NEW CREATIVE COMMUNITY

The Art of Cultural Development

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I worked in a lot of different places during my life. I’ve got to know this country pretty well. I can name every creek crossing between Robinson River and the Queensland border, and I know both the language name and the English name. When I went back to Robinson River after about 35 years I still knew the country better than anyone living there now. That’s one of the things about working as a drover and a stockman. You know a lot about a lot of places.

The speaker is Joe Clark, an Aboriginal Australian born in Australia’s northern territory. Since the 1980s he has lived in Dajarra in North West Queensland, one of the chief sites of work for Feral Arts, a community cultural development group based in Brisbane. Images and first-person accounts from his life are preserved at <www.placestories.org>, an online repository for digital stories made by people whose stories have been omitted from the official histories of the places where they live. Their narratives are linked to maps and other online tools, and are made public or private depending on the wishes of their creators.

Halfway across the world, in Richmond, California, where skyrocketing homicide rates have thrust the community into fear and panic, a group called Mothers Against Senseless Killing (MASK) was formed to mourn the loss
of children to gun violence and to begin addressing the causes. San Francisco-based artist Isis Rodriguez trained and led a dozen Richmond teenagers in producing a double-panel mural depicting residents of the Iron Triangle neighborhood (where Latino and Southeast Asian populations have in recent years joined the longstanding African American population). The mural portrays a vision of healing put forward by those taking part in community planning meetings for the project: “We should be burying our guns, not our neighbors.” Richmond closed many of its community centers to accommodate a budget crisis, but the Nevin Community Center was reopened with the installation of this mural in April 2005.

Meanwhile, in eastern Kentucky coal country, a community coalition that grew out of classes at Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College initiated a three-year project throughout Harlan County, famous for its long and violent 1973 coal miners’ strike. An array of artists and arts-related groups worked with more than 2,000 local residents to explore the social, economic and environmental conditions putting the community at risk. Changes in coal mining over recent decades triggered a chain reaction that reduced county population from 80,000 in the 1940s to 30,000 today, with an estimated real unemployment rate of 30 percent. A specific project focus was the prescription drug abuse exacerbated by these conditions, especially OxyContin, which has been called “poor man’s heroin” because it is so addictive, so destructive, and so widely available in rural regions. The highest abuse rate is in Appalachia.

Participants launched the project by collecting nearly 200 oral histories and involving local residents in art projects intended to nurture trust and bring
people together to work on something positive. The people who took part in art-making and story-collecting formed a base of active concern and hope for the community. Building on their involvement, a team of 60 local residents conducted the Harlan County Listening Project, carrying out 400 confidential interviews with fellow residents from many walks of life. Interviewers were trained in Listening Project methods devised by Rural Southern Voices for Peace <www.listeningproject.info>, widely employed in community organizing and in situations of conflict. Using material from oral histories, working with playwright Jo Carson and a team of theater artists assembled by director Jerry Stropnicki, the group produced and performed a play, *Higher Ground*, with a cast of 75 ranging in age from 2 to 80. The group also mounted community photography exhibits and created tile mosaic murals in public spaces. At this writing, the coalition behind this project is moving forward, engaging the community in creating new works.

In our Information Age, with its default tone of exaggerated self-importance—colossal, revolutionary, humongous!—human-scale phenomena are often dwarfed by energetically marketed trivialities. So it is with community cultural development practice, a powerful, ground-level approach to community and culture that struggles for visibility in a market-driven world. The three examples mentioned above suggest only a fraction of the interest, power and diversity of work in the field.
NAMING THE PRACTICE

"Community cultural development" describes the work of artist-organizers and other community members collaborating to express identity, concerns and aspirations through the arts and communications media. It is a process that simultaneously builds individual mastery and collective cultural capacity while contributing to positive social change. Many examples are described and discussed in this volume.

The community cultural development field is global, with a decades-long history of practice, discourse, learning and impact. In Europe and much of the developing world, the work of the field has long been recognized by cultural authorities, development agencies and funders as a meaningful way to assist communities coping with the forces of modernization. As the phenomenon of globalization accelerates, trailing protest in its wake, community cultural development practice has become more and more widely respected by activists and their supporters as a powerful means of awakening and mobilizing resistance to imposed cultural values.

