Both are represented in the collection, and as Guajardo notes, some, like his organization, the Llano Grande Center, are both. “Miz Culchure Lady,” Helen Taylor, is an organic bridge in Mississippi.

She runs a daycare center, incorporates the arts, and finds housing for people in need, often at the same time. So is Tufara Waller Muhammad, who in “Planning the Revolution over Collards,” describes her discomfort with being singled out to share her experience and separate her knowledge from the community in which it is grounded.

On the institutional side, “Breaking out of a Bifurcated World” considers questions of power and privilege within philanthropy and how to most effectively bridge institutional resources and communities. This conversation engages the paradox many funders face when the practices and structures of philanthropy disconnect them “from their cultures, their grantees, and their full selves.” Tia Oros Peters, who cosponsored this conversation, asks what may be lost in bridging. While our focus in this collection is on people who make their connections with integrity, can the act of bridging sometimes require too much of a compromise of one’s values and beliefs?

Roberto Bedoya says, “I feed the people who do the imagining,” his institution’s response to “the fault lines of our civic infrastructure.” Providing an infrastructure of their own, the Blue Mountain Center, Highlander Research and Education Center, Pratt Center for Community Development, Junebug Productions, Tamejavi Festival, Seventh Generation Fund, and Center for Cultural Understanding and Change (to name but a few) create spaces where people can come together, make change, and learn from one another. They recognize that, as Alaka Wali puts it, “art is part of the very fabric of humanity.”

“Who will carry this work forward?” The essays in this book were written from 2008 to 2011. Many transitions—births, deaths, new jobs, and new communities—happened over this time, making the question asked by Nayo Watkins just months before her own passing particularly significant. This book begins to answer the question in its conversations across generations and connections built on respect. Michelle Miller writes, “Dee Davis’s longtime work building bridges between arts and activism made me the cultural activist that I am today. I don’t mean his work contributed to some vague larger whole that impacted me, or that in the midst of becoming an activist I ran across it and liked it. I mean it made me.” Paula Allen describes how traditional Native languages are being preserved and shared on digital recorders: “To think that I can put a recording of, say, my great-grand singing onto my daughter’s iPod, to make that kind of connection between generations, is powerful.” And Isao Fujimoto’s Japanese-Welsh-Irish son Basho is “taking the consciousness of all of our heritage ... and working with that to create something new.”

I’m writing this introduction on the tenth anniversary of 9/11, an appropriate time to think about connection and transformation. In her book *A Paradise Built in Hell*, Rebecca Solnit describes the extraordinary communities that come together in response to disaster and how these ephemeral moments in time can enable us to improvise more meaningful lives in a more egalitarian society. What if they were more than just short moments in time? The conversations in this book offer an answer: the purposeful connections and sustained transformations that are possible at the heart of our everyday lives.

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

1

Activating the Creativity of Community Development

***Jeremy Liu and Gayle Isa talk about
the spaces 'in between'***

By Gayle Isa

JEREMY LIU is a community development advocate, urban planner, and artist. In 2009, he became the executive director of the East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation in Oakland. Previously, he led the Asian Community Development Corporation in Boston. He is a cofounder of the National Bitter Melon Council.



GAYLE ISA is the founder and executive director of Asian Arts Initiative and an active participant in Philadelphia's arts and culture community for the past 16 years, beginning as an intern and evolving as a staff member at the Painted Bride Art Center.



This interview took place in a café in Philadelphia on an icy day in December 2007, after attending a Citizens Convention attempting to define priorities for Philadelphia's mayor elect.

I had known Jeremy Liu by reputation for quite some time before we finally met only a couple of years ago at a conference about the intersection of arts and community development work. Though he runs a community development corporation (CDC) and I work for an arts organization, we have sometimes noted that our lives are surprisingly parallel. Both of us came from California in the late '80s and we are now just past our mid-30s, working in East Coast cities and holding onto the belief that the arts and community development are inherently intertwined.

To start this conversation, I ask Jeremy to define the worlds or communities that his work bridges. He begins with a story.

JEREMY LIU: In school I studied biology and ecology. I wasn't typical pre-med—I was interested in the environment. I learned about the concept of 'biomes', and the interesting thing about biomes—at least what I remember about them—is what goes on in between them at the interface between two types of environments, or ecologies, like the savannah and the desert or the beach and the ocean. These in between areas generally have the most species and are really rich in diversity. When I learned about the concept of biomes I was drawn to it, and I think that has been one of the fundamental guiding philosophies of how I do my work. I never wanted to narrow my field, but work in the liminal—or, to use a term from cellular biology, interstitial—spaces 'in-between'.

'Community Development' has such a broad definition, that basically you can do whatever you want and it is part of community development. So, housing or art or performance or marketing, urban planning, community organizing, neighborhood branding, financing, all of these areas intersect.

My father, John K.C. Liu, is an architect who does community-based planning. He moved back to Taiwan to create a new department of architecture at the National Taiwan University and an affiliated nonprofit organization that were focused on design-driven community planning and organizing, doing things like coming up with a sustainable development plan to protect an endangered bird habitat or designing and building a new theater with a community. Essentially they are designers and planners, but in addition they had artists, writers, musicians, community organizers, scientists, engineers, filmmakers all working with them, and I always held that as an ideal.

*I never wanted to narrow my field,
but work in the liminal—or, to use
a term from cellular biology,
interstitial—spaces 'in-between'.*

GAYLE ISA: I realize that an important aspect of your perspective is the fact that you are a working artist as well as a community development professional. When did you first identify yourself as an artist?

LIU: Twice. When I was growing up I took a lot of art classes in drawing and photography, but I never thought of myself as an artist. Then, in college, I decided to cram all of my arts requirements into one summer. So, I took an intensive course at the Boston School of Fine Arts, which was affiliated with Tufts, and it was kind of a transformation for me. In evaluating my printmaking, one of my teachers told me [in a critique of my ongoing work], "What I like most is how you keep working on it." My work was terrible. I realized that my natural inclination is conceptual—not strong technique.

The second time was when I saw a call for outdoor, site-specific, environmental sculpture. And I thought, "great," because it was the intersection of these interests of mine. But I wasn't really a practicing artist at the time—I wasn't making work, I didn't have a studio, I didn't really play with materials on a regular basis. But I did a project. There was not a lot of subtlety to it—I think part of the problem is that the only times I was doing it, I was in the public eye all the time, and had no chance to practice or refine my work.

Then I moved over to social performance. The Deep Creek residency in Arizona was the first time I ever did a 'real' performance—and I realized that it's all about engaging an audience. I guess performance art is the thing that got me thinking most about process in relationship to product.

More recently, I used a Fluxus performance as professional development where I took all our community organizers [from Asian Community Development Corporation staff]. The ability to go from concept to something very concrete, and back to concept again—that's what art does for you. And it's not just important for community organizing, but in anybody's professional development.

ISA: For you, it seems like the confluence of fields that you work within has been such an organic process. But I wonder whether it is ever challenging to articulate or convince others who are not so fluent?



Treasurehill Garden Portrait Radio Project. Photo: Hiroko Kikuchi

LIU: I've met with the mayor [of Boston] in several contexts—on an open space planning committee, to talk about cell-based technology-based language interpretation services, to advocate for affordable housing, and as an artist. He must think there's like six different Asian American people who all look the same!

But I think the world is coming closer to this perspective—people are realizing that nothing is 'single discipline'.

ISA: Yes, we agree that the world is becoming more interdisciplinary. But at the same time there is still the desire to place people in boxes—are you an artist or are you doing community development, are you an artist or are you an executive director? In your projects, does one realm—artistic or community development—dominate over the other?

LIU: When I was walking past your building (the former home of the Asian Arts Initiative, which has been demolished to make way for the Pennsylvania Convention Center's expansion), I thought it would be cool to do the Paul Pfeiffer thing (time-lapse photos that show chunks of the building crumbling without seeing the crane and wrecking ball making it happen), but even that is political. It's pretty rare that it's a 'pure' art project without content or organizing affect.

Another example is an economic development grant that the city offers that is usually used for facade improvements. But I had this idea that we should hire artists to redesign the bathrooms of ten restaurants in Chinatown. Can you imagine a situation where people are going from restaurant to restaurant to see the bathrooms?

ISA: In your mind, is this an 'art' project, or an 'economic-development' one?

LIU: It's both. The other term to use is that it's a "social intervention." But in the arts world, our projects are often faced with people who wonder, 'Where's the art in it?'

And in our grassroots communities there is often also that same question about “Where’s the art in it?” I share an example of the cultural barriers that we had to confront with seniors in the Philadelphia Chinatown community, whom we had invited to contribute line drawings of their childhood neighborhoods to be included in Hirokazu Kosaka’s *Memory Map* project, but who had expected that since he is an artist he should teach them how to paint or draw, to make ‘art’.

ISA: We go on to discuss a project that Jeremy and his partner, Hiroko Kikuchi, will conduct as part of the Asian Arts Initiative’s next *Chinatown In/flux* exhibition. *Chinatown Orange* is about interrogating the Glidden paint company about its choice in naming this particular paint color, and it is also—by using this paint color to coat an abandoned row-house owned by the City of Philadelphia on the long-languishing site of a hoped-for Chinatown Community Center—intending to bring public attention to the distribution of resources in order to make specific change in the local community. Jeremy gives another example of an artistic project he and Hiroko are working on with a policy agenda.

LIU: Another project is about voting. After learning about campaign politics and process in my role as chair of the campaign committee for Sam Yoon (the first Asian American to run for and win an elected office in the city of Boston), what we want to do is a Warhol Vote project in Boston’s next election for city councillor at-large where we will ask artists to vote for Andy Warhol as a write-in candidate. In Philadelphia, if South Philly votes one way, they know who’s voting—it’s a demographic. But artists don’t always concentrate in one [geographic] section; it’s hard to quantify what is the ‘artist vote’. Legally the write-in votes have to be reported, so this is way of literally projecting artists’ voices in the political realm.

ISA: We deliberate over the fact that in Boston each citizen is allowed to vote for up to four city council candidates, and whether it will detract from viable living candidates if people decide to ‘throw away’ one of their votes for this project.

Then, as in almost every conversation that I have with another executive director, eventually ours turns to a discussion about the challenges of managing an

*I think the world is coming
closer to this perspective—
people are realizing that
nothing is ‘single discipline’.*



Chinatown Orange. Photo: Jeremy Liu



Asian Arts Building facade: rendering of multitenant arts facility.

Original CAN/API publication: March 2008

organization—and the difficulty of balancing work responsibilities with other life pursuits. I wonder if there is a hybrid role that could be created within the organization? Could Jeremy become the creative director of a CDC? Develop other qualified staff so that some of his salaried time could be spent in pursuit of these artistic projects? That's what I hope for him—and so that I can live vicariously through his success!

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

2

AESTHETICS AND MATHEMATICS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Dee Davis and Michelle Miller discuss the art of strategic communications

By Michelle Miller

DEE DAVIS is the founder and president of the Center for Rural Strategies. He started in 1973 as a trainee at Appalshop; while he was Appalshop's executive producer, the organization created more than 50 TV documentaries, established a training program for Appalachian youth, and used media as a strategic tool.



MICHELLE MILLER is a cultural organizer and strategist. She spent the past decade working with artists to magnify the voices of everyday people at the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). She recently became director of creative projects at Strategic Productions LLC, a women-led national network that crafts digital campaigns.



THE CENTER FOR RURAL STRATEGIES (CRS) is a public-spirited communications organization that seeks to improve rural life by increasing public understanding about the importance and value of rural communities. Its goals are to use media strategically to reframe the broad public discourse that defines rural communities, and create an environment in which positive changes can occur. CRS helps communities and nonprofit organizations incorporate media and communications into their work in support of strategic goals. They also design and implement information campaigns that educate the public about the problems and opportunities that exist in contemporary rural communities. They believe that healthy rural communities are essential to the overall health of the nation, that Americans' overwhelmingly positive perceptions of rural life are a starting point for creating better governmental policies and institutions that rebuild and sustain rural communities, and that communicating the stories of rural America's struggles and successes to a broad audience is essential to creating positive change.

THE SERVICE EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION (SEIU) is 1.9 million working people and 50,000 retirees united to improve services and our communities throughout North America. SEIU members are winning better wages, healthcare, and more secure jobs at home, while uniting their strength with their counterparts around the world to help ensure that workers, not just corporations and CEOs, benefit from today's global economy.

Dee Davis's longtime work building bridges between arts and activism made me the cultural activist that I am today. I don't mean his work contributed to some vague larger whole that impacted me, or that in the midst of becoming an activist I ran across it and liked it. I mean it made me.

As a film student, I was initially interested in merely observing the world and editing it down into a neat story. But Appalshop's work organized me. I was a transplant from West Virginia to Washington, DC, and finding this group of people whose film, radio, theatrical, and community work reflected the value of my own history and culture helped me see my own experience in a more politicized context and turned me into an activist. I have learned from my own experience how art and media can bring people into a movement.

Dee's work at the Center for Rural Strategies continues on this path, helping to influence policy around rural issues by reflecting the diversity of the rural experience in this country through a variety of media and campaigns.

■ ■ ■ ■

MICHELLE MILLER: You come from a creative media background and are now running the Center for Rural Strategies, which is focused more on creating policy around rural issues. How do you integrate that background into your approach to this more straightforward policy work?

DEE DAVIS: Cunning and wile. The great part about coming to policy or social change work after having worked in the arts is that you develop an appreciation for trying to do the job well. There's something about trying to create art where you're trying to be excellent and reach out to audiences that appreciate the work, and there's something about that approach that is different from the mathematics of social change. By mathematics of social change I mean this idea of 'if I can get enough of my people and we can garner enough power'. It's a different approach. It has to do with the way you communicate, the quality of the relationships. That's not to say that coming at social change work



Children at Rural Action watershed summer camp preparing to build a dam.
Photo: Shawn Poynter

in an Alinsky* style of organizing isn't good. I just think that those of us who have the opportunity to work in the arts field are lucky in that we get to approach it from a different perspective. I feel lucky in that being able to deal with social change work I'm able to see the work in the same way that you see producing a record or making

a film or writing a short story. You get to pay attention to the rhythm of the voices, the movement and the relationships. I feel like I have a sense of the aesthetics of gatherings and what gets put on the page. I get that feeling. That allows me to feel



Dee Davis tours Grand Bayou Village, LA, after the BP oil spill.
Photo: Shawn Poynter

joyful in this work. I'm not saying that people who come at it in other ways are joyless. It's great to have this filter when you're approaching social change work. It doesn't make the losses any easier (laughs), but it helps you to see the long-term impact of this kind of relationship-building approach.

A lot of what peeves me about the typical social change work is that the approach is all about logic. In reality, people become motivated and act around moments and relationships and feelings and trying to find which tribe you belong to.

Sometimes we misunderstand how change works. We don't always know the nuances of it. Sometimes we don't actually know what changes someone's point of view. The whole thing about art is that it changes people—they are actually changed by seeing a piece of art or a performance. That can happen when you're in the right space where you're open and you're emotionally reaching out. These moments are quite important. They're catalytic. They change you, they change others. It's these powerful moments that are important. You still

have to do the work. You still have to involve the day-to-day work of organizing, of shoe leather, research, analysis. But these moments are an important part of social change work that is often neglected.

MILLER: I definitely agree about these catalytic moments. And an important thing to keep in mind is that we don't always know for certain

I feel lucky in that being able to deal with social change work I'm able to see the work in the same way that you see producing a record or making a film or writing a short story. You get to pay attention to the rhythm of the voices, the movement, and the relationships.

when they will happen, or how they will turn out. A lot of this work relies on our faith in the process. I tend to temper my own frustration with nonarts-based activists by remembering that we are all deeply committed to the communities we serve. And because of that it's difficult to consider spending even a minute on something with an uncertain outcome or a different approach. How do you

communicate this approach to nonarts people, these folks that approach social change from that specifically mathematical equation that you find problematic?

DAVIS: We're building coalitions around issues. We don't try to maintain the coalitions as much as we try to be honest brokers with the understanding that people change at their own rate and for different reasons. We try to be consistent and do our work from a set of values that we're comfortable with. We know that we make mistakes but we also know that we must engage openly and let people know what we're doing, why we're doing it, and where we're coming from. We just try to create a critical mass for the things we're doing. We try to do a lot of work with our friends because they tend to know what we're doing and we can have a frank conversation and if we lose our way they can help us back. We're not a model social change organization but we're trying to find a strategy.



Dee Davis with Sister Helen Vinton and Lorna Bourg of Southern Mutual Help Association, meeting with Jean Lafitte, LA Mayor Tim Kerner.
Photo: Shawn Poynter



Michelle Miller on the job. Photo: SEIU

MILLER: I don't know if there is a model social change organization! But you've certainly had some successes. Is there a particular approach that you have that has resulted in those successes?

DAVIS: We do different things, so sometimes we try to affect press and try to affect coverage with the idea being that we're contributing to

a mass of information. Then sometimes we're working on campaigns that have a policy result we want, like when we dealt with the Community Reinvestment Act to make sure banks weren't exempt from their rural obligations. Or in the *Beverly Hillbillies* campaign, where we stood up to Viacom. Oftentimes it's catching the right spokesperson and convincing them so they feel like they can join in. Sometimes it's getting people to understand and get active. There isn't one moment, and you don't know if you've succeeded for a long time.

MILLER: And what about us? Is there something that we in the art-based activism community can do better or learn more about? At SEIU, I tend to look to our organizing campaigns and try to draw on lessons we've learned with organizing

our community partners or bringing a different crop of people into our work and apply that to the way I do my own outreach.

DAVIS: I think that the arts can learn more about connectedness. How you connect different groups of people who aren't the usual suspects. In some ways, art is good about that, but in other ways it doesn't reach out into harder-hit commu-

nities. I think the arts can learn a lot about reaching into new communities and finding allies that they wouldn't necessarily have. That's funny in a way to say it. A lot of art really goes to the same folks over and over.

Artists bring their work to harder-hit communities in the most significant and powerful way when it's intentionally integrated into existing work in those communities.

MILLER: We can do better about reaching more people. I think that's where the power of building bridges between artists and activists really lies. Artists bring their work to

harder-hit communities in the most significant and powerful way when it's intentionally integrated into existing work in those communities.

*Saul David Alinsky, an organizer and writer who founded the Industrial Areas Foundation.

Original CAN/API publication: June 2008

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

3

ANTHROPOLOGY AS SOCIAL ACTIVISM

*Alaka Wali and R. Lena Richardson on drumming circles,
sustainable conservation, and valuing difference*

By R. Lena Richardson

DR. ALAKA WALI is curator of North American Anthropology and applied cultural research director in the Environment, Culture and Conservation Division of the Field Museum. Born in India, she was the founding director of the Center for Cultural Understanding and Change.



R. LENA RICHARDSON is project coordinator/editor of the Bridge Conversations. In 2008 to 2011, she developed an intergenerational oral history project with activist elders at the Berkeley Fellowship of Unitarian Universalists. Her current project builds relationships between elders and youth in East Multnomah County, Oregon.



I managed to catch Alaka Wali for our phone conversation just before she was leaving for South America to work on a project. Alaka is an applied anthropologist whose work has spanned fields and continents. The field of anthropology has provided the basis for her bridgework, but, as she explained, her identity as a bridge person started well before formally entering into the field. Alaka talked about how her early background led her to field of anthropology. As a former student of anthropology myself who struggled with aspects of the discipline's history, I asked about bridging within the field of anthropology and whether allying anthropology with a focus on social justice was a form of bridging within the discipline

■ ■ ■ ■

ALAKA WALI: I came here in 1960 at six years old. I was very influenced by the Civil Rights Movement. As an immigrant, I am always thinking about what my place is in America. We came before the big migration of Indians. When we moved here, we were living in places where people didn't really know what to make of us. We were forced to make bridges from the beginning. We didn't have an ethnic enclave to belong to. In a sense, my early life has influenced the way I think about making connections.

I came into anthropology in a time of social ferment. I knew I wouldn't want to do anything that wasn't about social change. All my teachers were protesting the Vietnam War. I saw how the discipline could bring in the voices of people who were being hurt by colonization, the Vietnam War. A lot of my passion in anthropology

was about advocating for human rights, Indigenous people,, and greater awareness about what was happening to them. My doctoral dissertation was on what was happening to Indigenous people in Panama. So, it's true what you are saying about making the connection between anthropology and social activism.

R. LENA RICHARDSON: How has your work continued to unfold?

WALI: I started doing urban anthropology—partly because I had two little children and couldn't travel. [She eventually became director of the Center for Cultural Understanding and Change at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, Illinois.] When we started doing the arts study, there were all of these people who were passionate about making art and whose voice was not being reflected in arts policy. How do you make the arts world realize that they need to pay attention?

We did 12 case studies of artists and arts groups who were not within the recognized spheres of arts practice—a quilting guild, a drumming circle that met in a park, community theater groups, informal music groups. A large part of our study was ethnographic research.

*There were all of these people
who were passionate about
making art and whose voice was
not being reflected in arts policy.*

What we found is that there are many ways that artists are engaged in various parts of this continuum of arts practice and there are people that jump back and forth. You had professional artists who would be teaching classes in the Park District, but then they would also have their gallery shows. And there were all these medium-sized arts organizations where people who were never going to make a career out of arts were making connections with people who were. We really had the intent of getting the arts world to see that they ought to broaden their definition of art. That they should go beyond audiences who they usually tapped into, to also include people who were being labeled as amateurs. They are missing a potential set of allies.

RICHARDSON: Was there a response from the arts policy world to the study?

WALI: I don't think the arts organizations have really understood that message. But other people have started to see it. The Rand Corporation and Maria Rosario Jackson of the Urban Institute did studies. The Urban Institute's whole project on cultural indicators confirmed the arts as a measure of community health. What we basically said in our study is that art is a great bridge between people who are otherwise socially divided. In the drumming circle, you saw people coming together across all these divides because they were interested in pursuing their art. In doing their art, they gained skills of trust, tolerance and listening to one other that are really important.

RICHARDSON: I agreed, and shared the example of ACCESS and the Arab American National Museum, whose model is discussed by ACCESS cofounder Ishmael Ahmed and Arab American National Museum Director Anan Ameri in another Bridge Conversation in this series. ACCESS has effectively built long-term relationships and civic engagement in the Arab American community and with other ethnic groups in Dearborn, Michigan, in large part through arts-based programming.

WALI: That's the power of art that we keep trying to marginalize or put it in some box. I've come to understand how culture itself works: Culture works to help build relationships. The fundamental aspect of culture is creativity that helps people problem solve, make things work. Creativity and art are a fundamental part of what it means to be human. If people don't have access to aesthetic expression, that's when they start to rise up and resist. That's how we try to approach it in our work. It

is how people tap into creativity in their life and how they create their identities, whether personal or collective.

RICHARDSON: What other forms has your bridge work taken?

WALI: I've started to do more and more work with environmental conservation. There



Mexican dancer and musicians, Pilsen, Chicago.
Photo: © 2011 The Field Museum, ECCo

was the need to bridge between people who were very impassioned about trying to protect certain kinds of landscapes and then others trying to make a livelihood in those landscapes. Are those two things incompatible? Do you have to exclude people to protect wilderness? How do you get both sides to understand what's at stake? Where is that common ground? Our approach here at the Center is to try to identify the common ground and to help people. We've been doing a lot of work in places like Peru, as well as in communities in the U.S. like the Calumet region here in Chicago, on how you can have sustainable conservation.

We've had some good success. In our work with the Indigenous communities and an environmental Nongovernmental Organization (NGO) working to preserve a park, the NGO has come to understand that only in working for security of the land title for the local people and respecting their cultural practices will there be long-term security for this landscape. Some environmental conservationists tend to think they need to teach these forest dwellers how to be environmentally appropriate. What we tried to show them is these people have great systems of knowledge and that their cultures are valid and worth respecting. Unfortunately, forest dwellers have been told they are the lowest of the low, and so they devalue their own cultural practices, when in fact, because of their low-impact subsistence lifestyle, they can potentially act as great promoters of conservation.

RICHARDSON: What other philosophies or methodologies have facilitated your bridging work?

WALI: I think it goes back to how you get people to really be empathetic with each other across differences. When people try to bridge, they often focus on commonalities and similarities. That is all to the good; there are a lot of commonalities. But there is also a need to bridge by respecting and deeply valuing each other's differences. And that is the harder thing to do—to connect people in a way that allows them to empathize but also respect or value the difference. Going back to the arts, you wouldn't



Drumming circle in a mixed-income housing development.

Photo: © 2011 The Field Museum, ECCO

want to turn all the people who have their musical ensembles in a church basement into formal arts organizations or nonprofits or members of the Chicago symphony. We need to respect that the way they approach their artistic work is different. By working on these different levels of engagement, you can open more space for arts practices.

Or with the forest dwellers we work with, so many people think they just need more schools and more health clinics and we need to give them Western medicine. Yes, up to a certain point. But no, they are educating their kids in a different way about the values of the forest. Making that connection through the understanding of differences is a lot harder, but we have to do it because it's the only way to maintain the creativity that we need.

RICHARDSON: What advice would you offer about doing bridge work?

WALI: I think so much of our ingrained ways of working militate against bridge work. We are such an individualistic society. We have a hard time dealing with connectivity and collectivity. Bridging work is probably the most difficult work we can do. But I do think that this strategy of trying to figure out how to be empathetic is part of what I've learned from anthropology. And people from anthropology are uncomfortable with it sometimes. How can you really understand something from someone else's perspective? But the ethnographic approach has really taught us how to do that. With ethnography, it really is what we call participant observation. When we do participant observation, we have to experience everyday life how other people would experience it. That's the participant part. At the same time, you don't 'go native'. You don't pretend to be someone else. It is kind of a balancing act that you do by maintaining a certain amount of distance and experiencing the world the way people do in their homeplaces.

When you do it long enough, it becomes a way of life. It is a way of looking at the world that is constantly with you. Anytime I am somewhere, I can try to understand things from all of these different perspectives. And partly I can do that because I grew up as a person from a different culture here, and it forced me to think about things from at least two or three different perspectives. There is a value

*Art is part of what it means
to be human, part of the
very fabric of humanity.
Arts organizations have
gotten away from that.*

in the method that can help other fields do this work of bridging. And I also think that practicing arts is in itself a very powerful form of bridging. But it takes a long time and it's not easy.

RICHARDSON: What should people in the arts know about other fields?

WALI: I think that in arts organizations or arts policy, there is so much of a tendency to gravitate towards statistical analysis, and to use these

kinds of approaches to make a case for audience building. I think they could learn a lot by doing more qualitative work and recognizing the power it has to open you to a more holistic understanding. I think the people in arts institutions could also learn a lot from people who have been forced to learn to keep their own arts practice going with very little recognition, but they have managed to keep art in their life. I think the people in arts organizations and arts policy could learn from those skill sets and strategies at the other end of the continuum.

RICHARDSON: What could more community-based art folks learn from other fields?

WALI: Community-based arts organizations could learn a lot from other kinds of organizing efforts, even the environmental movement. There are lots of strategies that folks have developed that could be useful for community-based arts groups. I think that some of these groups get very parochial in their approach and they feel like they have to sell themselves by saying they are doing good works in the community—we are helping the youth, etc. Have you looked at this book *Is Art Good for You?* The author, Jolie Jensen, makes the case that you don't have to prove that art is good for you, that art is therapy, or that art can help build reading skills. You have to make the case that art is part of what it means to be human, part of the very fabric of humanity. Arts organizations have gotten away from that.

RICHARDSON: What are the biggest barriers to successful bridging?

WALI: There are so many ingrained stereotypes about people. Everyone says social 'assets' are important, but they don't really want to acknowledge them. And even if they acknowledge them, they don't really know how to tap into these assets. I used to think if I identified the social assets that would be enough. But that doesn't happen. To know the assets and to really work with them are two different things.

So, in the case of the forest dwellers in Peru around the park, we did asset mapping. We showed how these communities have this low-impact subsistence lifestyle and they value their nature and resources and they have all kinds of local organizations. [But the environmental NGO] people were so wedded in the standard way of doing things that they couldn't figure out how to work with that. They went back to teaching farmers how to do things the technical way. [The local] people didn't need that much, they just needed to be respected for their own ways. They know that you don't have to grow 30 acres of corn to have a good life. You can have a good life by leaving your forest intact and live off the fruit off the land. It was very hard for [the NGO] people to understand this when they have been trained in another way. Eventually, though, I think the NGO staff has come around, and has had a lot more success.

A lot of my passion in anthropology was about advocating for human rights, Indigenous people, and greater awareness about what was happening to them.

It's the same in Chicago, trying to get others to see that people in low-income communities have assets. Even if we tell them, they really can't see that. There is the assumption that low-income people have to conform to our middle-class way to be happy. Not everybody has to live a single kind of normative lifestyle. Do single mothers have to get married? No. I don't think so. Is it hard to be a single mother? Yes. But maybe if people were allowed to share resources more and not feel so devalued because they don't have the same things that other people have, maybe if people were not pressured to consume, consume, people could define happiness in different kinds of ways.

There is this new rule in Chicago Public Housing: You must work 30 hours a week. But what if people could make do on working less if different conditions were there? Social service providers are constantly trying to get lower-income clients to change their behavior to a better 'work ethic'. A financial counselor was trying to work with this guy, saying you've got to get your act together and pay off your college debt. And then he saw him out on the street drinking a beer with some buddies; he talked about how this showed that this guy was irresponsible and had no work ethic. That he would never succeed.

After I had heard that, I was down in South America in this Indigenous community. They have a lifestyle where they cultivate small gardens, they have a very intact forest, and they can grow their gardens and they hunt and fish. And we were walking around the village and there were all these guys sitting around drinking. They don't need to work all the time because their culture focuses on living off the fruit of the land. And here I was thinking this doesn't look so bad.

If we really try to all live the same way, our earth will end or some people will suffer tremendously at the expense of others. I think we have to figure out how we can do this, respect different lifestyles and allow people to come up with different solutions.

I think people in the arts world need to understand that the power of arts is much more broad and deep than the way Western society defines art.

■ ■ ■ ■



Shipibo women in northern Peru organizing a handcraft cooperative. Photo: © 2011 The Field Museum, ECCo

I am inspired by Alaka's example of taking anthropology out of the ivory tower to promote social justice through its methodologies. Alaka calls for an accountability about what it really means to value difference. It is something that we talk about in trite ways in our society, but Alaka emphasizes that from NGO conservation efforts in South America to social service providers in Chicago, there is a long way to go. Her work offers some concrete

methodologies from anthropology (participant observation) and practices from the arts (community arts practices) for fostering the capacity to truly respect, empathize, and work fruitfully across differences.

In addition, Alaka's articulation of culture as inherently about creatively building relationships has continued to resonate for me since our conversation. This dynamic and alive understanding of culture and cultural processes exists in contrast to a static idea of culture, which I think is also pervasive in our society and, at times, in my own thinking. My conversation with Alaka reinforces my sense of wanting to help create more spaces and contexts where people (including myself) get to experience ourselves as co-creators of culture and that put relationship building at the center.

Original CAN/API publication: April 2008

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

4

BREAKING OUT OF A BIFURCATED WORLD

A conversation about the powerfully transformative and at times, painfully fragmented practice of philanthropy

By Caron Atlas

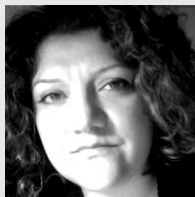
TIA OROS PETERS (Zuni), executive director of the Seventh Generation Fund for Indian Development, has been involved in community organizing and Indigenous issue advocacy for two and half decades. She also is actively engaged in human rights and international diplomacy.



PEPÓN OSORIO was born in Puerto Rico and lives in Philadelphia where he teaches at Tyler School of Art, Temple University. A MacArthur Fellowship recipient he has had numerous solo exhibitions and has been represented by Ronald Feldman Fine Arts since 1995.



AMALIA DELONEY has over 15 years of experience in community and cultural organizing and is the Grassroots Policy director at the Center for Media Justice. Born in Guatemala, she worked for many years at the Main Street Project in her hometown of Minneapolis.



TIMOTHY DORSEY is program officer for the Strategic Opportunities Fund of U.S. Programs at the Open Society Foundations, where he facilitates grant-making and research and development work related to cross-cutting social justice concerns and around the intersection of art, culture, and social justice.



Many funders face a paradox: while some of the most creative strategies for positive social change live at the intersections of sectors, disciplines, cultures, and generations, the practices and structures of philanthropy can create silos and disconnect funders from their cultures, their grantees, and their full selves.

“Breaking Out of a Bifurcated World: A Bridge Conversation on Philanthropy,” organized by the Arts & Democracy Project and Seventh Generation Fund as a session at the 2010 Grantmakers in the Arts conference, invited participants to engage this paradox and reflect on a practice that is powerfully transformative,

yet, at times, painfully fragmented. Three colleagues with multiple relationships to arts, culture, activism, and philanthropy—Pepón Osorio, Amalia Deloney, and Tim Dorsey—were invited to help us get the GIA conversation started. The following is an edited version of some of the dialogue from that session.

FROM LINEAR TO MULTIFACETED

TIA OROS PETERS: I've been thinking a lot about the word “bridge.” In some ways I am probably not one of those people that necessarily likes to use the word, although we often call our organization a bridge organization, because we are a connector—often at a nexus between philanthropy and Native communities and nations.

As a Native person, as a Zuni woman, and certainly as an American Indian here in the United States, I hear a lot of “there’s two worlds.” That there is the Indian world and then there is the White world.

What about social profit, what about cultural profit, what about ecology? What about the multiple things that are woven together, not alongside, not in parallel to the financial bottom line, but that might actually have more value than money?

I think we can often understand things best in the ways we’ve been taught—according to our cultures, experiences, worldviews, and what we have inherited as part of our collective consciousness. I would have to say that what I have been taught through these avenues is that there’s probably more like one world—and this world has multiple realities, many dimensions, and that they are not mutually exclusive but operating all together in time and space.

Someone at this Grantmakers in the Arts conference told me to “get with the real world,” in a conversation where I was talking about adding things to a bottom line which looked an awful lot like a dollar sign. We were talking about the Capitalization Project and I was asking the collective, “What about social profit, what about cultural profit, what about ecology? What about the multiple things that are woven together, not alongside, not in parallel to the financial bottom line, but that might actually have more value than money?” This individual who responded was disdainful of me and saw the world really differently and reacted to my question as if it were a personal assault on her thinking. I understand her world, her reality, and I understand that for some people like her, my very existence and perspectives may seem to be an affront to her reality. Yet, I think we’re all in it together—we share this world. But her reality is shaped by what she considered the “real world,” which was a financial/capitalistic reality. My reality is shaped by things that she wanted to dismiss; she did not want them to be as real as her worldview. It was a really interesting moment—and there was no nexus of understanding, no bridge.

So, in thinking about that when people refer to bridging, I'd have to say that it's a challenge and if I am expected to compromise my beliefs, well, then I don't like bridging so much—Point A to point B, it's a linear line, not a circle of relationships but a hierarchical reality.

SQUATTING

PEPÓN OSORIO: I'm not sure if I truly understand social justice—although I think I have a comprehensive idea of what it means. It just comes down to my personal experience of when I saw my mom being harassed by a guy, when I was very little. And my mom had a fit and turned around and then she looked at me and she



Pepón Osorio, *Drowned in a Glass of Water* (detail), 2010
mixed media installation, variable dimensions.

said, "I just want to live in a fair world. FAIR." And that stayed with me for a long time. And I don't think she thought of herself as anything but just a citizen that wanted to live in a fair world. I think of myself as a squatter most of the time. When I go to museums, when I present work in museums I know I'm being a squatter.

I'm just coming in, I build a thing, take it down, go away. Not a nomad but

a squatter. And the other thought, where I'm at lately, with this whole idea of social justice, is what my place is as an artist who is somehow established. How do I struggle with the younger generation and what is my place in relationship to that younger generation? How do we shape our communities and how do we shape our world based on how much I know and how much they're experiencing? That is something I've been struggling back and forth with for awhile, and trying to construct it, to round it all up to my Mom's experience. I just want to live in a fair world.

OROS PETERS: As an Indigenous person in today's world, I think there is sometimes a latent perception that we shouldn't be here—even if no one says that to our faces. We all know that there was a pretty effective campaign to destroy us, but it didn't work, so here we are shifting paradigms. Language is so powerful. By saying 'squatter' the way I hear it, you're saying you have no right, and anyone can take you out of there at any time. And my assumption is that you've been invited. You have a right to be there.

OSARIO: The notion of squatter comes from a place I've been in with so many intersections that I have to create a really strong sense of self and an unapologetic one. And I have been told many times how older people feel insecure about themselves and how secure I am of who I am, not as a man but more like someone of

color and Puerto Rican, and I know where I come from and I know what I eat. It's so ingrained in me that there's no doubt about that. So when I'm moving to other places, like for example, academia—I just started a job five years ago as a professor at Tyler—I felt like I was literally squatting, coming in with this history. I just have to build this place, and I'm not going away. And the same with museums. I just felt like, I'm going in, I'm building, I'm putting this thing together, but somehow, this is not the world that I was meant to be in, but I chose it and I'm coming in. I think of squatting as foraging. That it doesn't belong to me, but eventually, if I stay long enough, it will. And I dare you to move me out. That's what justice is for me.

*The notion of squatter comes from a place
I've been in with so many intersections
that I have to create a really strong sense
of self and an unapologetic one.*

BILL AGUADO: Squatting was a type of strategy, a political community strategy, to empower, to take over, to assume. I don't need a bridge, because I've just taken over the space. You need a bridge to get to me. I don't need a bridge to you. And many of my colleagues that I grew up with in this field—we defined our space and took a lot of pride in the quality that we produced. A lot of pride in the integrity of our cultures, whether Dominican, Puerto Rican, Salvadoran, we were all part of one community. Squatting was a way for us to take over housing, to take over hospitals and improve the health care, to take over school boards, saying, 'You don't listen to me, I'm taking it over'. In communities like the South Bronx, Harlem, Bed Stuy, Lower East Side, and many others across the country, we had to take control of our space.

JORGE MERCED: I'm a fellow squatter here. One of the things I love about when Pepón squats is that there's a whole bunch of people that come with him, a whole history, a whole tradition.

SHAPE-SHIFTING AND THE SPACES IN THE MIDDLE

AMALIA DELONEY: My understanding of movement has always been universal and that migration was never just about A to B, as in the immigration narrative. It was always about global migration or global movement from many places. I think about this movement a lot, in different pieces of my life. Like, how do I show up in a space or not show up in a space? How do I occupy a space? And how can I be in many spaces equally at the same time?

I've gotten to a place where it's not so much trespassing, it's maybe not even squatting, but I feel like I'm a shape-shifter. Whether it's code switching, with language, whether it's mimicking what I see around me, it's not about a lack of genuineness. It's about reflecting what's being fed to you and at the same time having the double consciousness to be in a whole different place internally and to have both of those realities at the same time.

When I think about what that means for the work I do, to who I am, there are traditions you can draw from. Mayans have a concept called *en lak etch*—it means “you are my other me.” It’s a concept that is rooted in a belief system that we can only come to know ourselves and communities in relationship to one another. It is not just about the individual, it’s the collective. Or, as Angela Davis calls it, “It’s about thinking things through, together.”

There’s the concept of *nepantla*—this idea that the space in the middle is actually a space, a place in and of itself. It’s not a place going to anything. It is a place to be and become all at once.

How do you hold many yous all at the same time within one person? How, as the Zapatistas ask, “do we create a world where many worlds are possible?”

*I’ve gotten to a place where
it’s not so much trespassing, it’s
maybe not even squatting, but
I feel like I’m a shape-shifter.*

Where in the work that we are doing in communion with one another do we value and teach that and not subvert it? I’ve had some interesting conversations that border a little bit on fetish. There’s a piece of me that’s like, how much do I want to share, because I don’t want it to become quaint or interesting.