However, public attention and resources have not been commensurate with the intrinsic merit of this work. Conditions vary from nation to nation, but nowhere has this been so clear as in the United States, where an active community cultural development field has been nearly invisible to those not directly involved. There has been little sustained support for community cultural development per se in the United States, forcing practitioners to struggle for legitimation. Because community cultural development employs the same art forms as conventional arts disciplines (e.g., dance, painting, video), work in the field has mostly been treated as a marginal manifestation of mainstream arts activities—for instance, as "community-based theater projects" competing for a tiny fraction of theater-oriented funding; or as "audience development" initiatives valued for their role in expanding conventional arts audiences by bringing new people into contact with arts work.

The result is a U.S. field that consistently appears atomized and dispersed, with no clear, easily grasped identity. Constantly reinventing arguments to convince funders of the value of their efforts, constantly reframing their work to fit the guidelines of social-service or conventional arts-discipline funders, community artists have been unable to develop adequate infrastructure of the type that legitimates a profession—its own widely accepted standards, journals of theory and practice, training initiatives and funding sources.

Indeed, people in the United States don't even know what to call this category of social action. Around the world, many different names are in simultaneous use. Here are a few of the most common:
Community arts. This is the common term in Britain and most other Anglophone countries. In U.S. English, it is also sometimes used to describe conventional arts activity based in a municipality, such as “the Anytown Arts Council, a community arts agency.” While I use the term “community artists” to describe individuals engaged in this work, to avoid such confusion, I have chosen not to employ the collective term “community arts” to describe the whole enterprise.

Community animation, from the French animation socio-culturelle, is the common term in Francophone countries. There, community artists are known as animateurs. This term was used in much international discussion of such work in the 1970s and sometimes appears in English accounts of the work.

Community-based arts is preferred by some practitioners, who find it sensible to scoop both participatory projects and conventional arts projects about community issues into a single category, united by their common social and political aims. Mat Schwarzman’s definition in his and Keith Knight’s Beginner’s Guide to Community-Based Arts reads this way: “Any form or work of art that emerges from a community and consciously seeks to increase the social, economic and political power of that community.”

Cultural work, a term with roots in panprogressive Popular Front organizing of the 1930s, emphasizes the socially conscious nature of the practice, stressing the role of the artist as cultural worker, countering the tendency to see art-making as a frivolous occupation, a pastime as opposed to important labor.

Participatory arts projects “community residencies,” “artist/community collaborations”—the list of labels is very long. Even though it is a mouthful, I prefer “community cultural development” because it encapsulates the salient characteristics of the work:

• Community acknowledges its participatory nature, which emphasizes collaboration between artists and other community members;

• Cultural indicates the generous concept of culture (rather than, more narrowly, art) and the broad range of tools and forms in use in the field, from aspects of traditional visual- and performing-arts practice to oral-history approaches usually associated with historical research and social studies, to use of high-tech communications media, to elements of activism and community organizing typically seen as part of non-arts social-change campaigns; and

• Development suggests the dynamic nature of cultural action, with its ambitions of conscientization (see Glossary) and empowerment, linking it to other enlightened community development practices, especially those in-
corporating principles of self-development rather than development imposed from above.

In 1987, "community cultural development" became the official label in Australia (generally abbreviated "CCD"). The Australia Arts Council was seen until recently as the national cultural policymaker most committed to community cultural development. But in 2005 and early 2006, the Council recommended cutbacks and other disturbing changes in national funding programs, triggering the formation of an advocacy group, the National Arts and Cultural Alliance (<www.naca.org.au>). NACA has had considerable success in mobilizing community artists and their supporters, securing the continuation of community cultural development funding for 2006. At this writing, the Australia Council is conducting a study of the CCD sector (using a new rubric, "creative communities") as the basis for its future funding, so the longer-term outcome is still uncertain.

Except in Australia, no term has become official or universal. "Community cultural development" is preferred by those who wish to acknowledge the wider meaning and impact of the practice. But whether one says "community-based arts," "community arts" or "community cultural development," someone is sure to respond with a question: "What is that?"

The answer can be complicated. Within the community cultural development field, there is a tremendous range of approach, style, outcome—every aspect of the work. New forms and applications are constantly being invented, so while nothing fixed between two covers could ever be fully inclusive, the balance of this volume provides a more complete description.

CULTURAL RESPONSES TO SOCIAL CONDITIONS

Community cultural development work inevitably responds to current social conditions: the work is grounded in social critique and social imagination. The precise nature of this response always shifts as social circumstances change. As Brazilian educational theorist Paulo Freire wrote in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, every epoch is characterized by "a complex of ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values and challenges in dialectical interaction with their opposites..." This complex forms our "thematic universe," to which contemporary community cultural development work responds.