ROBERTO BEDOYA: I really

love the shape-shifting concept. I run a public arts agency. It’s a weird mambo because I’m working with such a broad range of concerns, from the symphonies to the grassroots people, and I’ve always thought the job has been about making the space. I am perceived as an insider by the general public because of my agency’s status. Yet I have a high threshold and love for the outside. Maybe it started, as a little kid and my sister, loving Little Anthony and the Imperials singing, “I’m on the outside looking in” and later Patti Smith, “Outside is the side I take.” So, I flow in that zone. I’m comfortable there, between the inside and outside. What does it take to be a shape-shifter? How do you move in those spaces, loving the in-between, the interstices in anything that you do and being mindful of it? That’s, like, fierceness.

Who defined the world as bifurcated? It’s complex, and I live in complexity. The economy is showing us all the fault lines of our civic infrastructure, and they’re all collapsing. Not just culture, it’s railroads, it’s health care, it’s all collapsing. And my job is to imagine the plural, coming out of this collapse. You know, I feed the people who do the imagining.

RISÉ WILSON: I think double consciousness gets hard. I have to create a third space so that my whole self has somewhere to live, because everyone else has asked me to be either/or. That notion of a bridge, that A or B, it just doesn’t work. It’s both/and. But until we actually create a larger space where both/and can exist, then there’s this kind of third space to hold ourselves, where sanity lives.

HOLDING SPACE AND WRESTLING WITH POWER

TIM DORSEY: I traveled this year to India for the first time. I was getting schooled quite a lot in Gandhian philosophy and principles, thinking about this notion of *ahimsa*, which, translated badly, is nonviolence. And it turned out I had no understanding of what that really means, because I thought it meant to not be violent, and it actually means to actively be nonviolent in everything we approach and everything we do.

I work at a foundation and I've only worked there a year and a half. I've done the foraging, the squatting, and that makes me think also of agitating. And that there is the role for agitating, but you know, agitating only gets you so far in terms of advocacy or as an organizing strategy. You have to be able to have the dialogue, to have the conversation.

I love my job. I think the work I'm doing right now is what I'm really meant to be doing. You know, the amazing thing about this work is that I've never had such an opportunity for reflection, for reflective practice. But the more deeply I am reflecting, the less comfortable the power structure of philanthropy feels. Something I'm realizing is really important, as Tia said: "You always have to have your people with you when you go into these spaces."

I think it's really important to be in the institution, the power room, and it's also important to know who you are before you get there, so you can remember that and also have the place you can go back to. I think what many of us do in our work—whether we're grantmakers, organizers, artists, activists, or all of the above (most of us are all of the above and many other things)—is hold space. Not just for ourselves, but for so many other people who aren't in the room.

DENISE BROWN: A lot of what we're talking about is the inherent inequality of the power relationships, of philanthropy, and our discomfort with that. For those of us that come to this work after years of community and activist work, part of what we bump up against is our own discomfort with the power we've assumed. I'm in the privileged position of being able to create an organizational culture. And that culture can be a reflection of my values. But I think we talk about a lot of things, but we never talk about power. And I don't know how we can do this work without having that conversation. And so this notion of squatting from an activist perspective is about power; shape-shifting is about power.

MELANIE CERVANTES: I definitely feel like a weaver, and there's a very tactile, real reason. I think my art practice, and the art practice of the generations of women before me, who never had the privilege of being recognized as artists, is really rooted in our relationship to each other and to fabric, and to weaving. And so I think that sensibility is something I've been able to bring along this journey to transverse many different worlds, to the point where I'm traversing them in a day, back and forth, sometimes occupying more than one world at the same time. This notion of bringing your folks along empowers. It's not easy, but it has been incredibly useful, weaving those networks and bringing the folks along, in order to move the power.

I felt like I got access to education, so I fought for education for more people. And then when I went into philanthropy, I asked why is there concentrated wealth? And given that this is the structure, how do I have any power within this institution? How do we weave what we're trying to do here within this larger framework of social justice? How do we weave together the desire for something else? It's not easy.

HUONG VU: About two weeks ago I started kung fu. It's an all-women's studio in a mixed neighborhood. They'll do a demonstration, and then we're supposed to do what we learned. And what we've all learned about ourselves is as women, we may be able to throw the punches or kick, but when it's about the 'hai', the noise associated with a lot of the kicks, verbally, we just can't get out that big energy that we're supposed to.

And so, for me, I thought about that in the context of my life, being in a position of power, but also being an ethnic minority, an immigrant. I was intrigued and moved by what Sherwood [Chen] said about carrying our histories, carrying a lot of responsibility for our cultures. I think about the comments that were made about carrying burdens, carrying responsibilities, because we are in positions of power. It's a very complicated thing, and I deal with it, every day, and try to do my best.

AN INFINITE CAPACITY TO LEARN

GÜLGÜN KAYIM: I was with an interdisciplinary group of artists, planners, geographers working on something called 'Deep Mapping', looking at the landscape not as an object that's solid but as one that has many, many, many viewpoints. We spent five days journeying around Virginia, going to various sites of slavery, of lynchings, of Appalachian poverty. And listening to stories, some of them from the people who lived there; others were from historians because the people had been wiped out. What was fascinating was to see the way in which those histories had been preserved and not. So, for example, a slave house was turned into a bathroom. The community remembered what happened, but whoever made the decision to turn it into a bathroom had another set of priorities. From whose perspective do we create our environment, and how do we attentively listen to the communities as well as to the landscape?

I've started to think about what a deep attention means in my interactions with people, and then how I can represent that back into the foundation. I come from a foundation where often arts are competing with other things for funding. Having said that, I walked away from the mapping thinking it's even more imperative that arts become part of the conversation, that they become integrated into how we witness, and then build as a community.

SHERWOOD CHEN: I always have to remind myself that I have an infinite capacity to learn from the staggering diversity of the communities I work with, where 98 percent of the time, I'm an outsider, to the community, to the cultural protocols, to the cultural systems. And so, that's the greatest challenge, and the greatest joy and wonder in that process. It really forces me to humble myself, to try and sensitize myself in order to understand the communities that we work with.

I think we are working against very oppressive systems, and we've also internalized a lot of those oppressive systems, so they're in us. And we have that potential as well, to be able to express and exhort those things. So, I have to remind myself that the best of us have blind spots. And that vigilance has to be something that we keep, and we hold in our work; it's endless and it can be very exhausting sometimes. How do you begin to keep that vigilance in the ways you work with your grantees, the ways that you work with your partners, and particularly how you create your organizational culture, how you work with your staff?

JUDI JENNINGS: I think we mix up that power is money. I think in philanthropy, we just kind of get mixed up that we're all-important because we have the money, and we're going to make it OK. I come from Appalachia, which is a place defined by poverty, but I think we're pretty clear that that's not the most important thing. Where do we learn the lessons that we need to learn? In rural areas communities are still intact. If you go talk to somebody, they'll say, "Oh, you're Everett's daughter, aren't you?" That's what they'd say, really, and they know who you are. But rural areas are so devalued now, made fun of, and that keeps us from learning those lessons. That's really bad because there are great community lessons that aren't about money, they're about relationships.

WE'RE ALL VERY CONNECTED

LORI POURIER: I want to go back to the word 'humble.' When we began this journey with First People's Fund, we were gifted three feathers by this elder woman. It was at one of our very first Community Spirit Awards and she called me up to the podium and said, "You know this feather is for you." And I took the feather as with the 'you' being 'First People's Fund.' And she said, "This feather, the second feather, represents your ancestors." And it was a very old feather and she said, "You know anywhere you go your ancestors are all with you." It's not me alone, it's those ancestral footsteps, and we can all relate to that. And then she said, "This other is your future. This smaller feather here represents the future generations."

Oftentimes when you move in and out of institutions and these conversations, when you're coming from that background, it throws you. You have to pause and say, "OK, I know my ancestors are with me and I know I'm here for the future." But how do you move in the space in between with honor and with respect and not from a place of aggression? I don't want my daughter to be having these same conversations. She sees herself as a leader at eleven years old. She's been well prepared. How do we think of every one of us as human beings? I'm listening and listening, and I think we're all really saying the same thing, and we're all very connected.

OSARIO: I realize that I cannot teach art, that is something extremely personal. But what I can teach is for art students to commit and fully engage with their creative process. In my struggle to live in a just world, I have been welcoming students from all different places in the university and igniting them, sparking their light and acknowledging their creative force. To find their creative core. Directing them to a place where they can go out and come up with solutions. The more we think about art, the more that we think of a limited field. The more that we think of creative people, we open up the circle and become just.

DELONEY: I work for the Center for Media Justice, which sees itself as a movement-building institution. So we are a vessel that work passes through. And we honor it and we contribute to it, but we do not own it, it is not of us. I just came from a staff retreat where we closed our conversation around two archetypes that are like two truths that we hold at the same time: a person's fundamental need to feel safe and belong. And how can we learn? All the things I hear you struggling with exist in our institutions too.

DORSEY: I'm reminded at this point why I love my job, and why I'm so deeply grateful to participate in this conversation. It's a tremendous privilege that this work brings with it, the honor of being connected. I'm moved by the power that we have in the room collectively and the fact that we're been able to come together and have this conversation.

OROS PETERS: Power is a canoe in the water, right? Power is what you all said here in this circle, that's power. There's a great Karuk artist, Brian Tripp, who said—talking about basket weaving, but also about constantly creating the world—“One part river, one part land, weaving the world, strand by strand.” If we were to extend that metaphor to our conversation here, we did that. In the basketry of northern California you take from the landscape to create your patterns, and from the river to create your strength and your resilience. Can what you make survive? Can it absorb water? Can it hold hot rocks? Can it feed people? Can it be ceremonial? We created that very basket, that very world in our words today.

PARTICIPANTS QUOTED IN THIS ARTICLE:

BILL AGUADO, Bronx Council on the Arts

ROBERTO BEDOYA, Tucson Pima Arts Council

DENISE BROWN, Leeway Foundation

MELANIE CERVANTES, Akonadi Foundation

SHERWOOD CHEN, Alliance for California Traditional Arts

AMALIA DELONEY, Center for Media Justice

TIM DORSEY, Open Society Foundations

JUDI JENNINGS, Kentucky Foundation for Women

GÜLGÜN KAYIM, Bush Foundation

JORGE MERCED, Pregones Theater

TIA OROS PETERS, Seventh Generation Fund for Indian Development

PEPÓN OSORIO, Tyler School of Art at Temple University

LORI POURIER, First Peoples Fund

HUONG VU, Boeing Company

RISÉ WILSON, Leveraging Investments in Creativity

Originally published in Grantmakers in the Arts *Reader* vol. 22, Spring 2011

Pepón Osorio headshot photo ©Peggy Jarrell Kaplan. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York
Pepón Osorio's art appears courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York / www.feldmangallery.com

A low-angle, upward-looking photograph of a suspension bridge. The image shows the massive stone tower in the center, with two large Gothic-style arches at its base. A dense network of steel cables radiates from the top of the tower, creating a complex geometric pattern of triangles and diamonds that fills the upper two-thirds of the frame. The sky is a uniform, light gray, providing a high-contrast background for the dark bridge structure.

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

5

CONNECTING ACTION AND ACADEMIA IN CALIFORNIA'S CENTRAL VALLEY

Isao Fujimoto and Tim Marema on the power of 'edgewalking'

By Tim Marema

ISAO FUJIMOTO, PhD, grew up on the Yakima Indian Reservation in eastern Washington. For the last ten years, Fujimoto has been the project facilitator for the Central Valley Partnership for Citizenship, a collaborative of community-based organizations working with emerging immigrant, migrant, and low-income communities.



TIM MAREMA, vice president for communications of the Center for Rural Strategies, grew up in rural east Kentucky. He is a former newspaper journalist who served as development director of Appalshop, and helped found the Center for Rural Strategies in 2001 to provide communications planning and support for rural advocacy organizations.



Isao Fujimoto has spent his life crossing boundaries and borders. The retired University of California Davis professor grew up on a Yakima Indian reservation in the Pacific Northwest, where his family farmed. He spent World War II in the infamous Japanese American concentration camps in Wyoming and California. He graduated from Berkeley in the 1950s and served in Korea in the armed forces. And when he had his pick of schools for a graduate science-education program in 1960, he chose Howard University, where he was the only non-black in his program, because he thought he would learn more than just chemistry from the experience.

Isao is a one-man network, a direct link to seminal events in U.S. history, and a person for whom building bridges comes as naturally as breathing air.

His need to create connections is palpable, even over the phone when I interviewed him for this brief article. With 75 years of history and experience to discuss, he takes time to ask about my history. (It's far less interesting, I assure you. But Isao doesn't think so, or doesn't let on if he does.)

It's no accident that Isao wound up in an academic field that has allowed him to build bridges between the academy and communities, between immigrant and community groups and the labor movement, and among the diverse racial groups that call California home.

A rural sociologist by training, he joined the faculty at U.C. Davis's College of Agriculture in 1967 and quickly found himself straining to overcome divisions within the university. "When I came to U.C., there were very few people asking questions about

the social consequences of agriculture,” he said. Living wages, health effects of chemicals, the right to organize farm labor—all of these topics were out of bounds. “I started asking questions about this and, right away, I was hitting the wall. I found out these were not research questions, these were political questions.”

Isao was part of group of faculty who thought the study of agriculture should deal with people, not just crop hybrids and yields. So, he started building bridges. He participated in a large campus debate about the responsibility of the agriculture school to research social consequences of farming. Simultaneously, the field of ethnic studies started to blossom on the U.C. campus, and Isao helped start the Asian American studies program. The farm labor movement was in full force in California at the time, and Isao got involved in labor issues in the Central Valley, where his family had settled after being held in the Japanese-American internment camps during World War II.

This unique confluence of interests and events—agricultural science, rural sociology, ethnic studies, immigration, community organizing and labor organizing—led Isao and others into pioneering a new approach to academic studies—action research.

*Isao is a one-man network,
a direct link to seminal events
in U.S. history, and a person for
whom building bridges comes
as naturally as breathing air.*

Action research is yet another bridge discipline for Isao, one that links the power of academic research with the needs and expertise of local communities. In this research method, academics work closely with groups to frame research questions that explore community issues. The research provides information that citizens can use to organize and create change.

One example. Researchers from the Central Valley Partnership helped Central Valley high school students expose the effect of racial tracking in the school system. Students knew that the system was pushing certain racial groups into work and educational paths without regard to individual needs or aspirations. But the administration didn't see the problem until researchers helped students document and study the system of discrimination. Armed with studies of teacher and student attitudes, student performance, and other hard data, the students compiled a report that the school board couldn't ignore.

Creating these links between worlds can make bridge builders distrusted in both worlds. “Doing this kind of applied research is looked down on” by many academics, Isao said. And hardscrabble communities living on the economic edge may not easily see the value of investing energy into research. But both sides in the relationship benefit when it works well. “We have to figure out ways to communicate and do the bridging,” Isao said. “And the way I've done this is to work with off-campus groups on research.”

Over the years he's formed many relationships with social justice and community service organizations such as the American Friends Service Committee, Global Exchange, and Food First. Such groups have kept Isao abreast of the issues that are important to communities. In return, he's kept them informed about relevant academic research and helped them create their own research projects.

He's also been active with the Rural Development Leadership Network, which helps rural community organizers of minority background earn college degrees. The program, which Isao started working with at its inception in 1985, has helped participants from Indian Country, the Spanish-speaking Southwest, and African American sections of the Southeast. He's placed his students from U.C. Davis with these same organizations, building links around the country through practicums and internships. And his work with California's labor movement has

created bridges among the state's diverse racial groups: Chinese, Japanese, East Indian, Filipino, Mexican, Central American, and others.



Central Valley Partnership

Isao was also there at the beginning of Central Valley Partnership (CVP), a social justice organization that has brought together community-based groups in the Central Valley to work together to improve their

communities. "The Central Valley is the richest agricultural region in the world and yet has the greatest concentration of the poorest communities in California," he said. The CVP combines the disciplines of community-based organizing, legal strategies, popular education, social services, media, youth empowerment, and applied research.

It also looks as though Isao has built a bridge to the next generation. His son Basho, who is Japanese-Welsh-Irish, was featured in Nina Krebs' book *Edgewalkers: Defusing Cultural Boundaries on the New Global Frontier* (New Horizon Press, 1999).^{*} The book explores the social contributions of people who belong to multiple ethnic, cultural, or spiritual groups. Basho Fujimoto says, "We call ourselves 'fitties,' 50 percent this, 50 percent that. Our interest is not in taking traditional elements from our old cultures and mixing them all together, making a nice, evenly distributed multiculturalism. It is more like taking the consciousness of all of our heritage ... and working with that to create something new."

^{*}See also *Edgewalkers: Heirs to many cultures, multihued youth are creating an identity of their own* by Nina Boyd Krebs (Utne Reader, 1/1/99)

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

6

CREATING WITH A SENSE OF STRATEGIC PRACTICE

Maribel Alvarez and Jason Bulluck on paying attention to the 'little stuff', engaging in critical discourse, and understanding how power can be shaken up

By Jason Bulluck

MARIBEL ALVAREZ, PhD, holds a dual appointment as associate research professor in the English Department and as research social scientist at the Southwest Center, University of Arizona. Alvarez was born in Cuba, grew up in Puerto Rico, and has worked closely in the field of Chicano arts since the 1980s.



JASON BULLUCK is the former director of the Shifting Sands Initiative and Douglas Redd Fellowship. This initiative provided support, through the Ford Foundation, to arts and cultural organizations willing to immerse themselves in community development. He is a professional sculptor.



JASON BULLUCK: Maribel, your writing and work connect academics, community-based arts groups, arts administrators, arts and culture funders, and artists working across a range of economies. You certainly fit the bill as a bridge. Your work seems to have been cross-disciplinary for quite some time. Can you talk about your work in a holistic way? Do you have a single magnetic goal pulling at your various skills and interests?

MARIBEL ALVAREZ: Well, I think my work has two overarching themes that I try to somehow intertwine. On the one hand, I'd like to think my work is about paying attention to the little stuff that goes in between the lines of the big paradigms and social parameters. By saying 'little stuff' I don't mean to say things that are unimportant, just the opposite. I believe that the informal, the stuff that fills the in-between [places] of cultural meaning, are often as important as the big categories, insofar as they get us closer to the texture of how the 'big' stuff is felt and materialized, and also how it becomes possible or implausible to change the conditions that produce those things. So, let's say that the scholar in me is interested in theorizing meaning; that's a pretty big statement, but it is part of a very long tradition in anthropology. I see my work documenting artists' work as fulfilling this function.

Having said that, I think the other side of the coin is my personal obsession with understanding the infrastructural ways by which small stuff happens, in other words, the craftsmanship of meaningful systems. So, let's say also that the practitioner/organizer in me is concerned with taking apart and putting back together the

protocols, very much in terms of the mechanics, of how to get things both done and undone. My work as a consultant who teaches best practices would be part of this. My work as a programmer, someone who still has to raise money and put programs together, keeps me close to the ground on these issues as well.

I seem to spend a lot of my time writing up things that are a documentation of the small stuff, as well as working on the infrastructure systems that facilitate grants, organizational development, leadership classes for best practices, etc., and those are the two grooves of my life's work.

BULLUCK: Could you clarify what you mean by 'the small stuff'?

ALVAREZ: Folk culture, alternative spaces, emerging aesthetics among youth, Latinos, traditional artists—not necessarily stuff that makes it to the museums, but those practices that are always emerging, practices that borrow from many different sources, people's oral histories, and alternative and smaller organizations—specifically, the mid-sized nonprofits where so much of 'the action' of cultural work takes place, as a sector, in this country.

*My own ethical standard is to
be involved in artistic practice
that is touching someone in
some community.*

BULLUCK: Your idea of alternative aesthetics makes me think of the low-rider bikes exhibit you curated [for Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana (MACLA)].

ALVAREZ: Yes, that is a good example. That was a wonderful project and one of my first attempts to use ethnography in the context of curating and exhibiting. And there was a conference I just organized here in Arizona on how cultural practices, for instance, are implicated in some of the crises of death in the desert. What I mean by that is that it's important to talk about the big stuff—the crises of our age—but I am interested in how cultural understandings or misunderstandings affect policy. Those are some examples—I think of it as the texture of culture, not just the big text itself. How does it feel once you're implicated in it?

BULLUCK: I'd like to frame this question with a quote of yours that I found. Tom Borrup writes in his Community Arts Network review of your book, *There's Nothing Informal About It: Participatory Arts Within the Cultural Ecology of Silicon Valley* (San José, CA: Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley, 2005), that you recommend directing attention "to those points of intersections in which two seemingly opposed systems of meaning converge...supporting those nodes of cultural production in the nonprofit infrastructure where professional and amateur arts overlap, and can fruitfully cross-pollinate to strengthen each other." And that sounds like a very tense area.

ALVAREZ: Yes, indeed, there is a tension there, but mainly on account of the hierarchies of taste and skills that dominate still so much of the so-called

artworld. The tension can be generative, however. Those who theorize the field of arts and culture should also be thought of as practitioners, and practitioners should be respected as theorizers of practice. It's silly to bifurcate and polarize these two elements. When I get invited to talk at conferences and am not out there doing field work, after a while I feel a bit of a fraud. My own ethical standard is to be involved in artistic practice that is touching someone in some community. And I can also flip that and say that I want to infuse a more sophisticated critical language in arts practice. Both things are necessary.

An example of this intersection in my own practice is the work I do at the NALAC Institute each year. I teach workshops on financial practices for nonprofits—the



NALAC Leadership Institute. Photo: NALAC

intricate and mundane details of managing a budget—and I also teach a workshop on theories of social change and the big picture of the Latino cultural arts production in this country. Another example. I teach a workshop [at NALAC] on the ideology behind strategic planning, asking students to be skeptical of planning as it has been construed ideologically and then I turn around and teach them

how to do a strategic plan. It's a big theme in my life: this duality. For the most part, I feel that I personally have come to feel comfortable with this conflict. Every once in a while I need to be reminded about who is my audience; for example, my tone with academics does not always need to be disparaging, and with practitioners I do not need to use academic language only. I think I navigate that relatively well, but I'm not beyond having some blinders.

BULLUCK: Perhaps your ethnographic work with arts organizations provides a model for navigating between fields. Would you encourage more of this type of research, or suggest others?

ALVAREZ: Absolutely. Yet I also can share some cautionary tales on this topic. The Animating Democracy Project that I did at MACLA on Asian-Latino intermarriage was one such opportunity to reflect, deliberately reflect, on the upside as well as the downside of translating methodologies from one epistemological realm to another. Yet the opportunities that ethnography can afford artists, insofar that the core of an ethnographic inquiry is something anthropologists call 'fieldwork' (funny though, accountants also use that term when they are doing an audit!) can be very helpful. For example, the whole issue of the role that folklorists and ethnographers can play in urban planning and neighborhood revitalization—those areas are very important. I also believe that in our field we need to be better documenters of the success stories.

The other day I was working in El Paso where they are having a major urban-planning crisis around the gentrification in one of the old neighborhoods. There

are people there who are very active and working very hard to oppose the gentrifying policies, but few of the people in the conversation were aware of models that fuse political resistance to gentrification with interventions that are productive and creative. “Wow,” I thought, “these activists need to be at the table with the big boys ... why not create a CDC (community development corporation) to do history and preservation work?”

I was struck that the group had all the energy our communities have in terms of political awareness to document injustice, but little in the way of knowing how to reverse it. I am interested in that quite a bit. How can I be part of the solution?

BULLUCK: I enjoyed reading about your Border Identities Project of 2006. I'd like to quote your idea, 'inherent inequality as inherent

opportunity'. Is this a useful notion for the fields of arts and culture and social justice, arts and democracy, arts and community development, and community cultural development (community arts)?



Tucson Meet Yourself: Josefina Lizarraga (R) demonstrates Mexican paper flowers. Photo: Steven Meckler

ALVAREZ: Very interesting question. Again, the devil is in the details. One has to be careful that the argument is not one that glorifies or romanticizes marginality. There's nothing romantic about artists not having enough money to make the rent or Indigenous communities having their intellectual property appropriated without compensation by a big-box store chain. However, if by “margin” we mean that we learn how to build assets where none were evident,...then I think we are on to something. I have come to understand that the works with the most impact are truly multidisciplinary and engage the artist, writer, oral historian, [etc.]. When you're able to do that, wow! The projects do acquire a new depth. In essence, what interdisciplinarity means is that you are not self-contained in your own wisdom or your own capaciousness; it means you reach to others and others reach to you.

At the same time, like any collaboration, they are difficult and they have to be learned. No matter who, even a college professor with five PhDs, when it comes down to it, you're predicated to the arenas in which you are comfortable. I am working in the community of Ajo, Arizona, in an oral history project. When I go to that community, I feel I have a lot to offer, but first I have to learn. That sounds so basic—even cliché—but I am amazed at how often we forget it. To me, I believe that's the work that is exciting, where learning becomes teaching and teaching is about learning.

BULLUCK: You also talk about hard and soft 'border realities' in this work—physical signs of border, like the presence of a military and juxtaposed economies and demographics, versus 'cultural' signs, like language, ritual, art and work. Are you suggesting that successful work around arts and social justice requires broad training, or the interests of a polymath?

ALVAREZ: Yes, I want to say yes to that question, but I don't feel that it's only broad training academically. It's also the training of being an organizer, and to me what is important is to recognize that there are different forms of knowledge and different kinds of expertise. Traditional artists, elders and artisans, for example, are very thoughtful about their work; yet there is a prejudice, dating back to the 1400s, that

We have in this country a naïve notion of social change and it is the naiveté that turns into cynicism when things don't go as we planned.

artisans are not abstract thinkers. I like the notion of organic intellectual. The question, however, is one of language. Who has access to languages that have been privileged as discourse and who has knowledge that has not even been codified? For example, to do great

transnational work you don't need to read all the books on transnationalism, but you do need, however, to define how your work is different from what, say, the World Bank is espousing on transnationalism. So, while an artist/activist need not be a scholar of transnationalism, he/she definitely has to contend with the discourses that frame people's understandings about an issue, often preceding the artist's intervention, the ideas and understandings that circulate in the public sphere as ideology.

For that artist or artisan at some point the critical question of theory is going to come up. If you're going to be a person of long-term impact, then you are going to be someone who needs to master the language required to participate in the discourse, not academically necessarily, but a critical language to be sure. On the other hand, you see the phenomenon of those who master the critical language not being able to relate to or engage with frontline cultural workers; the universities are full of people who are not making connections with practice. As a hopeful sign in this regard, there is the beautiful effort of *Imagining America*. But I can tell you that I am frequently surrounded with people whose research is very profound, but their ability to connect with practice is very limited, and I spend a lot of time thinking about those things. And granted, I think my life would be easier if I was just a writer. I don't spend as much time writing as I should.

BULLUCK: I think your work around semiotics and language—your lessons on metaphors and identity from the Border Identities Project—provide a great deal of grist for the mill for the nonprofit and community-based arts field in particular. They help to frame the work and provide a model for work with various constituencies to 'hear' from one another.

ALVAREZ: The question of language is important as much as anything else only insofar as it relates to the ability to connect with people at the places where they are at, especially in the time in which we're living. Can you imagine a tool kit to use in your community arts center—it's the equivalent of a car mechanic's tools, like a wrench and a phillips screwdriver. To me that's all it is, and it's also

only good for when you need those specific tools. There are certain moments when the fact that you are able to explain how a sign signifies is truly what is needed. It's all very contextual and is great to feel that you have the right tool when you need it—a word to describe something, an approach to engage people in this or that way, a process by which the art that is created can be more relevant, the knowledge of how to conceive and write a proposal. But those are just tools. I don't think we should be so enamored of methodologies like semiotics or ethnography—they are there for when we need them—but the thing that touches people and changes lives and changes social dynamics is never a method or a tactic alone. It's about a lot more...about the ability of art to represent the possibility of imagining a different reality—'to walk in beauty', as the Yoeme people of northern Mexico say.

Artistic practice needs to re-energize its links to social change. Those of us who do creative work need to locate our

work in terms of where it resonates in the social sphere. How can we be looking at issues like immigration, for instance, and think that an artist that deals in the arena of Western representation can't really change anything? How can we continue to be troubled by the idea of art not being good for something—that eternal self-doubt. "But what is it good for?" I still hear a lot of that going on.

If we are going to do creative work, we need to do it with a better strategic sense of practice; some folks have referred to this as having a theory of social change. I am interested in that question and I think that all cultural workers should be. Yet I find that I have so many students who learn so much about how to theorize power, and the more they learn the more their hope diminishes.

BULLUCK: I recognize that and the issue of hope really resonates with me; it's one of the reasons I was eager to interview you.

ALVAREZ: I feel that as cultural workers—for young people—that is still the question we do need to ask: Where is power and how can power be shaken up? It would be nice if we had one simple answer, but we don't and that's part of the problem of our times. What are you going to do? In our time this is how power structures things and is structured by things. I'm glad we came around to this question. It's more a reflection of the times. Are my students correct? Partly yes. There is not a clear path pointing to where the node of social change, is coming from. We don't

*The question we need to ask [is]:
Where is power and how can
power be shaken up?*



Tucson Meet Yourself: Kenya Masala leads drum circle.

Photo: Steven Meckler

have a clear sense of that, not even with Obama. But I think this is a question that becomes artificially complicated because of the liberal idea of linear progress. We have in this country a naïve notion of social change and it is the naiveté that turns into cynicism when things don't go as we planned. It's hard to give up the sense of mastery over nature and human affairs that is built inside the ideology of the U.S. And I don't think other people in the world have this cynicism. Other people in the world believe you can organize and expect change. Here we have the luxury of having the space to be troubled. Our politics in the U.S. lack too often a practical dialectic of social change: How would you make change? By means of social tremors, coups, by means of war; in other words, what is the horizon of possibilities given the alignments of the planets as they now stand? Ultimately, we each have to answer that question about our work and our politics.

Original CAN/API publication: April 2008

A low-angle, upward-looking photograph of a suspension bridge. The image shows the massive stone tower in the center, with two large Gothic-style arches at its base. A dense network of steel cables radiates from the top of the tower, creating a complex geometric pattern that fills the upper two-thirds of the frame. The sky is a uniform, light gray, providing a high-contrast background for the dark bridge structure.

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

7

CREATING TRANSFORMATIVE SPACES

Harriet Barlow and Kathy Engel talk about the Commons and crossing borders

By Kathy Engel

HARRIET BARLOW is the director of the Blue Mountain Center, and founder or cofounder of 15 nonprofit organizations. For four decades, Barlow's work has been focused on creating a synergy between elements of progressive work. Her particular interest is in strengthening the capacity of and integrating cultural work within movements.



KATHY ENGEL is a poet, teacher, activist. She has co-founded, directed, and consulted with numerous organizations, including founding and acting as first director of MADRE, always emphasizing the relationship between imagination and social change. She teaches in the Department of Art & Public Policy at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts.



I first met Harriet Barlow in 1982 when we were organizing for the historic March and Rally for Disarmament and Human Needs coinciding with the Second U.N. Special Session on Disarmament in New York City. I, in my twenties, was a cultural coordinator, and Harriet had started something called Arts Alive, acting even then as a bridge between people who saw themselves as organizers and organizations and artists and imaginers. I remember her walking into a gathering of actors, dancers, writers, etc., aimed at involving people in the momentum building toward the June actions. After everyone talked and hemmed and coughed and slid around, Harriet, standing at the back of the rather elegant room, said "I often come to gatherings such as this one, and I hear a lot of 'yes, yes, yes', but not a lot of 'me, me, me!' It was a call to action and a call to end bullshit! That simple statement struck me as so strong, so wise, so on the mark that I've quoted it no less than 50 times since. She had the ability to go to the heart of the situation to shake people up without alienating them completely.

Harriet plucked me up and told me she thought I probably needed some time to rest and think and write and read after that wild moment in history. And she was right, as I was losing my mind, waking in the middle of the night, looking out the window for the children we might have left off the stage!

I went to Blue Mountain Center (BMC) in June 1982. I think it was the first session ever, maybe the second. It changed my life. My husband and I went back the following summer, and he started their garden. I encouraged my friends to go there. It was at BMC in 1982 that I met Kamal Boullata. Kamal and I, with June

Jordan and Sara Miles, organized Moving Towards Home, a benefit poetry reading for children in Lebanon, with Lebanese, Israeli, Palestinian, and American poets, and Kamal edited the book based on the reading *And Not Surrender*. Twenty-five years later, during the July 2006 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Kamal and I reconnected and edited a new edition of the book with new work, called *We Begin Here: Poems for Palestine and Lebanon* (Interlinkbooks).

I returned to BMC as a resident in June 2007 with Alexis De Veaux and Valerie Maynard to work on a collaboration on women, silence, and terror. What struck me, actually awe-struck me, coming back after so many



Blue Mountain Center

years, is what care, wisdom, and vision had gone into building BMC into a lasting institution that makes the world more beautiful, sustainable, and possible by caring for people engaged in creative, thoughtful, daring efforts of transformation. The sense of community—albeit transient by definition, or changing—the ‘who’ of it, the ‘where’ of it, the ‘how’ of it—is remarkable. I count myself among the most fortunate of cultural workers/activists, or as my students have called us, ‘artists’, to have spent time at that extraordinary place steered by Harriet Barlow.

Harriet's remarks below are excerpted from my interview with her in December 2007.

■ ■ ■ ■

Mine is a standard tale for a political person of my age. I moved through the rivers of the work—civil rights, antiwar, women's movement, Central America—each one feeling they were doing something different, insistently a different stream. This pride of distinctiveness became clearest when I got into the antinuclear movement and was told I had to choose between antinuclear power and antinuclear weapons and that both were separate and different from alternative-energy exploration. During my antinuke work I unsuccessfully dedicated myself to trying to make bridges between weapons, power, and alternative energy movements. I tried to employ my Quaker roots.

There is an increasingly bizarre sense of hierarchy of the oppressed, the superiority of one issue over another one, where you choose an issue and are defined by that issue. What all of this ended up saying to me was that we didn't pay attention to the origins of the movements—to the essential body of water we all come from.

When it became clear to me that something was wrong about the way we were approaching the work, I also became aware of the cultural underpinnings and the fundamental role of analysis in our work. I realized that in single-issue organizing we mostly talk about tactics and strategy with little of our time spent moving across the elements of the work. That propelled me into thinking about

the Blue Mountain Center. When Adam Hochschild and I talked about it in 1981, we asked ourselves what kind of place would help advance the work. I thought we needed to do everything possible to avoid being associated with any sector or ideological strand, but rather to ground long-term organizing in long-term cultural work. I had been researching this and believed that this was how we could strengthen political work.

*There is an increasingly
bizarre sense of hierarchy of
the oppressed, the superiority
of one issue over another one.*

When I heard this at a Quaker meeting I was moved to the core: “The goal of the spirit is to keep it open enough so it can ultimately contain all that it wants to cherish.” At the Blue Mountain Center we want to believe in collective consciousness and the power of the dynamic, not just at this time, but also with all the

people who came before. Jung was right; it’s all about consciousness.

When I say I’m simply not interested in single-issue work except tactically, people often become frustrated or angry. I can only think that it’s my job to figure out how to talk about it more effectively than I know how. We don’t have a way of talking about it; it’s too abstract. Most great literature is great by virtue of being great about many things—the human heart finding its place against the backdrop of the chaos of the world. I find the questions and complexities expressed more in the arts, in literature, than in polemical writing. Dickens, for example, in a Western context, explores class profoundly. (I am a Marxist, but not prescriptive. I am a fan of the clarity of Marxian analysis expressed brilliantly by Dickens.) Nobody has to read Marx or Engels to understand class; they can read Dickens. Or read Pers Petterson’s *Out Stealing Horses*, and you could talk for weeks about gender, class, betrayal, and the land. In the end, you could say how reading helps you place yourself in history. Isn’t that the reason we try to find our own voices, to find where we want to place ourselves in history? *Out Stealing Horses* helps me do the most difficult work—to keep the distinction between respectful analysis and judgmentalism. To be useful in history requires me to keep struggling with that.

I can’t figure out the immigration issue in 2007 unless I work out the distinction between being judgmental and being analytical. One does well to avoid sinking deep into any single rivulet, because that makes a useful detachment impossible. Reading *Out Stealing Horses* helps. I have the same feeling looking at Mark Rothko. *Invisible Man* is about race, but about everything. People from any culture can read and identify with it. It’s important not to be sectarian in any way, to work to find what is a window.

People who are not in the arts tend to see the arts as decorative. Great art is still seen as a luxury rather than a starting point or essential or integral to the capacity to proceed with the accuracy one needs in order to act politically. We need consciousness, analysis, tactics, and strategy (in that order). We need arts

braided with political or nonarts-specific community. This is one reason for the Blue Mountain Center.

The last eight years of my work on the Commons has been an effort to find a way of talking, a world view that matches this commitment. It works because it encompasses every element that I find essential to achieving a just world, a healthy world—everything we care about. The Center for New Community is trying to approach the immigration question by finding the Commons. Its main political argument is against the politics of scarcity.*

On a practical level, what impedes us is the way the work is organized, that political change is felt to be legitimized in the nonprofit sector (my professional home), and it is all based on tactical and strategic opportunity driven by funding possibilities. Foundations won't give support for general work, for saying 'let's figure' out what it would take to make a difference in this community and then 'let's do it'. In all the Commons work we haven't raised pennies, but we have made inroads to help people to think differently. It's unfundable because it's too abstract. We hear from funders: "I love this, it's so relevant, but it doesn't fit anywhere."

*We need to be unafraid to
be wrong, unafraid to
ask the next question. To
go to that soul place.*

To institutionalize these approaches into systemic change is not as complicated as we think it is. It is what the Rockwood Leadership Program [a training program for progressive leaders] is trying to do. Huge numbers of organizers and activists move through the program learning confidence building. It demonstrates the efficacy of taking time for discovery—well guided, personal, and interactive discovery. It is an important model. They have four-day and yearlong trainings that are dramatically significant for their participants. What underlies the work is room for soul, analysis, and connectivity. How do we find that together?

For example, if we want to talk about race, we could talk about a national conversation about possibility. But we need to talk about public education and prisons. Rhetoric trumps analysis that might take people to the place where they would take action on those institutionalized renderings of American failure to address race and class systemically.

We need more conversations—to not be afraid to bring people together just to talk, to read to each other. We need to be unafraid to be wrong, unafraid to ask the next question. To go into that soul place.

■ ■ ■ ■

Talking with Harriet about the connections among art, artists, the creative process, and progressive political work was like swimming a river I know and love and still finding new life in it, new rivulets, new names for fish and wildflowers and the ways the waters move. Her water imagery, the sensuousness and continuity of

her rendering of our human organism, our journey; her persevering commitment to challenge herself on the question of judgment, as distinct from analysis; her forward movement toward understanding fused with pragmatism, creativity fused with analysis, humility fused with purpose—move and inspire me.

The way she talks about literature and art as windows for social understanding and depth resonate with me. I only wish more people engaged in progressive political work shared this sensibility. I feel if more of us viewed our work with this wholeness we would be more powerful in our ability to make meaningful, respectful change.

I agree with Harriet; we need more conversation. Never should we dismiss talk as lack of action. In this terrifying age of smart bombs, the shelling of language

and culture, the hijacking of our humanity, we must honor our most basic and useful communication—our ability to talk, probe, think, and create together.



Blue Mountain Center

And we need the space necessary to figure out other ways to fix things, reimagine our world. Here's what I wished at the end of my conversation with Harriet—more time to talk and listen and explore

in the way that your body sometimes craves green vegetables and fresh fruits.

It's hard to live in the space that doesn't fit into categories, that perhaps goes unnamed. The place of attempting to pull down walls and reconnect in new and different configurations. It's uncomfortable. And exciting, interesting, filled with possibility. I so appreciated hearing Harriet define this 'bridge' space that is familiar to me, and I'm also grateful because I always learn so much from the well of her references and breadth of information and analysis she brings to any conversation. She reminds us that we don't have to choose between being conscious, intellectual, creative, pragmatic, analytic, strategic, humble. We are all these things, can be, must be—just like the river, the Commons, the threads connecting us to those who came before.