In the period since the 1960s—the decades that have shaped the current field—these contending forces have been, as Machiavelli put it so elegantly half a millennium ago, “like the hectic fever which, as the doctors tell us, at first is easy to cure though hard to recognize, but in time, if it has not been diagnosed and treated, becomes easy to recognize and hard to cure.”2 Indeed, the issues discussed in this chapter often feel overwhelming to contemplate.

While this complex of issues can be broken into segments to facilitate examination, as I have done below, considering contemporary Western culture as a whole exposes two overarching and countervailing truths addressed by community cultural development. The more complex and commercial the society, the more people experience a loss of agency, a decline in spontaneous connection, a tendency for consumer activities to supplant other social relationships and a strong pull toward isolated pursuits. Yet as these tendencies have come to light, the will to resist them has grown stronger, expressed in countless ways, such as the locally based “slow food” movement, remarkable growth in the popularity of do-it-yourself approaches, burgeoning interest in craft and other traditional cultural practices and a great awakening of the impulse to seek spiritual meaning. The feelings that animate this growing refusal to succumb to corporate values also enspirit those who work for community cultural development.

Global Proliferation of Mass Media

Since the advent of radio, motion pictures and television, penetration of commercial mass-media products around the globe has proceeded at a pace unparalleled in history. In its wake have arisen several disturbing social trends:

- the weakening of traditional multidirectional means of cultural transmission and preservation (e.g., person-to-person sharing of stories) in favor of the unidirectional transmission of mass-produced cultural products such as film, television and recorded music;
- the creation of a global youth market that has broken longstanding patterns of transmission for traditional cultural heritage, often alienating youth from cultural roots and substituting products for an immaterial legacy; and
- the pervasive passivity of consumer culture overtaking live, in-person activities that bring people into the commons and into direct contact with each other, with an attendant decline in the vitality of civil society.

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I do not mean to suggest a simple dichotomy here: commercial culture, bad; traditional culture, good. Social and individual impacts can be quite different. For instance, the United States consumes a quarter of the world’s energy, which keeps me warm and cozy in the winter, but from an environmental perspective, the costs are great. Despite the concerns listed above, I welcome the way technology has brought me easier access to the literature and music of the world, which seems to me an entirely good thing—that we should know more about each other, that we should appreciate each other’s creations. In fact, when it comes to mass media, in the social as in the personal sphere the results have been mixed. Along with the products they exist to sell, commercial cultural industries have indeed sometimes spread liberatory ideas of individual choice and social mobility. As Robert McChesney has pointed out:

Global conglomerates can at times have a progressive impact on culture, especially when they enter nations that had been tightly controlled by corrupt media crony systems (as in much of Latin America) or nations that had significant state censorship over media (as in parts of Asia). 3

Markets don’t respect traditions, which can be both good and bad for culture. Because commercial media have one imperative—to increase profits through expansion of their clientele—their operators view constraints such as cronyism and state control merely as temporary obstacles, glitches in a larger marketing plan. When such obstacles are overcome, the net result is to expose populations to a broader range of news, a wider spectrum of programming suggesting new life possibilities—as well as virtually unlimited opportunity to arouse new needs that can be fed in the marketplace. But the progressive impact of global conglomerates does not extend so far as to incite political change, since transnational corporations, in media as in other fields, are intrinsically conservative, always preferring a stable climate rather than the volatility that leads to rebellion or revolution.

The advent of new media has also softened the distinction between consumption and participation. When I sit in front of a computer interacting with other computer users, am I an active participant in the life of a particular (albeit virtual) community? Or have I merely succumbed to the enchantment of seeing my own words on television? The predominant use of the Internet is for commerce; in comparison, political speech occupies very little space on the World Wide Web. Personally, I have enjoyed being in easy touch with friends and colleagues around the world via the Internet. But whether such personal pleasures will suffice to counteract the soporific social effects of unidirectional

communication will remain unknown for some time. I am skeptical that the impetus for democratic cultural development will naturally flow from television or computers. Without dismissing the genuine cause for hope represented by newer technologies' democratic potential, any provisional judgment should be based on mass media's impacts to date, not their unrealized possibilities. If advocates of free cyberspace prevail, the trend may be reversed; but until then, the channeling of cultural energy into consumer choices is the primary effect of current arrangements. Everything else is a minority interest.