*The Commons is made up of all that we inherit and create together and should pass on undiminished to the next generation. It consists of gifts of nature (air, fresh water, the ocean, wilderness, etc.) and gifts that we as a society have 'gifted' to one another (Social Security, farmers markets, the Internet, bridges, scientific knowledge, libraries, etc.).

The Center for New Community is a national organization committed to building community, justice and equality.

Original CAN/API publication: April 2008

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

8

CROSSING THE BORDERS OF CULTURE AND POLITICS.

*Paul Chin and Vanessa Whang talk about animating
a Latin American Idea in the U.S.*

By Vanessa Whang

PAUL CHIN was born in China and raised in a Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta farm town, a child of cannery workers. He spent time in Chile supporting the socialist government of Salvador Allende, taught English in Brazil, and in 1979 was hired by La Peña to develop community programming.



VANESSA WHANG joined the California Council for the Humanities in 2008 as director of programs. Before joining the staff there, she was a New York-based consultant with an interest in cultural equity, arts philanthropy, multidisciplinary arts production, community cultural development, and cross-sector partnerships.

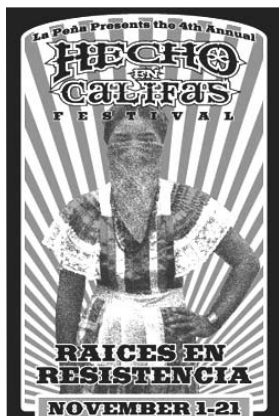


LA PEÑA CULTURAL CENTER (Berkeley, California) is a community cultural center that promotes peace, social justice, and cultural understanding through the arts, education, and social action. As a gathering place, La Peña provides opportunities for artists to share diverse cultural traditions, to create and perform their work, and to support and interface with diverse social movements. La Peña was started by a multiracial group of Latin Americans and North Americans as a response to the military coup that overthrew the socialist government of Salvador Allende on September 11, 1973, aided and abetted by the U.S. government. La Peña incorporated one year after the military coup and opened its doors in June 1975. Annually, La Peña presents over 200 events with emerging and established artists, organizes an arts education program, produces new works by local artists, presents internationally and nationally renowned artists, and houses a Latin American café that complements the organization's mission.

■ ■ ■ ■

When I heard about the idea of having conversation about work that bridges different sectors and the arts, one of the first organizations I thought of was La Peña Cultural Center—not that there aren't loads of wonderful organizations around the country that have laudable cross-sector and holistic philosophies and programs. It's just that La Peña happened to play a very formative role in my life, anchoring me in the nonprofit field precisely because I internalized its approach to arts and culture—as a friendly portal to consciousness-raising about

social justice issues, and as essential components of what it means to be human in the myriad ways that this is expressed around the globe. I was introduced to the idea of cultural work at La Peña precisely at a time when I was looking for some deeper meaning in my activities as a musician. I became involved with La Peña in the early '80s: first through joining its community chorus (that had a Latin American new song repertory) and as a student in its free Latin American music classes, then as a regular volunteer at its community events and cultural programs, then as a member of the staff collective, and finally as a board member.



*[La Peña is a] friendly portal
to consciousness raising about
social justice issues...*

Working in communities that don't have a lot of resources often means you have to wear many hats; and La Peña was no different. La Peña moved seamlessly between providing space for political updates about various national and international issues and movements, and presenting artists from communities in turmoil and connecting them with displaced compatriots or those who were interested in learning something new. It served to help build the capacity of other community groups to organize events. It developed emerging artists and supported artists insufficiently acclaimed in the U.S., building audiences for them. It offered arts training not offered in schools or other venues, and built common cause around ideas that might strike a chord among disparate people and groups.

It has been 13 years since I worked at La Peña, so I thought it would be good to have a look at how the organization is functioning now, and to do that through a historical lens. Clearly the person to talk to was Paul Chin—someone who was there before I got there, who was there when I left, and who is there for the long haul. I interviewed Paul in December 2007 to get his perspective on how La Peña has been able to work with so many different kinds of communities over the years—across lines of race and ethnicity, culture and politics, the local and global.

Paul has been on the staff of La Peña since 1979, though he began volunteering there in 1976 after returning from a Venceremos Brigade trip to Cuba.

"I think, from my personal viewpoint, when you are involved with activist organizing, it involves building bridges in order to build a bigger, broader movement and to involve more people in a collective cause. You want to build broad coalitions. And you want to find allies who you can call on when the chips are down.

I learned about building a broad front when I was in a student group working for ethnic studies at San Francisco State [University]. It's important to create and build

messages that resonate broadly. Being a part of the Third World Coalition Liberation Front, we had to work across racial and ethnic divides and political divides as well. Although I was a member of Inter-Collegiate Chinese for Social Action, I personally felt more comfortable associating with bohemian/artists groups at that time because they were just more relaxed about things than some of the heavy politicians.

Part of the 'social revolution' in the '60s was about living life differently and questioning the existing social order. I was influenced by the Summer of Love—though I wouldn't call myself a hippie, even if other people did. Like other young people, I sported long hair and experimented with an alternative lifestyle. I was circulating with all these artist types, like poet Alan Lau, writer Frank Chin, filmmaker Curtis Choy, and a political group that was organizing for social services in Chinatown [Inter-Collegiate Chinese for Social Action]. At that time, there were also a lot of different groups that were trying to build an alternative party. Later going into the '70s, I recall a lot of those debates happening at La Peña. I was personally drawn into La Peña because of the arts and political context, and because of my experiences of having been in Chile and traveling in Latin America. It was at La Peña that I saw the power of art to transform people."

Paul then talked about how throughout the history of La Peña the organization has always tried to build bridges with social justice issues, and didn't see itself as an 'arts organization' strictly speaking.

"The broad mission of La Peña is to link ourselves to grassroots work that isn't necessarily arts related. Like issues of infant mortality, opposition to Proposition 209 [the anti-affirmative-action ballot measure], and the farm workers—issue-based agitation. In the early days, we thought of ourselves as a social service agency. It was in the '80s that we worked with a consultant through support from the California Arts Council who helped us define ourselves as an arts organization."

Eric [Leenson, one of the organization's founders] saw La Peña in the lineage of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade [volunteers from the U.S. who fought in the Spanish Civil War against Franco]. He went to Chile as a Fulbright scholar, met Victor Jara, and brought back the 'peña model' [This model was one of a gathering place that combined culture and politics.] He wanted to politicize people with information through culture. Other founders—like Chileans Carlos Baron, and Hugo and Patricia Brenni—understood this model. Hugo and Patricia were cooks so, like in Chile, having a gathering space like a café became an important part of La Peña. It was a place for people to interact in an informal way.

Even if La Peña didn't think of itself as an arts presenter early on, the view of culture as an entry point for people to become familiar with other countries and then their socio-political and economic issues has been a fundamental one for how La Peña operates.

We always worked with theater people, like early on when Danny Glover came and wanted to do a production of *The Island*, Athol Fugard's play. We would always take chances with projects that were politically progressive but financially risky. In the early days it was easier to take chances. Now we have to look more at the

economic consequences of our decisions. Back then, we didn't really present as much as make a space available to the community. We saw ourselves as a community gathering place where art and politics and food would bring people together to contribute to building a mass movement to change U.S. domestic and foreign policy.

The music classes [for many years subsidized by the California Arts Council] have been a great way for people from different backgrounds to meet, and also for people who are not necessarily politicized when they come in. There are also progressive people who link up with other people through the classes and go on



We make long-term commitments because we know the issues are not going to go away quickly.

to help build movements. For example, Dr. Loco [an alias for Prof. José Cuellar at San Francisco State University] teaches accordion at La Peña, but also curates some of the music programming and helps organize forums on immigration.”

When asked if La Peña is more reactive or proactive in the way it tries to link up cultural activities with social issues, Paul explains that the center not only responds to who walks in the door, but that the organization creates opportunities for bridge building.

“Sometimes the way it works is staff members find issues that they strongly identify with—like with the Fruitvale Project. Elia Arce [a U.S.-based Costa Rican theater artist] was asked to do a two-year residency on issues of immigration in the Fruitvale neighborhood [a low-income area of East Oakland with many Latino immigrants], mentoring younger artists on how to work with communities. The Spanish-Speaking Citizens Foundation and the Unity Council were the neighborhood partners we worked with.

In practical terms, how we do this kind of work is we look for appropriate partners, we look for appropriate artists. And it's good to know what people's reputations are in their own community. And we make long-term commitments because we know the issues are not going to go away quickly.

It's also about professional development. In the Fruitvale Project, there were workshops for the spoken word artists we worked with in writing, lighting, stagecraft, self-presenting, finding community partners, and doing oral history. It's not just about the performance; there are workshops and educational activities. Our Hecho en Califas Festival, like the Fruitvale Project, featured a local artist whose spoken word/music performance looked at the murders of women on the border near Ciudad Juarez. There was a writing workshop for young Latina writers, and they had a chance to perform their work. That was led by the artist Mamacoatl.”

La Peña has been doing this kind of work for over 32 years. I ask Paul how they have been able to sustain the level and quality of work they do.

"We try to keep the work at a manageable scale for the staff. Whatever issue you engage in, you always need to assess your limitations and assets. You have to understand not only your own capacity, but the capacity of your partners to make things work. It's good to have people on staff who reflect the people you are working with in order to build trust. Communication is a two-way street. Things can get lost in translation. Partnership terms need to be laid out as clearly as possible and in a way that's intelligible to both parties. You have to ask 'Will we still respect each other after this is over?' We enter each collaboration with the hope of long-term, sustainable relationships."

■ ■ ■ ■

After speaking with Paul, I thought about the quiet but dogged way La Peña has always done its work, though the focus has moved from the international solidarity movements of the '70s and '80s to more locally-centered work with youth, the progressive spoken word and hip-hop movements, as well as national issues concerning immigration and affirmative action. But La Peña also remains rooted in an internationalist/global perspective, never forgetting the lessons of its beginnings (having been founded on September 11, 1974—the first anniversary of the U.S.-supported military coup that overthrew President Allende of Chile), and staying alive to U.S. interventions globally.

Though Paul has been on the staff of La Peña for almost 30 years, he doesn't put himself forward as the front man of the organization. There has always been a rejection of 'the cult of personality' at the Center, and that ethic of maintaining a flat power structure is underlain by a deep belief in the talents and assets that different people bring to the work. It is that belief and respect that has enabled La Peña to build relationships across all kinds of difference.

When I was at La Peña, I had the privilege of working with people who had an enormous amount of integrity and commitment, who were smart, good-hearted, and good-humored as well (if you can't maintain a sense of humor about doing woefully under-resourced social change work, you won't last), and who were incredibly fair-minded and honest. I found and still find La Peña's valuing of creative processes, not just products, and looking underneath those processes to uncover diverse ways of thinking and being in the world to be extremely resonant and wise.

*La Peña has a governing structure that functions like a workers' collective. The role of executive director is not the traditional one found in most nonprofit organizations.

Original CAN/API publication: April 2008

A low-angle, upward-looking photograph of a suspension bridge. The image shows the massive stone tower in the center, with two large Gothic-style arches at its base. A dense network of steel cables radiates from the top of the tower, creating a complex geometric pattern of triangles and diamonds that fills the upper two-thirds of the frame. The sky is a uniform, light gray, providing a high-contrast background for the dark bridge structure.

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

9

DIRECT AND INDIRECT APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY CHANGE

Littlelobe and SouthWest Organizing Project talk about finding a relationship between community-engaged arts and organizing

By Valerie Martinez, Robby Rodriguez, Molly Sturges, and Rosina Roibal

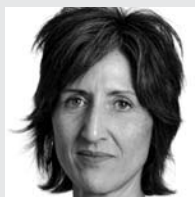
ROBBY RODRIGUEZ is a programme executive at the Atlantic Philanthropies. He was formerly executive director of the SouthWest Organizing Project, where he helped lead the organization through a leadership transition and generational shift. Since 2004 he has been a team member of the Building Movement Project.



ROSINA ROIBAL started organizing as a child and continued at Loyola University where she earned an MA in viola performance. She served as arts and culture organizer at SWOP and in 2010 moved to California, where she works as a program coordinator for the Bay Area Environmental Health Collaborative.



VALERIE MARTINEZ is an award-winning poet, educator, playwright, librettist, and collaborative artist. As executive director and core artist with Littlelobe, she has been involved in a wide range of community engagement projects with children, youth, adults, seniors, and families. She was the poet laureate of Santa Fe from 2008 to 2010.



MOLLY STURGES is the cofounder and artistic director of Littlelobe and is best known for her work integrating intermedia performance, community dialogue, and social and environmental equity and healing. Sturges is a professor of practice at the University of New Mexico.



SOUTHWEST ORGANIZING PROJECT (SWOP) is a statewide multiracial, multi-issue, community-based membership organization in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Since 1980, SWOP has worked to make it possible for thousands of New Mexicans to begin to have a place and voice in social, economic, and environmental decisions that affect their lives. Its mission is “working to empower our communities to realize racial and gender equality and social and economic justice.”

LITTLELOBE is a Santa Fe-based, nonprofit consisting of a team of seasoned, professional artists, activists, and facilitators from diverse cultural and artistic

backgrounds committed to restorative and generative interdisciplinary, collaborative art practices that heal and strengthen our communities and foster life-affirming connections across the boundaries that divide us. Littlelobe partners with people around the world to create works that support and lift the expressions, voices, and wisdom inherent in each individual and community.

COMMON GROUND: TOC: Littlelobe and SWOP are currently partners on a large-scale, multiyear project based in Cuba, New Mexico, and the two nearby eastern agency Diné (Navajo) communities of Torreon and Ojo Encino. The objec-



Crosstown #4, Santa Fe Bus Opera. Photo: Chris Jonas

tives of this new initiative are to provide participants with the tools to express issues of significance and meaning in their lives; explore and elevate underrepresented perspectives, stories, and experiences; provide mentorship opportunities and options for economic development related to the arts; and teach a wide range of community facilitation and dialogue skills. Littlelobe and SWOP hope to support and advocate for real change in these areas through a multiyear commitment to each community. After six months of working with over 90 community members in schools and an intergenerational ensemble, the community participants created the Common Ground Festival (June 7, 2008, Cuba, New Mexico) at the Sandoval County Fairgrounds.

■ ■ ■ ■

MOLLY STURGES: Rosina, you have been working with us on the Common Ground project in Cuba, New Mexico. Could you talk a bit about your work and what it's been like to collaborate with Littlelobe?

ROSINA ROIBAL: One thing that is nice about my arts-based work with SWOP is that it attracts people who are not typically interested in being involved in community organizing. My experience of being involved with SWOP during the '80s and '90s was that the arts were mainly used in for keeping the kids busy while the adults were in meetings. I rarely experienced a connection between art and social change. I think Robby's interactions with Littlelobe changed our

ideas at SWOP. We didn't see art as connected to social change. I am an artist and an organizer, and even I have had trouble seeing how to connect the two.

VALERIE MARTINEZ: Littlelobe values intergenerational work so much—the power of older and younger working together, both artistically and socially. Anytime we feel that we can't successfully integrate the ages we feel it is a loss. Today, it is rare that generations work together and yet the idea is so important and so natural. It echoes a very old tradition. We are forgetting the power of intergenerational work, and if we do, we will lose the wisdom of the elders and their influence and the energy of young people to shape their communities.

*As artists primarily
working in community
contexts, we don't start
with the issues.
We start by bringing
people together.*

STURGES: Rosina, how has it been for you coming to work with us from a community-organizing background? As artists primarily working in community contexts, we don't start with the issues. We start by bringing people together. We move slowly, we eat together, engage in a range of creative explorations. We create a sense of safety together. We wait to see what emerges. In my conversations with organizers, and my

experience of organizing, this is different than traditional organizing.

ROIBAL: I am not used to the Littlelobe process. It evolves. You (Littlelobe) create a space for the arts and then let community issues arise. You facilitate and create opportunities to bring people's opinions and concerns forward. I think a lot of people in small communities don't feel safe or comfortable going more directly against the grain and that is what we social justice groups do—we fight against things. So many people are scared to do this—so how does it become possible?

But I also think Littlelobe could create more time where direct and deliberate education about issues is possible. People become inspired by this process and can make art from this place. Maybe this is where we can really connect and help each other. I do this at SWOP when we choose a song for an educational purpose. Once we focused on a Guthrie song about worker camps and we would talk about Chavez. The kids came to empathize with farm workers through the song and the conversation. They begin to understand it on deeper levels and it inspires them.

MARTINEZ: I think this is an important point and it brings up ideas of direction and indirection. Often, when I teach poetry classes, I say that the language of good poetry is the language of indirection. I have a fear of too much directness; sometimes what is lost is nuance and complexity. I'm much more interested in the gray areas. But there is a place for both in Littlelobe's work; we have both in mind. Sometimes, we give prompts (for creative work, for discussion) that are

more directive and sometimes we just wait for things to bubble up. It is a balance. The play between the two is very important.

ROIBAL: I think it is important for artists and community organizers alike to remember that people don't want to be lectured, and often direct education feels like that. I can see why you are afraid with such directness. I have been faced with this before. One example of this is when I asked my mom, who knows of all of my politics, to come to a play about hunger that we did at SWOP. My mom said she didn't like it because she is tired of being lectured.

MARTINEZ: I think so often political rhetoric does not allow for participation. I think this is also an issue of time. We have to know each other first to be able to trust and speak our thoughts.

That is why our projects are long-term. We have to commit to each other first, to issues second. Long-term collaboration allows for an unfolding that the group can honor and hold. We encourage people to feel the strength of their feelings in a place of mutual trust. When something is too direct, or too quick, I think it does not allow this process.

It is important for artists and community organizers alike to remember that people don't want to be lectured, and often direct education feels like that.

ROIBAL: In my opinion, we organizers are often not creating a space for the diversity of people's experience and expressions. We say: Here are the issues and how can you help? What can you do? This may often relate to the issue of time because, for example, maybe the city council is going to decide on something next week and they need voices right away.

STURGES: When someone is trying to organize an emergency response, what time is there?

MARTINEZ: Yes, in that case, there's no time to wait—it must be direct.

STURGES: At this stage of the project (six months in), I think we have a group of people who are bonding. Trust has developed. We see empowerment. It is now that we need you, Rosina, to help us start conversations with community members about what comes next. How do we continue to support the cultural leadership that is emerging? How do we integrate direct education that is relevant and meaningful to these communities?

ROIBAL: I think artists and organizers should be giving each other workshops and training.

MARTINEZ: For us it is about encouraging and nurturing a community. Bringing people into community who would not typically work together. After the bonds

emerge we are able to respond to the issues that arise. And they do arise. Where we are working now, trust comes slowly but it is coming.

STURGES: So, how do we nurture that process and find the right times to bring up, for example, systematic issues regarding power? It is not an easy transition in our projects. Some people seem to crave this kind of discussion and others shrink from it. We have a lot to learn here and we have to remember each project and community is unique.



Molly Sturges conducting the *Memorylines* ensemble in rehearsal. Photo: Chris Jonas

ROIBAL: This is a challenge. We were talking about the Mexican revolutions in a workshop once, and a girl said, "I hate Mexicans." She didn't want to learn the music of other cultures, especially Mexico. This discrimination between Hispanics and Mexicanos is scary.

MARTINEZ: We've seen this prejudice, and prejudice leading to violence, in the schools of Santa Fe, too. When I talk to Hispanic kids, they often are surprised to learn that where they live was Mexico until 1848. Much of these problems result from not knowing our own history, not understanding how complex the history of the Southwest is.

STURGES: Take an example from our group. We received an e-mail from someone who would not drive from Cuba to Torreon ('the rez'), where we hold some of our meetings. We found out many people from Cuba had never been out there, even though kids from Torreon come in every day for school and services. Several people from Cuba feel Torreon is 'unsafe for non-Natives'. We went back and forth about how to respond. We had purposely scheduled our weekly workshops in both communities. We decided to offer her a ride.

Now, many weeks into the project, many people now cross these lines every weekend. But I don't know how many people are thinking about the history of that area, the historical trauma, and why the mistrust and tensions have developed. Again, it is an opportunity to create something that could be more educational, but in a creative way.

ROIBAL: And that is where direct education can be effective. For most of my life, I grew up around organizers who had anti-White sentiments. There was a lot of hatred and my mom is White, so it was hard. I didn't totally understand their judgment of White people. Then I went to an Undoing Racism workshop by The People's Institute For Survival and Beyond. Extreme facts were offered to us. White people in the group got offended and could not deal with the facts of

their own privilege. I was shocked. Then I finally understood what people in the movement were talking about. It was a great thing to learn this.

I think now we could incorporate more educators and organizers into Littleglobes sessions—presenters showing films about hate crimes or immigration—issues that are relevant to what is already coming to the surface in your sessions.

MARTINEZ: This is where you can help me, Rosina. Honestly, I actually feel afraid of bringing things up directly. I worry about alienating people after working so hard to create a place where people feel comfortable together. We work so hard to foster connections and healing.

STURGES: Val, we can reflect on our experiences with La Migma in the last project and how a family we worked with, and many others, went into hiding because of the immigrations sweeps. The whole ensemble had to deal with this and did.

MARTINEZ: The ensemble members who lived in fear during the sweeps all came to the workshops during those hard times because they had trust. It had evolved naturally. Of course, we responded. We all cried. In our current project, I think there is more distrust between community participants.

ROIBAL: I have seen people feel alienated because of one comment. That individual then felt targeted by the rest of the group. I think it is helpful to be very sensitive and to make a space for everyone. A space that is beyond right and wrong. SWOP tries to pick issues that the community will obviously support, such as healthcare, living wage, clean and fair elections. Issues that we know will get people involved. We want to give people a voice.



Performer Brenda Granados in *Memorylines*. Photo: Kate Russell

MARTINEZ: I think art can also do this. We could show works that are more confrontational, even from our own previous projects. Then we could have a conversation about it. There are plenty of examples of art and music taking on some of these topics in many different ways. Littlelobe is working to ensure that our projects lead to conversations with our audiences about the pieces we create—healthy dialogue about controversial subjects.

ROIBAL: It is important in organizing not to assume that one thing is right or wrong. We so often have agendas. A side we are on.

*Artists and organizers
should be giving each other
workshops and training.*

STURGES: We have this opportunity to explore the relationships between definition and abstraction, between direct and indirect. As we think about the next stage of our project we will be dealing with many of these issues. We

will be moving from creative exploration to work around building community capacity. We will be responding to concerns around economic development and sustainable programming within the TOC communities.

A FOLLOW-UP CONVERSATION BETWEEN ROBBY RODRIGUEZ AND MOLLY STURGES

MOLLY STURGES: Robby, what made you interested in collaborating with Littlelobe initially?

ROBBY RODRIGUEZ: When I saw the DVD about your project *Memorylines* (a community-dialogue new opera), I realized that what you were doing was organizing even though it was not a campaign, and you never called it 'organizing'. We have attempted to collaborate with cultural workers for years, and we have attempted to do it in various ways. It is a nut we are still cracking.

STURGES: What do you think SWOP could teach artists that work in communities?

RODRIGUEZ: There are tools that we have learned that are helpful in terms of how we analyze problems and have discussions that may require a little more directness because the problem is so concrete and acute. Within organizing people learn to name and understand the roots of the problems they are facing.

I think the arts are always relevant. Generally speaking there is a scarcity of arts and cultural engagement and that is an obstacle to creating social change work. If we don't engage people in terms of recognizing them as whole people, it is problematic. I think community-engaged art making, organizing, advocacy work, and service work are all done best collaboratively. We do our best when we are working with others who are trying to address other parts of the problem.

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

10

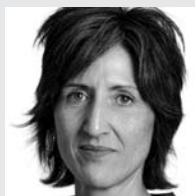
FINDING COMMON LANGUAGE BETWEEN ARTISTS AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS

***The second Bridge Conversation between Littlelobe and
SouthWest Organizing Project about their ongoing collaboration***

ROBBY RODRIGUEZ is a programme executive at the Atlantic Philanthropies. He was formerly executive director of the SouthWest Organizing Project, where he helped lead the organization through a leadership transition and generational shift. Since 2004 he has been a team member of the Building Movement Project.



VALERIE MARTINEZ is an award-winning poet, educator, playwright, librettist, and collaborative artist. As executive director and core artist with Littlelobe, she has been involved in a wide range of community engagement projects with children, youth, adults, seniors, and families. She was the poet laureate of Santa Fe from 2008 to 2010.



MOLLY STURGES is the cofounder and artistic director of Littlelobe and is best known for her work integrating intermedia performance, community dialogue, and social and environmental equity and healing. Sturges is a professor of practice at the University of New Mexico.



MOLLY STURGES: It seems to me that you, Robby, as an organizer, and we as artists at Littlelobe are all involved in looking deeply at the processes whereby we come to access the stories that inform our lives—the process of choosing, discarding, and reframing those stories, and then the telling the chosen stories in our own strong voices.

ROBBY RODRIGUEZ: I have been watching the news a lot lately and in terms of race, I think the only way we can get to a point where we can really move forward, into a post-racial place, is through cultural change.

VALERIE MARTINEZ: I go to the word ‘fear’. I am thinking of all of the public racial slurs of late. So when you say, how do we change the story, I wonder—is changing the story possible when fear is really present? At Littlelobe we spend so much time building relationships and creating safety. I know you do that too. We are both working against fear, I hope, reclaiming, and re-linguaging. How does changing a story affect the presence of fear in our lives that is constantly being affirmed by conservative media? I have a lot of questions about this.

RODRIGUEZ: I feel that the work that we [SWOP] do, and have been doing is about working with and facing fears. But how do you do that to a level of scale and significance? One of the things so important in developing leaders is encouraging people to tell their story in their own voices.

STURGES: How do we create/identify/unearth the living stories that inspire us and give us strength rather than perpetuate fear?

How does this happen in community organizing? How do artists do this? So many questions. In our work we see that creative exchange facilitates emotional connection, empathy, the discovery of new possibilities. We develop the connective tissue we need to work over the long-term on difficult issues. We also see that creative exchange and art making can give rise to metaphors that guide us.

I am wondering, in all this, about where we place art making. It can be perceived as so separate in the conventional paradigm to basic human need, but it is always present—it seems so essential. I would like to see this work become more accessible to other fields and sectors as it really is about engagement. Deep engagement, something that happens when we feel significant connections with ourselves, others, and the world around us. I continue to be interested in a regional team of practitioners, of cultural workers, such as organizers and artists, who evolve and develop the capacity of this work in the Southwest.



Molly Sturges in group session in Cuba, New Mexico. Photo: Jason Jaacks

This being said, we know from our experience working with you, Robby, and SWOP on Common Ground: TOC that the languages we use can be really different. It seems to me we need to find out where we connect and where we don't and try to identify an integrative language for this kind of engagement work. People have been working on this for a long time in many places, but I think this has to be specific to this region and the people who live and work here.

MARTINEZ: We talk a lot about how collaborative art making allows people to take risks. We witness one another. We practice sharing. We are learning to see one another, hear one another. It seems to me we spend a great deal of time creating

exchanges where we can individually and collectively deconstruct fear and find new ways of working with it. I continue to be amazed by how many voices we don't hear in the political dialogue. All of this work can lead to civic engagement.

At Littlelobe we tend to draw a circle, an artistic and community frame, and this is the circle in which we come together to create. Our projects, because they involve creative collaboration over a long period of time, tend to build bridges. One thing I have noticed from working with SWOP is that we definitely have areas of shared practices and goals. But we also work differently

*Creative experimentation
(as a group process) can
expand our individual
and collective capacity
because it involves [a] kind
of shared risk taking.*

RODRIGUEZ: I am interested in an integrative language between organizers and artists. What do we have in common in terms of our practice and goals? Organizers tend to work from principles. For example, you never ask someone to do something you would not do yourself. Another principle is that organizers are supposed to push responsibility out, which means you don't want to do stuff for people, but rather encourage people to do it for themselves. These are some of the

fundamentals of how we do our work. Maybe by putting them out there to a group of artists, we can find out what we have in common. It may make sense to come out with a different language. The point of reference seems very different.

STURGES: Yes, I can understand working from principles and your ideas sound familiar, but to me, speaking as an artist, and the place where my creative practice comes from, I don't think in terms of strategies. I think a lot of artists would not be starting there, some might. Listening, investigating, curiosity, connection, moving into unfamiliar places, even love—I don't know, lots of things that are hard to talk about in linear communication forms inform my creative practice.

MARTINEZ: I have recently been working on Littlelobe's core values. In them, we say the same things you say, Robby, but in a different way. We see the power in the collective and this is different than 'empowering' those that have less. We can't do that in reality, but we do see that someone may become empowered through a process. Creative experimentation (as a group process) can expand our individual and collective capacity because it involves the kind of shared risk-taking and creation that encourages all of us to experience possibility. I think this kind of language might be really different than that used by organizers.

STURGES: We need to articulate where we diverge. Back to reflecting on the Common Ground: TOC project—I am thinking about when a SWOP member came in and did some sessions about the will of the community, but some people wanted to do art, they felt they were there for 'the art'. There were some big disconnections after that moment. We turned away from the language and momentum that had been created internally and there were some consequences.

Good things came from it, but it has been an important point of reflection for us. That group had already bonded and made their own language, their own vision.

MARTINEZ: At those sessions there was a community organizing exercise about the ‘river’—it was meant to emphasize looking at community problems from deeper sources—that was metaphorical. TOC residents loved it. Then we broke for lunch and came back to talk more directly about organizing. This is where we saw a disconnect. Once we moved away from more creative dialogue, residents were treading in unfamiliar water; I don’t think they were ready for it. We would like to see creative capacity building and moving towards civic engagement in much more integrated ways. How to move from metaphor to more direct organizing language and action plans? We don’t know how to do this though we have been working on it. We actually need to work much more closely with community organizers. We wish we could have an organizer as part of our core team. We don’t currently have the staffing capacity but we really love the idea and want to see it happen.

*We have stereotypes that organizers
and artists have about each other. . . .*

*We are going to find real differences
in approach and practice.*

RODRIGUEZ: One thing that would be helpful to do is talk about what are the stories we say about each other and break them down. We have stereotypes that organizers and artists have about each other. There are triggers. I am telling you that because I hear organizers talk about artists all the time and many don’t want to like you and reinforce the story they tell themselves, and that is a big problem. The other thing is we are going to find real differences in approach and practice. When we identify places of divergence we see which areas you excel in, and which areas we can take on.

STURGES: I often think about differences in sense of urgency, relationship to ambiguity, and timescale. Often artists are not thinking about working on projects in terms of years. We have come to do that, but that is after a long process of learning and realizing the importance of sustained engagement. I don’t even think a lot of artists think this is possible. It is a different approach, but I think many would be interested in such a commitment.

RODRIGUEZ: Reflecting on Common Ground: TOC, I think one of things we have underestimated, and are realizing, is the amount of time and resources needed to do that level of community building and where does it make sense for a group like SWOP or Littlelobe to be the primary group. SWOP is realizing it can’t be that group. We think of ourselves as supporting the capacity of a local group towards its sustainability over time. We are talking on the scale of years.

STURGES: Yes, it takes a lot of time. We believe in long-term relationships and supporting local emergent leadership related to what you are talking about. These questions you are asking are also important to us. We have a two-year community digital storytelling project up now that is in several communities around New Mexico; we have been wondering more about a ten-year project. We do need to reflect upon what we do best and build partnerships from there. What we are learning is that partnerships need to be seasoned, practiced, and tested. We are learning about what we do best and what we need help with.

RODRIGUEZ: We too are balancing and discovering our priorities and capacities.



Student director in *Turn the Lens* program in Taos, NM. Photo: Chris Jonas

MARTINEZ: I'm thinking that artists and community organizers need to spend more time together, accompany each other on the ground where we could learn much more about how we practice, how we use language, how we communicate. It would be wonderful to accompany you and your staff, Robby, to see how you work. This would teach us a lot. And we would love to have you come along when we are working in a community, so you could experience what we do. Then, we could reach across any differences in ourselves and find ways of integrating what we do.

Original Arts & Democracy publication: June 2011

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

11

INCARCERATION, FATHERHOOD, AND ARTMAKING

Carol Fennelly and Ayo Ngozi on artmaking with fathers and children in federal and state prisons

By Ayo Ngozi and Carol Fennelly

CAROL FENNELLY, a lifetime activist and community organizer, is the founder and executive director of Hope House. An advocate for the homeless through the Community for Creative Nonviolence, she also has been a political commentator for WAMU and director of communications for Sojourners magazine.



AYO NGOZI is an artist, art educator, and alternative health practitioner. Trained as a journalist, she began working as a cultural activist and arts administrator 20 years ago, and as a self-taught artist began exhibiting and performing her own works in 1998. She is currently an intern in clinical herbal medicine at Tai Sophia Institute in Laurel, Maryland.



In 1997, the Washington, DC, Department of Corrections closed the Lorton Correctional Complex—the equivalent of a state prison—handing over nearly 10,000 DC inmates to the U.S. Bureau of Prisons. These men were relocated from nearby Lorton, Virginia, to federal correctional facilities across the country, with a devastating impact on thousands of DC-area families. With many families living in or near poverty, visits and even long-distance phone calls became nearly impossible. Spouses drifted apart; most fathers became deprived of any contact with their children.

In 1998, longtime faith-based activist and journalist Carol Fennelly started the non-profit Hope House to address the needs of the families affected by Lorton's closing. Starting with one prison in 1998, the organization's programs have since expanded to serve thousands of fathers and children in 16 state and federal facilities across the country. Hope House has received nationwide attention for its arts-based summer camp program, in which children and fathers are able to spend sustained time together within minimum, medium, and maximum-security institutions. Through a program of workshops and projects, the Father to Child Summer Camp facilitates relationship building between fathers and their children, building stronger families and, by extension, stronger communities. The following is a conversation between Carol Fennelly and Ayo Ngozi, Hope House's artist-in-residence, who facilitates art making with fathers and children in federal and state prisons.

■ ■ ■ ■

AYO NGOZI: Carol, I came to the work that Hope House does as an artist, after receiving a random call from you, introducing your work and the opportunity to facilitate art making with incarcerated fathers and their children. I remember you sent me a slide show that I showed to my son, who told me, “Mom, this is so important, you have to do it.” He was right. After working for several years as an art educator and administrator and then as a visual and performing artist doing gallery and museum work, there was a lot of work that I was not doing involving healing, and it was very important personally that I do that. I semi-retired to become a clinical herbalist. So that’s what I was doing as I began working with Hope House; I was in kind of a Bridge Conversation with myself, trying to further the possibility of bringing art making to the healing work, and looking instead at how I can be of service as an artist.

You are a different kind of healer, with a long history as an activist and as a cultural worker. You were one of the visionaries of the Community for Creative Nonviolence—along with your partner, Mitch Snyder, and others—that brought the issue of homelessness to the national forefront throughout the

1970s and ‘80s. And then you made a transition to doing this work with incarcerated men and their children and families through the creation of Hope House. Where is the bridge for you, the connecting thread in those works?

*Part of what we do is go
in and help people find their
way back to their families.*

CAROL FENNELLY: When I left CCNV I wrote for public radio, and was doing a lot of research and writing about the inmates that were being transferred out of the DC area (from Lorton prison, which moved its last prisoner out in 2001) and what was happening to them and their families as a result of transfers to prisons far from here. The journey was not that far for me; I run into a lot of the same guys in the work—the same issues that take people to homeless shelters take people to prison too. The journey is often the same. So part of what we do is go in and help people find their way back to their families.

A lot of the same socioeconomic and racial dynamics are at work in both shelters and prisons. We work with primarily African American men who have fallen off our communities’ radars as important people in our lives, people who are no longer involved in our community. I feel like through this work we’re able to really help these men find their place in community again, as fathers, as members of their families, and as valued people.

NGOZI: It seems than in order to facilitate this larger reconnection to community that you talk about, a lot of smaller-scale connections need to be made. On the one hand, there’s the connection that has to happen between the fathers themselves, inside prison. Everyone involved in this program has to work together to make the programs successful; fathers have to agree to work together in order to agree on how things will go with them and with their children. Then there are the connections between the inmates and the prison guards, and the warden and the

line staff, and with the families at home, making sure things don't fall through the cracks so children can participate.

FENNELLY: I think it's also about transformation, about fathers and children transforming their relationships. Maybe they didn't have a relationship before the dad was incarcerated, maybe it was tenuous, or maybe it was good. Whichever way, it is transformed by spending five intensive days having experiences together.

The Father to Child Summer Camp also transforms the prison. North Branch Correctional Institution is one of the highest-security facilities in the country; it was our first time bringing a camp there, and we were coming into a resistant space. Only the warden welcomed our program. In our first meetings, the senior staff was there saying, "Oh no, we can't let the children and fathers hug each other." And the warden was right there saying, "Yes, we can." But that didn't get to the line staff, the guys who deal with inmates on a day-to-day basis. That facility is very rough, and the relationships between the inmates and the staff are not good. So the staff would do things like sabotage meetings scheduled with the fathers by locking them down so they couldn't attend. We had these sour-faced guards who would stand at the doorway, and I'd invite them to come in and look at the murals, and they'd say no and just stand there. But by the end of the week, after looking at the art and after seeing the kids and dads together, I know we made some changes there.

There was a warden there who some people thought was the hardest man in the federal system. At the beginning he was too busy to meet with me and didn't want to talk.

Another example is from Cumberland Federal Corrections Institution. There was a warden there who some people thought was the hardest man in the federal

system. At the beginning he was too busy to meet with me and didn't want to talk; had he been the warden when we first started programs there, we wouldn't have gotten in the door. By the end of his tenure at that facility he was one of our biggest supporters, and when he left for a new facility he brought us in to start a program there. He eventually described the camp to the Bureau of Prisons as one of the most successful programs he'd seen in his 20 years at the Bureau.

NGOZI: When I look from the perspective of a clinician at the work that Hope House does, I can see a different version of a well-known medical truth: it is so important for us to be with each other, to be in community, in order to heal. Study after study shows how people do better when they're not in isolation. And we can think of that in terms of physical disease or ailments, and also in terms of the dynamics that are at work in the lives of our families. The children in Hope House programs are—as far as they're concerned—the only ones dealing with having a father in prison, and they don't talk with other children about this experience.

The children that we work with learn to connect with each other in a way that helps them do the 'inside work' that we can't come in and do for them. I come to the work as an artist and a mother, but not as a therapist or healer. I am not there to 'fix' the fathers' relationships with their children, or anything else. The work that you've created through Hope House is not unlike my bridged work as an artist and herbalist: we are here to open up the possibility of a new story, out of which we can make new choices for our own healing.

FENNELLY: That's exactly right. Fathers in prison are not given the opportunity to be dads; we come in and give them that opportunity. That's the only thing we do. The fathers take it and make the best of it, or they don't.

NGOZI: It is like working with someone who is ill—that person, to paraphrase Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*, has to want to be well and willing to make changes. That's also key to the whole process of involving incarcerated fathers in the work that you do.

*We are here to open up
the possibility of a new story,
out of which we can make new
choices for our own healing.*

FENNELLY: It all starts with the dad; he has to make the effort to become part of the program. We are just there to provide the opportunity, the fathers do the rest. And they really live up to being great dads, and they encourage each other as well. At Cumberland especially, when a father joins our program he is embraced into this strong community of fathers.

At North Branch, it was a different case. We had all these disparate elements and had to pull them together; that was critical to the success of the first program there. Not only did we have opposition from the guards to the program, there was opposition of some of the dads to one another. We had four competing gangs represented among the fathers there, some of them from the deadliest prison gangs in the country. The first day when I met with these guys, everybody was closed and hard-looking, and I just couldn't see how it was going to work. These guys were rough. Normally before camp, I meet with the dads three times, but for this camp we met every week for a couple of months, just trying to get a cohesive group and not knowing that this gang issue was at play until camp actually started. But that kind of thing exists in every prison to some extent.

NGOZI: What did you envision as the role art would play in creating a cohesive group in this situation?