The formidable challenge lies in allowing people a larger, more meaningful choice in relation to commercial culture, as articulated by Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, former Director-General of UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization):

The only pertinent question facing us today is not only of choosing between an outdated past and imitation of the foreign but of making original selections between cultural values which it is vital to safeguard and develop—because they contain the deep-lying secrets of our collective dynamism—and the elements which it is henceforth necessary to abandon—because they put a brake on our facility for critical reflection and innovation. In the same way we must sort out the progressive elements offered by industrial societies, so as only to use those which are adapted to the society of our choice which we are capable of taking over and developing gradually by ourselves and for ourselves.⁴

Because American consumer cultural industries are the main generators of commercial cultural products, many other nations have mobilized to protect themselves from this onslaught from Hollywood. For instance, they have enacted legislation mandating a certain percentage of domestic content on their own airwaves or taxed American product to finance indigenous media development. The imbalance has been remarkable. In part to address it, in October 2005, member states of UNESCO adopted a “Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.” In describing the need for such a convention, France's cultural minister, Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres, was quoted by the BBC as saying: “Hollywood movies account for 85 percent of movie tickets sold around the world. In the United States, only one percent of shown movies come from outside the United States.” The eighth of the Convention's nine objectives speaks directly to this issue: “to reaffirm the sovereign rights of States to maintain, adopt and implement policies and measures that they deem appropriate for the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions in their territory…”

The United States is the point of origin for most of the cultural products that crowd the world’s screens and storefronts. But the same imbalances exist within this country, where there has been only minimal regulation of commercial exploitation of broadcast media and other cultural industries and no organized effort has succeeded in highlighting the need to protect living cultures from the deadening effects of a surfeit of mass media. To the contrary, the U.S. leads a small but vociferous opposition to such protection. For instance among the 191 member states of the United Nations, there were two votes against UNESCO’s 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, the U.S. and Israel, as well as four abstentions, Australia, Nicaragua, Honduras and Liberia.

This is not a new position for the United States. The U.S. role in international discourse concerning the problem of imbalance between American cultural industries and other countries’ has consistently been to dismiss it as no problem at all. The U.S. government waited until 2003 to reverse Ronald Reagan’s 1984 decision to leave UNESCO, the primary international forum for such dialogue. For the nearly two decades the U.S. sat out, official policy was simply to refuse to engage.

On those pre-1984 occasions when an official American voice joined the UNESCO dialogue, it was to reject any “internationally imposed cultural standards or norms limiting, in any way, the rights of individuals. ... Our cultural policy is a policy of freedom,” as articulated by Jean Gerard, United States Ambassador to UNESCO, at the organization’s global cultural policies conference in Mexico City, August 1982. The classic interpretation of this language was provided by French cultural minister Jack Lang at that same conference: “Cultural and artistic creation is today victim of a system of multinational financial domination against which it is necessary to get organized. ... Yes to liberty, but which liberty? The liberty ... of the fox in the henhouse which can devour the defenseless chickens at his pleasure?”

Since these positions were put forward more than two decades ago, global saturation of American commercial media has reached undreamed-of levels, a core component of the complex now referred to as globalization. Again, the phenomenon is also at work within the United States: recognizing that media portrayals will be many people’s chief experience of individuals and communities remarkably different from themselves, rural residents, people of color and members of other cultural minorities consistently complain of their misrepresentation within the mainstream media.

In 2001, Don Adams and I co-edited an anthology of essays on community cultural development by practitioners from around the world. The editorial group for Community, Culture and Globalization included one member each
from the Philippines, South Africa, India and Mexico. Several had never before visited New York City, the site of our editorial meetings. Our work session was planned in the spring, well before the horrific events of September 11th. Even then, people had been extremely anxious about their security: would they be safe from thieves and attackers? Should they take special precautions? “NYPD Blue” occupied space in our visitors’ minds, in the slot where “gritty realism” meets “reality show.” In the event, everyone survived unscathed. But as we walked the streets, our visitors stayed close, replaying the familiar scenes of fear on their inner TV screens.

How many stories have we seen since 9/11 detailing arrests of people whose complexes matched a bystander’s mental profile of “terrorist,” and thus whose innocent overheard phone call or personal conversation seemed to warrant alerting Homeland Security? Across the U.S., how many citizens have had direct, positive experiences with persons of Arab descent sufficient to balance their ubiquitous media portrayals as terrorists?

I would never say that media reality supplants direct experience, but often it creates a context that influences interpretation and experience. As global media penetration increases, that influence grows.