FENNELLY: Here's an example: one of the things we do at all the camps is have the fathers create a performance for their kids. They have to agree on what to do, and figure out for themselves the songs or whatever will be in the show. In some prisons when I've explained this, I get this 'look', because they are so unused to working as a group.

So I put together a sort of 'greatest hits' compilation of moments from past camp shows, so they could get a feel for it. Working together was still a challenge because of the gang issue, but they worked on it, they became a group.

NGOZI: On our way to North Branch in July, I remember that we had to keep calling—when we left DC, when we stopped for lunch, when we reached the playground. It was not about the prison, but about the fathers' sense of disbelief that their children were actually coming to them. Once we were inside, I learned that as a facilitator, once we started a process with a family, we had to complete that process—meaning that if I've promised Jamal I'll get him some light blue paint and I'll be right back, I really have to do exactly that. There's a different level of accountability that is required here, because in these environments there's so little follow-through. Without that, it's hard for the fathers and the kids to make these transformations because there's no sense of stability.

FENNELLY: Once I brought in a longtime staffer to do an acting workshop with the fathers in preparation for the performance. We had a moment when we finally just had to stop and let them know: "Look, to us you're just dads." And there was this shift. The room went dead silent, and then somebody in the back of the room quietly said "thank you."

We had a moment when we finally just had to stop: "Look, to us you're just dads."... The room went dead silent, and then somebody in the back of the room quietly said "thank you."

NGOZI: That's critical to setting the stage for the transformation that happens through this work. Because we're coming in allowing people the possibility to change their story—not to change their past, or even their personalities—new opportunities are

opened up for these families. It's about allowing the space to meet the fathers where they are, as men, and not as murderers or bank robbers or whatever. I personally didn't know why any of the fathers I worked with were incarcerated. This allows me as an artist and a healer to come in with a clean slate and let the relationships and art open up as they will, in the space this program has provided.

Original Arts & Democracy publication: May 2011

*Bridge
Conversations*

ARTS & DEMOCRACY

12

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO LINKING NONPROFIT AND FOR-PROFIT MODELS

Adam Huttler and Ruby Lerner on entrepreneurial arts service organizations

By Adam Forest Huttler

RUBY LERNER is the founding executive director and president of Creative Capital Foundation. Before joining Creative Capital, Lerner served as the executive director of the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers (AIVF) and as publisher of *Independent Film and Video Monthly*.



ADAM FOREST HUTTLER is Fractured Atlas' founder and executive director, growing the organization from a one-man-staff housed in an East Harlem studio apartment in 1998 to a broad-based national service organization with an annual budget of nearly \$8 million.



CREATIVE CAPITAL acts as a catalyst for the development of adventurous and imaginative ideas by supporting artists who pursue innovation in form and/or content in the performing and visual arts, film and video, and in emerging fields. The organization is committed to working in partnership with the artists whom it funds, providing advisory services and professional development assistance along with multifaceted financial aid and promotional support throughout the life of each Creative Capital project. Founded in January 1999, Creative Capital is interested in artists who are deeply engaged with their art forms and exhibit a rigorous commitment to their craft, as well as projects that transcend discipline boundaries.

FRACTURED ATLAS is a nonprofit organization that serves a national community of artists and arts organizations. Fractured Atlas' programs and services facilitate the creation of art by offering vital support to the artists who produce it. Fractured Atlas helps artists and arts organizations function more effectively as businesses by providing access to funding, healthcare, education, and more, all in a context that honors their individuality and independent spirit. By nurturing today's talented but underrepresented voices, Fractured Atlas hopes to foster a dynamic and diverse cultural landscape of tomorrow.

■ ■ ■ ■

The nonprofit and for-profit sectors are converging. Trends like corporate social responsibility and social entrepreneurship are leading for-profit corporations to engage in activities that have historically been within the purview of the nonprofit

sector. Meanwhile, charities must be equipped to respond to an increasingly 'results-oriented' environment. Venture philanthropists may provide huge injections of funding for risky projects, but they want a clear way to measure their return on investment. Websites like Charity Navigator are applying the kind of financial analysis to nonprofits that used to be seen only on Wall Street. In short, we're being asked to behave like businesses.

I've always tried to bring an entrepreneurial, 'for-profitish' mindset to Fractured Atlas. But when I founded the organization in 1998, there weren't a lot of role models. It wasn't until a year later that Ruby Lerner started Creative Capital, bringing to it a long and successful career in the arts along with some fresh ideas about how entrepreneurial strategies could serve the community.

Creative Capital broke new ground with a business model that was at once a response to these new realities and a strategy for helping its constituent artists adapt to the changing environment. The organization incorporates principles and practices from venture capitalism and social entrepreneurship.

Its approach is holistic, recognizing that solving difficult problems always takes more than money alone. Creative Capital has also proven that a service organization needn't be poor to be authentic, and that wedding meaningful capital to a clear vision of change can have a powerful impact.

I was honored to have a chance to sit down with Ruby and talk through some of these issues.

■ ■ ■ ■

ADAM HUTTLER: Creative Capital and Fractured Atlas share a reputation for bringing ideas from the for-profit business world into the nonprofit arts industry. The most conventional way to do this is through a focus on earned revenue, which is the approach we've taken. Creative Capital, however, gets its reputation from the use of other strategies, while your underlying business model remains dependent on contributed income from traditional sources. Does this apparent dichotomy in any way undermine your reputation as a businesslike nonprofit?

RUBY LERNER: Our organizational business model is completely traditional, and I'm unapologetic about that. In fact, it's going to get even more traditional as we try to raise an endowment to make our work permanent. Why I think we've developed that reputation is that we actually help artists see themselves as small business enterprises. And Creative Capital still has a hybrid approach because of our entrepreneurial sensibility, which I don't think is related solely to earned income. That said, I come out of arts marketing, so earned income is important to me. And we are currently looking at some new entrepreneurial ideas that are based on earned income.

*Solving difficult problems
always takes more than
money alone.*

HUTTLE: Like venture capitalists, Creative Capital seeks out individuals and projects with untapped potential in the belief that you can help maximize that potential through an injection of both cash and knowledge. In the for-profit world, maximizing that potential is quantifiable and defined by return on investment [ROI]. Obviously it's much harder to measure the ROI of an artist's creative or career development. Is Creative Capital a form of venture capitalism? If so, how do you measure your ROI?

LERNER: Our payback provision [by which Creative Capital is entitled to a small percentage of any future profits that result from the project] is obviously one measurement, but by that measure we've only had three projects that succeeded. But there are other objective criteria. ... Did they finish the project? Was it well reviewed? You could even develop a point system to evaluate a project's success.

The venture philanthropy concept is really interesting, because it looks at 'social return on investment', or SROI. How do you translate that to an arts project? "Are you better off now than you were when we first funded you?" is a good place to start. So, we created a self-assessment form that asks people to identify their goals and to figure out what resources they're putting into their arts practice and what returns they're getting out of it. We also ask them to rate themselves at things like financial management, networking skills, time management, comfort level at speaking in public. It's subjective, but it's the same person answering at the beginning of the project and then again after three or four years. One of the things that we haven't yet asked about is their annual income when they come in and what is it at the end. We've never gotten to a comfort zone on that one, but in theory I'd really like that information.

HUTTLE: Before you founded Creative Capital, you ran two other arts service organizations, Alternate ROOTS and Association of Independent Video and Film (AIVF). What about those experiences led you to where you are today?

LERNER: Alternate ROOTS taught me the most, because it was a grassroots organization with a tiny budget. It needed to be a very smart organization to survive. And actually the idea for Creative Capital's artist retreats came directly out of my experience producing an event like that for ROOTS.

AIVF was a national membership organization, so one of the most important things I learned there is that what you can do yourself is quite limited, but what you can facilitate is much more extensive. There's a tendency to feel like things aren't happening and that the only way to solve the problem is to do it yourself. You can't solve every problem yourself, but you can help to facilitate solutions. At Creative Capital we do this by creating relationships for the artist and by publicizing the artist's work. We take ourselves out of the middleman position and become an information broker. In that role, we're creating opportunities for someone to contact the artist directly. I think this idea of facilitating rather than doing is a secret to success.

HUTTLE: At Fractured Atlas, we encounter a lot of skepticism from the Old Guard. The industry leaders who rose to prominence in the '70s and '80s had a

particular paradigm for how a nonprofit arts service organization should function, and much of what we do at Fractured Atlas is at odds with that vision. Part of what I find so interesting about you, Ruby, is that you are from that generation and yet you've developed a model that could only exist today and wouldn't have seemed possible just 15 years ago. Do you encounter any of that skepticism yourself, or does your 30-year track record inoculate you against such criticism?

LERNER: Absolutely I've encountered skepticism. When we launched, I had friends who bet that we wouldn't get any applications because they thought the model was too interventionist. At most, they thought we'd maybe get 80 proposals. We got 1,800. This is a community that historically has been very skeptical about business and about business language. When I first got to AIVF we had a meeting with a consultant and I kept talking about marketing, since that's what my background was. Well, eventually the consultant stopped me and said, "In this community, marketing is a dirty word."

It's important for you to understand the cultural moment that these organizations grew out of. They came from the nonmaterialistic '60s. The '80s came, then the '90s came, and the business ethos had replaced the nonprofit ethos, but it seems like a lot of people didn't notice. You have to look at your environment. You can't found the same organization in 1999, when I founded Creative Capital, as you could in 1976.

But my track record did work in my favor. That I was well networked in the field before I got to Creative Capital definitely didn't hurt. I also felt it was very important to articulate the conceptual framework for the work from the very start, and in a way that established the legitimacy of the model. I talked about a system of support—a system that is integrated, multifaceted, and sequential—that combines money with services throughout the life of an artist's project. There's not one business word in there that could freak people out. That's very calculated.

The language you use is so important. So, today we talk about bringing nonprofit values forward by helping artists to use specialized tools and techniques to achieve their goals. You can proceed from your own definition of mission and values to your own definition of success. That is kind of mind-blowing for people when they realize that is possible. We have a wonderful strategic planning consultant who always says, "You can use these tools if you're a capitalist, you can use these tools if you're a communist, you can use these tools if you're a criminal." She neutralizes the tools, so that you can apply them in your own way.

As far as people being skeptical of Fractured Atlas's earned-revenue model... AIVF had an earned-revenue model, but it was founded by the community. Fractured Atlas was founded by a creative entrepreneur who saw a vacuum and came in to fill it. I suspect a lot of the skepticism you encounter stems from that. It's ironic, though, because you constantly hear people talk about how important it is that we find new models for the nonprofit sector, and here's one that's very successful, but it makes some people uncomfortable. I do think eventually your generation will take over and they'll be a lot more comfortable with Fractured Atlas' business model.

HUTTLE: I'm glad you mentioned all this industry chatter about a 'new model' for arts organizations. As far as I can tell, most of the proponents of this idea are envisioning some kind of hybrid structure that incorporates ideas and principles from both nonprofit and for-profit corporations. Some have even suggested that we need a new type of legal entity to accommodate this approach. Is this a discussion that you're participating in and, if so what are your thoughts on the subject?

LERNER: We need a multiplicity of models. There's not one right model. The way Creative Capital is structured wouldn't necessarily work for anyone else. You have to understand what your money formula is. If you're a theater company that does musical revivals, you're obviously going to be supported almost entirely by earned revenue. But that formula doesn't make any sense for the Wooster Group. We need

What you can do yourself is quite limited, but what you can facilitate is much more extensive.

to understand that, and then the next step is to start developing typologies around different money formulas that can bring clarity to the field.

I will say that the nonprofit capitalization model is absolutely screwed up.

When I look back on the success that we've had and try to understand it, I realize that the fact that we were adequately capitalized from day one was hugely important. We were founded with a venture capital model. First you raise the money, then you start looking for projects to invest in. You don't identify your investments and then scramble to raise the money you need to invest in them. In the nonprofit sector we really need a radically new approach to capitalization.

Original CAN/API publication: April 2008

A low-angle, upward-looking photograph of the Manhattan Bridge, showing the intricate network of steel cables and the stone structure of the bridge towers. The perspective creates a strong sense of height and architectural scale.

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

13

INTERWEAVE OF CULTURE AND ECOLOGY

Ken Wilson and Caron Atlas talk about cultural context and creative philanthropy.

By Caron Atlas

DR. KENNETH WILSON is the executive director of the Christensen Fund, a foundation based in San Francisco that works internationally to sustain cultural and biological diversity. Born in Malawi, Wilson studied in the UK and joined the Ford Foundation in 1993. He established Christensen's new mission and operations in 2002.



CARON ATLAS, project director and editor for the Bridge Conversations, works to support and stimulate arts and culture as an integral part of social justice. She currently directs the Arts & Democracy Project and codirects the New York Naturally Occurring Cultural District Working Group.



THE CHRISTENSEN FUND believes in the power of biological and cultural diversity to sustain and enrich a world faced with great change and uncertainty. It focuses on the 'bio-cultural'—the rich but neglected adaptive interweave of people and place, culture and ecology. The Fund's mission is to buttress the efforts of people and institutions who believe in a biodiverse world infused with artistic expression and work to secure ways of life and landscapes that are beautiful, bountiful, and resilient. The Fund pursues this mission through place-based work in regions chosen for their potential to withstand and recover from the global erosion of diversity. It focuses on backing the efforts of locally recognized community custodians of this heritage, and their alliances with scholars, artists, advocates, and others. It also funds international efforts to build global understanding of these issues. It seeks out imaginative, thoughtful, and occasionally odd partners to learn with. The Fund works primarily through grantmaking, as well as through capacity and network building, knowledge generation, collaboration, and mission-related investments.

■ ■ ■ ■

It was my experience of working with Ken Wilson and the Environmental Grantmakers Association on a cultural plenary for their 2007 fall retreat that sparked this Bridge Conversations project. While I grappled with assumptions and language, Ken easily engaged the environmental funders about the fundamental value of arts and culture in their work. I sensed that this ability to bridge sectors was key to making social change, and I wanted to learn how to do this with the grace and integrity that Ken had demonstrated.

When I spoke with Ken a few months later, he immediately complicated my premise about bridging. He described how in the Middle Ages the bridges across the great rivers in Paris and London had become much more than simply ways of getting from one side of the river to the other. Instead they transformed themselves from a span between two disparate places into lively and interactive places unto themselves, with markets, stores, and public spaces. Bridges became destinations.

"Indeed, in the 13th century, London Bridge was so busy with visitors that people took to using riverboat taxis if they actually wanted to get to the other side quickly." He encouraged me to transform my thinking as well by considering more holistic approaches.

"Let's get squarely into the topic, and not live in a bifurcated world. In other

words, instead of thinking of a world in which topics are siloed, with occasional linking bridges, let's move to a world where we recognize that the richest things happen in the connections."

This, in fact, is the essence of the Christensen Fund's 'bio-cultural' approach: a focus on "the interweave of humankind and nature, cultural pluralism, and ecological integrity," mixed with the core values of "respect, diversity, learning, (traditional and scientific), interdependency, creativity, and innovation."

It's not easy for a foundation to have this integrated vision. Ken evoked the following image to describe the challenge.

"In Africa, the river was a life force, which drove the economy and the culture. In the colonized world it became a colonial frontier and so a boundary. What used to unite people was used to divide them. The idea of some boundary between culture and nature—between a natural pristine world and a human sociopolitical world—is firmly rooted in particular patterns of western Cartesian thought. It runs very deep in Western society and is very hard to get rid of, even when people recognize that it is an artificial boundary."

However, Ken prefers to talk about possibilities rather than obstacles. He describes how most of the organizations the Christensen Fund supports have historically recognized the link between environment and society; it is just when they have to deal with government funding that they present the artificial divisions. Even in the case of the university, NGO, and government agency grantees that have long divided themselves, there are staff members who want to work in a more integrated fashion. They are interested in those 'on the other side of the river'—connecting cultural and environmental or academic and community-based Indigenous knowledge and vision.

*In Africa, the river was a life force,
which drove the economy and the
culture. In the colonized world
it became a colonial frontier and
so a boundary. What used to unite
people was used to divide them.*

I asked him how the Christensen Fund integrates its mission throughout its organization. He responded: “We have built a team at the foundation that has very deep experience working across boundaries. They are good listeners. They spend a lot of time in the field listening and being in the landscape with people, understanding subtle relationships. Institutions have different ways of working. The Christensen Fund board didn’t want to start with a mission statement; it



Pamri musician. Photo: The Christensen Fund

wanted to explore through grant-making and see through its practice. It would then follow up with drawing up a mission statement built bottom-up from practical experience. It enabled grantmaking and strategic thinking to follow the contour of unknown reality. It was important to go forward with an inquiry frame of mind, [including] at the board level.”

That may be the case for the Christenson Fund, but, I wondered, what about other foundations that

haven’t had the opportunity to recreate themselves? And while an interwoven program might be an ideal for the Fund, in other instances (like our work together with the Environmental Grantmakers Association) bridging is still necessary.

Ken responded that every funder is different, but “the majority of people working in foundations realize there is a disconnect between the world and the categories [they use for their programs] and find ways to bridge them.” An integrated geographic approach provides opportunities to see linkages, as does the problem-solving approach of community-based grantees who draw on their natural local connections. Even funders who start out with a strictly conservationist or academic approach may come to value arts and culture. Ken noted that while they may initially engage arts and culture in an instrumental manner, over time this could lead to more subtle and nuanced work.

“I have great faith in human beings—as we interact we usually realize things are more complicated. People innovate and learn. We also learn through failure—that we can live in a world that’s less linear, that we can co-create a different vision around a problem through more open-ended creativity. When people tell their stories they use a form of communication that can convey that complexity. It’s a learning process that leads people to transform a priori and bureaucratic ideas.”

How do you get the boards and senior management of foundations to respect this open-ended exploration and storytelling, I asked.

Ken recognizes that it can be hard for board members to hear these stories, a form of knowledge that is still very much at the margins. But, he adds, board members won’t be able to understand the on-the-ground experience without hearing these stories. “In the governance process it’s hard to have enough of

a funnel to gather that experience. It's easier to deal with simpler categories like numbers or financials. It's more difficult to understand intangible learning processes and the invention of new knowledge and practices."

ON THE OTHER HAND

"Most scientists, after receiving the Nobel Prize, will talk about their exploratory creative process, not their deductive method. They use deduction to test creative theories. Scientists have human brains and interpret complex ideas in a human way."

One of the ways foundations can integrate their work is through open-ended grantmaking. Ken gives an example of a grant the Christensen Fund gave in the Bay Area: "To support

New Music Works in an exploration of new and traditional music making and the landscape that a botanical garden could make to show plant diversity." When New Music Works and the University of California Santa Cruz Arboretum realized that they had a lot in common, including several members of their boards of



Arnhem land. Photo: The Christensen Fund

directors, they began to work together. Illustrating how "plants and music are part of the same beautiful diverse world," they held an event in the Arboretum, which is renowned for its collections of New Zealand plants, together with Maori and other musicians who explored the soundscapes of nature and that particular culture. Meanwhile "they celebrated the plants by cooking them (and with them) in Maori custom."

Ken has found that foundations are good at organizing collaborations among their grantees by deploying financial support. When organizations are open to collaboration, share goals, and engage in the right kind of collaborative process, there is often success. However, he notes that collaboration inside foundations has "a much less glorious history," given their tendency to silo over time, and the high transaction costs of collaboration between institutions that typically guard their independence and often have quite idiosyncratic governance.

"It is ironic that some of the main institutional change agents in Western democracies are some of those most resistant to their own change. They are more likely to solve problems in the world without solving them in themselves. The same is true with universities. The accountability is so diffuse."

Yet he recognizes that opportunities for bridging exist, often involving staff members who get along together, and some kind of blessing from senior level, such as extra money or kudos.

It is ironic that some of the main institutional change agents in Western democracies are some of those most resistant to their own change.

When I asked Ken what the arts could learn from other fields, he spoke about applying a cultural lens. One of the challenges that the arts face is that art tends to be defined as creativity professionalized and separated from daily life. It is important to study the cultural dimension to arts funding, which includes ... how people live with creativity and traditions in

their daily life, as well as on an elitist level. When you understand the cultural life of the community, you understand what creativity and artistic expression mean in that community. (This includes) what people are actually participating in, not just what you are trying to get them to participate in."

How do you apply a cultural lens in a foundation, I wondered.

"Staff skills and experience are crucial. There is the complex reality and the two dimensional pieces of paper. Get out of the office, not just going to arts events, but also engaging in the cultural context. Go within that society and understand. This approach needs to gain credibility in the art world; it isn't seen as having rigor.

Whether it's in development or in, say, health, you don't get transformational results without engaging at the community level within the context in which things happen. It's not enough to say, 'Take this tablet to prevent disease'. Only through understanding deep context about how the disease interacts with other factors can you have a successful intervention ... you can't do it by remote control. In the field of epidemiology, unless you understand the dynamics of the whole system you can't control the outcome by intervening in one component. But given the way we finance health in the U.S., there is the privileging of the individual patient as the only point of intervention. Instead of dealing with the breeding of mosquitoes you simply resolve to treat more patients. The parallel here is with our tendency to focus on the proficiency and professionalism of the individual artist, production company, or venue, believing that this alone will have automatic transformatory impacts on the whole arts-culture ecosystem."

Then Ken considered the financing of the arts, and its unequal distribution.

"Unfortunately, the underlying purpose of much arts funding is not to increase artists or creativity or maximize human engagement in the arts. Rather it is an area for the creation of social status for the funders themselves; and that is why in societies like the U.S. what tends to happen is a huge proportion of funding

is concentrated in a few elite institutions that accumulate the highest standing. Rather than funding being distributed among many institutions and efforts where it might have much more impact, the opposite occurs, which is that the already wealthiest institutions attract even more money because of the associated prestige. That's the problem we are dealing with: a perversely shaped ecosystem of funding and institutions. The question is whether, as foundation funders, we encourage that. I hope we don't do that, but we know how arts funding is often a special category even for foundations. What may help us conceptually is to move from ideas of the arts that are about audiences consuming the highest possible level of professionalism in elite institutions towards notions of participation and creativity and resources reaching the artists themselves."

I am struck by Ken's question about whether foundation funders encourage an unbalanced arts ecosystem. It raises for me the question of what kinds of intentional and fundamental changes are needed to create a system of support that reflects and furthers cultural equity and social justice. Meanwhile, Ken looks ahead with hope at the ways that youth movements are transgressing categories and democratizing the arts.

Before, the right to create was highly limited, now there is more persistence of everyone's creative expression. This is healthy for the arts.



Drying dung for fuel in the Pamir mountains, Tajikistan.
Photo: Nicolas Villaume

"Over the last decade there has been a convergence between different forms of expression. This is due to the digital environment, but not only that. Young people are much more interested in thinking across the boundaries in the arts and in different spheres of human problems. The environment for baby boomers was a special interest—places you could go to or make suburbs on. The younger generation has a different experience of the environment—tied to economic development, equality, all aspects of life. Youth movements transgress boundaries and have different ideas about the creative process with more belief in co-creation in a digital age. Before, the right to create was highly limited, now there is more persistence of everyone's creative expression. This is healthy for the arts."

I leave the conversation considering when it is better to bridge what already exists and when it is better to create new hybrid and integrative structures and approaches. Is there a danger in the latter of losing depth of grounding or the power of creative tensions? On the other hand, is it possible to authentically engage another sector or culture without questioning your own assumptions

What kinds of intentional and fundamental changes are needed to create a system of support that reflects and furthers cultural equity and social justice?

and being willing to change and develop something new? Of course, it's not an either/or proposition; that's just another example of bifurcated thinking. Ultimately I find the river image most helpful: "a life force that unites people rather than divides them."

Original CAN/API publication: April 2008

A low-angle, upward-looking photograph of a suspension bridge. The image shows the massive stone tower in the center, with two large Gothic-style arches at its base. A dense network of steel cables radiates from the top of the tower, creating a complex geometric pattern that fills the upper two-thirds of the frame. The sky is a uniform, light gray, providing a high-contrast background for the dark bridge structure.

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

14

LISTENING TO THE STORIES UNDERNEATH THE WORK WE DO

Paula Allen and R. Lena Richardson talk about traditional arts and culture as resources for Native community health

By R. Lena Richardson

PAULA ALLEN was born and raised in Humboldt County and is an active participant in the local cultural traditions and ceremonies of the Karuk and Yurok people. She has worked in the field of American Indian healthcare for over 15 years and currently manages the Traditional Resources Program at United Indian Health Services.



R. LENA RICHARDSON is project coordinator/editor of the Bridge Conversations. In 2008 to 2011, she developed an intergenerational oral history project with activist elders at the Berkeley Fellowship of Unitarian Universalists. Her current project builds relationships between elders and youth in East Multnomah County, Oregon.



UNITED INDIAN HEALTH SERVICES is a nonprofit tribal health consortium serving American Indian communities in Humboldt and Del Norte Counties of Northern California for over 35 years, providing culturally sensitive healthcare services that support and promote wellness for the individual, the family, and the community. The history of United Indian Health Services (UIHS) began in 1968. It was a time when Native activism coincided with the nationwide Civil Rights Movement and the Office of Economic Opportunity programs. Together these factors helped create a new era of self-determination for Indian peoples. In California, where health services were so lacking, Indian groups formed their own health organizations. Each maintained its separate programs, but together they started the California Rural Indian Health Board Inc. (CRIHB), an organization that continues providing its members with a variety of quality improvement and advocacy services. Today, as part of CRIHB, UIHS offers innovative prevention programs, including a nationally renowned diabetes treatment and prevention program and dental, medical, vision, and nutrition services; a pharmacy; counseling; as well as as an increasing array of cultural and arts events.

■ ■ ■ ■

R. LENA RICHARDSON: As Paula and I didn't know each other, we began the conversation with some introductions, specifically with me introducing myself, talking about my work with oral history and with the Arts & Democracy Project. After we got more comfortable with each other, I began to ask Paula about her work.

PAULA ALLEN: I work for a rural tribal health organization. I have been on staff for five years as part of the development of a new program, the Traditional Resources Program. Before that, I was on the board of directors [at UIHS].

The Traditional Resources Program was created in part to provide support for culturally-based community prevention activities that promote community wellness. We recognize that it is important to find a balance between all those things that impact an individual's health; this includes one's physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health in order to truly support wellness for individuals, their families, and our community. We are really starting to look at how the history of the area, the historical trauma that is a result of the last 150 years, how those things impact individuals' health. We are looking at approaches to connect people to their history and to get people reinvolved with culture as pathways to health. We offer ways to re-expose and reconnect people to traditional arts and culture, the land. We're fortunate to have people on board who are community activists. These people have their fingers on the pulse of community needs.

*We are really starting to look
at ... the historical trauma
that is a result of the last
150 years, how those things
impact individuals' health.*

Before that, I worked at Humboldt Area Foundation at the Native Cultures Fund, which was parallel work in the arts and culture world. That project supported revival and revitalization for traditional activities in rural California.

Both of those projects were extensions of my work as a bridge person. I think of it as being a community activist, advocate. The reason I've been able to do the work I've been able to do in arts, culture, and health is because I was born and raised in a traditional family within this community. I've been able to draw on resources within the community, living and working here. I've been someone that people trust. There can be a lot of emotion involved with sharing our stories with the larger community. What are the ways to share our story that are respectful yet really honest to both sides? It is easy to paint an idealistic picture of communities of color to try to please funders. The biggest role that I see for myself as bridge person is to be honest during the process of sharing those stories. Everyone needs to be accurately represented. Sometimes the challenge is being honest with yourself. But when you are, you make the exchange that much richer. Even if you don't get that funding, you have maintained integrity for your community's story. That's the most important thing.

RICHARDSON: What has helped you to become a bridge person or community advocate?

ALLEN: I think the thing that really first introduced me unofficially to being a community advocate is my upbringing. My family really raised me within the community. I was raised with the understanding that I was responsible not only for myself, but that I also had a responsibility to give back to the community I came from, back to those who provided me with my foundation. I can't really go out there and make up some song and dance. I'd get called on it. People would call me on it if I wasn't doing good work. That's the benefit of being part of a community: There are checks and balances to help keep us grounded to



Ceremony time, Paula Allen with daughter Ahtyirahm.

what's important. The other thing that has encouraged my work in this area have been mentors from within my community, including people from the Humboldt Area Foundation, who have really supported and encouraged me to share our stories with a larger audience. And this was modeled to me by my mentors. For example, my father was on the Humboldt Area Foundation and retired just before I got on the board. His willingness to share his story and the stories from his experiences, and to use those to benefit others by helping to create programs that benefit the entire commu-

nity, that is the inspiration. And although his story is special to me in particular, it is not entirely unique because there are examples throughout my community of people who work for the betterment of the whole. That's what a village was about. Our relationships to everything around us are respected and honored, so this tradition of being a community advocate is really just continuing our traditional ways of being.

My training as a bridge person began in the traditional cultural world. With ceremonies, there are these organizing skills, working together for the common good, learning to go with the flow. That was really the training for my work in community organizing. This was something that I learned from my parents, and from others of that generation who were working with their elders to preserve and promote their cultural traditions. They were very involved with the cultural renaissance of sorts that happened in this area in the '60s and '70s, and at that same time that was combined with social activism. It really started there. As a community, that was really the beginning of many of the organizations that were created to support education and health, and also the beginning of a real organized return to our cultural traditions and beliefs as a way of life. Our work today is a continuation of that work, building on what they were already working towards.

One of the things my dad always tells me—he is one of my biggest inspirations—is you can't make or tell a person how to get better or what they should be doing, but you can provide them with the support and foundation they need to make those choices for themselves, in their own time, for their families. His generation provided that for all of us in my generation, and now it's on our generation and it's

our responsibility to leave something stronger for our kids and grandkids. That's why this work is really about awareness and empowerment. When people become more aware of their own strengths, of their own stories and histories, then they start making connections to how they relate to others. It is these relationships that really can create wellness. And when rural people, poor people, disenfranchised people become involved in this process, when they can start to see how their lives are interwoven with things happening in other parts of the nation, and other parts of the world, then they can begin to become more responsible for how their lives and actions matter. When you begin to see how your existence is important, when you begin to honor and take responsibility for your place in creation, that can be very empowering and that empowerment can support real change in our world.

When people become more aware of their own strengths, of their own stories and histories, then they start making connections to how they relate to others. It is these relationships that really can create wellness.

RICHARDSON: Can you talk more about your involvement as a bridge person working with arts projects and organizations?

ALLEN: There are some really well-known arts organizations locally—both non-Native-based arts organizations. The Ink People Center for the Arts is a nonprofit arts cooperative and their executive director was very instrumental in working with American Indian artists to support and encourage cultural arts programming for our community, including hosting an annual American Indian art show that really supported our traditional and contemporary artists. She was able to do this because she had worked to gain the trust of bridge people from the community, and also because she believed and recognized that our own community folks and cultural leaders had the knowledge to do the work, but just needed to be empowered and supported to be successful. With her help, and by working together, we had these really amazing art shows and openings. Since that time we have seen American Indian artists show their work throughout the community in both Native and non-Native galleries, and the community art show has been re-established at UIHS and at other tribal organizations. For this to come full circle, to come back to ownership to the community it serves, has been a very important process.

This other arts organization wanted to work locally with the American Indian community and the Latino community and they pulled us in with this cookie-cutter approach. They got this big grant and had their mind set up on how we would fit into their work. That was kind of tough. That was a good lesson for me to realize what my limitations are. I also learned to be an advocate for inclusion

at all levels. People of color are asked to do the final touches at the end. To be a token. We're often not involved in budgeting. I think it's really important to start empowering bridge people so that they get involved in visioning and getting to the end result.

RICHARDSON: What advice would you offer about navigating between fields and with people whose outlook is less holistic?

ALLEN: The biggest thing is to share stories with each other, across fields and backgrounds. Even the way you started this conversation with a willingness to share a little about yourself, listening, and making sure we schedule enough time for this conversation. You have to learn to be a good listener. All of our histories affect where we are at. I even recently watched that movie, *The Namesake*, and watching him fight his upbringing in the beginning of the movie and then finding the importance and being empowered to embrace it by the end of the movie, that's really an important process. People need to be willing to understand how each individual's unique history impacts how they see the world. We're so American. We think if we've been here two generations, we don't need to

know our histories. All of our histories are important. And it is in the shared histories, the shared experiences, where we can make connections.

Taking time to own your own story before you go out and learn about others is important. We need to listen to the stories underneath the work we do.

RICHARDSON: People can have a fear of exploring histories because of the violence of our histories on this continent.

ALLEN: People think if you are one of the oppressed, maybe it's easier than if your history is part of the oppressors. But it's not. All of those choices were forced upon all of us. You have to learn to grow from it. Taking time to own your own story before you go out and learn about others is important. We need to listen to the stories underneath the work we do. It makes you more accepting.

RICHARDSON: What do people in the 'arts'—perhaps the more mainstream arts field—need to learn from the nonmainstream arts and traditional realm?

ALLEN: It's important to understand the cultural context that the arts come from. To take time to see how those things are reflected in an arts process. It's easy to reduce someone to the folk arts. But what is the story behind quilt making and basketry? It's not just beautiful arts, but environmental lessons, and mentorship between women, and lessons that were taught. These are the contexts for why people participate in arts. I always look for them

RICHARDSON: You mentioned kids ... can you talk more about your work with young people?

ALLEN: Kids are the best ones to work with. We found that a lot of those young people who were very involved in their traditional values and ceremonies were the ones who were making it academically. We are trying to find ways of sharing that. We support tribal programs in the area and offer curriculum materials for schools to use that introduce our topics. We help to pull together resources for people and connect people throughout our area.

At our organization, we have our annual youth summer camp that I coordinate. It keeps me going year in and year out. We bring all the kids together at a traditional village site, and the camp includes health education issues, environmental issues, cultural building, storytelling, traditional games, and language work. It's amazing the connections they make with one another.

And with my own daughter, do I move or send her to live with family so that she can go to a school that is predominantly Native? Or do I keep her in school out here on the coast where I have to work harder to keep her connected to the community? These are decisions all parents

have to make. That why programs like the summer camp we hold are important, because we are building a community for kids throughout the region. We bring together kids from throughout our entire service area so they can get to know one another. How do we create a sense of community and social responsibility? Those are the kind of things that keep your work worthwhile.

Kids are amazing. If adults were as open as kids, we'd be in a much better place.

RICHARDSON: What about leadership development in Native communities?

ALLEN: One of the interesting things for us as Native people is that though tribal communities are as old as they come, we've been here forever, tribal governments have been developed in the last 30 to 35 years. One of the things I am interested in setting up is opportunities for people in tribal communities to be bridge people between tribal governments and nonprofits. Although there are specific laws that require consultations with government entities, there is necessarily that same kind of connection between tribal governments and nonprofits who are doing work around environmental issues and other issues. I feel like this connection may be the more important one, the one that brings activists on different levels together to find a common value, a common goal that benefits a community.

One of the areas I'd like to see is leadership opportunities. None of us have a degree in bridging. A lot of times—I know for myself—you sort of fall into it. There's not always the same opportunities for leadership training for people

To think that I can put a recording of, say, my great-grand singing onto my daughter's iPod, to make that kind of connection between generations, is powerful.

from more challenged and lower socioeconomic backgrounds. But that's where we need the leadership to come from for those communities, so I would like to see us broaden our definition of leadership and to provide opportunities for these people to hone their natural leadership skills.

One of the most recent conferences that I have had the chance to attend that always keeps me inspired and motivated is the Bioneers Conference held annually in Marin, California. Its keynote speakers are often talking about issues of environmental responsibility and social justice, and they are often innovative thinkers who believe in people making positive changes for our shared world. I've noticed that many of their keynote speakers are people of color, but not a lot of

their participants are people of color. And yet I know how inspired I get when I am introduced to these speakers and thinkers, so how do we bridge those ideas to make them useful for our communities? Bioneers does have a program they called Beaming Bioneers that does just that, it brings these keynote speakers to communities across the nation through telecommunications, and we are hoping to



UIHS May-Gay-Tolth-Kwe "A Healing Place" Photo: UIHS TRP

bring that conference to our community in a few years.

There is also a lot of potential with various technologies that already exist, but have yet to be applied to community projects. But once they are, man, to see community people taking these tools to make a difference in the work they are passionate about is inspiring.

For example, there is this digital recorder called the Marantz that has had a huge impact on work of people in our community who are working with Indigenous languages. These recorders allow people to take an old tape recording of people speaking the language and transfer it into a digital format, and then kids download these onto their iPods. To think that I can put a recording of, say, my great-grand singing onto my daughter's iPod, to make that kind of connection between generations, is powerful. There are so many potential connections and partnerships to be made that can have a meaningful impact in our communities. It's an exciting time to be involved, and I am always inspired by people in my community who are making these connections in their field of interest, working towards a common goal of strengthening our community.

Original CAN/API publication: June 2008

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

15

MULTIFACETED ART OF COMMUNITY PLANNING

Ron Shiffman and Anusha Venkataraman consider the intersections of organizing, creative practice, and community-based development

By Anusha Venkataraman

ANUSHA VENKATARAMAN is a Brooklyn-based planner, writer, artist, and activist. She is the Green Light District arts and education manager at El Puente, a community human rights institution that promotes leadership for peace and justice through the engagement of members in the arts, education, wellness, and environmental action.



RON SHIFFMAN is a city planner with close to 50 years of experience providing assistance to community-based groups in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. In 1964, he helped to found the Pratt Institute Center for Community and Environmental Development. He is a faculty member at Pratt Institute.



I first encountered Ron as a teacher, and he became a mentor for me both in school and, now, as a young planner working at a community-based organization. Ron has quietly—and sometimes loudly and forcefully—shaped many neighborhoods and organizations throughout the city, but it is his impact on how planners concerned with issues of equity and social justice go about their work that is most lasting. This conversation is only one of many discussions we have had and many interviews I have conducted with Ron, which hopefully makes it a deeper discussion of practice than we would have been capable of if we had just met.

■ ■ ■ ■

ANUSHA VENKATARAMAN: How do you describe your work to someone who is not from your world of work?

RON SHIFFMAN: It has been almost impossible. It's funny, my parents never understood what I did. I was trained as an architect, and they understood architecture,... but they could never understand planning. Was I a politician? Was I a sociologist? Was I a social worker? A community organizer? None of those things was a specific enough profession that they could identify with. It wasn't like being a doctor, a shop-keeper, or an engineer. But people don't separate their lives into narrow professions. We all experience our lives through a variety of sensory awarenesses of the whole array of human needs,... everything from our need to participate, our need for love, our need for affection, the need for shelter, the need for food. All of those are our basic needs, and we all seek ways to satisfy those needs.

As I started into planning and working with communities, I began to very quickly realize that the kinds of interventions that were needed on a local level had to go way beyond designing just the physical layout of cities. They had to deal with education; they had to deal with culture, the arts, issues of health and mental health, and a variety of other factors. I began looking at things from a very holistic perspective very early on; it's always been hard to try to learn how to weave it all together, and how to explain that to others. The tendency is to disaggregate it all into its different components,... and the challenge is to weave those strands back together again. In education, that is hardest



Shiffman at the dedication of Jennings Hall in Williamsburg, 1978.
Photo: Builder Levy

thing I've found. How do you get people to look at the whole picture? It's easy to address just housing or just the physical environment. It's always been a pedagogical struggle. Even in our own planning curriculum at Pratt we do either a preservation studio, or a land use studio, or an urban design studio. But I don't see it that way. I think it's important that we look at communities in their entirety and complexity, try to understand them, try to help people improve their quality of life by touching on all those aspects.

Early on, our interventions [at the Pratt Center] followed the impulses of the people we worked with. It was both their impulses and our ability to react and garner resources. When there were resources for people in the Pratt Institute School of Art and Design to work with kids in the neighborhood, we did that, and when there were folks who could crunch numbers, we put them to work. We always associated with other institutions and other community-based groups. I think, to a great degree, it was that need to cooperate with and draw on the resources of others that helped us develop an approach where planning and community development and the work we did at the Pratt Center was never in competition with others, but always working in partnership with them. I found, later on, as resources became more difficult to acquire, that there was less and less of a commitment to community-based development, and it was a little hard to communicate those values to the next generation of planners.

VENKATARAMAN: Why do you think the following generations of planners were unable to build on your work to the degree you would have liked?

SHIFFMAN: First, everybody wanted to become an expert, and in becoming expert, they lost the sense of integration and multidisciplinary; they developed their expertise in one aspect, rather than becoming an expert in being a generalist. I've been having this conversation lately with a few of my colleagues

that are in a similar place, generationally, as I am. The impulse of some of the generations following us [in the planning profession] has been to focus and compete, rather than to look at things from a general and broad scope and cooperate with others. It has led to a different means of operating.

We began to ask: How do we create more comprehensive and integrative ways of looking at communities and the total environment in which people are living?

The other part was the pull by donors and foundations to produce results, and the results that could be easily produced were those you could measure. There are fewer resources, and those that provide the resources are looking for quantifiable instead of qualitative results. A lot of what you do in planning, in com-

munity building, and even in the arts,... the results are much more diffuse. You see the results of your effort in the long term, not in the short term. We've become too focused on short-term results, I think, that we forget too much about the long-term.

You can measure achievement by the number of units developed, for example, but there are softer things that elude measurement, particularly in the short term. Finally and inevitably, the fight for resources pushed you to look at others as competitors rather than as partners.

VENKATARAMAN: This issue of competitiveness is related to the trend towards professionalization you were speaking of earlier.

SHIFFMAN: Of course, when we got started [at the Pratt Center], we didn't know what we were doing. We fell into a lot of things. There was more of a willingness by donors and foundations to take chances on us, and there were far more resources to experiment with. As I said at the beginning, communities' needs are very diverse. You can start by asking who are the change agents in a community? You find that the change agents, in my experience, were women; they came into the field of community development because they were concerned about their children and particularly about education. They were trying to build better schools, and then they found that improving the quality of the neighborhood was an integral part of improving health and education. They worked to improve the safety of the neighborhood for their children traveling to school. There were issues of culture, and health—kids don't learn if they're not healthy. All of these issues began to overlap. We began to ask: How do we create more comprehensive and integrative ways of looking at communities and the total environment in which people are living?

We embarked upon addressing these neighborhood, personal, family, [and] community issues comprehensively and simultaneously. Everything led to something else, the discovery of something else, each project to another one, and each time we would take on something new, the threads began to connect even

further. It becomes hard to even discuss it now or to even communicate it as a discipline because it is so diffuse, and each time you touch on something, you're brought out to a different world. It's hard to discuss, and the idea of bridging worlds—which is initiating this discussion—really fascinates me.

Part of the approach deals not only with the different strands of interventions, but with different ways of intervening, from organizing to political campaigns to being supportive parts of different social movements. I could never describe myself as a Civil Rights activist, but that was part of what we were doing and whom we were working with. We worked with people who were deeply involved in antiwar efforts, but we didn't focus on that. We were never the leaders in any movement, but we always tried to connect the various movements to each other and to what was happening on the ground in different neighborhoods.

VENKATARAMAN: Can you think of an analogy to use to describe this role of the community-based planner working in this way?

SHIFFMAN: The analogy to a conductor is almost correct, but not exactly. The conductor leads

the orchestra, and you don't want to lead, but somehow you want to be able to mix together all of the different leaders working out there. So it's hard to find an analogy.... The person who came closest to articulating this tenuous position is a Chilean philosopher whom I came across when I traveled there, Manfred Max-Neef. He talks about things as being transdisciplinary ... that an expert can describe a problem, a multidisciplinary team can explain it, but you can't solve it unless you move to a transdisciplinary state. I think that's what we're all seeking to do.

VENKATARAMAN: You have had a long history of working to build young community organizations from the ground up in neighborhoods around New York. What does it mean to work deeply and meaningfully in a community that you are not from? What does it mean to build a bridge that is sustainable, lasting, and goes in both directions?

SHIFFMAN: We can talk about being the outsider. Sometimes being an outsider really helped. In one struggling community in Brooklyn, for example, one of the early challenges was gaining the trust of the community. One of the early directors of a nonprofit housing development organization in that neighborhood once confided in me that he did not have the full confidence of the community because they did not believe he had the skills to get them out of the dire housing situation they were in. Building indigenous leadership is extremely significant, and building the capacity of people from the neighborhoods [in which] we work is important, but also is cultivating 'followership': How do planners help people to engage

*An expert can describe a problem,
a multidisciplinary team can explain
it, but you can't solve it unless you
move to a transdisciplinary state.*

with each other and really trust each other? These were—and are—complicated dynamics that had to be dealt with on a local, interpersonal level.

People trust you because you've stayed. I continue to work with the model that an architect or a planner has to have a client in the community they work in. The word 'client' has become somewhat corrupted; as an architect or a planner, you understand the client as 'the boss'. In the social work field and in the government, the client has become subservient—the client is the one you are managing, in a way. When I use the term 'client', it means that the community sets the direction for your work together.

VENKATARAMAN: What does that mean for collaboration?

SHIFFMAN: I don't see organizations like the Pratt Center being in a leadership



Clarence Robinson and Rex Curry in Ocean Hill/Brownsville, 1970/71. Photo: Builder Levy

role; I really believe we can collaborate, but that the communities need to be the ones setting the strategy. We are helping them to achieve a goal themselves. They are the clients. When you move too much into the partnership model, you then pick people who only agree with you, or who are helping you to achieve your goals. It's a fine line. It's a discussion I've had many times over the years: How do we avoid driving our own agendas, rather than pushing the agendas of the people we are working with and for?

We envisioned these varying roles as a triangle. One point was direct technical assistance to community groups—the clients. Another point was the conven-

ing of clients as a coalition. And the third thing was that, because we knew the strengths and weaknesses of all the organizations we worked with, we could bring in training

programs to strengthen those organizations from within. But we never functioned as an intermediary, as a gatekeeper. Each of those three roles served to strengthen the others: We were better technical assistance providers because we knew public policy, we were better policy advocates because we worked with people in the groups, and we were better trainers because of the trust we had developed with each group and individual.

VENKATARAMAN: You have been an inspiring mentor to so many people at Pratt and beyond over the years. I'm interested in what it means to build bridges between

generations, and what it means for the next generation of activists to learn from the lessons or challenges or failures of the previous one.

SHIFFMAN: Teaching and mentoring has truly been a two-way street. Just as I've learned immensely from the communities I've worked with, every student here at Pratt has been a mentor to me. I say that very honestly and very humbly. I've learned more about food security issues, for example, from a few recent students in a way that I wouldn't have if I were just teaching. Students come into planning from many different back-

grounds and disciplines—planning itself is a bridge. Not only do they con-
you into thinking you're
a lot younger than you
are, they also introduce
you to things you were
never aware of before. As
long as you are open to
that, and don't close the
door to that, it becomes
an enormous learning
experience. For instance,

you've reconnected me to the arts and gotten me to look back critically at things that happened years ago. As long as you understand that education is not a one-way street—between teacher and student, as well as [between] the technician and the community—then it works. You must seek to bridge generations because the generations growing up today come in with new attitudes and experiences that challenge you and force you to think about things you wouldn't otherwise think about. I could be as tired as hell in the morning, but once I come in here I become reinvigorated and can't fall asleep at night.

*Teaching and mentoring has truly
been a two-way street. Just as
I've learned immensely from the
communities I've worked with,
every student here at Pratt has
been a mentor to me.*

■ ■ ■ ■

At the time this interview was recorded, I did not know that I was about to be offered (to my surprise and excitement) a position working with El Puente, a respected grassroots organization in Brooklyn that Ron has worked alongside over the years. El Puente works in the predominantly Latino (though changing) neighborhoods of Williamsburg and Bushwick in Brooklyn, promoting leadership for peace and justice through the engagement of community members in the arts, education, scientific research, wellness, and environmental action. It is a big-thinking, far-reaching, and deep-reflecting institution whose history and roots remain central to the work that is done.

Adjusting to a new position at an organization that is very rooted in a community that I have a history with, though I am an outsider to nonetheless, has given me much to think about in light of Ron's personal and historical insights. I can identify with Ron's struggle to describe—and have others understand—what he does, and what his brand of planning is.

The ‘doing’ of the work is almost innately understood once experienced, but the ‘talking’ about the work remains a challenge, both for me and my field in general. This is perhaps one of the reasons why I am interested in dialogues—such as these Bridge Conversations—which, through conscious articulation of values and intentions, seek to tackle these discursive, practical, and pedagogical struggles.

As the arts and education manager for a new neighborhood-wide sustainability initiative that seeks to rethink and reorient ‘greening’ strategies to resonate with and



A Community Rises, Bushwick, Brooklyn, 2003. Artists Joe Matunis, Noah Jemisin, and Miguel Luciano with El Puente youth. Photo: Joe Matunis

spring from the indigenous and mostly low-income residents of the neighborhood, I certainly walk a fine (inter) disciplinary line. Though I am trained as a planner, am I a planner? It's nowhere in my job title nor in the style of work I do, yet I certainly use the skills I've gained on a daily basis, and many of the problems faced by the community I work with are, in great part, planning issues.

Further, while I am also an artist and a writer, in what ways does my own creative practice intersect with my work to support and facilitate others' creative development? Affirming creative and cultural practice is an integral part of self-determination; our own creative development (which involves an affirmation of one's own agency) is intertwined with that of others. In this way, El Puente's work is grounded in the belief that community development and personal transformation are inseparable. The organization models this transformation within the staff of the organization, with its members (youth and adult), and outward into the wider community.

While it is my time at El Puente that has ingrained these truths in my thinking, the seeds were planted by Ron and what I've learned from his work. If anything, talking with Ron (always) assures me that path I traverse as a hybrid planner/activist/artist will coalesce into coherency if I am intentional about the work I do. Ron channels these tensions in describing the multifaceted nature of the work he does, which is many things to many people, depending on their own perspective. Knowing Ron as a person—a caring, open, and yet inquisitive and critical individual—signals that intentionality extends to the interpersonal dimension as well. It is clear to me from Ron's example and my own experience that justice—social, environmental, political—cannot be lived or accomplished without love.

Original Arts & Democracy publication: July 2011

A low-angle, upward-looking photograph of a suspension bridge. The image shows the massive stone tower in the center, with two large arched openings at its base. From the top of the tower, a dense network of steel cables extends upwards and outwards, creating a complex geometric pattern of triangles and diamonds that fills the upper two-thirds of the frame. The sky is a pale, uniform grey, providing a soft background for the bridge's structure. The overall tone is architectural and monumental.

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

16

NEW PARADIGMS OF ARTFUL CHANGE

A discussion about whether art can be as powerful a vehicle for change as it can be a bastion for maintaining the status quo

By Dudley Cocke, Peter Pennekamp, and Craig McGarvey

DUDLEY COCKE is artistic director of Roadside Theater, the Appalachian ensemble known for its original plays and national artistic collaborations with traditional musicians and other professional theater companies. He has directed or codirected the premieres of 28 main stage productions.



CRAIG MCGARVEY is an independent consultant working with foundations on program development and evaluation. For a decade he was with the James Irvine Foundation, a California-wide philanthropy, serving first as director of administration and then as program director in civic culture.



PETER H. PENNEKAMP is executive director of the Humboldt Area Foundation, distinguished for its mix of philanthropy and direct community services, particularly in regional economic and community development. He is a trustee of the Bush Foundation and on the steering committee of the Rural Development Philanthropy Collaboration.



DUDLEY COCKE: Peter, we first met 20 years ago when you were working at the National Endowment for the Arts. And Craig, we met 10 years ago when you were running the Civic Culture Program at the James Irvine Foundation. That whole time I've been working at Roadside Theater/Appalshop in central Appalachia. Each of us has chosen the nonprofit sector as a way to make a contribution to a more just and equitable world, and in our work each of us daily experiences the power of art. But for all of art's potential, each of us is often disappointed that artists and community organizers—and others who are working for social justice at the grassroots—cannot collaborate in more powerful ways. Why is this? What's the disconnect?

CRAIG MCGARVEY: The arts and community organizing/social justice fields were much more organically connected in the Civil Rights Movement through the tradition of music in the African American church and in the farmworker rights movement through *teatro* in the fields. The role of the arts in social reform activism, with some notable exceptions, has arguably fallen away in the past 20 years.

COCKE: Some would think that's surprising given how much both artists and community organizers understand about the intellectual and emotional impact of public storytelling. Story is at the center of their respective efforts.



Roadside Theater community potluck/square dance, Buchanan Co., VA

PETER PENNEKAMP:

I think we humans are the storytelling animal. My refugee father was a storyteller who used material from his life during the rise of Nazism to teach us—his children and his friends—values, strategies, and ways to analyze struggles for change. These included tales of humor in prison camps (“those who survived did not take themselves seriously”), of being rescued by a member of the Gestapo (“even the most airtight stereotypes are only stereotypes”), and of courage by people who did not know that they were courageous, until tested.

COCKE: I remember a Holocaust survivor saying what gave him the will to survive was his obsession with telling the story of what had happened—although he knew that it would be far more pleasant to die.

*Community organizing puts
storytelling to use purposefully to
bring people from the private
to the public arena, not as passive
victims but as active narrators
of their own lives.*

MCGARVEY: Community organizing puts storytelling to use purposefully to bring people from the private to the public arena, not as passive victims but as active narrators of their own lives. Organizers help marginalized folks draw connections between their life stories in order to see systemic patterns behind the arcs of their narratives. But the organizers are sometimes wary of ‘art for art’s sake’. With their sights set on particular social change goals, organizers can be impatient with the aesthetic value of the arts. And artists worry about compromising the aesthetic quality of their product. Art seems often to be seen as something produced by genius, which can only be diminished by specific utilitarian goals in the community.

COCKE: Well, part of this misunderstanding comes from both artists and organizers mistakenly thinking that more truth means less beauty, and vice versa.

PENNEKAMP: As I age, I get less tolerant of work that has no larger community purpose other than aesthetic pleasure. Also, it now seems to me that all fields of knowledge, including the arts, are one field of knowledge, splintered into phenomenological parts initially for the ease of study—for the power of focus—

and then because those who master the part can claim some authority over the whole. There is polarity between the understanding and practice gained from isolating and focusing attention on specific parts of human experience and the blindness and limitations created by that focus.

MCGARVEY: I think one notable exception to this separation of art from the community can be found in the youth organizing that has grown rapidly around the country—young people from high school through college age and beyond working collectively to solve social problems in their communities and institutions. The use of the arts—poetry slams, story and theater, visual arts, digital arts—seems to come as naturally to this next generation as the newest electronic gadgetry.

PENNEKAMP: I think they're on the right path. The main lesson I've learned through endless mucky efforts to further social justice is that the justice to which the community aspires always has to take primacy over a particular field. The field of art can be highly effective in contributing to social justice along with other fields, but only if it contributes first to the structure of change, instead of the structure of change

being modified to fit the arts—the same can be said for community development, media, political reform, etc. This is why constructive community change is so rare: Members of fields try to modify action based on presumptions about their field, rather than to every moment hold the assumptions of the field accountable to the realities and possibilities for community change.



Cambodian Dance Group, Tamejavi Festival 2007, Fresno, CA. Photo: Eduardo Stanley

MCGARVEY: Then art, depending on how it positions itself, can be as powerful a vehicle for change as it can be a bastion for maintaining the status quo?

COCKE: That's been my experience. And I'm inferring from what we're saying that the present gap between artist and community organizer/social activist can't be bridged by the exchange of their respective techniques and methodologies, but that what's required is a new paradigm for their relationship.

MCGARVEY: I think so. When you say, Peter, that art "can be highly effective in contributing to social justice along with other fields, but only if it contributes first to the structure of change, instead of the structure of change being modified to fit the arts," I think about community engagement. Authentic engagement starts with the dreams, aspirations, and problems of people, working with them to develop their collective authority and ability to build their community. Art can greatly enhance this process, because cultural change is made possible by the connecting influence of cultural exchange.

The Tamejavi festivals (the name is drawn from the Spanish, Mixtec, and Hmong words for cultural harvest market) of the past few years in California's Great

Central Valley represent some attempts at this paradigm shift that we are discussing: Aging *Braceros* (Mexican guest workers) sharing oral histories, young Hmong refugees staging a play about their epic journey from the mountains of Laos to this country, Cambodian artists presenting for the first time in the U.S. their classic opera *Lakhaun Bassac*—used in Cambodia to draw people into public space for civic activity. As one Tamejavi organizer put it, “It’s like a tree. The history of my people, the traditions, my parents, all are the roots, they make me who I am. Reaching out through the branches, others can understand me, know who I am, not just what I do. And I need to understand their roots, everything behind them in order to know them. Expression through art is a way of attracting people, pulling them together, and opening up the connection. It starts with the relationships, then they are empowered to more common actions.”

The arts are an inherent form of human and cultural expression and a powerful means of human connection and the strengthening of community. Performance by those who have reached the peak of their artistic disciplines—and passive reception of such expert performance—is arguably but one end of the spectrum of the arts in the human condition. Starting from this perspective of a spectrum can be an empowering position for those in the arts who wish to collaborate with other fields, for it enables the arts to empower others. A new paradigm may mean ‘undoing’ personal perspectives that keep separate the ‘amateur’ from the ‘professional’, and the receiver from the performer.

Once the spectrum is acknowledged, profound implications can follow. Rather than simply filling seats through community outreach, the goal of those in the arts field becomes one of community engagement in as many aspects of the work as possible, from conception to final production. It is neither the same work as outreach, nor is it easy work to engage community members. It is organizing work: the patient, respectful, nuanced effort to come to know individuals and their lives, to draw various viewpoints into collective consensus, to bring the appropriate art world professionals into the common mix.

I regularly witness art as the sacrament of daily life, the path to greater personal and community health, and as the power that demands better treatment.



Roadside/Junebug community residency story circle.



Danza del los Diablitos, traditional Mixteco dance from Oaxaca, Mexico, Tamejavi Festival 2004, Fresno, CA. Photo: David Bacon

COCKE: Producers and their marketing departments think of art as a commodity to be packaged and sold. But many artists, myself included, think of their artwork as a series of experiments in which at any moment in the art-making process—not just during the ticketed presentation in the auditorium—there is the potential for insight

and even catharsis. As you point out, Craig, this can be true for the public as well as the artist, if the public is invited to witness and otherwise participate in the creative process. As I understand it, Tamejavi as a year-round organizing project makes room for these multiple opportunities for the artist and community alike.

PENNEKAMP: In traditional Native American culture on the Redwood Coast, there is little distinction between artist and audience member. The most important thing is participation. In these Indian communities, I regularly witness art as the sacrament of daily life, the path to greater personal and community health, and as the power that demands better treatment.

COCKE: With that, I think our inquiry has come to a resting point—to be continued. We agree that the barriers to more effective collaborations between artists and community organizers will require more than an exchange of techniques and methodologies. We think what's needed is a new paradigm for the relationship. We see this new paradigm valuing broader and deeper public participation in the entire art-making process. We are encouraged by all those—including youth organizers—who seem to have an innate understanding for what many of us will experience as a new way to work together for positive social change.

This e-mail conversation was convened and edited by Dudley Cocke.

Original CAN/API publication: March 2008

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

17

ORGANIC AND TRADITIONAL BRIDGING

Francisco Guajardo and Edyael Casaperalta on intentionality, consciousness, and creating new opportunities

By Edyael Casaperalta

FRANCISCO GUAJARDO, PhD, cofounder and executive director of the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development, is a former teacher who is now a professor of educational leadership at the University of Texas-Pan American in Edinburg.



EDYAEI DEL CARMEN CASAPERALTA VELAZQUEZ, born and raised in Durango, Mexico, has participated in community development, youth leadership, college mentoring, and digital storytelling programs with Llano Grande Center since 1998. She is currently program and research associate at the Center for Rural Strategies.



LLANO GRANDE CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT: Throughout its long history as an idea, a local movement, and later a nonprofit organization, Llano Grande has worked to increase educational opportunities and expectations of young people in Edcouch-Elsa, Texas, by developing effective, culturally relevant teaching methods and practices. In a predominantly Mexican American and rural community, where poverty and the lack of educational opportunities were prevalent, this new trend brought hope and higher expectations to the community. The work of Llano Grande began informally in the early '90s through a process to show Edcouch-Elsa High School students that not only was college an option for them, but that it was necessary, and that they could go to any college they wanted. The work progressed in 1997 with the formalization of the Llano Grande Center and the move toward redeveloping the scope of the Center's outreach. The work of college preparation became more focused on transforming students into community-minded leaders who would be ready for higher education.

■ ■ ■ ■

"Caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar"

"Walker, there is no path, you make it as you walk" —popular saying

In response to the concept that people function as bridges, Francisco Guajardo, executive director of the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development (Llano Grande), responded.

“There is a power mechanism that allows the flow of ideas, answers, from one place to another, and that is the bridge—the bridge people. They are facilitators of making things happen. Not everyone can be a bridge person.”

Not everyone can be a bridge person? I cringed. The suggestion that some people are unable to be bridges struck me. Guajardo mentioned in one of our conversations that a bridge person is someone who “facilitates, brokers, provokes, inspires, challenges, motivates, and/or helps heal people and contexts.” I believe that everyone is able to perform these abilities in diverse ways, thus everyone is able to be a bridge. However, referencing the Gramscian* framework of traditional versus organic intellect, Guajardo reflected upon the difference between traditional and organic bridges.

According to Guajardo, some people have been ‘tailored’ as bridges and are more aligned with an institution-alized understanding of bridging, while others may have ‘emerged’ as bridges thanks to the “organic reservoir of knowledge” they possess.

*A bridge person is someone
who ‘facilitates, brokers,
provokes, inspires, challenges,
motivates, and/or helps heal
people and contexts’.*

To make better sense of Guajardo’s words, I characterized the distinction between the traditional and the organic bridge. A traditional bridge person, I imagined, could be a member of a wealthy family renowned for their generous philanthropic initiatives. Bridging resources to disenfranchised communities could be highly valued in their lives and integrated into the family’s assets such as foundations, centers, nonprofits, and any other institution that facilitates their philanthropic vision. Thus, such individuals might be raised with bridging not only as an altruistic practice, but a social justice responsibility.

On the other hand, an organic bridge person may not have grown up in an environment where an institutionalized understanding of altruism and philanthropy is the norm. However, they may possess wisdom and localized knowledge about community resources that can be shared with the rest of the community, thus making them by default into organic bridges between community assets and community needs.

This subtle difference in the development of someone as a bridge is shaped by life experiences and informs our understanding and practice of bridging. Guajardo’s work as an educator in South Texas public schools has earned him a national recognition as a bridge person who connects low income youth with higher education opportunities. He emigrated from México at a young age and grew up in the Rio Grande Valley as the son of immigrant farmworkers. His life experiences help him intimately understand the reality of many South Texas youth—a reality plagued with despair for most traditional educators, but one

abundant in resiliency and hope for Guajardo. In education, Guajardo saw opportunities not only for himself, but for many like him. These were opportunities his father, Don Angel Guajardo, pointed out to him as a child. Guajardo recounts occasions when Don Angel would stop in the street to formally introduce him to local teachers, stressing the importance of their role in the development and preservation of the community. Don Angel also shared with young Guajardo the story of Pablito, a young Mexican man who left his small rural community to



Fellows of the South Texas Kellogg Leadership Community Change Initiative in 2002. Photo: Francisco Guajardo

attend university in the city and become a teacher, but always with the intention to return to his community and teach. Don Angel is an organic bridge. He was not 'tailored' in the practice of bridging educational opportunities (attending university), community assets (teachers and local success stories), and community members (his children), but he did bridge these ap-

parently separate worlds because he possessed what Guajardo calls 'organic knowledge' about all of them. As Don Angel says, "el fue a la mejor universidad, la universidad de la vida" (he went to the best university, the university of life).

It is precisely this knowledge that Don Angel bequeathed to Guajardo (much as a wealthy family leaves a monetary inheritance to their heirs) that informed Guajardo's understanding of bridging worlds. The disparities in college access for Latino youth that Guajardo experienced firsthand during his undergraduate career at the University of Texas at Austin further encouraged him to return to his small rural community of Elsa, Texas, with the intention to teach. Although a college degree is considered a ticket out of small rural areas with few economic opportunities, Don Angel's words, local teachers who served as role models, and Pablito's story resounded strongly in Guajardo's conscience.

"It is intentionality, purpose, and consciousness," that sets bridge people apart, said Guajardo. "It is about how one can be effective about bringing people together, and creating new opportunities."

And it is easy to see how with such clarity of purpose in life, Guajardo made the intentional decision to return to Edcouch-Elsa High School, his alma mater, to bridge the world of higher education with his community. What better way to do this work than to begin by asking students in one of his English classes about their college plans? While some students planned to attend the local university or community college, very few dared to venture outside of South Texas. Delia Perez was amongst the few students planning to attend U.T. Austin. Yet Guajardo challenged everyone in class: "What about the Ivy League universities in the East Coast? Brown? Harvard? Yale? Columbia? MIT?"

Guajardo's question was loaded with opportunities, and the students eagerly decided to organize the first East Coast Ivy League Trip. While Guajardo raised small donations from alumni/ae, Delia and other students wrote grant proposals, held garage sales, organized car washes, and operated a daily breakfast bar where they sold tacos, fruit, pan dulce, and juice—edibles donated and prepared by their parents. The school district supplied funds to cover gas for a 12-passenger van that a group of ten students, Guajardo, and his wife, drove northeast during the spring break of 1992.

The college trip Delia and her peers organized was the first in what is now an annual trip the local school district has institutionalized. Since then, more than 60 students have gone and graduated from Ivy League colleges, many more have attended equally renowned institutions of higher education across the country and abroad, and the local high school has created a Peer Advisory Center to help local students with the college application process. As a result of that trip, Delia attended Yale University and, with the same intention as Guajardo, returned to Edcouch-Elsa to teach.

According to Guajardo, “because of the organic reservoir of knowledge that we have, we can nurture others into becoming bridges.” However, in order for others to emerge as bridges, we need to create “conditions of intentionality, tolerance about difference, and creativity.” Both Guajardo and Delia intentionally returned to their community with the purpose to share the knowledge they had acquired, and to imagine and create new opportunities. Guajardo says that creativity plays an important role because the practice of bridging is a lot “about the imagination—about using diverse approaches, about having courage and venturing into the unknown.”

Most important, they understood this work cannot be accomplished without rooting it in community. From its conception, the work of the Llano Grande Center has focused on the personal and collective stories of the community and its members. In fact, Llano Grande began as an oral history project that would document the history of Edcouch-Elsa via the stories of our elders. Young community members, often the grandchildren of the interviewees, were in charge of documenting the oral histories. The oral history method has transitioned into digital storytelling, with youth creating videos documenting community stories.

Now youth-led programs at the Llano Grande Center involve the creation of digital media, intergenerational work, and higher education opportunities. For example, last year the local school district requested the help of Llano Grande youth with the creation of an informational video about a bond loan the district wanted to pursue, but first needed the approval of the local community. Llano Grande youth produced a video that informed community members of the



Homepage of Llano Grande's digital storytelling kit
created by Eric Davila and found at
captura.llanogrande.org

process and the responsibility of bond loans. The community voted in favor of the bond, and the district was able to obtain more than \$21 million towards the improvement of local schools.

Further bridging politics and community members, Llano Grande youth organize an annual Candidates Forum. Open to the public, the forum invites local political hopefuls to answer questions from the community. 2008 will be its fourth year. Llano Grande youth were also the driving force behind a grant the City of Elsa received to renovate the local Mario Leal Park. Youth met with city officials to discuss the use of the funds and held workshops with the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, to imagine the new design for the park.

*All this important work
has been facilitated
by the 'intentionality,
consciousness and
purpose,' of bridge people.*

Beyond bridging worlds through projects, Llano Grande has incorporated digital storytelling into the classroom. All students in Edcouch-Elsa High School can enroll in one of two Social Research Methods classes taught by Llano Grande staff. The classes focus on learning about and documenting local history via student-produced personal digital stories. Currently, students are learning about environ-

mental issues by researching the history of the Red Barn Chemical Plant in Elsa, and the adverse health effects on residents near the site where it once operated.

All this important work has been facilitated by the "intentionality, consciousness, and purpose" of bridge people and the "condition of creativity." Guajardo, Delia, and the folks at Llano Grande approach their work with the intention to create positive change in our community, and from a middle point between organic and traditional bridging. As Guajardo says, "because we live in the margins, yet we have been part of the institution, the work of Llano Grande carves its own place in the middle."

Those of us who have been part of the work of the Llano Grande Center do not focus on the development of one single bridge (or a single bridge person) with one single direction. Instead, we nourish many bridges headed in diverse directions, but always with return paths. The bridges we construct begin with ourselves, with our community. We use our community as the main resource, and it is here that we find the resiliency to take on opportunities and, by the same token, to further the opportunities we bridge to the community. Currently, the entire Llano Grande staff are Edcouch-Elsa High School graduates who went away for college and graduate school and chose to return. This is the result of the two-way bridges that each of us has built, which, regardless of distance or direction, have always brought us back to our community.

*Antonio Gramsci, 1891-1937, Italian writer, politician, and political theorist.

Original CAN/API publication: April 2008

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

18

PLANNING THE REVOLUTION OVER COLLARDS

Tufara Waller Muhammad and Javiera Benavente talk about arts and culture in Southern organizing and the danger of spotlighting individuals

By Javiera Benavente

TUFARA WALLER MUHAMMAD is a cultural organizer who for more than 17 years has combined art and activism to help people deepen their relationships with each other, demystify complex problems, nurture and sustain their communities, and strengthen their work for justice.



JAVIERA BENAVENTE is an artist, educator, and cultural organizer who has been involved in a variety of social justice issues for over two decades. She is currently involved in several projects including Food For Thought Books Collective, C3, Permaculture F.E.A.S.T., and the Arts & Democracy Project.



HIGHLANDER RESEARCH AND EDUCATION CENTER is a residential popular education and research organization based on a 106-acre farm in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains, 25 miles east of Knoxville, Tennessee. Since 1932, Highlander has gathered workers, grassroots leaders, community organizers, educators, and researchers to address the most pressing social, environmental, and economic problems facing the people of the South. Highlander sponsors educational programs and research into community problems, as well as a residential workshop center for social change organizations and workers active in the South and internationally. Generations of activists have come to Highlander to learn, teach, and prepare to participate in struggles for justice.

■ ■ ■ ■

This essay is based on a telephone conversation Tufara Waller Muhammad and I had in late April 2008. Prior to the conversation, Tufara had shared some concerns with me about participating in this project, and I was surprised to learn that she didn't think she fit into its framework. I met Tufara for the first time in November 2007 during a three-day gathering of artists, activists, organizers, and cultural workers who had come together in Jackson, Mississippi, to talk about different approaches to integrating art and culture with organizing. During the course of gathering, it became clear to me that Tufara had a great deal of insight to share about the value and challenges of being a bridge between sectors, communities, and cultures.

As we talked in March, and later in April, I came to understand that for Tufara being a 'bridge person' is such an integral part of her work as an organizer that it was strange to separate it out and examine it as if it were a unique feature of what she does. Tufara also shared her discomfort with being singled out to participate in this project and share her experience and knowledge.

Again, I was surprised. I was excited about this project, and it had not occurred to me that the proposition to have this conversation might create discomfort for some people. I believed that this project was valuable and needed to articulate why. What value does a conversation like ours have? What is the value of this series of conversations? What is the value of sharing them publicly?

My response went something like this: I think it is important for us, as organizers, to be transparent about the work that we do, to be explicit about the values and visions we bring

to our work, and to share what we are learning along the way. This is especially true if our approach to organizing is facilitative, if it is about bridge building. I believe the only way we can create positive social change is through an open process of reflection, deliberation, action.



Photo: Danny Lyon, Bleakbeauty.com

That is why I think these conversations are important, and that is why I think it is important for us to share publicly what we learn through conversations like these, and identify ourselves as part of the conversation: so that we can find each other. At the same time, I think it is critical that we acknowledge that much, if not all, of what we learn happens in community, with other people, and that this knowledge is collective knowledge. We need to honor the people and communities that have taught us what we know. With that said, we agreed to have this conversation, though Tufara's questions remained.

■ ■ ■ ■

JAVIERA BENAVENTE: Talk about your experience being a bridge between sectors, communities, and cultures.

TUFARA WALLER MUHAMMAD: Every organizer should be using art and culture as a strategy to help people build bridges. I come from a school of Southern organizing where the organizers need to be invisible and the focus is placed on the people we work for. Sometimes this creates conflict with the art world because artists want to be in the spotlight.

This is why I've questioned whether or not this conversation is even appropriate.

BENAVENTE: I think what you are talking about has a lot to do with organizers following the leadership of the people they are working with and playing a facilitative role, rather than a leadership role. I think this is the work of bridge building. While this can create conflict with some artists who are invested in getting a certain kind of recognition for their work, you are still committed to integrating art and culture into your work as an organizer. This isn't the case with many organizers. Why do think that is?

WALLER MUHAMMAD: Sometimes people don't (use art) because they feel intimidated. Even if they don't mean to, sometimes artists make it seem like art is something that people can't do themselves, that there are skills that you need. It's complicated because if you create situations where organizers and people can (be artistic) themselves without being dependent on a professional artist, then artists work themselves out of a job.

*Some artists who
work in communities
hold on to their power
as artists for fear that if
they pass it on, they will
no longer be needed.*

BENAVENTE: That is a very interesting point—that some artists who work in communities hold on to their power as artists for fear that if they pass it on, they will no longer be needed. I think this is very similar to a dynamic that happens with social service providers and organizers who, while they come at the work from very different places, make a living by virtue of the fact that injustice exists in the world. Sometimes we hold onto the power we gain by be-

ing gatekeepers between communities and outside resources and, in the process, we perpetuate some of the very injustices that we want to dismantle. Because if we create a world in which injustice doesn't exist, we won't be necessary anymore, we will also be out of a job and then what will we do? I think it is really tricky when this work of creating social change becomes our livelihood. It is not always easy to navigate the sometimes competing interests of the movement and our own individual needs. What do artists need to know about working with organizers and communities?

WALLER MUHAMMAD: I have formal training in different (artistic) genres and have operated solely as an artist. I've toured as an artist. But I identify myself as an organizer and, because I've done both, I realize that there are certain things that people need in order to work effectively.

Artists need to learn about the community. Three-week short-term residencies are ineffective because they don't give folks the time to build relationships. There is no such thing as microwave relationships. Artists need to get in there with the community, they need to get in and work with the community on an

issue, get dirty with them, share a meal with them so that then a bridge can be built with them. This work is about long-term collaboration.

Some artists doing community-based work are only interested in doing research, learning and taking from the community rather than giving something back to the community. This kind of work doesn't inspire people, and it's just as bad as global conglomerates like Wal-Mart taking from the community and not giving back anything that is of any real value to the community. I only work with artists who have a political analysis and clear intentions.

BENAVENTE: Tufara explained to me that her work as an organizer is primarily about bringing people together. When community members ask her to help them address an issue or set of issues, the first step is to put together a team of people that can work with the community. These people can come from within the community or outside the community. Either way, there is a balance that needs to be present and, Tufara has an equation for working this out, which she explained.

WALLER MUHAMMAD: As an organizer, the hardest part of my work is thinking about who I'm going to bring together in a room. Something happens organically there. The magic is about who you put in the room. Once you get the right people together, you let it go. You've done your job. You go on and build the next bridge. It becomes the people's project.

The equation needs to include an organizer, an educator (popular or formal), a person of faith, and an artist. Within this equation, you need to try to make sure you have a young person and an old person, so that it's inter-generational. The team can include more than four people, but it needs to be balanced in terms

of power. Artists are an important part of this equation, but they need to have a political analysis because we are building a movement here, we are trying to change the world.

As an organizer, the hardest part of my work is thinking about who I'm going to bring together in a room...

Once you get the right people together, you let it go. You've done your job... It becomes the people's project.

If you are working on environmental justice issues, for example, everyone needs to understand the issues, the community, and its values and culture. You might work with an artist from the community, but you might also partner with an artist from outside the community who has experience working with similar issues. For example, you can bring in a White artist from a mining community in West Virginia to work with Black folks in Louisiana's Cancer Alley. Perhaps the community in the deep South is not used to working with White people, so you bring a White artist who has experience working with Black people. This is not just about

artists presenting their work (to the community), this is about (the artist) being the connector, the bridge. Everyone in the equation needs to be willing to be a bridge, which is a long and in-depth process that takes time. A lot of artists don't want to work in this deep way.

BENAVENTE: While I agree that some artists are not interested in making the long-term investment that this way of working requires, I also believe that many organizers aren't willing to make this kind of investment either. I think that this

Art, deep and resonant art, takes time to make, and if you are going to make it in community, with community, it takes even longer, and if you are going to align this art with an organizing campaign, then you have your work cut out for you.

is one of the barriers to organizers working with artists. The truth is that art, deep and resonant art, takes time to make, and if you are going to make it in community, with community, it takes even longer, and if you are going to align this art with an organizing campaign, then you have your work cut out for you. So, I think this is why some organizers shy away from working with artists in any deep

and meaningful way, because it is a long and complex process.

WALLER MUHAMMAD: I come from a long organizing tradition that includes the Ella Baker Schools, and people like Hollis Watkins and Bernice Johnson Reagon, among others, where art and culture have always been a part of organizing. When I started working outside the South, the thing that freaked me out was organizing with no cultural or artistic component. I didn't realize that it didn't happen everywhere until I left the South. For me, the cultural piece is integral to organizing, but for some people it is frivolous.

I think that a disconnect happened with the industry of professional organizing. Before that, folks organized out of necessity.

BENAVENTE: And art and culture were a part of that because people often came together at the end of long days of hard work, and it was essential to have food, music, dance, something for people to enjoy and that gave them physical, emotional, and spiritual sustenance. Organizing doesn't do that alone.

WALLER MUHAMMAD: When organizing became people's jobs, this shifted. When someone else determines the bridges that you build, when it is a directive from the organization you work for, rather than an organic need emerging from the community you work with—this is corporate organizing, and it doesn't work. You try to fit people and relationships into a specific timeline—like we have control over time, or over the way people connect, like we control when trees bloom.

This organizing, I feel, is not holistic. It burns people out because it doesn't allow people to grow and heal and develop together as a group.

BENAVENTE: This makes so much sense to me and I think it is a large part of why I have moved away from being a full-time organizer. When I had organizing jobs I often felt beholden to outside forces that had little to do with the needs and desires of the people and communities I was working with. Maintaining financial support for the work without compromising its integrity was a constant struggle, and it often left me feeling empty. That's why I'm trying to integrate my work as an artist, organizer, and, most recently, as a collective member of Food For Thought Books, a worker-owned bookstore. This way I can bring all the resources I have to addressing the issues that affect my multiple communities.

WALLER MUHAMMAD: Sometimes money stifles people; we think if we don't have it we can't do the necessary work. But we need to remember that we are building something bigger than this capitalist system. We are building a new world and a new way of thinking.

BENAVENTE: What advice would you give other folks interested in this holistic approach to organizing that includes art and culture?

WALLER MUHAMMAD: When you come from the outside of the community you want to work in, you need to cultivate the ground, give people time, and make sure that people are ready to move with you. It is important to know the community you are working with, to know their reality, to be invited in by some members of the community. If some of the people in the group are looking for help outside their community, you know they are ready to move.

It is important to survey what already exists in a community before you get there. There may be an artist there that you can work with. Once you have identified the people in the equation, conversations have to happen among these people before you bring more folks together. Do they share the same values? Do they want to do the same things? If a part of the equation is missing in the community, who can they bring in from the outside?

BENAVENTE: What can be done to institutionalize what folks know about integrating art and culture with organizing?

WALLER MUHAMMAD: The political education work that Alternate ROOTS does and the cultural organizing workshop that took place at the Mississippi Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement Gathering are important parts of institutionalizing this work. It helps people see that this as a useful methodology, that we are not just a bunch of hippies who want to dance in the middle of the room, even though some of us are and that is necessary.