**Mass Migrations**

The social upheavals and violent conflicts of the last century produced an unprecedented flood of refugees and exiles. Certain situations are familiar to consumers of news. For example, the visibility of the Dalai Lama and his celebrity supporters has brought attention to the way Chinese domination has endangered traditional Tibetan culture and to the massive emigration of Tibetans from their homeland. Many less visible crises have contributed to the primary flow of refugees from global South to North. At the beginning of 2005, the United Nations High Commission on Refugees recognized over nine million refugees and more than 19 million “persons of concern” from Darfur to Pakistan, in every world region. The problem has become so monumental and desperate that evacuees from New Orleans after 2005’s Hurricane Katrina protested, “We aren’t refugees, we’re survivors,” fearing that the very word “refugee” carried a fatal charge of indifference.

It is possible to maintain a degree of cultural continuity in diaspora, but eventually, being forcibly uprooted from one’s homeland leads to cultural deracination. My immigrant parents were sent to study Yiddish at the end of each school day, equipping them for fluent conversation with their elders; most of my generation knows few words beyond the common terms that have made their way into the larger culture, such as _kvetich_ and _schlep_. I see the same story
repeated in Chinese and Vietnamese families and among Haitian friends who know only a few words of their parents' Creole. Some grow new roots, but for many, the path of rootlessness leads to anomic, reflected in violence and dropout rates among the young, as this community artist described:

This latest project is the biggest challenge ever.... These newer [Southeast Asian] immigrants—most are refugees and they have a different mind-set [than previous immigrant groups], ... youth violence, high failure rates and a real void in leadership from these communities. So we're trying partnerships with emerging organizations and social-service agencies and trying to find strategies for program development; but all of this is very complex. It raises many issues. It takes work, care, negotiation, leadership skills. Amazing stuff comes out and healing. But I'm putting out fires all the time.

Within the United States, forced internal exile has generated a similar dynamic, especially during the 1960s and 1970s, when urban renewal projects (known to those they displaced as "urban removal") banked on ending poverty and urban blight by demolishing inner-city neighborhoods, forcing the inhabitants to relocate, thus eliminating both the material and immaterial networks that previously sustained local culture. These internal migrations have been further complicated by ongoing transformation of the American cultural landscape through immigration, leading to a resurgent backlash of anti-immigrant feeling.

Around the globe, the last decade has seen an unprecedented upsurge in economic exile in the form of migration, often temporary, from impoverished countries to nations seeking low-cost labor. A friend who recently visited her retired parents in Israel recounted how well these aging friends and family members were cared for by legions of Filipina nurses and maids. In 2001, when I visited Italy for the meeting that originated Community, Culture and Globalization, a Filipina friend and I took an excursion to Como on a free afternoon. After a week of pasta, my friend had a yen for rice. She stood in the town square for a few minutes, scanning for faces that reminded her of home. Looking through her eyes, I saw dozens of young women whose glossy black hair and eyes, whose high cheekbones and flat noses stood out among the Italians doing their weekend shopping. My friend approached one young woman, exchanged a few words in Tagalog, then led us through a chain of alleys to a market stand serving homestyle chicken and rice. A couple of years later, I was invited to a community cultural development conference in Hong Kong. There too, on Sunday the public park was thronged with young Filipinas. Maids' day off, I thought, remembering Como, but as

it turned out, it was the day to protest the government. Hong Kong is in east Asia. Low-paying workers into families on the subcontinent.

[O]ver several major challenges.

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The Environment

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5 Sheila C. Ferrell at <http://pc
it turned out, on that particular Sunday they were using their scarce leisure
time to protest wage cuts imposed on foreign domestics by Hong Kong’s gov-
ernment. More than half of the estimated 250,000 foreign maids working in
Hong Kong in 2005 were from the Philippines, the rest from south and south-
east Asia. It is estimated that nearly one in ten Filipinos works abroad, often at
low-paying domestic jobs that nevertheless channel aggregate billions of dollars
into families back home. As Sheila S. Coronel wrote in her spring 2005 report
on the subject for the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism,

(0)verseas work is the country’s main source of foreign exchange and is a
major driver of the local economy.

The social cost of this in terms of separated families, especially a whole
generation of children growing up without their mothers, is also well known;
it has even been immortalized in popular culture through films like the heart-
trending Anak (Child). The loneliness and homesickness that migrants suffer,
not to mention the discrimination and prejudice they often encounter, cannot
be quantified in monetary terms. Neither can anyone convert in any currency
the pain, longing, and neglect that scar motherless children.5

This is globalization at its starkest: cultural continuity and family values are
treated as expendable as compared to economic benefits in the form of salary
savings to privileged societies employing low-paid foreign workers and, ironically,
to overseas workers’ own societies in the form of wages they send home.

The Environment

While land, air and water are part of the birthright of every human being,
often they are seen less as universal heritage or public trust than as assets to be
managed to the advantage of specific interests (and thus to the disadvantage
of others).