There is a great skit that Nayo Watkins wrote about artists working in communities. In the skit, Kathie deNobriga would play a community artist coming into a community from the outside and Nayo would play a member of the community. Kathie, the artist, would tell the people about a beautiful exercise that she wanted them to

do. In response, Nayo would say, “But we don’t have any street lights and the kids keep getting run over.”

It is really important for community artists to be knowledgeable enough about the local community and their issues in order to be able to inspire people in a way that is related to what is affecting them right then and there. Artists need to be shape-shifters who can realize when something isn’t working and be able to shift their agenda in order to address the immediate needs of the community.

*Artists need to be shape-shifters
who can realize when something
isn’t working and be able to shift
their agenda in order to address the
immediate needs of the community.*

When people are hungry, it is hard for them to focus on ‘expressing themselves’. So, maybe what you need to do is take the art and make it about the children and the darkness, and show it to the city council, and dedicate it to the kids who got run over. Maybe you need to shift your agenda and meet people where they are at.

You need to know what is going on in a community; you need to be invited in by the community, and you need to take the time to sit down and eat with the community, because the revolution is going to be planned over collards, it is going to be planned over food. That is how our people get together.

Original CAN/API publication: June 2008

A low-angle, upward-looking photograph of a suspension bridge. The image shows the massive stone tower in the center, with two large Gothic-style arches at its base. A dense network of steel cables radiates from the top of the tower, creating a complex geometric pattern that fills the upper two-thirds of the frame. The sky is a uniform, light gray, providing a high-contrast background for the dark bridge structure.

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

19

POLITICS AND HUMANITY

*Mark Ritchie and Caron Atlas talk about
balancing work and life*

By Caron Atlas

MARK RITCHIE, Minnesota Secretary of State, partners with township, city, and county officials to organize elections on behalf of Minnesota's 3.7 million eligible voters. He served as president of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy from 1988 to 2006.



CARON ATLAS, project director and editor for the Bridge Conversations, works to support and stimulate arts and culture as an integral part of social justice. She currently directs the Arts & Democracy Project and codirects the New York Naturally Occurring Cultural District Working Group.



I met Mark Ritchie in 2003 when he was leading National Voice. I was impressed with the diversity of the groups making up National Voice and encouraged Mark to include arts and cultural organizations as part of the coalition. Mark immediately embraced the idea and I became a cultural organizer for National Voice. When National Voice ended (it was an 18-month initiative), Mark successfully ran for Secretary of State of Minnesota, an office that he still holds. When I began to think about this series of Bridge Conversations, Mark was one of the first people who came to my mind. His openness, flexibility, and humanity, combined with his focus and ability to see the big picture, make him a highly effective facilitator of social change.

■ ■ ■ ■

CARON ATLAS: I was impressed that in your work with National Voice you surrounded yourself with people who had different perspectives than you—and that you were very open to them. This included the young people of color who had leadership positions in National Voice. I experienced how this enriched the work.

MARK RITCHIE: National Voice was wonderful because it attracted a wide diversity of perspectives within a framework—everyone believed that mobilizing people to vote would help make the world better—not perfect but better. Political work—including partisan campaigns and nonpartisan civic engagement—do tend to attract a much wider diversity of people since there is virtually no limit to the size. Most nonprofits are small, and so it is hard to have much diversity or a

critical mass of relatively different perspectives. While there are certainly limits on the range of folks who get attracted to a candidate or political party, it is more like a church than a traditional nonprofit. Almost every church, synagogue, or mosque will have people of different political persuasions, and those organizations have to be run with this in mind.

ATLAS: Related to your position in state government as Secretary of State and commitment to civic participation, what is the bridging role between a political leader and the people he serves? How can this bridge truly work two ways in a manner that supports participatory democracy?

RITCHIE: I think it is two-way if there is honest sharing from both sides. When I go out to give a speech I have to be short and to the point and authentic in sharing what I am thinking, feeling, believing. There has to be time to hear from others in the room about what they honestly think about what I had to say and what they are thinking about or experiences that can inform me about what I need to be doing in my job as Secretary of State—or perhaps beyond my job in the sense that I end up representing state government as a whole whether I like that or not.

ATLAS: What connections do you make between your work and the rest of your life?

RITCHIE: As I have gotten older, I have been working on getting more of a life that is beyond my work. Which is another way of saying that for much of my working adult life I have blended all aspects of work with the rest of my life and it has made me, I believe, less well-rounded, less grounded, and somewhat less effective in the sense that I had a narrow understanding of other influences and experiences of others. This is especially important in organizing where it is crucial to be able to connect in an authentic and personal way with others—in fact, that is all it is about on one level. So, I have learned over the years that I need to be reading a wider range of views, genres, and authors—I need to be learning from and appreciating more deeply other forms of creative activity/art. I need to be expanding my community of friends beyond work for lots of reasons, including knowing how others view the world ‘from their own shoes’.

*As I have gotten older,
I have been working on
getting more of a life
that is beyond my work.*

ATLAS: How has this approach been beneficial? How have you overcome barriers and pitfalls? What has been your journey to get to this place?

RITCHIE: It has not been easy to make changes in life patterns, but I had the benefit of a life partner who understood some of these dynamics much earlier in life and so was supportive and sympathetic, and also my community of friends, including many people in other countries and other cultures, that understood the need for better life balance in ways that were helpful. I also had the shock of losing our

daughter suddenly to a drunk driver—something that turned everything upside down and made me think about what was really important—among other things.

ATLAS: How has this applied to your work as Secretary of State? Does it help you in this position to have a more holistic approach to your work? Would you say that the political world is more or less receptive to a holistic way of working than the nonprofit world?

RITCHIE: I have not given this a lot of thought, but one thing I noticed immediately after I began to campaign for Secretary of State is that there are people in the process who absolutely do not understand the idea of balance in life and some folks who get it completely and who work constantly to make their voice heard inside of a campaign and advocate for keeping healthy, rested, and in balance as crucial to being able to connect with audiences and to being able to remain true to yourself. I think there are people everywhere—from big law firms to nonprofits, multinational companies to political campaign firms—who get it about needing balance, but perhaps they are not as honored or rewarded as some of the

louder voices for 24/7 shopping/campaigning/emailing/working.



Mark Ritchie in canoe and with his wife, Nancy Gaschott Ritchie.

ATLAS: How do you respond to people who haven't yet achieved a balanced life and insist on things being stuck into categories and boxes? What can we do when we see organizing not living up to its own values of humanity?

RITCHIE: I spend part of each day with people who are stuck on categories and boxes and then I spend the rest of the day with folks who have gotten beyond this. I think that one advantage of the political world in this regard is that if you make it your goal to win an election and this requires gaining the support of over 50 percent of the people then you have to be always thinking about how to expand the base of support and the coalitions of supporters and this in turn demands that your actions and words be about including more and more people. I am aware that some candidates do the opposite, speaking and acting in ways to drive some folks away in hopes, I assume, of attracting others. This may have been successful for some politicians over the years, but it is a dead end for the society and deadly for virtue and values.

ATLAS: What advice would you offer about navigating between fields and with people whose outlook is less holistic? How would you suggest that this work be further institutionalized or integrated into systemic change?

RITCHIE: I do think the trend towards teaching leadership (leadership weekends, training seminars, year-long leadership development programs, etc.) is a very good

sign of both recognition of the need for coaching/learning/reformatting and a good place to begin the development of the tools needed to get to more holistic leaders and organizers. I am also aware of the role of travel, especially to other countries, as a way to get shaken out of our groove and in touch with other perspectives and with people that have found balance in a very effective way.

ATLAS: What should people in the arts know about the fields you have worked in to help us work better with them? What methodologies and experiences from these other fields can the arts learn from?

RITCHIE: Wow, this is a great question, and what is interesting for me is that I have thought about it from the other side (what I can learn from arts folks), but never really considered this. One thing that comes to mind is the idea of mass movements; I think that during the Great Depression some in the arts world had a vision and implemented aspects of it in terms of national arts activities, but I am not very well-versed on this history. Maybe this is another area, the awareness of the history of movements within movements, of leaders, ideas, vision, barriers, strategies, tactics. This is something that I think might be useful. How many spoken word artists know about the Last Poets?



From National Voice November 2 campaign brochure.

ATLAS: Say more about how you have thought about it from the other side. What can you learn from the arts? How can the arts enrich the work you do?

RITCHIE: The arts community reaches every nook and cranny of our society, so in this regard it has a powerful lesson to share about inclusion. Of course, not every form and genre of art is attractive or of interest to everyone, but the sheer range of music available on a Friday night in any community is a testimonial to diversity and inclusion within a fragmented society.

Another lesson from the arts community is that it takes the investment of the whole society over time to result in a truly great artistic achievement. While there are born musical geniuses, most musicians grow up first taking lessons in public schools. Writers are not born knowing language and grammar or inspired to devote themselves to putting words on paper; it is learned over time and then perfected with great help from others. Safe roads and bridges, caring public servants, visionary leaders are the same—not born in a manger or fallen from the sky. As a society we have to invest in the future—be it the future of arts and creativity or the future of our economy, educational system, or natural environment.

■ ■ ■ ■

Hearing Mark talk about balance reminded me of the danger we face but often ignore, of losing sight of the better world we are working toward when the way

we work contradicts our fundamental values. I have heard young activists talk about the need to redefine leadership in a manner that furthers principled action in all aspects of our lives. Those who grew up without their parents present because of their commitment to the movement asked whether our personal relationships reflect values that are consistent with our political idealism.

**Set the alarm
early and loud
Wake the nation
Fill the car
with neighbors
Drive to the polls
This is it
Now is here
We decide.**

National Voice's Latino organizer, amalia deloney, describes how balance is a critical part of a culturally-based approach to organizing. This approach grows from and respects "how you are being in the world" and takes the time necessary to "bring the human element back to how we communicate". The humanity Mark brought to National Voice encouraged us all to stay grounded in our cultures and our values.

It is interesting to consider the implications of Mark's definition of art, not as a solitary activity or an act of a genius, but rather as an inclusive social process and investment. It provides a good starting point to consider a holistic social and cultural policy where the arts are part of an inclusive and reciprocal social contract. His extension of this premise to investments in our economy, education system, and environment further raises for me the question of how the arts can be integral to a democratic process of systemic change.

Original CAN/API publication: March 2008

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

20

POWER OF ART TO MOVE PEOPLE

Ismael Ahmed and Anan Ameri discuss the extraordinary model of the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS)

By Anan Ameri

ISMAEL AHMED cofounded Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS) 40 years ago and became its executive director. He served as director of the Michigan Department of Human Services from 2007 to 2010 and is currently associate provost at the University of Michigan Dearborn.



ANAN AMERI, PhD, is director of ACCESS Arab American National Museum. Under her leadership, ACCESS cultural arts and educational programs have established partnerships with community organizations, museums, and educational institutions across the U.S. She is a longtime promoter of Arab and Arab American humanities and arts.



ARAB COMMUNITY CENTER FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SERVICES (ACCESS), Dearborn, Michigan, is a human services organization committed to the development of the Arab American community—and the greater community—in all aspects of its economic and cultural life. To support this goal, ACCESS provides a wide range of human and cultural services, as well as advocacy work. Its staff and volunteers have joined forces to meet the needs of low-income families, to help newly arrived immigrants adapt to life in America, and to foster among Americans a greater understanding of Arab culture as it exists both here and in the Arab World.

■ ■ ■ ■

ANAN AMERI: Tell us a little bit about the connections between your personal life and your professional life. Did that work for you or not?

ISMAEL AHMED: Pretty much my work has been an extension of my personal life. I grew up in a home where my mother read letters for immigrants and filled out forms for them. My father loved Egyptian music, and we moved to Detroit so we could open up a record store to sell Egyptian music—which, by the way, failed. So, when I started the work I do now, that wasn't the direction I wanted to start in. I wanted to go to university and teach in the university one day. I wasn't interested in ethnic identity or culture. I was more interested in American rock and roll.

But all of those things became a part of a mix, part of my life. I think also of activism in my family. Activism was a big part of my grandmother's life, and that was something that I looked up to. All of those things were in my personal

background. Then growing up in a low-income, working-class neighborhood where you could see parts of people's lives, and the things that went wrong or right in their lives, and went wrong and right in the way things happened in America. All that has had a profound effect on me. Also, traveling around the world, going into the army, seeing the haves and have nots, the different ways people live. But in the end, people are people, and they are always more the same than they are different.

Taking all those things into consideration, I think, pulled me into the work and activism that really had no boundaries in my life. The work that I took up with other people, and friendships, were a part of that too. Whether it was working with people in my neighborhood or with people who did things that I liked—

whether they were in the arts or direct activists, or there were things I was interested in personally—they all kind of fit into community development. There was no wrong direction possible. If you were interested in the arts and community development, there were ways to bring people together around arts, and to strengthen your community in the arts.

The same thing with human services. You would work with people you knew to help them out, and with other people whom you didn't know. All of those things were part of a no-boundary way of living, and as ACCESS grew, and the work that I did, the boundaries became even less. You could do a giant concert that brought different nationalities together or you could learn about healthcare that affected your life and other people's lives in such a way that you would end up doing research on cancer. All of these things kind of fit together. I think a lot of the boundaries that we have in life are artificial and in fact take us away from a more organic human direction. Human beings aren't one category or one thing. I think for community work in particular and creative work, it's important that we don't fall into these silos and embrace a broader approach to our humanity and our work.

AMERI: Do you think, looking back, you would have done it differently, some people might call it 'be more professional', or do you think your approach was the correct approach?

AHMED: To me, to be professional means that you bring integrity and knowledge to your work. I know there are other meanings to professional, but that's what I think it means. You do things that you do because you know what you know, you feel what you feel, and you are inspired by what inspires you. I have a big interest in music, and part of our work at ACCESS was around music and arts, and maybe if I didn't have that interest it would have had less of an emphasis at ACCESS. It is what it is, and we are what we are, and the work we do grows

A lot of the boundaries that we have in life are artificial and in fact take us away from a more organic human direction.

from that. The experiences and the epiphanies that we have as we do our work, and the interactions we have with other human beings, if we're doing it right, will inspire, teach, and move us. Everyone in our orbit, and some people who aren't in our orbit, take us to different places, allow us to recheck our direction, recheck our work.

AMERI: ACCESS has very holistic model. Why is this model so successful? Were there any obstacles?



Concert of Colors. Photo: Rebecca Cook

AHMED: There were obvious barriers to the work. They had to do with the environment in which we developed—including racism, ethnic stereotyping and our position in society, and economic barriers. Our strength and our weakness was one of principle; we wanted to reflect the people we came from and the people we served, and that meant that we were unwilling to take some of the short cuts—we wanted to maintain an organic

relationship with the community. Those were all really hard things to do.

But there were good things in the environment that helped us. We developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when a lot of these social experimental organizations thrived, and there was a fairly good economic atmosphere to start in. It was a formative period for the Arab American community, one when there was a lot of hope for the Middle East and the community, and we drew strength from that. We also had a lot of weaknesses when we started. Most of the activists tended to be like-minded and couldn't draw on the diversity of the larger community—the Arab community—let alone the much broader community.

Our greatest strength was that we learned and then applied what we learned to the next level. So, when we discussed should ACCESS be only for Arab Americans, we always agreed that we would serve everybody, they were all human beings. How we thought about both the membership and the leadership of the organization was a big struggle. We weren't sure if we were right at first, but it has helped us so much since then. When we made decisions, whether small or large, we decided that it wasn't just about our neighborhood or our people, but that we wanted to take on bigger things in the world. When we decided to take on new work, when we invested heavily in the artistic part of our community and the larger artistic community, we did so because we believed that was part of our humanity, almost as important as food and clothing. So all of those were decisions that grew to a bigger understanding, but they were decisions that we came to from learning. They weren't innate. So, in that way, I think our greatest strength was in our ability to learn and grow and take the lessons, not only from ourselves, but from those who surrounded us.

The second area that was really important was we came to understand that everybody didn't have to think like us, that people do good things for different

reasons whether it's because they believe in God or because they believe in Karl Marx. The engine is not the same in everybody and the understanding is not the same. So we looked for the common good to bring us together so we could package our work in a way that everybody could believe in from their point of view. Finally, I think that the decision to stay connected to the community, not only our community but other communities (and it's very hard as you become bigger and broader), has been important—that is, building those relationships with others who are struggling to be present, whether it's through meeting the needs in their lives or growing the inspiration from their culture and other cultures.

AMERI: You mentioned being flexible. How do you institutionalize that so the organization remains open to change? Organizations grow and sometimes become stagnant or don't build the infrastructure to sustain that growth.

When we invested heavily in the artistic part of our community... we did so because we believed that was part of our humanity, almost as important as food and clothing.

AHMED: I don't know how you teach it. In some ways institutions and the people in them either have that going for them or they don't. Maybe they don't have it at one time, then they do later. But I think it's important that the leadership in any organization preach flexibility, preach a creative approach to the world. That means that they have to have a positive view of the world. You can't go into the work that we're talking about and have a negative view of the world. You have to have hope, you have to believe that people will rise to the occasion. You have to believe that you can make life better and that you can change things, that the art of creation resides in all of us.

AMERI: The generation that led ACCESS for many years came out of the '60s generation. They were activists, they had international solidarity, they believed in humanity, they thought the future was hopeful. Being involved in your community and the kind of work you did was not unusual. Now younger people live in a totally different world where there are more expectations to be financially successful, and they live in a more consumer-oriented society. How do you assure that this work will continue?

AHMED: I think that the '60s and '70s were overrated. There were only a small percentage of people who were the activists and, yes, it was a more open atmosphere for creativity and activism, here and anywhere else in the world. But I really think that still resides in America, even in young people. ACCESS is a good example. It is still a magnet for people who believe in things, young people who have hope, young people who have creative ideas and believe in their community and want to do good. It's a more harsh atmosphere for them to do that now. That's why institutions like ACCESS are really important, because

there has to be a place where they can go to because the larger society provides less opportunity for that.

I was just recently at a social work graduation where I was the keynote speaker. I saw hundreds of young students graduating with master's degrees who clearly were what I'm describing—they were going out to change the world. I listened to them one after another tell me about their projects, things they wanted to get done, things they believe. I really think that it resides out there, but it brings home the importance of maintaining safe places where they don't think they're crazy to do this kind of work. In some ways they're better at it than we were because they have a more practical bent. I see a lot of hope there—enough to be a catalyst of change for the country and the world.

AMERI: In your experience in the arts, there is more than one way to interpret the arts, and the power of them. There are the 'large institutions' and there is community-based arts production. What can these two learn from each other?

AHMED: I think that both of these interpretations of the arts are a bit risky, and I think those are changing in the arts community and the arts world. For very practical reasons, arts institutions are beginning to look around and the arts professionals are saying, "Gee, we're going to have to open ourselves up to this broader world around us." I think there has been serious change in the arts community. It has opened up more broadly now. We need to understand that all that is artistic and creative comes from life and that there are millions and millions of people toiling and working and living and enjoying life and creating culture and creating ways that are inspirational for both kinds of artists—within those communities and the arts professionals who may not relate to those communities. There are barriers still there.

That flow between all the practical things that are human and all the aspirations of people needs to be injected more into the institutional life of the arts world. That doesn't mean that we don't need our Rembrandts and our Tchaikovskys, but we also need the community drummers and the stories that make up real life injected into the arts. It's the only way that our arts institutions are going to succeed in a practical way and build new audiences and become spiritually more of the world that surrounds them.

The other thing is that arts have been looked at in a very narrow way and they have such power to reconstruct communities. It's something I talk about all the time. The arts can play a role in rebuilding the community; arts can play a role in bringing people together; the arts can play a role in bringing out what makes people proud of themselves, their lives, their ethnicities, their history; the arts can be such a powerful force that really has been tamed too long and needs to be allowed to be a little bit more wild. Traditional arts need to be embraced more than individual arts, and also the understanding that arts production takes place many fold more in the street than it does in the arts institutions, and an appropriate marriage really has to exist.

AMERI: Let's look at the arts in ACCESS. There is the *Concert of Colors* and its Cultural Exchange Network, which is basically a coalition of almost 65 arts

institutions, large and small, from every ethnic group in our area. Through the Concert, various communities work together, and it gives them a sense of pride and a comfort level in working with each other that all these groups would have missed if they didn't have that experience.

AHMED: The Cultural Exchange Network had other practical outcomes. The immigration reform committee which came out of that helped lead the immigration work and the marches that took place recently. You had the Chinese community and the Arab community help each other on a capital campaign. It helped create the 'immersion sessions', which were a way to visit and know communities and know their issues, which is not at all an arts focus. So, there are very practical permutations from the work. That's a very important thing.

The other thing is that every sector of the society has power. People usually look at the arts and their ability to move individuals or audiences, but the arts have the power to move the world. They played a pivotal role in the Civil Rights Movement, they played a pivotal role in the Vietnam War, and we need to comprehend that they're playing a pivotal role now and apply that.

I think that the arts community can learn more about art's ability to move people. Right now most of the experiences are individual experiences: You look at my painting, what does it do in your head? I think we need to think "I've created this, how does it change the world, how does it change communities, how is it relevant to the person on food stamps?" It's really who are you speaking to, and how are you moving the world, not the individual.

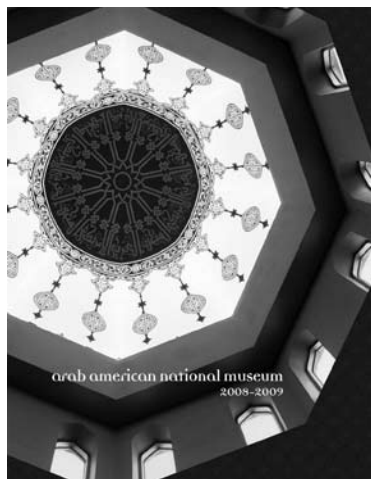
AMERI: If you look at the Arab community, what role did ACCESS' Cultural Arts program play in the reconstruction of communities?

AHMED: There was no presence of Arab American arts outside of the internal community. ACCESS played a pivotal role in injecting Arab and Arab American arts in Michigan's arts community in a pretty big way. On the national scene, we affected what presenters around the country present, as well as provided a model for that. We have helped to create a network of Arab and non-Arab presenters who work to present Arab and Arab American art, music, poetry, and literature. We were among the first to do that. ACCESS created an institution [the Arab American National Museum] that tells the story of Arab Americans, and it does it as much through the arts as it does through a worded story.

Accurate information on a national level about Arab Americans is really important. We brought together from across the country Arab American artists who either never had a format to think together to look at those practices or to learn from each other and provide support for each other. In many ways we've played a pivotal role in the creation of our own community, not only because of the arts, but because of other work that ACCESS has done, including its integration into the larger community. To enrich and help the community is all a part of the work that we've done, whether it's in mental health or health research, in creation of exhibits, or in sharing information about cultural competence.

Is this all what we wish it could be? Did we change the American government's views on the Middle East? Not substantially, but even there we've had some impact. Is there a presence of Arab art like we'd like to see it in America? No, but certainly there's a place to go to talk to people about it, and there is a creative force in America that helps to harness other creative forces.

One small institution can only do so much. Part of the job is to become an engine for others, a model, in some cases to replicate, like we're doing with the action network for Arab American communities in 12 states now. In other cases, it's to show what can be done, and never to forget that institutions are made up of people struggling to do whatever they can do.



Museum photo by student in SURA Arts Academy. Photo: Diana Molina/Arab American National Museum

I think that in some ways there was a historic confluence of Arab American and other leadership at ACCESS, which happened for a lot of reasons. Part of it was the failure of the liberation movement in the Middle East so good activists had nowhere to go but here, it's been a magnet for young people who want to find a place to make a difference and for people who want to do good for their community, whether Arab or non-Arab. That's replicable in many ways, though maybe not in exactly the same way. That's why it is particularly important that models like the Arab American National Museum and ACCESS continue to exist, grow, and affect the world.

AMERI: Thank you very much. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

AHMED: The important thing here is I was one of hundreds, maybe thousands, of people who were part of the process, and that's a very important thing to understand in institutions. There is no great leader that comes forward and moves everybody in a particular direction. You can have many, many great leaders, small and big in their arena. This view of history that tends to highlight people who've done this or that, it isn't those people usually. There are people who do things on their own who impact society. I think the community-embracing model that ACCESS has is a much better model.

Original CAN/API publication: March 2008

*Bridge
Conversations*

ARTS & DEMOCRACY

21

SPIRITUAL CORE OF INDIGENOUS SOCIAL JUSTICE

Tia Oros Peters and Vanessa Whang talk about maintaining your vision and integrity in rooms of power

By Vanessa Whang

TIA OROS PETERS (Zuni), executive director of the Seventh Generation Fund for Indian Development, has been involved in community organizing and Indigenous issue advocacy for two and half decades. She is also actively engaged in human rights and international diplomacy.



VANESSA WHANG joined the California Council for the Humanities in 2008 as director of programs. Before joining the staff there, she was a New York-based consultant with an interest in cultural equity, arts philanthropy, multidisciplinary arts production, community cultural development, and cross-sector partnerships.



SEVENTH GENERATION FUND FOR INDIAN DEVELOPMENT (SGF) is an Indigenous nonprofit organization dedicated solely to promoting and maintaining the uniqueness of Native peoples throughout the Americas. SGF emerged from the political, social, and cultural revitalization movements in Indigenous communities during the mid-1960s and 1970s and was founded in 1977 by the late Daniel Bomberly (Salish/Cayuga). The organization derives its name from a precept of the Great Law of Peace of the Haudenosaunee (Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy), which mandates that chiefs consider the impact of their decisions on the seventh generation yet to come. This principle guides SGF in its frontline work with all the grassroots Native communities it supports in revitalization, restoration, preservation, planning, and development projects. SGF has grown in vision and direction over the decades. It has advocated for the sovereign rights of Indigenous Nations at the annual Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues of the United Nations and has helped establish local, state, national, and international coalitions for social justice and human rights. Today it lends its support and extensive expertise through an integrated program of advocacy, small grants, training and technical assistance, fiscal management, and leadership development. It supports programs and projects that include environmental and social justice, sustainable communities and alternative forms of energy, recovery of tribal languages, protecting sacred sites and traditional spiritual practices, and documenting tribal histories to preserve tribal customs and cultural traditions for future generations.

■ ■ ■ ■

In January 2008, I interviewed Tia Oros Peters of the Seventh Generation Fund for Indian Development to learn about how the organization has navigated through different realms to become one of the largest and longest-standing organizations of its kind in the U.S., and what she, as a long-time staff person and now executive director of the Fund, has learned and would share about her experiences of crossing through tremendously diverse and challenging cultural terrain.

■ ■ ■ ■

In the spring of 1993, Tia Oros Peters began her work at the Seventh Generation Fund for Indian Development answering phones, working on programs, doing whatever needed to be done—as many do at small nonprofit organizations. For Tia, working at SGF has been much more than an individual endeavor.



Tia Oros Peters at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.
Photo: Chris “Mo” Hollis, SGF media director

“My daughter is 17 and she grew up in it. Chris [my husband] came in 1989 as a senior program officer at a time when a lot of restructuring was going on ... and was one of the last ones left standing through some transitions at that time. He’s now president and CEO.”

Founded in the 1970s, SGF sees itself as working in the realm of social justice, and the work has historically been culturally centered. It was developed by elders concerned about building capacity in their communities. But distinct from some other groups of color organizing at that same time, “it wasn’t about getting a piece of the pie,” explains Tia.

“Indigenous peoples were not necessarily seeking the ‘American Dream’. We actually didn’t want the pie being shoved down our throats.... We are trying to retrieve and maintain the ideas and philosophies that come from Indigenous perspectives.”

The work of SGF is conceived in response to issues in its many communities.

“We see ourselves as an operating foundation in a sense—though we are not that formally. We have always been a part of supporting what grassroots people need. Arts have been central—but tied to everything else—like sovereignty and cultural vitality.”

When I ask about the various realms that must be traversed in her work, Tia first emphasizes the vast diversity that exists within the Native communities that are the center of SGF's work.

"We walk in many worlds. Local, regional, national, international, family, and clan. There are a multitude of worlds, even within the Native world. We could be speaking one day with someone from the circumpolar region, and from Latin America

Indigenous peoples were not necessarily seeking the 'American Dream.' We actually didn't want the pie being shoved down our throats.... We are trying to retrieve and maintain the ideas and philosophies that come from Indigenous perspectives.

the next. A meeting of two different Indians is already an international meeting. I believe if we can maintain our core, we can remain steady.

But in addition to looking inward to the communities they serve, Tia also highlights the importance of looking outward and engaging the different fields and sectors that must be negotiated in order to be effective.

We can't just be in our communities. We need to have all sides going. The

external work is an essential piece.... In the environmental arena, there are the academics and intellectuals, and there are the Earth First-type of activists. Within the arts arena, there are different issues. A lot of Native people don't consider themselves artists. But when you go to Zuni [the reservation in New Mexico], you see that everyone is an artist. But there are also people who do consider themselves artists. And the categories in the art world don't necessarily hold. Some work is legislative. Sacred site protection can involve spiritual practice as well as environmental justice. There are all kinds of protocols. But we try to go into these different realms in the same way that we would anywhere else. We do have to adjust our terminology, but we need to maintain a standard."

I asked what she means by "maintain a standard," and with that Tia illustrates through examples what SGF's mission to "maintain the uniqueness of Native peoples" means in practice in rooms of power.

"Sometimes people think they have to be something different wherever they go—to change to each circumstance, or become aggressive because other people are behaving that way. But, for instance, we would never raise our voice to make a point. We would always make room for another person. We would always stand by an ally. We would never air our dirty laundry in public. We don't change our behavior because there is a funder in the room. Does it seem powerful to run after a funder?

We can't control how others behave. But we know we need to maintain the standard. You don't cut off your arm to get something with your hand. How do you go back to face your community if you compromise? We won't accomplish our goals if we aren't who we really are.... It's easy to get wrapped up in the energy of a meeting. If you see everyone getting in a line for something, you get in the line too, but you may not know where you are going. Do you know what you are in the line for? You have to maintain a sense of personal and cultural integrity."

Tia touches on the complex dynamics that many people of cultural minorities face when they are the only ones of their race, ethnicity, nationality, class, etc., at a gathering with a preponderance of those of the

dominant culture. Under such circumstances, it can not only be a challenge to stay true to one's sense of self/identity/way of being, one can also be put in the position of 'representing one's people' (whoever they might be perceived to be) by the majority, whether one has explicitly assumed that mantle or not.

"I think for Native Americans the challenge is being one or two in a room of 200. We try to sit in solidarity with other Native people in meetings. But look at the arts. People talk about individual artists a lot, but Native people might not think in that way. They might think about what is important for their family, for their community. Not just about individuals. It's difficult to go into other forums where people don't have that way of thinking. Being outnumbered is hard.

In meetings, lots of people run for the microphone. It's how they show leadership. But it's a culture clash. If you are not leaping to get time on the agenda or to the mic, people interpret that as your being too shy, not showing leadership, or needing public-speaking skills. Sometimes Native people might say they need to think and pray. And they mean it. And then other people think it's cute. So what do we do?

We are so few that people look at us as if we represent all of our people. So you feel like you have to be up on all the issues. We know we are observed a lot. We are in the global region of North America from the point of view of the U.N. Our goal is to maintain a standard because we know that others are judged by our behavior."

Given that being in these kinds of situations where the power dynamics can be, at best, uncomfortable, or, at worst, emotionally/spiritually/ physically intimidating, the question arises: How does the Fund find ways to remain open, to build bridges, to reach its goals under these circumstances?

"We talk with the staff about this all the time. It's one thing to go to a traditional gathering, it's another to go to the Council on Foundations. Your core will be shaken. You have to be prepared to have someone you think is your ally ignore

*You don't cut off your arm to get
something with your hand.
How do you go back to face your
community if you compromise?*

you or to feel unwelcomed. We make sure people don't go to things alone. We have lost people.... There have been issues of physical safety, spiritual safety.

Sometimes people need to take time to think. We are waiters, not jumpers. You have to be careful—there may not even be water in there. Sometimes you need someone to pull you out of something you jumped into. Sometimes you need to debrief with someone. You need to maintain the tie, the connection. We don't throw people out there alone. Of course, you don't want to crush people's creativity and independence. But we want to nurture people, so we travel together. It's harder to lose yourself if you keep the connection—especially with younger people traveling.

The conscious and thoughtful mentoring of staff and organizational representatives to be prepared to negotiate unfamiliar realms—particularly ones of power, influence, and resources—and to provide a safety net when deeply felt challenges to one's way of being can arise when in those realms, seems to me a brilliant way of building essential capacity and sustainability of human resources and consequently of the organization itself."

Sometimes people need to take time to think. We are waiters, not jumpers. You have to be careful — there may not even be water in there.

I ask Tia what else has been important in helping to overcome the difficulties and potential pitfalls of 'crossing over' into different worlds and sectors.

"The traditional lifestyle builds discipline. It creates a personality type. I think everyone

has the potential. We really look at our organization as a family—that includes our projects. We have had relationships with some projects for 20 years. We just had a gathering of 250 people in July—grantees, project partners, family members. We have a gathering like this about every two years. This year, we even had two people from the Masaai Nation in Africa come who learned of our work through the U.N. And now they are part of our family. There are supports built from doing this. Say, if someone we knew was stuck somewhere in New Mexico, we could probably call on someone out there to help them. The White Roots of Peace go in the four directions. If you are in trouble, you could follow that root and seek asylum, shelter. We're small, but the work is huge. We are very serious about this and we know it is a lifetime commitment to the people."

Having just celebrated its 30th year, the Seventh Generation Fund is one of the longest standing organizations of its kind. How has it managed to sustain and extend its work through difficult times? Tia explains.

"Slow, mindful growth has always been what the organization has done. I think that is why we have lasted. Right now we are the largest we have ever been, with

the most staff. We moved into a new building. But it's been really a slow evolution. We have 11 people on staff, but only seven full-time. Jonathon [Freeman] is the only program officer and we cover the Americas! But we are all about program. We have a very involved board of directors (but they are not micromanagers!). They are all leaders in their own communities. They all run projects. Our grants are small. We could put all our grant monies into one place and it still would not make a huge dent since the needs of Native communities are multifaceted and require focus and extended dedication. It breaks our heart to decline support of a worthy and innovative project simply because we do not have the regranting funds available at the time of their request.

This work is not for everyone. It can tear you up. There is so much need. The poverty, the suicide, cancer, violence, torture survivors, the loss of sacred sites. Some people can find a way to resolve this for themselves. This is long-term work. We're putting down a stepping-stone. In contemporary society, it's hard to be patient. But dancing can help teach you that!

People on the SGF staff are so dedicated. They are often in at 6 a.m. and stay until 8 p.m. But you do it because you know: It's not for me, it's for the community. I wish we could pay everyone more.

We have a retirement plan, health insurance, and we have spiritual leave, aside from sick leave or vacation. But we struggle with hiring not only because we are located in a rural location, but also because we can't really afford to pay people what they would be able to make outside in an urban setting or in a more mainstream organization. But then we would not be who are, what we are. Also, we don't take state or federal funding. We raise all of our budget each year from foundations and individual donors.

We really are a grassroots Indigenous organization by and for Indigenous peoples. It's about supporting traditional Native people to do what they need to do, in accordance with the manner they want to do it in. We have never changed. It's not glamorous. At the core, there is the sense of responsibility, not entitlement. It's a spiritual core.

The White Roots of Peace go in the four directions. If you are in trouble, you could follow that root and seek asylum, shelter.



Tia Oros Peters in Quito, Ecuador during a march for Indigenous Peoples' rights. Photo: Chris "Mo" Hollis, SGF media director

*At the core, there is the sense of
responsibility, not entitlement.
It's a spiritual core.*

The Great Law of Peace of the Haudenosaunee speaks of how you need to walk gently on the skin of mother earth because the faces of the unborn are watching you. It's like your grandma is always watching you! We are striving for that way of

working. Natural law is hard. If breached, it is unforgiving. It will seek its own justice.

We would not have survived for 30 years without humility and collectivity or without vision and integrity. We are striving for harmony—within here and externally. You have to find common ground to be sustainable.”

Original CAN/API publication: March 2008

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

22

TENSIONS AND SYNERGIES OF BEING STRATEGIC AND CREATIVE

Brad Lander and Esther Robinson discuss organizing and art, anthropological listening, and whether being holistic is important

By Esther Robinson

BRAD LANDER is a New York City Council member representing the 39th district in Brooklyn. Prior to his election to the Council, Lander was the director of the Pratt Center for Community Development. Before joining Pratt, Lander served for a decade as executive director of the Fifth Avenue Committee.



ESTHER ROBINSON is the founder of ArtHome, a non-profit business that helps artists and their communities build assets and equity through financial literacy and home ownership. Robinson was director of Film/Video and Performing Arts for Creative Capital for seven years. Her film, *A Walk into the Sea: Danny Williams and The Warhol Factory*, is currently in international theatrical release.



PRATT CENTER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT works for a more just, equitable, and sustainable city for all New Yorkers by empowering communities to plan for and realize their futures. As part of Pratt Institute, it leverages professional skills—especially planning, architecture, and public policy—to support community-based organizations in their efforts to improve neighborhood quality of life, attack the causes of poverty and inequality, and advance sustainable development. The Center was founded at the birth of the community development movement as the first university-based advocacy planning and design center in the U.S. For over 40 years, it has worked with community groups to revitalize their neighborhoods, create and preserve affordable housing, build childcare and community centers, and improve their environment. The Center has trained hundreds of community leaders and organizations to implement effective community development strategies and supported a wide array of successful public policy and community planning efforts.

■ ■ ■ ■

I first met Brad when I and others in my predominantly low-income residential neighborhood (Gowanus, Brooklyn) were fighting to prevent the construction of a proposed Ikea store, a development that would have radically impacted the nature of our community. Brad was the director of the Fifth Avenue Committee (a nonprofit community development organization), and he and his organization tirelessly supported us in a struggle we ultimately won.

It was a struggle, like many neighborhood struggles, that necessitated a forging of unlikely alliances to become successful. It amazed me how Brad was able to imagine and support the most unlikely alliances and to directly inspire belief in the possibilities for direct change held in those coalitions—angry counter-culture activists, small-business owners, long-time homeowners, and first-generation immigrant tenants that all felt that Brad listened and understood their concerns and in turn were able to work together for a successful campaign.

What has always impressed me about Brad, and inspired me as well, is his incredible curiosity, creativity, and consensus-building skills—all grounded in his conviction that all ships must rise with the tide. Our friendship has deepened since those initial meetings, and I have found Brad to be both an inspirational colleague and a provocative advisor on my ArtHome project.



Nuestro Comunidad (Our Community), ceramic mural at Fifth Avenue Committee. © 2005 Mauricio Trenard

It was Brad (along with Miguel Garcia at the Ford Foundation) who began asking hard questions about how ArtHome could be used to work with neighborhoods and advocacy groups beyond just arts groups and artists. These provocative questions set me on a soul-searching path that has considerably deepened my thinking about how artists integrate (or not) into neighborhoods, and the role of subsidy in this equation. This deepening has taken ArtHome to a new level, where the goals are no longer simply the equity building and education of artists, but also the enrichment of the communities in which they live (a goal that is much more challenging, forward thinking, and potentially rewarding).

Our conversation was wide-ranging, and I have condensed it quite dramatically. I also made the decision to focus on Brad's unique perspective on listening—which inspired me and I felt should be heard with little editorializing. However, in fairness to the breadth of our conversation (and the assignment to converse, not interview), I feel compelled to say that the later part of this is excerpted from a much longer conversation on two books well worth reading: *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* by Lewis Hyde and *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* by Marcel Mauss.

■ ■ ■ ■

ESTHER ROBINSON: So, what moves you to work in between worlds? In particular, what led you to begin working with arts and culture groups?

BRAD LANDER: Originally it was not all that intentional. In work at a community organization like the Fifth Avenue Committee, you wind up in dialogue with people who—despite coming from very different backgrounds—are upset about the same

things, or hopeful about the same things, or just doing interesting work with their neighbors or with young people. Once you're in it, you see the power of it.

You go to a place like El Puente and you see the power of the connections it makes between artists, young people, and the nascent Environmental Justice Movement, and you really can't help but come home and think, "Hey, how can we do something like that?"

...For people who are aspiring to make the change you are, by definition, doing something a little soulful whether you like it or not.... You're saying something else is possible.

The first big opportunity we had to combine arts and community development was when the Fifth Avenue Committee built its new home on 4th Avenue—ironic, I know. This felt like our first opportunity to more deeply integrate the presentation of art and the involvement of lots of people into the identity of the organization. It's more of a story of how than a story of why.

ROBINSON: What brought those things together?

LANDER: Well, what I'm tempted to do is give the rationale for why it's good to have art and community activism go together—which I think we have come to be able to do. But it's not the real reason, it's not really what motivated the intersections.

It's funny. There's a way in which I think of myself as an utterly uncreative and unartistic person, but I definitely think for people who are aspiring to make the change you are, by definition, doing something a little soulful whether you like it or not. You're curating that part of human beings that is not about getting-and-spending or accepting the particular grind of life and daily existence. You're saying something else is possible.

And you're trying to bring people together to think about it and imagine it and make it happen. And that does turn out to be a soulful or creative practice even if individually you're not very soulful or creative and aesthetically inclined.

So, I think there is synergy between that belief in the possibility of change that calls for some imagination and some kind of hunger for something beautiful.

ROBINSON: Is this something ingrained or can it be taught?

LANDER: It's a kind of curiosity and openness and tolerance for things—you kind of have more or less of it. You have to be genuinely curious and interested in random funky things when they come across your path.

This is a big challenge because many people who are very strategic in pursuit of community organizing goals are not open to working in new ways and letting different things happen or trying something that comes out of left field. And the reverse problem is also true. You wind up in some creative but very unstrategic

spaces. That's part of the price of this type of work, and finding the overlap isn't always easy.

Doing strategic bridge building work does require two things which are sort of contradictory: an openness to things you're not sure will be strategic,... and then some strategy.

ROBINSON: Can you elaborate on this?

LANDER: There's some tension between strategic and creative thinking. In the case of effective bridge building, the strategist is thinking: "How does this potential partnership amongst three or four different groups of people work in the self-interest of each, and how would we get there from here," and then working to help the conversation head in that direction. I find that kind of thinking a lot of fun—and ironically feel that's actually the time when I am at my most creative.

ROBINSON: Can you tell me more about the creativity? You always refer to yourself as uncreative so I'd like to seize this moment when you self identify as creative to dig a bit deeper.



Brad Lander at housing rally.

*Doing strategic bridge building
work does require two things
which are sort of contradictory:
an openness to things you're not
sure will be strategic,... and
then some strategy.*

LANDER: So, it's a funny thing to say—creativity—there's nothing aesthetic about this. It's having listened enough, just having been interested enough to notice that different sets of people were looking at something in different ways. Talking to people and reading and being open to things outside your world. Listening enough to have a sense of how people approach and think about something.

You have to understand the things people are working on in their own terms and not in your terms. And then you have to take people's different ways of thinking, find things they have in common, see the differences that mean they are not naturally working together and recognize that if you help by doing some translating or some bridging that something more will be possible as a result.

So, its creative, but I think it's more anthropology than art.

ROBINSON: I think an artist would say that their job is also translation, and that the artistic moment is that 'reframing' where everyone resees something

that they think they know. The artist is using aesthetic language to make that proposal that 'this is not a pipe', this is an art piece, and you're making a different argument, but it's a similar goal and both come from creative impulses. The reframing is an artistic expression. It's artistry.

LANDER: An artist is doing that reframing really from themselves, from their creative ego. But in the organizing world this creates a basic tension: On the one hand you really are genuinely trying to have the framing come from the different, collective perspectives of the group. But you also need to help the group see their problem in a collective way.

There's manipulation in both cases. In a funny way I feel that for the artist there's the sense there's nothing wrong with that singular voice. And for the organizer there's a sense that there's everything wrong with it, so you pretend it isn't happening.

ROBINSON: (Laughter)

LANDER: You sort of pretend like all of these people just happened to wander into the room. I invited you all here—and now magically you will share a sense of which actions to do to get what outcomes.

I think the better and more honest organizers recognize that it just can't be all or nothing—that some amount of manipulation is necessary to make something strategic happen, but if it's totally scripted it's not really going to work well either.

And, I mean, I think that a challenge for artists who engage in this work is figuring that balance out, because it's not all or nothing. And you have to transcend the sense that your particular reframing or perspective is just the one that should govern. That is fine for a work of art, but it doesn't work as well in bridge building.

There needs to be a certain openness and a kind of listening that is hearing the perspective that different people are bringing, not just translating what they are saying into your perspective.

I have come to think about it as anthropologic listening—appreciating that there are different languages being spoken; these languages can be intelligible, but that doesn't make it completely collapsible with how you view the world.

ROBINSON: The last question is: What advice would you offer people that navigate between fields for connecting with people whose outlook is not holistic?

LANDER: It's funny, but for me it's never interesting that things are holistic. I must confess as a value it's something I don't really get.

ROBINSON: Really? Why?

LANDER: I never really thought about why. I'm always suspicious when someone says, "We want it to be holistic." I don't care if it's holistic.

ROBINSON: (Laughter) That's great....

LANDER: I mean, at some level, and again this is an anthropological response, it's kind of preposterous, right? I don't know what holistic means. Most things people

call holistic don't encompass hundreds or thousands of different experiences of the planet. And they couldn't. Sometimes I think that trying to be holistic is actually privileging one's own way of looking at the world over many, many others.

I agree that there seems to be a human longing for the ineffable. Many people would like to have an experience which feels complete, total, whole. But I just don't feel invested in my outlook being holistic. I understand that my outlook is very particular, it's varied, it's interested in lots of different things. And it's one very particular, fragmented vision of completeness.

In interdisciplinary or cross-sector bridging I don't think of holistic as necessary.

I think of cross-sector bridging as coming from what French sociologist Marcel Mauss calls "sociological apperception." One of his students, the brilliant French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, has talked about one of Mauss's lectures, and how he described how this happens.



Brad Lander at education press conference at City Hall.

Mauss is standing on a train platform and appreciating what it really means that of the 600 other people around you there are 600 other really genuine consciousnesses and very different experiences of that exact same moment. You are all standing on this train platform, so there is a common structure to the experience, firmly rooted in railway structures and physics and engineering. But you're coming from different places, and you're going to different places, and so many things about how you're experiencing and seeing that moment are different. There are enough that are similar, and these are human experiences, and you are all on the train platform. If you really appreciate that then each one is as interesting as yours, and as particular.

And then holism is not really what is important, listening and appreciating and understanding and translating are what are important.

For me, that holds in bridge building as well. The goal is not usually to find the holistic space where everyone feels as one. Save that for synagogue or church or

retreat, for a space where people share a common, often spiritual pursuit.

Mauss is standing on a train platform and appreciating what it really means that of the 600 other people around you there are 600 other really genuine consciousnesses and very different experiences of that exact same moment.

In bridge building, and especially bridge building with a goal to make change, I think it makes sense to hold onto Mauss's idea of "sociological apperception," to try to be a better listener, to recognize and appreciate particularity, to hear people's self interests and hopes and barriers. Then you can seek to translate

between different groups, to help very different sets of people to hear each other, and to find common ground for action.

Original CAN/API publication: June 2008

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

23

THEATER AND BANNED CULTURAL EXPRESSION IN BELARUS

freeDimensional talks with the Belarus Free Theatre

By Todd Lester and Carolin Wiedemann

NATALIA KOLIADA AND NIKOLAI KHALEZIN are founding artistic directors of the Belarus Free Theatre. They are collaborators, with Vladimir Scherban on *Eurepica. Challenge*, a new European epic. Khalezin is the author of *Generation Jeans* and *Discover Love*, among ten plays and 200 publications. Koliada started a campaign in support of the UN Convention against Enforced Disappearances through *Discover Love*, co-authored with Khalezin. They have helped initiate the global artistic campaign Free Belarus, and in 2011 received an OBIE, French Republic Human Rights Prize, Europe Theatre Prize Special Mention, Freedom to Create Prize, and Atlantic Council Award.



TODD LESTER is the founder of *freeDimensional* and, more recently, the Creative Resistance Fund. Before launching *freeDimensional*, he served as information and advocacy manager for the International Rescue Committee in Sudan.



CAROLIN WIEDEMANN studied at Sorbonne University Paris and at the University of Hamburg, where she recently graduated with a MA in journalism and communication, as well as in sociology. Currently, Carolin is a teaching assistant at Hamburg University while working on her doctorate.



BELARUS FREE THEATRE is an underground company that began in 2005, during the second term (2001–2006) of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, as an artistic means of resisting government pressure and censorship. It was founded by playwrights and human rights activists Nikolai Khalezin and his wife, theatre producer Natalia Koliada. As a dramatist, Nikolai became famous with his piece *Ja prishel (Here I am)*, which attracted numerous international awards. The team was joined by stage director Vladimir Scherban, who has produced the majority of Free Theatre performances. Currently the theatre consists of ten actors, a dramatist, four managers, and two technical assistants.

Under the current political system, Belarus Free Theatre has no official registration, no premises, nor any other facilities. While it has gained critical acclaim internationally, it is effectively banned at home. Rehearsals and performances (free of charge for the public) are normally held secretly in small private apartments, which, due to security and the risk of persecution, constantly must be changed. On several occasions, performances were given in street cafes and in the countryside in the woods, with audiences alerted via text message or e-mail. Members of the Theatre have been repeatedly harassed by the authorities for their participation in the Belarus Free Theatre, and Scherban and others were fired from their day jobs at state-run theatres.



Photo: Vladimir Shlapak

FREEDIMENSIONAL. The goal of freeDimensional (fD) is to support culture in the service of free expression, justice, and equality. freeDimensional values artists as communicators and vanguards on a range of critical issues, and community art spaces as sites of innovation that can provide a range of solutions. Based on the belief that creative expression fuels social justice movements, freeDimensional works with the global arts community and art spaces in 70 countries to identify and redistribute resources, and support meaningful relationships between art spaces and activists. This includes protecting critical voices by providing safe haven in artist residency apartments through the Creative Safe Haven program, and quick-response funding through the Creative Resistance Fund. By providing a range of support to people using creativity to fight injustice, fD sends a message to repressive regimes and people who misuse their power that culture workers will not be silenced without the international community taking note and coming to their defense.

■ ■ ■ ■

Each year, hundreds of culture workers are violently assaulted for pursuing social change through their art forms. As community leaders and role models, they lose their jobs, face arbitrary imprisonment, and are sometimes killed for speaking truth to power. Through its Distress Services, freeDimensional provides opportunities for threatened culture workers to continue their creative practice.

We first met the founders of Belarus Free Theatre, Natalia and Nikolai, in Lund, Sweden, in March 2009, where their company was hosted by a local theater for the production and presentation of *Eurepica*. In 2010, we learned that the company would be performing at the Theatre Without Borders conference *Acting Together* in New York City and invited it to participate in a Critical Dialogue. Critical Dialogue is a fD process linking advocates, policy makers, and the general public with an activist or culture worker passing through New York City. We hosted a three-day retreat for the company in conjunction with our upstate New York partner, Ledig House at the Omi International Arts Center, and included Svetlana Mintcheva, director of programs at the National Coalition Against Censorship, and additional fD staff. We also held a Political Salon public discussion at the World Policy Institute and saw Belarus Free

Theatre perform at La MaMa Experimental Theatre. This Bridge Conversation is an extension of this dialogue.

In early 2005, Belarus was listed by the United States as Europe's only remaining 'outpost of tyranny'. Opposition figures are subjected to harsh penalties for organizing protests, and anyone in the country who expresses criticism or just the desire to be free and creative finds her or himself confronted with various kinds of repression ranging from threats of imprisonment and legal and social harassment to social and economic exclusion, censorship, job loss, physical threat, and violent attack. The country became independent in 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

More than a decade later, international isolation continues and the nature of political links with Russia remains a key issue for the dictatorship. For much of his career, President Lukashenko has tried to develop closer ties with Belarus's neighbor to the north with one outcome being Belarus's privileged access to duty-free oil. Since 2008, the European Union (EU) has started a dialogue with the Belarus government (through the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council and Prague Eastern Partnership Summit, for example). The West's new will to cooperate with Belarus might be inspired by Russia's role as a major energy supplier to the rest of Europe and Belarus's position as a key transit country. Being this transit country as well as the buffer state between Europe and Russia makes it difficult for the EU to put pressure on Belarus—even if the EU member-states pretend to support Belarus's transition to democracy.

■ ■ ■ ■

NATALIA KOLIADA: All theatres in Belarus are state-owned. The directors and creative directors are appointed by the Ministry of Culture. The performances are censored and the programs are old and musty.

FREEDIMENSIONAL: You offer a program based on contemporary/modern plays that are celebrated all over the world. Does your artistic quality offer you the powerful voice that then works as a political tool?

NIKOLAI KHALEZIN: We don't consider our performances to be political. We don't claim to have a political agenda, but we do art, high-quality art, an art that highly affects the political system.

KOLIADA: There's no politics in the play, but there is something that is threatening to a dictatorship: open conversation. The dictatorship says: We have no suicide, no alcoholism, no drug abuse. And we say: We have to talk if we want to solve problems.

[For example, Belarus Free Theatre's piece *Numbers* shares statistical details of living conditions in Belarus.]

FREEDIMENSIONAL: You mean, is it threatening to the dictatorship to be confronted with any form of individual artistic expression that illustrates present-day dilemmas?

KOLIADA: Yes, exactly. Because it challenges the ideological system of the Belarusian dictatorial regime. With our performances we break through stereotypes of the Belarusian population that the dictator imposes. That inspires

the people to reflect on their situation, encourages them to resist the lies that Lukaschenko tells, makes them become critical.

FREEDIMENSIONAL: Is there any chance at all for the people in Belarus to start to organize a resistance movement?

KOLIADA: The problem is that there are no longer ways to communicate without censorship. The government starts to control the Internet, as has already happened in China. Everything is under the control of the dictatorship. Nikolai, whom you can call an experienced dissident, was a journalist for three newspapers that were all shut down, and he was sent to prison a few times. The police are so strong: if people went on the streets to demonstrate, there would immediately be the same number of policemen. It's a surveillance society, and you never know whom you can trust. Our mobiles are cut, and it's nearly impossible to inform the interested people where they can see our performances.

*There's no politics in the play,
but there is something that is
threatening to a dictatorship:
open conversation.*

FREEDIMENSIONAL: So it is probably a very special sign for you that people come to see you even though they are prohibited?

KOLIADA AND KHALEZIN: Yes, that is a good sign for the whole society. The audience comes even though it is threatened; sometimes policemen or some KGB guys arrive to film the faces of the people in the audience. In 2007, our whole company and 50 audience members were arrested during a performance. We take a lot of risks. We know that they could make us disappear just when we take the garbage downstairs. Even though we are afraid for our families we all stand together to fight for our art and freedom. My daughter once hid the USB stick with our data when we crossed the border. I was so afraid for her; can you imagine such a climate in which your young children know to hide the laptop computers when a stranger comes to the door. Despite the pressure and harassments, we manage to deliver cutting-edge performances, and we will fight for our right to do so until Lukashenko's regime comes to an end.

FREEDIMENSIONAL: That's why it is so important for you to reach people outside of Belarus in order to make political change there more possible?

KOLIADA: Yes, our major goal is to get more publicity about the situation in Belarus, to make people all around the world aware of this last European dictatorship.

■ ■ ■ ■

By performing all around the world, explaining again and again to people in western countries where they perform, Natalia and Nikolai raise awareness about the situation of Belarus. It is due to its artistic work that the Belarus Free

Theatre is noticed and recognized internationally. And it is due to the quality of its performances that people from all around the world listen to Natalia and Nikolai's stories from Belarus and then take action. Famous playwrights and world figures like Tom Stoppard, Harold Pinter, and Václav Havel have supported the Free Theatre. In 2007, Belarus Free Theatre also met Mick Jagger, who promised to give the first concert in a democratic Belarus in a YouTube clip shared virally in Belarus until the site went down due to oversubscription or state censorship. And in 2009, Belarus Free Theatre visited Steven Spielberg in Los Angeles, who shared others' concerns regarding the violations of freedoms of speech, expression, and religion in Belarus.

Not only do these celebrities shed light on an underreported situation (and offer hope to the people of Belarus), they also afford protection against even more drastic repressive measures from the Belarusian authorities who cannot blackmail culture makers the way they do politicians. The performances of Belarus Free Theatre are packed with strong imagery and experimentation; they captivate the audience and make each spectator reflect on how to contribute to change the situation in Belarus, to make it a place where artists and intellectuals are not persecuted because they express themselves freely.

In the above interview, we get a hint of some tactics that Belarus Free Theatre engages through its hybrid art activism. When Natalia was telling the story of hiding the flash drive on her daughter, she lamented on having to take such dire measures. Other tactics include never mentioning President Lukashenko within a performance. When traveling, they often cross the border into Lithuania by car and fly out of Vilnius to reduce the surveillance they are subjected to in Minsk. Nikolai is also a journalist, and he has helped to start an online news service pertaining to Belarus called Charter 97, which is not linked to the Theatre's website. Similarly, for a campaign to not forget the disappeared, Natalia and Nikolai helped orchestrate a street-style alternative distribution plan of a book of testimonies from family members. This book did not mention the Theatre and also stated 'published in EU' to obfuscate any relation to a Belarusian publishing house.

■ ■ ■ ■

POSTSCRIPT: Since this Bridge Conversation was written, Lukashenko was re-elected. The government cracked down on dissent following the flawed election, and more than 600 writers, journalists, and opposition activists were arrested, including Natalia, Nikolai, and other members of their theatre. When they were released, Natalia and Nikolai went into hiding and ultimately came to New York, where they performed *Being Harold Pinter* at the Under the Radar Festival to standing room audiences, receiving critical acclaim. The PEN American Center held a benefit for them, a demonstration of solidarity with writers and artists, such as Tom Stoppard, on the eve of their return to Belarus. The Public Theater and Amnesty International joined in a demonstration outside of the Belarus Mission to the United Nations.

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

24

WHO WILL CARRY THE WORK FORWARD?

An intergenerational conversation at the State of the Nation festival and a tribute to Nayo Watkins

By Caron Atlas, R. Lena Richardson, and Carlton Turner

NAYO BARBARA MALCOLM WATKINS (1939-2008)

was a poet, essayist, playwright, arts consultant, and cultural organizer in North Carolina, where she lived, and throughout the South. For over 40 years she worked with nonprofit organizations with a focus on arts as tools in community empowerment and social transformation.



CARLTON TURNER is executive director of Alternate ROOTS and artistic director and cofounder, along with his brother Maurice Turner, of M.U.G.A.B.E.E. (Men Under Guidance Acting Before Early Extinction), performing a blend of jazz, hip-hop, spoken word poetry, and soul music.



Note: We had hoped that Nayo Watkins would participate in a Bridge Conversation, but her tragic death in January 2008 made that impossible. However, earlier that fall she facilitated an intergenerational conversation at the State of the Nation Arts and Performance Festival, and this was a Bridge Conversation if there ever was one. We include portions here as a tribute to Nayo. In this conversation she asked how the work she and others were doing would be sustained, given the long arc of social change. It is clear that Nayo's work lives on in many ways—and we are pleased to have this opportunity to further share her wisdom. We also want to acknowledge all the participants in this conversation for their honesty, passion, and willingness to listen to and learn from one another. (Caron Atlas)

"She is still everywhere, telling the children who they are and who it was that came before to make a way for them. It is her mission. Well, as for me, as long as she is 'taking care,' and we are singing those songs, beating the drums, speaking our orations, reading our poems, painting our pictures, making meringues, planting flowers, and strutting our stuff, I will believe that somehow, no matter what they throw at us, we're gon' make it over. Yeah, we're gonna make it."

—From *Miz Culchre Lady* by Nayo Watkins

INTRODUCTION BY CARLTON TURNER

In many ways I feel there are many more people more qualified to introduce the work of Sister Nayo Watkins. She was working the community arts scene long before I was even a bright spot in my father's eye. But the fact that she meant

so much to so many people qualifies me to honor her spirit and keep her name alive. I and countless other cultural organizers stand on her shoulders, many unknowingly. She was, is, and always will be a force to be reckoned with.

Nayo completed her work in this realm. Her children, both the ones that she gave birth to and the countless ones she helped navigate the wretched seas of an intolerable unjust system, are a testament to that. Nayo's presence continues to provide energy to those that knew her. Her words lift up an astonishingly



State of the Nation Festival conversation, Jackson, Mississippi, 2007. Photo: Carlton Turner

simple, commonsensical way of honoring community. Not 'community' as the buzzword it has become throughout the nonprofit world over the past couple of decades. Nayo was about real COMMUNITY. The way that she would value artistic work was not by the number of people that came to see it, but the number of people that were able to use it in a tangible way to create a better life.

The following conversation comes from Nayo's last visit to Mississippi and the last time that I saw her in person before her passing. It was part of the State of the Nation Art and Performance Festival in Jackson, Mississippi, in October of 2007. This festival is an annual gathering organized by M.U.G.A.B.E.E. of Raymond, Mississippi, and ArtSpot Productions and Mondo Bizarro of New Orleans, Louisiana. The hallmark of this annual festival is its community forums.

This particular forum was a joint venture organized by Alternate ROOTS and the Arts & Democracy Project. Nayo Watkins gracefully facilitated the two days of discussion. We began the session by looking at the work of a number of cultural organizers living and working in communities throughout the Southeast. The artists provided a framework to consider how we use art as a common reference point for communities to think critically about manifesting progressive social change. All of the artists that presented were under 40 years of age, and it was quite fitting that Nayo was yet again the guiding force for these young voices.

During our discussions we found ourselves questioning the role of institutions. Veteran organizers John O'Neal, Owen Brooks, Hollis Watkins, Okolo Rashid and even Nayo herself asked questions about the continuation and legacy of the work. How does the work continue to live on after its driving force is no longer there? During this conversation a real generational divide existed in the room. On one hand, you had young people challenging the rigid nature of institutions as well as the overall 501(c)(3) model as a means to create real impact and social change in this country. On the other hand, you had elders making a

*People will often ask you:
'What do you do?' How can
you get your mouth open to
say what you do? Because it's
about a journey. And it's about
all kinds of things that happen
within that journey....*

case for institutions to carry on the work and legacy of past generations. As facilitator, Nayo navigated the room with grace and generosity, creating space for all voices to be heard. No, we didn't find all the answers, but we heard from all sides and walked away with a deeper understanding of the issues.

The backstory is that during the course of the three-day festival Nayo spent the night in the hospital. No one knew but her family because Nayo facilitated the daily forums, was present at the nightly per-

formances, and even stayed up with us on the last night of the festival at the local poetry spot until 2 a.m.

This is Nayo in her truest form, beauty as nature intended. Her work and legacy continues to manifest through those she touched.

NAYO WATKINS: People will often ask you: 'What do you do?' How can you get your mouth open to say what you do? Because it's about a journey. And it's about all kinds of things that happen within that journey that contribute to the whole thing. It's not about defining what I do. It's so broad that you can't put it in a box.

I started off as a single parent with a whole bunch of babies, trying to figure out how I was gonna make it. And everything grew out of that.

But what I want to get to is that when we were talking about this gathering, I brought up the fact that I knew a lot of people in Mississippi who would not be able to identify with the term 'cultural organizing' because that's not how they necessarily think of themselves. You know, they are doing the work in community. And they are using culture and they are organizing, but that's not necessarily how they think about their work. They are doing what's in front of them to be done.

When we were doing the American Festival Project in Mississippi, what these people who are in all kinds of communities, in all kinds of situations who are us-

ing culture, art, history, organizing, all of the tools that they can—(a younger man comes in and gives her a kiss) “Hey, babes”—to save their communities, to heal the wound, to save the children who are getting pregnant, shooting up, because they don’t know their history. The people—mostly women, but men too—are culture ladies, Miz Culchure Ladies. And I wrote an article about Miz Culchure Lady for the American Festival Project magazine.

And there were some really wonderful people who were part of that project, who sort of fit that bill. I remember one—Helen Taylor up in Starkville. And Helen definitely used the arts, but she ran a daycare center. She did food and housing for people who were in need. And I was after Helen to get us a picture for the American Festival Project magazine, and Helen had been promising, and Helen had been promising. And I called Helen up one time and said, “Helen, we really need it.” And she said, “Nayo, honey, I’m dealing with this woman down the street, the house burned down, she got five little kids, her husband done run off, she ain’t got nothing, and I ain’t done about your picture!” It was about the reality. You can’t put her in any box called cultural organizing, but she was the ultimate cultural organizer.

*Do we really believe that
something else is possible?*

Ever since the Southeast Social Forum, this issue has been there for me. That whole idea of another South is possible. Another U.S. is possible. Another world is possible. And I think: Do we really believe that something else is possible?

You know somebody brought up that to bring about change in that Jena Six situation, it might be necessary to call a boycott. Which might mean boycotting Louisiana, including New Orleans. And where New Orleans is at now, that’s like (makes a hitting sound), but if we overlay that with “Do we really believe another world is possible?” If we really believe another world is possible, then we can’t get frightened by, you know, the world will fall apart if an economic boycott of Louisiana happened. I am talking about our response to anything that says there is prime sacrifice, risk, and being really, really willing to climb out on the limbs of faith.

NICK SLIE: Based on what I heard at the U.S. Social Forum and some other places, I don’t believe. Because what I saw and what I continue to see, is a lot of individuals who have a stake in leading. They have some sort of identity about running organizations and running movements, and I’ve seen it happen a number of times and I think we can observe it in the New Orleans landscape, that when it came down to what was best for some organizations, it came down to power struggles between people.

I think a lot of times I hear people from the movement, the Civil Rights Movement, hanging onto this rhetoric of 40 years ago that is no longer applicable for what the problems are now. And the tendency is for us to believe that there is some pristine time when everything worked, and what we don’t hear enough is that it didn’t work. And I have to say personally that when I look at the movement or whatever it is that we are doing, most of the time I don’t believe. So, all I do

is hold on to a small community around me, that I feel like I can affect change with. But I throw that out there, based on all of the evidence we see, what would make us believe?

STEPHANIE MCKEE: I struggle identifying what is the movement. For me, it's a little bit more clear when I think about my parents' time, and I am constantly wrestling with what was different then than what's going on now. It's very clear to me that Black folk were very clear on what the injustices were. And it was out there and so it was simple, or relatively simple, during that time. Now we have so many different things, as opposed to one. Gay and lesbian rights. Human rights. It is so spread out. So, how do we mobilize? How do we say we are all in the movement together? And there's the question: Are we willing to sacrifice? What are we actually willing to do without? It is a different time, and in lots of ways, I think our generation doesn't get it.

OWEN BROOKS: But that's not necessarily true ... because none of us individually can speak for that generation, for your generation. And I think we really need to understand or try to ferret out, what are the differences today? You see, that's why you need to look back at history. You know some of these conservative folks say, you're too rooted in the past, right? But there are always lessons to be learned from history, all right? For one thing, I can say that when I was your age, the world was very small, OK? And it was hard for me to see over the backyard fence, much less see where my folk came from. And my folk came from the West Indies. And I had to go and live there for two years just to learn what was wrong with that part of the world that related to us in the United States. And I may be saying things that you all already know and have already studied, but I am hearing what I heard 40 years ago—in this room today. One difference was it carried me over to another level of understanding. I didn't have a global view 40 years ago. I had to acquire it. You have moved very quickly into a global view.

I remember after a pace of involvement in the movement, I threw up my hands and said these folk in this country cannot do it by themselves. Ain't no way in the world. America is not going to change in and of itself. But America must sustain the need to change among whatever cadre can evolve from age to age.

So, you haven't got the time to indulge yourself in confusion because you are only going to be here for a very short time, all right? My day is almost up. But I don't ever want to stop hearing progress.

And looking at Jena, it's appalling. It's just a tragedy that we have fixed it that so many of our folk have a capability to move stuff, but are not moved by a Jena. That's a tragedy. And that's what makes me come into this arena and say to you I've failed in so many areas. And so many folks that I lived and worked with made so many mistakes. Don't make the same ones that we made. You have the opportunity to look at the world through a different set of eyes than we had. You can move stuff if you stay on course. You will need to rearticulate a vision that was articulated for you 40 years ago. OK, rearticulate it! But you have the opportunity to move the movement. The movement never stops. It has valleys and peaks. And we are maybe in a valley, but you have the opportunity to recharge

'cause the mess this world is in is going to keep giving you the opportunity to recharge. Don't waste time with self-examination. We did that. We wasted a whole lot of time in the movement 40 years ago, arguing amongst ourselves about direction, about White folks, about these conservative Black people, what we gonna do. That reality is there, and it's time for you to already accept it, understand it, and move on.

CARLTON TURNER: So, I think part of exactly what Brother Brooks is saying is that if you look at the visions that Stephanie is laying out, you got gay rights, human rights, you got all of these different things, and most of them are about what we are fighting against. But that articulation of that new vision, of another world is possible, has to start with talking about what we stand for and the things that we want to create, that we have not been traditionally good about articulating.

Are we trying to replace the power structure of the United States with people who look and think like us? Or are we trying to create a whole new spectrum of how we live in the communities and societies that we support? Because if we are just talking about electing Obama for president, that doesn't change the situation that we are in. So, how do we think about a new way of organizing ourselves around a vision of what we want and it being completely different than what we live in?

*We can meet at intersections
and do some work together,
and the next day we
are going in different
directions, but we'll meet
at another intersection.*

WATKINS: I remember during the year that Jesse Jackson was running for a nomination for president, there was an argument going through the country,... and it was whether Jesse was a strategy or a goal. Obama or Hillary or whatever cannot be a goal, but it can be a strategy if we are identifying a long-term goal that is about substantial, radical change.

It is important that we see the steps as being strategies. It's also important—this is something that Myles Horton (founder of the Highlander Center) taught me—he was talking about his work with communists and he said, “There's no such thing as integration. I'm not integrating with communist people. It's intersecting. We can meet at intersections and do some work together, and the next day we are going in different directions, but we'll meet at another intersection.” There are people who are going to approach the long-term struggle through the gay-and-lesbian movement, through education, through women's rights, through immigrant rights, because of our individual needs and interests. The long-term goal, then, is to see how struggles intersect, build each other up, the next day going in different directions, but meeting at another intersection. And Myles said when we meet at another intersection and another intersection, we get to understand each other's work and we respect each

other's work and therefore we strengthen the whole movement. As opposed to having all of these very narrow struggles that make us isolated from other comrades.

TURNER: The whole notion of institutionalizing is part of the problem. The fact that we are not creating structures that really evolve around a set of values and visions and thinking that we can create an institution like Alternate ROOTS in 1976 and that the same foundation that it was built on in '76 is going to be valid in 2007. A few years ago I made my first visit to Whitesburg, and Dudley Cocke (director of Roadside Theater) cooked a dinner, and we sat around the table. And he said, "Well, you know, ROOTS was supposed to be around for five years and then die and then whatever resurfaced from those ashes became whatever we need to be moving towards." It's 32 years later. I hear people saying, well, the



Civil Rights leaders Hollis Watkins and Owen Brooks at the State of the Nation Festival conversation, Jackson, Mississippi, 2007. Photo: Carlton Turner

organization wants to survive and I say, no, people want to continue doing the work. But we don't need to sit here and think that if ROOTS is not there that the work won't get done. And so it becomes a thing about what does the institution need and how does trying to sustain an institution actually drain our ability to do the real work.

CARON ATLAS: There are some pretty strong arguments for having institutions, and especially institutions run by people of color, and longstanding institutions, and institutions that are not the conventional kind. I just want to put that out there so we don't totally discredit that. I think the problem is that a lot of these institutions become rigid and aren't living institutions. But I've heard very compelling arguments about building power in communities, about the importance of having a place that you own, that people feel is a safe place to come to, that has been around long enough that people can trust it and challenge it. And I know a lot of institutions aren't that. But if everything comes together around leadership and is always shifting, I think it can be hard to build power. I'm working in Brooklyn in gentrifying neighborhoods, and a lot of people there are saying if we had our own

organizations here that we own, we wouldn't be thrown out of this neighborhood now, our culture wouldn't be discredited. We could claim our culture and represent it as an institution in the neighborhood.

TURNER: I just want to say a lot of that is built on trying to contrast institutions. You know what I am saying? So, you build an institution in order to fight against another institution. What I am talking about—and I am not disagreeing about the need for institutions because I think where we're at you may need to establish institutions to fight against those—but what I am talking about is a dynamic and a change in the way that you think about your community to where power is based on value and it's something that everybody holds so it's not that you feel like you need to build this to combat those folks over there because you all share the same values.

SLIE: Over the summer I realized—Bruce (France) and I were talking about it—I don't want to be an organization. I didn't get into this to want to be an organization. We created an organization because nobody else around us was helping us to do our work and we had a vision of what we wanted to do, so we were like, okay, let's pick a name and an organization. At this point, I feel like we know enough people—does it make sense for us to join forces with a bunch of other people and create more of a collective organization, a shared-power organization? Or does it make sense for our little organizations to keep doing what we are doing into the future? Because I do not see the merit of simply having a two-person organization where you have no life because you are overworked, you have two jobs, you're writing for these grants, and you have these little projects.

BRUCE FRANCE: I think part of it is I only have so many hours in the day. I only have so many things that I can involve myself with in a year, in my lifetime, and so I have to ask myself the question. Yes, I think what we are doing is valuable. And I've seen the results of it with people and how it helps move folks. But I start to wonder—I almost want to give it to somebody else. Like great, go run with that, because I had this other idea that I want to go run with.

JOHN O'NEAL: The thing that I am thinking about right now is the discussion about institutionalizing certain aspects of the work. And the impression I left that part of the discussion with is that the prevailing sentiment in the room is that institutionalization is of necessity a bad thing. And I realized that was a very brief discussion of a very, very big subject. But I want to tell a little story.

When I was 22 years old and decided to come south to work in the movement, I viewed it as an interruption in my plans to go to New York and learn about theater and how to become a participant in the institution of theater. I was going to New York because that's where the U.S. headquarters of that institution exists. And my plan was to stay for three to five years. I was shocked when I got south and I found that most people who had come to work in the movement—who were students, I was just graduating—had come to stay for three to five weeks, three-five months at the outside—they were going to get everything straight and then go on with their lives. I soon discovered that the struggle that we had chosen to engage was not going to be straightened out in three to five weeks, three to five months, three to five years. Indeed, I had joined a struggle that was going to take at least

one lifetime. Normal lifetime, because lifetimes were being cut short there by all kinds of means. So, I made a decision then that this would be my life's work.

Since then, I've come to understand that it may be three to five lifetimes of work in the lifetime of an average human being. And that these problems are not

I soon discovered that the struggle that we had chosen to engage was not going to be straightened out in three to five weeks, three to five months, three to five years. Indeed I had joined a struggle that was going to take at least one lifetime.

problems of the South but problems of the way the whole Western culture is structured and built. Now some of those problems can be attacked in a meaningful way in a short time. But most of them cannot be. And with the things that take a long time to deal with, it's essential to have institutions. Otherwise each new generation of work is going to start all over and reinvent the

wheels, even as the institutions that we oppose are rolling forward with a certain consistency. As hard as we work on these short-term goals, we get further behind if we fail to have an overarching, long-term view that has substance.

And so I just hope we think through real carefully what our designs are going to be to get at that long-term work because I believe—the world in which our grandchildren are growing up in is far worse than the world that I grew up in. The problems that they will have to confront and solve are more difficult by far. Some things have to be attacked as institutional issues. We have a long row to hoe, a long road to travel to even to get to the field where our work lies. If we don't do it, all we are doing is making it worse for those grandchildren.

WATKINS: I am taking home more questions than answers. And some of the main questions have to do with institutionalization. And not just because I am not sure exactly what we mean by institutionalization. It seems to me that it can take several different forms.

We sit here just a couple of blocks from some of the most important cultural organizing that I have done in my life. Farish Street. You go down here a couple of blocks and you run into Farish Street and, especially during the days of segregation, that was one of the two hubs of Black business and Black culture in Jackson, Mississippi. At a time when some of us grasped the idea that concentration of culture was beginning to fly away from us, and asking how do we preserve it, how do we celebrate it, we came up with the Farish Street festival. Essentially, it was two days a year that we'd do this big festival on Farish Street and we'd present artists that were current in Jackson and in Mississippi. But we'd also find ways to celebrate the past.

There was a club called Birdland—some of the great jazz musicians had played at Birdland. And there were several Black businesses. Dr. Harmon's where you could find the latest pharmaceutical stuff, but also you could find some witchcraft stuff. And also the federal building—it was a big struggle in Jackson to get that named after a Black man. In Jackson, Mississippi, at that time, that was kind of like “oooh, what?!” But it was named after a Black man. And there was the Alamo Theater, which was at one time the only movie house in town that Black folks could go to.

What I tried to do with the Farish Street festival was to build in something that was educational and also inspiring in terms of what we might do with a street that was our street. And further down there was a school—Smith Robertson, the first Black school—and Richard Wright attended that school, as did one

*Who will pick up this work,
who will understand what this work
was? Who will carry this work
forward?... It's not that the work
I've done has been so great—
but it has been a road. It has been a road
to hope and how do I leave that
to others? How does that not get lost?*

of my children. How do you preserve that history, use that history in organizing people? And you had the power structure here that was interested in injecting drugs in that area. And that went up to the highest level of leadership. And the struggle of people like Mrs. Collins, whose family owned a funeral home there. The struggle of Black people to maintain small businesses, to have some sort of economic leverage, to have some sort of power base from which they could do certain things that they thought were important in the community.

So, what I tried to do with the festival—as opposed to, “Hey come out, let's whoop and holler and leave the streets dirty”—was to support that kind of history and also to hear the voices of those people, like Dr. Harmon, who had the best hot tamales that I ever tasted. He still got 'em. Is he still down there?

SOMEONE: Let's go get some...(laughter)

WATKINS: The best tamales I ever had. And to hear those people's voices and what their aspirations were and what their struggles were and to put it in print and to feature them and you could have time on the air and so forth. I remember during the end of that time feeling that there was so much of that that was misunderstood. I remember wondering did people understand the difference between ‘Heidy-heidy ho, let's have a good time’ and an event that had high visibility that was already trying to point to the issues that the community was facing. And I remember feeling very clearly, “Who will pick up this work, who will

understand what this work was? Who will carry this work forward?" And at this stage of my life, that's one of my—it's not that the work I've done has been so great—but it has been a road. It has been a road to hope and how do I leave that to others? How does that not get lost?

ADDITIONAL PARTICIPANTS QUOTED IN THIS ARTICLE

CARON ATLAS, director of the Arts & Democracy Project

OWEN BROOKS, research historian at the Smith Robertson Museum and Cultural Center in Jackson, Mississippi, and a Mississippi Freedom Movement veteran

BRUCE FRANCE, co-founder and co-artistic director of Mondo Bizarro

STEPHANIE MCKEE, a New Orleans-based performer, choreographer, and educator, founder of Moving Stories

JOHN O'NEAL, emeritus artistic director of Junebug Productions in New Orleans, Louisiana

NICK SLIE cofounder and co-artistic director of Mondo Bizarro

Original CAN/API publication: June 2008

A low-angle, upward-looking photograph of the Manhattan Bridge, showing the intricate network of steel cables and the massive stone towers. The perspective creates a strong sense of height and architectural scale.

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

bios



20 Power of Art to Move People

ISMAEL AHMED is associate provost for Integrated Learning and Community Partnerships at the University of Michigan Dearborn and is a nationally-recognized expert on immigration and social reform. He co-founded ACCESS (Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services) 40 years ago, and was appointed executive director in 1983. ACCESS is the largest Arab American human

services organization in the U.S., offering over 90 different programs with more than 900,000 client contacts annually. In 2007, Governor Jennifer M. Granholm appointed Ahmed as director of the Michigan Department of Human Services, the state's second largest agency, which he led through 2010. He also has served on a number of governing boards for southeast Michigan organizations as well as with Eastern Michigan University's Board of Regents, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Association of Performing Arts Presenters, University of Michigan Citizens Advisory Board, United Way, and New Detroit Coalition. He is a 1975 graduate of the University of Michigan with a BA in Secondary Education and a minor in Sociology.