Often the brunt of environmental risk is borne by communities under
great cultural pressure. For example, the Environmental Justice Movement
was conceived at the beginning of the 1990s to address the pervasive practice
of imposing the costs of environmental despoliation on low-income commu-
nities of color: channeling toxic runoff from mining and manufacturing into
the rivers and creeks of their neighborhoods; situating toxic waste dumps
near their homes; spraying the fields where they tend crops, heedless of the
resulting birth defects and incidence of illness; allowing lead paint to persist

in urban housing despite its effects on children's health; and much, much more. The terrible consequences of 2005's Hurricane Katrina on the poorest of New Orleans demonstrates official indifference to the well-being of poor communities.

In these times, the issue is usually framed as economy versus environment. Cultural considerations—what it means to be tied to the land, how language, customs and spiritual grounding are shaped by that connection, the harm it may do to sever such ties—by and large, these concerns have not been heard. Instead, people are asked to consider how much quality of life and health they are willing to sacrifice to keep their jobs or homes. Corporations assert that forcing clean-ups will drive industry away, that environmental regulation's impact on profits will be too dire to be borne. Communities are deeply split by such controversies, with the added irony that often, the debate quickly becomes moot; by the time the dust has settled, the corporate polluter has moved on, leaving its formerly loyal supporters without employment. Mustering the courage and the arsenal of information and skills needed to stand up to such threats often requires a monumental investment of time and resources, pitting David communities against Goliath corporations and government agencies.

One hard-fought and highly visible campaign has focused on India's Narmada River. A people's organization known as Narmada Bachao Andola has organized mass protests against the Indian government's program to dam the river and its tributaries to produce electricity, flooding countless traditional villages and agricultural areas in the process. Civil disobedience has been massive; some protestors drowned as the waters rose, choosing death over leaving their traditional homes. Economic arguments are primary for the dams' advocates, but cultural concerns loom just as large for the people directly affected, as writer Jai Sen recounted in a 2000 essay on the impact of the dams on the tribal peoples affected,

Perhaps most profound of all has been their being uprooted and torn away from their forests and from their river itself, and from the spirits of their ancestors, each of which are key elements of their culture, and then being scattered like this in a virtually treeless and riverless environment, far away from where their spirits dwell. There are some things in life that can never be recovered except by returning, which is what many have now done, to live if necessary higher up on the slopes of their hills the lower reaches of which have now been submerged.

Similarly, communities that have traditionally been sustained by agriculture or resource extraction—mining, timber, fishing—have been hard-hit by

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For "Development projects and the Adivasi: What kind of country do we want India to be?" see the Friends of Narmada website, <www.narmada.org/articles/JAI SEN/whatkind.html>.
the restructuring of those industries. For example, as forests in the global North are logged out by companies with no commitment to sustainable practices, timber harvesting has moved South, where low wages and even weaker environmental regulations ensure greater short-term profit. What becomes of those left behind, whose histories, cultures and identities are tied to the land along with their livelihoods? The conflict between land as life and land as commodity is one of the strongest dichotomies of our thematic universe.

Recognition of Cultural Minorities

Though the consequences have sometimes been troubling, the fact of human diversity and its recognition have transformed our times.

In the United States, recognition of minority cultures as distinct and different in character has grown, reflected in better textbook histories and school curricula, in increased availability of ethnic foods, dress, literature and music and in the proliferation of culturally distinct celebrations, festivals and observances. But at the same time, oppositional feeling and the incidence of persecution—synagogue fires, anti-immigrant legislation, anti-Arab violence, organized white supremacist activity—have become more visible through media exposure.

Recently, domestic reports of persecution have declined. The FBI’s reported domestic hate crimes for the most recent available years dropped overall from a peak of 9,730 in 2001 to 7,649 in 2004. (It is widely accepted that such crimes are underreported, so no one claims that these figures represent all hate crimes, merely the total of those reported to law enforcement agencies.) Crimes against African Americans consistently account for two-thirds of all racially motivated crimes. Within the overall drop were certain contrary trends, such as a nine percent increase in crimes based on race. In its *Annual Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents* released in April 2005, the Anti-Defamation League also reported a 17 percent upturn in anti-Semitic incidents in 2004 after several years of relatively flat numbers. Many recent hate incidents resulted from increasingly aggressive campaigning by white supremacist groups. As diversity increases, scapegoating escalates.