14 Listening to the Stories Underneath the Work We Do

PAULA ALLEN (KARUK/YUROK), born and raised in Humboldt County, is an active participant in the local cultural traditions and ceremonies of the Karuk and Yurok people. She has worked in the field of American Indian community programming for over 15 years and currently manages the Traditional Resources Program at United Indian Health Services (UIHS), working to integrate traditional

cultural values into all the services provided by the organization. Allen serves on the board of directors for the Humboldt Area Foundation and the Alliance for California Traditional Arts, and also serves as a cultural advisor to the Native Cultures Fund and the Humboldt State University Native American Arts Gallery, the only art gallery in the California State University system dedicated to exhibiting works from the American Indian community. Allen and her husband are the proud parents of two daughters, four and 14, and are actively involved as extended family to the community, serving as cultural mentors and community organizers.



6 Creating with a Sense of Strategic Practice

MARIBEL ALVAREZ, PhD, holds a dual appointment as associate research professor in the English Department and as research social scientist at the Southwest Center, University of Arizona. She teaches courses on material and visual cultures of the U.S.-Mexico border, oral narratives, folklore, and ethnography. Alvarez is a trustee of the Library of Congress's American Folklife Center and serves on

the board of directors of the National Association of Latino Arts and Culture (NALAC). As a public scholar, her work often involves interpreting the regional culture of northern Mexico and the U.S. Southwest, and she has documented the work of more than a dozen of the nation's leading alternative, community-based art groups. From 1996 to 2002 Alvarez served as the executive director of MACLA/Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana, a multidisciplinary urban arts space in San José, California that she also co-founded. Alvarez was born in Cuba, grew up in Puerto Rico, and has worked closely in the field of Chicano arts since the 1980s. She has worked as a consultant to the Ford Foundation on programs focused on changing demographics and aesthetic practices.



20 *Power of Art to Move People*

ANAN AMERI, PhD, is the founding director of the Arab American National Museum (AANM), the only museum of its kind in the world. A Palestinian American who emigrated to the U.S. from Amman, Jordan, Ameri is a widely respected sociologist, scholar, and author. In addition to her museum duties, she lectures and conducts cultural competency training in the U.S. and abroad on the

topic of Arab and Muslim Americans, the Arab world, and Islam. In 1997, Ameri became director of the Cultural Arts Program at ACCESS, the museum's parent organization. There she planned and promoted a variety of educational, cultural, and arts programs; launched critical local, national, and international collaborations; and secured major funding to establish the AANM, which opened in May 2005. Prior to joining ACCESS, Ameri served as acting director of the Institute for Jerusalem Studies in Jerusalem, visiting scholar at Harvard University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies, and executive director and national president of the Palestine Aid Society of America. She earned her PhD in sociology at Wayne State University.



Intro: *Something Else Is Possible*

4 *Breaking Out of a Bifurcated World*

13 *Interweave of Culture and Ecology*

19 *Politics and Humanity*

24 *Who Will Carry the Work Forward?*

CARON ATLAS, project director and editor for the Bridge Conversations, works to support and stimulate arts and culture as an integral part of social justice. She currently directs the Arts & Democracy Project and codirects the New York Naturally Occurring Cultural District Working Group. Atlas consults with foundations (including Ford, Nathan Cummings, and Surdna) and teaches at New York University and Pratt Institute. Previously she directed Place + Displaced, a project of Fractured Atlas, worked at Appalshop, the Appalachian media center, and was the founding director of the American Festival Project, a national coalition of activist artists. She also has worked with National Voice, Urban Institute, and Animating Democracy, and is co-editor of *Critical Perspectives: Writings on Art and Civic Dialogue*. She is a board member of freeDimensional and an active member of the Freelancers Union. Atlas was a Warren Weaver Fellow at the Rockefeller Foundation and holds a MA from the University of Chicago. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.



7 *Creating Transformative Spaces*

HARRIET BARLOW is the director of the Blue Mountain Center. She is an advisor to a number of foundations and individual donors. For four decades, Barlow's work has been focused on creating a synergy between elements of progressive work. Her particular interest is in strengthening the capacity of and integrating cultural work within movements. The founder and cofounder of 15 nonprofit organizations, Barlow also has served on the boards of directors of more than 50 organizations.



18 *Planning the Revolution over Collards*

JAVIERA BENAVENTE is an artist, educator, and cultural organizer who has been organizing around a variety of social justice issues for more than two decades. She began organizing as a high school student, co-founding SEED (Students Educating Each Other about Discrimination), a social justice education program run by and for youth. Benavente studied Latino/a, Latin American, and Community

Studies at University of California Santa Cruz—where she worked with working-class women in Santa Cruz County and Santiago, Chile to address issues of violence against women in their communities. She credits much of what she knows about organizing to these experiences. A movement-based performance artist, Benavente is interested in the relationship between physical action, intuition, improvisation, and cultural transformation. She currently is leading silent meadow walks near her home as part of a performance development process. She is involved in several projects including Food for Thought Books

Collective, C3, Permaculture F.E.A.S.T., and the Arts & Democracy Project. She is originally from Santiago, Chile and lives in Northampton, Massachusetts.



6 *Creating with a Sense of Strategic Practice*

JASON BULLUCK is the former director of the Shifting Sands Initiative and Douglas Redd Fellowship. The initiative provided support, through the Ford Foundation, to arts and cultural organizations willing to immerse themselves in community development. These organizations are in 'Shifting Sands' communities, neighborhoods undergoing profound shifts in demographics, experiencing

tension due to competing development agendas, or lacking representation of certain voices in directing local economic development. The Douglas Redd Fellowship binds emerging leaders from a variety of fields with mentors from many disciplines in an effort to document intergenerational learning and support innovation for arts, culture, and neighborhood change. Bulluck is a professional sculptor and currently is producing work that investigates the shadow history of the '80s-era drug culture that developed in an upstate New York federal housing project, and how that history may be reminiscent of the Sengoku period in Japan, Lucas' *Star Wars* saga, and Bamana blacksmithing.



17 *Organic and Traditional Bridging*

EDYAEI DEL CARMEN CASAPERALTA VELAZQUEZ was born and raised in Durango, Mexico. At the age of 12, her family immigrated to Elsa, Texas, a small rural border town she considers one of her homes. This formative experience inspires her interest in researching immigrant youth identity formation. She holds a BA in Psychology from Occidental College and a MA in international Affairs with

a focus on Latin American Studies from Ohio University. Since 1998, Casaperalta has participated in community development, youth leadership, college mentoring, and digital storytelling programs with the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development, during which time Francisco Guajardo has been her mentor. Currently, she is a program and research associate at the Center for Rural Strategies, a nonprofit organization that seeks to improve rural life by increasing public understanding about the importance and value of rural communities. In this capacity, she coordinates the efforts of the Rural Broadband Policy Group, a growing national coalition of rural advocates for fast, affordable, and reliable Internet service.



8 *Crossing the Borders of Culture and Politics*

PAUL CHIN was born in China and was raised in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta farm town of Isleton. The child of cannery workers, he was the first in his family to attend college. After graduating from San Francisco State University in 1971 with a BA in Social Sciences he journeyed overland to Chile to support the socialist government of Salvador Allende. Chin began volunteering

at La Peña in 1977 and was hired in 1979 to develop community programming. As director, Chin oversees the Programming Committee and capital improvement projects. He has served on peer panels for the California Arts Council, National Endowment for the Arts, San Jose Arts Commission, and the Rockefeller Foundation; on the board of California Presenters; and on the advisory boards for the Cultura Sin Fronteras series of Cal Performances, the Berkeley Civic Arts Multicultural Festival Committee, and the WAA Equity Advisory Committee. He represents La Peña at the Latino Arts Network and serves on the La Peña board.



16 *New Paradigms of Artful Change*

DUDLEY COCKE is artistic director of Roadside Theater, the Appalachian ensemble known for its original plays and national artistic collaborations with traditional musicians and other professional theater companies. He has directed or codirected the premieres of 28 main stage productions. Under his direction for 30 years, the company has toured in 43 states and Europe. Cocke has produced radio and television specials and often writes and speaks about cultural policy issues. For creating artistic opportunities

and a sense of pride for people whose stories have not been included in mainstream American cultural institutions, Cocke was awarded the 2002 Heinz Award for Arts and Humanities.



2 *Aesthetics and Mathematics of Social Change*

DEE DAVIS is the founder and president of the Center for Rural Strategies. He has helped design and lead national public information campaigns on topics as diverse as commercial television programming and federal banking policy. Davis began his media career in 1973 as a trainee at Appalshop, an arts and cultural center exploring Appalachian life and social issues in Whitesburg, Kentucky. He

is a member of the Rural Advisory Committee of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation and is on the boards of Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, Fund for Innovative TV, the Media and Democracy Coalition, and Feral Arts of Brisbane, Australia. He is also a member of advisory boards for the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues and the Rural Policy Research Institute. He lives in Whitesburg, Kentucky.



4 *Breaking Out of a Bifurcated World*

AMALIA DELONEY is the Grassroots Policy director at the Center for Media Justice (CMJ). Born in Guatemala, she worked for many years at the Main Street Project, a MAG-Net anchor, in her hometown of Minneapolis. While there, she codirected a nationally recognized four-state rural Latino capacity-building initiative, called The Raíces Project. She has over 15 years of experience in community and

cultural organizing, with a specific interest in human rights, cultural rights, and traditional knowledge. At CMJ, she uses her extensive experience for field building, community building, and policy advocacy. Nationally, deloney is a board member of the Indigenous Women's Network, Main Street Project, and the Media and Democracy Coalition. She earned her BA in Urban Studies and History from Macalester College and her JD with a focus on Social Justice from Hamline University School of Law. As a result, she has huge student loans, which she likes to complain about. When she is not working, deloney likes to travel, read, watch pretty much anything on TNT, work on her personal blog—or Tweet from the borderlands where she lives, works, and plays!



4 *Breaking Out of a Bifurcated World*

TIMOTHY DORSEY serves as program officer for the Strategic Opportunities Fund at Open Society Foundations, where he facilitates grantmaking across the foundation's U.S. Programs related to research and development, rapid response, and crosscutting social justice concerns. In prior work, Dorsey was director of the Youth Media Learning Network, managing director of the Educational Video

Center, deputy director of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, program coordinator at Sponsors for Educational Opportunity and the Experiment in International Living, as well as a high school teacher at the Navajo Preparatory School. Dorsey has served on advisory boards and planning committees for Girls Inc., Urban Visionaries Youth Film Festival, Youth Media Reporter, Grantmakers in the Arts, and the Neighborhood Funders Group. He currently serves on the national advisory committee for the NoVo Foundation's Move to End Violence initiative and is on the steering committee for the Art & Social Justice Working Group.



7 *Creating Transformative Spaces*

KATHY ENGEL is a poet, teacher, and activist. She has cofounded, directed, and consulted with numerous organizations, including founding and acting as first director of MADRE, always emphasizing the relationship between imagination and social change. Engel teaches in the Department of Art & Public Policy at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. Her poetry has most recently appeared in *5 AM* and

Poet Lore. Her books include *Ruth's Skirts* and *We Begin Here: Poems for Palestine and Lebanon*, coedited with Kamal Boullata. With Alexis De Veaux, Engel offers the website Lyrical Democracies

(www.lyricaldemocracies.com). In March 2012, she will be a featured poet at the Split This Rock Poetry Festival: Poems of Provocation & Witness in Washington DC.



11 *Incarceration, Fatherhood and Artmaking*

CAROL FENNELLY, a lifetime activist and community organizer, is the founder and executive director of Hope House, a DC-based nonprofit with a critical mission to build and transform the bonds between incarcerated fathers and their children. In this capacity, she created the Father to Child Summer Camp, which

has brought dozens of children into penitentiaries for a week of artmaking and other family activities. She also has founded several other initiatives and organizations, including the National Volunteer Clearinghouse for the Homeless, Voices from the Streets, and the Trust for Affordable Housing. Fennelly is well known for her decades of work as an advocate for the homeless through the Community for Creative Nonviolence in Washington, DC. She has been active in the media as a political commentator for the NPR affiliate WAMU and as director of communications for *Sojourners* magazine.



5 *Connecting Action and Academia in California's Central Valley*

ISAO FUJIMOTO, PhD, grew up on the Yakima Indian Reservation in eastern Washington. He attended University of California Berkeley, taking to heart an inscription on Berkeley's Hilgard Hall: "To Rescue for Human Society the Native Values of Rural Life." Those words have guided his work over the last 40 years, starting the University of California Davis graduate program in Community

Development and serving on the boards of Global Exchange, Food First, American Friends Service Committee, California Institute for Rural Studies, RuralAmerica.org, Rural Development Leadership Network, and the Data Center. For more than ten years Fujimoto has been project facilitator for the Central Valley Partnership for Citizenship, a collaborative of active community-based organizations working with emerging immigrant, migrant, and low-income communities. Faculty at University of California Davis for 35 years, he is senior lecturer emeritus at the graduate program in Community Development. In 2010, 50 years after starting his doctoral degree, Fujimoto received his PhD from Cornell University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.



17 *Organic and Traditional Bridging*

FRANCISCO GUAJARDO, PhD, cofounder and executive director of the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development, is a former teacher who is now a professor of educational leadership at the University of Texas-Pan American in Edinburg, Texas. Guajardo began Llano Grande with a vision of motivating local students to become educated citizens and active members of their commu-

nities. He applies his first-hand experience daily through interaction with leaders in the educational field in South Texas, and more recently has transferred that skill set to wider interaction with a broader audience through the Community Learning Exchange, a national network of communities working to build local power through collective leadership processes. In this capacity, he researches many of the challenges and best practices that are pertinent in today's learning spaces.



12 *Innovative Approaches to Linking Nonprofit and For-profit Models*

ADAM HUTTLER is Fractured Atlas's founder and executive director. He has a BA from Sarah Lawrence College and an MBA from New York University. Since forming Fractured Atlas in 1998, he has grown the organization from a one-man-band housed in an East Harlem studio apartment to a broad-based national service

organization with an annual budget of nearly \$8 million. Huttler serves on the board of directors of the Performing Arts Alliance, the steering committees of the National Network of Fiscal Sponsors and New York City's One Percent for Culture campaign, and the Policy Leadership Circle of the Institute for Culture in the Service of Community Sustainability.



1 **Activating the Creativity of Community Development**

GAYLE ISA is the founder and executive director of the Asian Arts Initiative. She has been an active participant in Philadelphia's arts and culture community for the past 16 years, beginning as an intern and evolving as a staff member at the Painted Bride Art Center. She also spent three years working with the Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Associations Coalition, learning about human services and advocacy within the Asian American community in Philadelphia. Isa has been a national finalist in the Ford Foundation's Leadership for a Changing World program and has served on the boards of the Philadelphia Cultural Fund and the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance. She is currently on the executive committee of the National Performance Network and the steering committee of the nascent National Asian American Theater Project. Isa was once an aspiring taiko (drum) player and is now learning to be a theater dramaturg.



23 **Belarus Free Theatre and freeDimensional**

NATALIA KALIADA is founding artistic director of the Belarus Free Theatre. She is co-author of *Eurepica. Challenge*, a coproduction with Manteatern and the Municipality of Lund, Sweden with support from the European Cultural Foundation. She started a campaign in support of the UN Convention Against

Enforced Disappearances through the production of *Discover Love*, written with Nickolai Khalezin. In 2010, the Soho Theatre in London presented her play *They Saw Dreams*. In 2008, with Khalezin and Shcherban, Kaliada organized Fortinbras, the only underground arts school in Belarus. She has taught at the European Humanities University, Lithuania; DasArts, Netherlands; California Institute of the Arts, Los Angeles; and Chantier Nomades, in cooperation with ENSATT, Lyon, France. Kaliada is an initiator of the global artistic campaign Free Belarus, which is supported by Sir Tom Stoppard, President Vaclav Havel, Harold Pinter, and others. Belarus Free Theatre has received several awards including, in 2011, an OBIE, the French Republic Human Rights Prize, the Europe Theatre Prize/New Theatrical Realities Special Mention; ArtVenture Freedom to Create Prize; and, with two other Belarusian organizations, the Atlantic Council Award on behalf of the people of Belarus.



23 **Belarus Free Theatre and freeDimensional**

NIKOLAI KHALEZIN is founding artistic director of the Belarus Free Theatre. He is co-author of the *Eurepica. Challenge*, a new European epic, and the author of *Generation Jeans* and *Discover Love*, among ten other plays and 200 publications. *Generation Jeans* was performed over 100 times at prestigious stages such as the Swedish Royal Theatre, Norwegian National Theatre, and Public

Theatre (New York), and at the home of President Vaclav Havel. His play *Here I Am* was one of six works selected from 557 plays at the Berliner Festspiele, and he participated as a playwright in Doug Howe's Odyssey project with the piece *Return to Forever*. His New York performance in *Discover Love* was recognized as Outstanding Off-Off-Broadway Performance by the Independent Theatre Bloggers Association. In 2008, with Natalia Koliada and Vladimir Shcherban, he organized Fortinbras, the only underground arts school in Belarus. He has taught at the European Humanities University, Lithuania; DasArts, Netherlands; California Institute of the Arts, Los Angeles; and Chantier Nomades, in cooperation with ENSATT, Lyon, France. Khalezin is an initiator of the global artistic campaign Free Belarus.



22 **Tensions and Synergies of Being Strategic and Creative**

BRAD LANDER is a New York City Council member representing the 39th district in Brooklyn. He has spent his career standing up for affordable, livable, and sustainable communities in Brooklyn and throughout New York City. Prior to his election to the Council, Lander was the director of the Pratt Center for Community Development. Before joining Pratt, Lander served for a decade as executive director of the Fifth Avenue Committee, a nationally recognized, nonprofit, community-based organization in Brooklyn that develops affordable housing, creates economic opportunities, and organizes tenants

and workers. His work has been recognized with awards from the Ford Foundation, Fannie Mae Foundation, DoSomething.org, American Planning Association, Prospect Park YMCA, and *New York Magazine*. Lander holds an MS in City and Regional Planning from Pratt Institute, an MA in Social Anthropology from University College London, and a BA from the University of Chicago. He teaches community planning, housing, and urban policy in Pratt's graduate city planning department. Lander lives in Brooklyn with his wife, Meg Barnette, and their children, Marek and Rosa.



12 Innovative Approaches to Linking Nonprofit and For-profit Models

RUBY LERNER is the founding executive director and president of Creative Capital. Prior to Creative Capital, Lerner served as the executive director of the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers (AIVF) and as publisher of the highly regarded *Independent Film and Video Monthly*. Having worked regionally

in both the performing arts and independent media fields, she served as the executive director of Alternate ROOTS, a coalition of Southeastern performing artists, and of IMAGE Film & Video Center, both based in Atlanta. During nearly 30 years in the arts, Lerner has written and lectured extensively on arts issues and consulted with hundreds of arts organizations on audience development and related areas of arts management. She has received the Catalyst Award from the National Association of Artists Organizations (2007), the BAXten Award from the Brooklyn Arts Exchange (2007), a Creative Leadership Award from the Alliance of Artists Communities (2005), the Artist Advocate Award from the Alliance of New York State Arts Organizations (2003), and a special citation from Artists Space for her support of individual artists (2003).



23 Theater and Banned Cultural Expression in Belarus

TODD LESTER is the founder of freeDimensional and, more recently, the Creative Resistance Fund. Before launching freeDimensional, he served as information and advocacy manager for the International Rescue Committee in Sudan. Lester holds a MA in Public Administration from Rutgers University and is a graduate of the Refugee Studies Centre's Summer School in Forced Migration

at Oxford University. He is adjunct faculty in Media Studies at the New School for Social Research, from which he received a film production diploma. Lester is active in several networks, think tanks, and boards, most notably the World Policy Institute, 21st Century Trust, Res Artis, Sangam House, and the Gorée Institute. In 2006, he received the Peace Corps Fund Award for his work starting freeDimensional, and in 2008 was named Architect of the Future by the Waldzell Institute.



1 Activating the Creativity of Community Development

JEREMY LIU is a community development advocate, urban planner, and artist with a passion for civic, social, cultural, and political entrepreneurship. He combines his interests, training, and experiences in art, environmental science, community organizing, and urban development to create innovative community development solutions. In December 2009, he became the executive director of the East Bay Asian Local

Development Corporation, a nonprofit social enterprise based in Oakland, California that, since 1975, has been a national leader in community development, building healthy and economically vibrant neighborhoods across the East Bay. Previously, he led the Asian Community Development Corporation for over a decade. He is a cofounder of the National Bitter Melon Council. Liu has received an Artadia Award, a Visible Republic artist grant, and several LEF Foundation Contemporary Work Fund grants.



5 Connecting Action and Academia in California's Central Valley

TIM MAREMA, vice president for communications of the Center for Rural Strategies, grew up in rural east Kentucky. He is a former newspaper journalist who served as development director of Appalshop, a rural cultural and media arts center located in Whitesburg, Kentucky, from 1993 to 1999. He helped found the Center for Rural Strategies in 2001 to provide communications planning and

support for rural advocacy organizations. Marema has been a grants panelist for agencies such as the National Endowment for the Arts, Kentucky Arts Council, National Telecommunications Infrastructure Administration, and Kentucky's AmeriCorps program. He is a musician and, with his wife, Liz McGeachy, performs contemporary folk music at festivals and community events in the Southeast. He is a graduate of Kentucky's Berea College and holds a MA in Journalism from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He lives in Norris, Tennessee.



9 Direct and Indirect Approaches to Community Change

10 Finding Common Language Between Artists and Community Organizers

VALERIE MARTÍNEZ is a poet, educator, playwright, librettist, and collaborative artist. She is the author of six books of poetry, including *Absence*, *Luminescent*, *World to World*, and *Each and Her* (nominated for a National Book Award and

Pulitzer Prize), and she was the poet laureate for the City of Santa Fe from 2008 to 2010. Martínez has more than 20 years of experience as a teacher, primarily at the college level, and has worked with children, young adults, adults, teachers, and seniors in a wide range of community outreach and educational programs for more than ten years. She is executive director and core artist with Littlelobe.



16 New Paradigms of Artful Change

CRAIG MCGARVEY is an independent consultant working with foundations on program development and evaluation. For a decade he was with the James Irvine Foundation, a California-wide philanthropy, serving first as director of administration and then as program director in civic culture. McGarvey holds degrees in English and Engineering from Brown University and was for many years a high

school mathematics teacher and administrator. The 2001 recipient of the Council on Foundations' Robert W. Scrivner Award for Creative Grantmaking, he has been cochair of the steering committee for Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees and of the Education Committee for Northern California Grantmakers.



2 Aesthetics and Mathematics of Social Change

MICHELLE MILLER is a cultural organizer and strategist. Her years of experience in the political, advocacy, and foundation worlds has informed a creative strategy that enables people's stories to be told by talented artists who have reached far beyond traditional progressive media. A filmmaker at heart, Miller spent the past decade working with visual artists, performers, musicians, videographers, and

celebrities to magnify the voices of everyday people at the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). At the SEIU Miller transformed public spaces into pop culture union halls, trained janitors to be photographers, and developed online campaigns that used humor and creativity to reach newer, younger audiences around issues such as health care reform and corporate accountability. She oversaw the production of more than 25 original art pieces, trained hundreds of members in storytelling and digital media production, and spearheaded major public events with audiences of up to 20,000. She recently became director of creative projects at Strategic Productions LLC, a women-led national network of creative strategists, producers, writers, and designers who craft digital campaigns that change minds, stir hearts, and spark action.



18 Planning the Revolution over Collards

TUFARA WALLER MUHAMMAD is a cultural organizer with more than 17 years of experience. She has worked with the Arkansas Equality Network on its Safe Schools Campaign, ACORN on housing and Community Reinvestment Act issues, and the Women's Project as the lead organizer for the African American Women's Institute. She is a certified HIV/AIDS peer counselor who has done

youth trainings worldwide. Waller Muhammad is a vocalist, radio producer and DJ, published writer,

and visual artist. She has coordinated cultural programs at the Highlander Research and Education Center for the last seven years. She also is a member of Alternate ROOTS, a founding member of Datule' Artist Collective LLC, on the steering committee of Black America Organizing Project, on the board of the Arkansas Women's Project, and is the international advisor for the New Seasons Youth Program, which provides U.S. educational opportunities for African and Caribbean students. For the last ten years Waller Muhammad has been one of the U.S. fundraisers for Creative Solutions Zanzibar, a program empowering women and children towards economic independence.



11 *Incarceration, Fatherhood and Artmaking*

AYO NGOZI is an artist and art educator, as well an alternative health practitioner. Trained as a journalist, she began working as a cultural activist and arts administrator 20 years ago, and as a self-taught artist began exhibiting and performing her own works in 1998. She has served many institutions and communities in capacities ranging from afterschool art teacher to grant panelist for the DC Commission

on the Arts and Humanities. In 2008, the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art commissioned two site-specific performance works; immediately thereafter, she followed the call to a healing profession and is currently an intern in clinical herbal medicine at Tai Sophia Institute in Laurel, Maryland.



4 *Breaking Out of a Bifurcated World*

PEPÓN OSORIO was born in Puerto Rico and lives in Philadelphia where he teaches at Tyler School of Art, Temple University. Ronald Feldman Fine Arts has represented him since 1995. His previous installations at the gallery—*Badge of Honor* (1995), *Las Twines* (1999), *Face to Face* (2002), and *Trials and Turbulence* (2005)—explore issues pertaining to the Latino community and society

in general. A MacArthur Fellow and participant in the PBS *Art21* documentary series, Osorio has had numerous solo exhibitions, including the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid, the Escuela de Artes Plásticas in San Juan, and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia. His work was included in the traveling exhibition, *NeoHooDoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith*, co-organized by the Menil Collection and P.S.1 Contemporary Arts Center in 2008–2009; and *Voces y Visiones* at El Museo del Barrio in 2010. Public collections include the Brooklyn Museum of Art, Walker Art Center, Whitney Museum of American Art, Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico, and the National Museum of American Art.



16 *New Paradigms of Artful Change*

PETER PENNEKAMP is executive director of the Humboldt Area Foundation (HAF), an organization distinguished for its mix of philanthropy and direct community services, particularly in regional economic and community development. HAF has been recognized as a national model in framing and implementing community action on social, economic, and environmental concerns. Pennekamp is on the board of

CFLeads and was a member of its National Task Force on Community Leadership. He is a trustee of the Bush Foundation and a steering committee member of the Rural Development Philanthropy Collaboration. Pennekamp was a trustee of the California Endowment, Morris Graves Foundation, InterNews Network (chair), Grantmakers in the Arts (chair), California Council on the Humanities, and others. Past employment includes vice president of National Public Radio and director of the Interarts program of the National Endowment for the Arts (both in Washington, DC).



4 *Breaking Out of a Bifurcated World*

21 *Spiritual Core of Indigenous Social Justice*

TIA OROS PETERS (Zuni) has been involved in community organizing and Indigenous issue advocacy for two and half decades and has been particularly active in organizing for sacred sites protection, leadership development, language recovery, and cultural revitalization at the local, national, and international levels. Serving numerous organizations at the board and advisory levels, she joined the Seventh Generation Fund for Indian

ous organizations at the board and advisory levels, she joined the Seventh Generation Fund for Indian

Development in 1993, and has served as executive director since 2005. For more than a decade, Oros Peters has been actively engaged in human rights and international diplomacy, and has taken leadership in bringing forth the voices and critical concerns of the globe's more than 220 million Indigenous women and girls to the world arena. Her international work includes designing international policy and advocacy on the protection of water as a physical, cultural, and spiritual resource for Native peoples. A published author, cultural artist, and traditional regalia maker, she earned her BA in Law and Society from the University of California Santa Barbara and MFA in Creative Writing from Antioch University in Los Angeles.



3 Anthropology as Social Activism

14 Listening to the Stories Underneath the Work We Do

24 Who Will Carry the Work Forward?

R. LENA RICHARDSON is the project coordinator/editor of the Bridge Conversations. She has worked with the Arts & Democracy Project in various capacities since 2006, and also has worked as a facilitator with StoryCorps,

a national U.S. oral history project, and with the Lower East Side Tenement Museum. From 2008 to 2011, Richardson developed an intergenerational oral history project with activist elders at the Berkeley Fellowship of Unitarian Universalists in the Bay Area, funded in part by the California Council for the Humanities. She now lives in Portland, Oregon, running an intergenerational project that builds relationships between elders and young people in East Multnomah County. She has an MA in adult education and community development from the University of Toronto.



19 Politics and Humanity

MARK RITCHIE, Minnesota Secretary of State, partners with township, city, and county officials to organize elections on behalf of Minnesota's 3.7 million eligible voters. He also oversees a wide range of services for Minnesota businesses provided by the Office of Secretary of State, including the archiving of official documents. First elected in 2006, Ritchie serves on the State of Minnesota's

Executive Council, State Board of Investment, Twin Cities Army Recruitment Advisory Board, and on the board of the Minnesota Historical Society. He served as national president of the 2011 National Association of Secretaries of State and was recently appointed by Governor Dayton to cochair the Civil War Sesquicentennial Commemoration Task Force. In the 1980s, Ritchie served in the Minnesota Department of Agriculture working to address the economic crisis threatening family farms and rural communities. He served as the president of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy from 1988 to 2006. Ritchie and his wife, Nancy, live in Minneapolis.



22 Tensions and Synergies of Being Strategic and Creative

ESTHER ROBINSON is the founder of ArtHome, a nonprofit business that helps artists and their communities build assets and equity through financial literacy and home ownership. Robinson also has a philanthropy consulting practice and was a technical advisor on the Shifting Sands Arts, Culture and Neighborhood Change Initiative. This initiative recognizes neighborhood-based arts and cultural organiza-

tions as unique stakeholders in poor neighborhoods experiencing economic and demographic shifts and is funded by the Ford Foundation and managed by Partners for Livable Communities. Robinson was the director of Film/Video and Performing Arts for the Creative Capital Foundation, 1999–2006, and was one of the principal architects of its grantmaking system. She is also a filmmaker and has a film-and-television degree from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. Her film, *A Walk into the Sea: Danny Williams and The Warhol Factory*, currently in international theatrical release, won top prizes at the Berlin, Tribeca, and Chicago film festivals in 2007.



9 Direct and Indirect Approaches to Community Change
10 Finding Common Language Between Artists and Community Organizers

ROBBY RODRIGUEZ is a programme executive at the Atlantic Philanthropies. He was formerly the executive director of the SouthWest Organizing Project (SWOP), a grassroots community organizing group based in Albuquerque, New

Mexico and founded in 1980 to realize racial and gender equality and social and economic justice. At the age of 29, Rodriguez became the youngest director of SWOP and helped to lead the organization through a leadership transition and generational shift. Since 2004 he has been a project team member of the Building Movement Project. Rodriguez has recently co-authored, along with Frances Kunreuther and Helen Kim, a book entitled *Working Across Generations: Defining the Future of Nonprofit Leadership*. He has represented the U.S. social justice movement as a speaker, panelist, and trainer throughout the U.S. and in Mexico, Chile, Paraguay, Switzerland, South Africa, Costa Rica, and Brazil.



9 Direct and Indirect Approaches to Community Change

ROSINA ROIBAL grew up in the South Valley of Albuquerque, New Mexico. She started organizing her community as a child with SouthWest Organizing Project (SWOP), and started playing the viola when she was nine years old. Roibal continued organizing in college at Loyola University, where she also studied music education. She taught public school orchestra in the South Valley of Albuquerque

for six years, received a MA in viola performance from the University of New Mexico, and served as the arts and culture organizer at SWOP, where she taught social justice guitar classes. Other projects Roibal coordinated at SWOP included the play *We Won't Pay! We Won't Pay!* by Dario Fo; workshops in mask and puppet making, music, graffiti, and hip-hop; as well as collaborations with many local artists/musicians. In 2010 Roibal moved to California, where she currently works as the program coordinator for the Bay Area Environmental Health Collaborative in San Francisco. Roibal says she "fights for a world that is healthy for all people to live, work, play, and be creative."



15 Multifaceted Art of Community Planning

RON SHIFFMAN is a city planner with close to 50 years of experience providing program and organizational development assistance to community-based groups in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. Trained as an architect and urban planner, he is an expert in community-based planning, housing, and sustainable development. He has had extensive experience bringing together private and

public sector sponsors of housing and related community development projects. In 1964, Shiffman cofounded the Pratt Institute Center for Community and Environmental Development (PICCED), which is today the oldest continuously operated university-based community design and development center in the U.S.; he served as director until 2003. He has sat on boards of local, national, and international organizations committed to equitable and sustainable planning and development efforts, and served on the New York City Planning Commission from 1990 to 1996. Shiffman chaired the Department of City and Regional Planning at Pratt Institute from 1991 to 1999 and is currently a full time faculty member in the Graduate Center for Planning and the Environment at the School of Architecture at Pratt.



9 Direct and Indirect Approaches to Community Change
10 Finding Common Language Between Artists and Community Organizers

MOLLY STURGES (artistic director/composer/performer) is the cofounder and artistic director of Littleglobe and is best known for her work integrating intermedia performance, community dialogue, and social and environmental equity and healing. Projects include working as guest artistic director with the Creative Center, Arts for People with Cancer; creator and director of Moment, a four-month project with homeless older adults for the EU Festival of Culture in Ireland in 2005; and *Memorylines: Voces de Nuestras*

Jornadas, a new community-dialogue opera commissioned in 2007 by the Santa Fe Opera and the Lensic Performing Art Center. Current projects include creator/artistic director and composer for *Lifesongs*, an intergenerational music project with nursing home residents and hospice patients; TOC Common Ground Ensemble, an intermedia community capacity and arts project with intergenerational participants from two Eastern Agency Navajo communities and from the rural village of Cuba, New Mexico; and artistic director/co-composer for *COAL: A Musical Fable*. Sturges is a professor of practice at the University of New Mexico.



24 *Who Will Carry the Work Forward?*

CARLTON TURNER is the executive director of Alternate ROOTS, a 35-year-old southern based member service organization dedicated to supporting artists working in communities across the South. Turner is also artistic director and cofounder, along with his brother Maurice Turner, of the performing group M.U.G.A.B.E.E. (Men Under Guidance Acting Before Early Extinction), a group composed of two brothers

performing a theatrical blend of jazz, hip-hop, spoken word poetry, and soul music. He is currently on the board of Appalshop, on the planning committee for the Association of Performing Arts Presenters, a member of the Free Southern Theater Institute's Phoenix Squad, and on the national planning committee of the United States Social Forum. Turner is also on the planning advisory board of the Parents for Public Schools in Jackson, Mississippi, and is a former board member of the Network of Ensemble Theaters. He lives in Utica, Mississippi with his wife and two children.



15 *Multifaceted Art of Community Planning*

ANUSHA VENKATARAMAN is a planner, writer, artist, and activist. She works as the Green Light District Arts and Education Manager at El Puento, a community human rights institution in Williamsburg and Bushwick, Brooklyn. In 2010, she edited *Intractable Democracy: Fifty Years of Community-Based Planning*, a book celebrating New York City's legacy of community activism and Pratt Institute's plan-

ning role in that history. Venkataraman has worked with a variety of community planning organizations in New York City, including Pratt Center for Community Development, Broadway Triangle Community Coalition, Municipal Art Society of New York, and Center for Urban Pedagogy. From 2005 to 2008, she was the youth and outreach director at the Steel Yard, an industrial arts community center in Providence, Rhode Island. She has worked with numerous community groups in local organizing efforts, and also as a visual artist individually and with collectives in both Providence and Brooklyn. She holds a MA in City and Regional Planning from Pratt Institute, and a BA in International Relations from Brown University.



3 *Anthropology as Social Action*

DR. ALAKA WALI is curator of North American Anthropology and applied cultural research director in the Environment, Culture, and Conservation Division of the Field Museum. She was born in India and received her BA from Radcliffe College and PhD in Anthropology from Columbia University. As founding director of the Center for Cultural Understanding and Change, she was responsible for coordination of programs designed to enhance interdisciplinary work at the museum, strengthen public programming on cultural issues, and promote efforts to link the museum closer to the Chicago community. Wali pioneered the application of an asset-based approach to community engagement in everything from conservation programs in biodiversity rich regions in the Amazonian and Andean foothills regions of Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia to community building in mixed-income residential develop-

ments in poor communities in Chicago. As curator, she explores research themes of how changing social contexts impact identity, gender roles, and forms of activism and creativity within the urban and Amazonian contexts. She is the author of two books, several monographs, and over 30 articles.



24 *Who Will Carry the Work Forward?*

NAYO BARBARA MALCOLM WATKINS (1939–2008) was a poet, essayist, and playwright who also worked as an arts consultant and cultural organizer in North Carolina, where she lived, and throughout the South. For more than 40 years she worked with nonprofit organizations, including the Mississippi Cultural Arts Coalition, At the Foot of the Mountain Theater, Southern Regional Development

Initiative, Chuck Davis African American Dance Ensemble, and Alternate ROOTS, with a focus on arts as tools in community empowerment and social transformation. She founded and served as executive director of the Mekye Center in Durham, North Carolina. "She would see things not right, socially or politically, and she would commit," said her son John Watkins. "The things she believed in, she believed in passionately. It wasn't seasonal. She was all in."



8 *Crossing the Borders of Culture and Politics*

21 *Spiritual Core of Indigenous Social Justice*

VANESSA WHANG joined the California Council for the Humanities in 2008 as director of programs. Previously, she was a New York-based consultant with interest areas in cultural equity, arts philanthropy, multidisciplinary arts production, community cultural development, and cross-sector partnerships. Her clients included

the Asia Society, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Ford Foundation, Leveraging Investments in Creativity, and Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors. From 1999 through 2003, she served as director of Multidisciplinary Arts and Presenting at the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in Washington, DC. Before joining the NEA, Whang was director of Arts Partnerships for Educational Excellence, a youth-centered arts learning initiative of the East Bay Community Foundation in Oakland, California. For nearly eight years, she was a member of the staff collective of La Peña Cultural Center, a multidisciplinary and multicultural community and arts center in Berkeley, California.



23 *Theater and Banned Cultural Expression in Belarus*

CAROLIN WIEDEMANN studied at Sorbonne University Paris and at the University of Hamburg where she recently graduated with a MA in journalism and communication as well as in sociology. During her studies she reported for various media outlets such as the *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin* and *Der Freitag*. She has also worked in AIDS and HIV education in Togo, is a member of the international Humanity in Action network, and a fellow with freeDimensional. Currently, Wiedemann teaches

as an assistant at Hamburg University while working on her PhD.



13 *Interweave of Culture and Ecology*

DR. KENNETH WILSON is the executive director of the Christensen Fund, a foundation based in San Francisco that works internationally around an integrated mission to sustain cultural and biological diversity through an approach that emphasizes creativity and adaptation rather than top-down preservationism. Born in Malawi with "a life spread rather across the world," Wilson studied zoology and

anthropology at Oxford and University College London and began his career as an academic combining research and applied work in Africa. In 1993 he joined the Ford Foundation, first as program officer for Mozambique and then in New York as the deputy to the vice president of the Education, Media, Arts and Culture Program. He left Ford to establish Christensen's new mission and operations in 2002. He has published widely academically and explored photography, poetry, and film. Wilson has served on a variety of boards including International Funders for Indigenous Peoples, Consultative Group on Biological Diversity, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, Seva Foundation, and as a member of the College Eight Provost's Council at the University of California Santa Cruz.

*Bridge
Conversations*
ARTS & DEMOCRACY

This publication is also available online at
<http://www.artsanddemocracy.org>

To order additional copies of the book please
contact the Arts & Democracy Project at
info@artsanddemocracy.org