Everywhere, as pointed out by the World Commission on Culture and Development, “people turn to culture as a means of self-definition and mobilization and assert their local cultural values. For the poorest among them, their own values are often the only thing that they can assert.” 7 The cultures of major European and American cities have become immeasurably more vibrant, diverse and lively as a result of such assertions. In many other parts of

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the world, the result has been more mixed, leading simultaneously to greater overall autonomy—as in the key part Islamic culture played in overturning the Shah of Iran—and a corresponding lessening of freedom for individuals who diverge from the presumed cultural consensus—as for those Iranians who resisted adopting the lifeways of fundamentalist Shiite Islam under the Ayatollah Khomeini.

This is a confusing time, offering enough contradictory evidence to feed almost any theory about cultural identity. The embrace of particularism is widening: in the developed world, many people have sought fresh connection with cultural roots that previous generations tried to prune. Johns and Janes are giving birth to Juans and Juanitas, Kwames and Imanis, Yaaccovs and Yaels. In developing countries, indigenous voices are claiming their ways of life, even attaining the highest offices, as with the 2005 election of Aymara coca farmer Evo Morales as president of Bolivia. Increasingly, cultural rights are deemed essential to human rights, a trend that shows no signs of stopping.

Yet even as immigration increases diversity in the global North, it heightens the anxiety of those who wish to preserve the dominance of their own groups. For example, in 2004 and 2005, some American retailers replaced the traditional December greeting of “Merry Christmas” with the more neutral “Happy Holidays” so as not to offend non-Christian shoppers. They became the target of Reverend Jerry Falwell’s “Friend or Foe Christmas Campaign” and the American Family Association’s parallel retail boycott. As William Donohue, president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, said (citing highly questionable statistics), “Ninety-six percent of Americans celebrate Christmas. Spare me the diversity lecture.”

Growing recognition of cultural minorities is a chief characteristic of these times. Indeed, ours has been an era of cultural particularization, marked by what the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes has called “the emergence of cultures as protagonists of history.” The question of whether they are protagonists in a tragedy or triumph is not settled.

“Culture Wars”

Our thematic universe has been shaped by extreme polarization of cultural values. The two main contending camps have been fundamentalism and liberal humanism: on one side has been the desire to eliminate cultural expression that offends received religious and social beliefs; on the other, to promote free expression.

We have witnessed a series of cultural uprisings in which resistance was the driving force, as in the Islamic fundamentalist revolution in Iran. Andres Segovia's piano playing was the emblem of the revolutionaries in Spain, whose democratic government was crushed by the fascists. In the United States, the most recent wave of cultural assertiveness was the rejection of the hegemony of Anglo-American culture and its replacement by cultural expressions of the Mexican and Native American cultures, as well as a growing recognition of cultural rights. The question of whether these new cultural rights are essential to human rights remains open.

In the 2000s, the so-called “Culture Wars” (a term coined by Richard Rorty) have become a focal point of public debate. The debate has been centered on the issue of multiculturalism and the rights of cultural minorities. The debate has been characterized by a polarization of cultural values, with one side advocating for the elimination of cultural expression that is deemed offensive to religious and social beliefs, and the other side advocating for the promotion of free expression.

In 1985, the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes wrote that “the emergence of cultures as protagonists of history.” This statement reflects the growing recognition of cultural minorities as a chief characteristic of these times. Indeed, ours has been an era of cultural particularization, marked by the demand for cultural expression that offends received religious and social beliefs. The debate continues to be characterized by a polarization of cultural values, with one side advocating for the elimination of cultural expression that is deemed offensive to religious and social beliefs, and the other side advocating for the promotion of free expression.
free expression of divergent views.

We have seen countless manifestations, from the burning of books in revolutionary Iran to the hue and outcry over witchcraft in the Harry Potter series of children’s stories. In the United States, there has been an unending stream of controversy over works of art that are perceived as dangerous when viewed from the fundamentalist camp: Robert Mapplethorpe’s sexual images, Andres Serrano’s and Chris Ofili’s religious ones, Marlon Riggs’ challenging transgressions of racial and sexual taboos. In 2005, a main U.S. battlefield was the debate between those who wish to teach “Intelligent Design” (i.e., creationism) in schools as an equivalent to the study of evolution, a campaign supported by religious fundamentalists and just as vigorously opposed by liberal humanists. By now, such controversies seem to be fixtures of the zeitgeist: wherever expressive freedom is asserted, a counter-assertion of disapproval is sure to claim a higher authority.

In the community cultural development field, skirmishes in the “culture wars” (Pat Buchanan’s rubric from a 1992 speech has become the label of choice across the political spectrum) have most often arisen around works of public art. Consider Los Angeles’ Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC), one of the oldest and most accomplished community mural groups in the United States. SPARC has repeatedly mobilized its allies to protect its work, often with success. For instance, former Los Angeles Mayor Riordan’s “zero tolerance” crime-fighting campaign of in the late 1990s led police to demand the obliteration of alternative history murals in communities of color. Claiming that portrayals of past rebellion would inspire fresh revolt, police singled out such images as a Black Panther and a mestizo from the Mexican Revolution.

In 2005, “Save Our State” (SOS), a group opposing illegal immigration, demanded the alteration of “Danzas Indígenas” (“Indigenous Dances”), a Metro station monument in Baldwin Park created thirteen years earlier by SPARC’s director Judith F. Baca, using an extensive process of public dialogue with the support and approval of the City. SOS condemned multilingual, multicultural messages from local residents that were part of the monument. As Baca described it in her May 2005 artist’s statement,

The work is not a work of a lone artist working without relationship to the community, but rather a representation of community sensibilities and sentiment of the time. While this group has cast the artwork as part of a “Reconquista movement,” it is in fact neither advocating for the return of California to Mexico, nor wishing that Anglos had never come to this land. This statement [incorporated into the monument] “it was better before they came” was
deliberately ambiguous. About which “they” is the anonymous voice speaking? The statement was made by an Anglo local resident who was speaking about Mexicans. The ambiguity of the statement was the point, and is designed to say more about the reader than the speaker—and so it has.

Once again, SPARC launched a counter-campaign that drew passionate opposition to SOS, preserving the monument intact. But each victory requires a fresh mobilization, a huge investment of time and energy merely to protect what already exists.

Even when individual artworks are not especially controversial, there can be an underlying conflict between the assertion of protected public space which is intrinsic to the idea of public art (which Baca has called “sites of public memory”) and encroaching commercialization of public space. In 1998, for instance, an advertising company (subsequently bought out by the huge advertising corporation Clear Channel, which has a virtual monopoly on billboards) won a court ruling that it was unconstitutional for the city of Portland, Oregon, to regulate billboards but not murals, erasing the legal distinction between art and signage. This effectively amounted to a six-year moratorium on exterior murals.
The City tried to «wire» around the court decision by creating a special status for public art whereby the owners of buildings receiving murals would in effect deed the works to the City of Portland, exempting them from sign ordinances. But property owners who don’t want to enter into such a relationship blocked several community murals from the start. Clear Channel, calling the City’s compromise part of a “jihad” against sign companies, pushed its case hard, arguing that local muralists should have no voice in the court proceedings, but in December 2005, muralist Joe Cotter was granted the right to participate in the trial as a “non-aligned third party.” At this writing, the legal outcome is uncertain. But there could hardly be a clearer expression of the conflict between community cultural development values and the rampant commercialization of absolutely everything—a different type of culture war, one that protected public space seems to be losing.

Meanwhile, yet another category of cultural conflict has been surfacing. Looming over issues involving freedom of expression since 2001 has been the United States government’s and its allies’ “War on Terror,” deploying weapons such as the USA Patriot Act to expand government surveillance and otherwise curtail civil liberties. This too has been framed as a “culture war.” In his speeches, President Bush has explained such measures as necessary to op-
pose “Islamic radicalism, militant Jihadism, or Islamo-fascism,” while civil libertarians counter with alarm at the threat of censorship. For example, the American Library Association and other library and bookstore associations have protested against provisions allowing the government unrestricted access to readers’ records (including secret monitoring of library Internet use). Some librarians have taken to shredding records rather than keeping them on hand and available for FBI review. Meanwhile, citizens have repeatedly been cautioned by members of the Bush administration that expressing criticism of the motives and methods of the War in Iraq lends comfort to America’s enemies.

This culture war too is global. Britain responded to terrorist bombings in 2005 by passing new legislation that put much stricter limits on speech, making it a crime to publish anything that “glorifies the commission or preparation (whether in the past, in the future or generally)” of terrorist acts, including “matter from which … members of the public could reasonably be expected to infer that what is being glorified is being glorified as conduct that should be emulated in existing circumstances.” In March 2005, surveying recent developments worldwide, the International Federation of Journalists and the human rights organization Statewatch co-published *Journalism, Civil Liberties and the War on Terrorism*, concluding that:

Having considered the current state of policymaking at national and international level, it is impossible not to conclude that the war on terrorism amounts to a devastating challenge to the global culture of human rights and civil liberties established almost 60 years ago. … [T]he war on terrorism is undermining more than half of the minimum standards in the 1948 UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

For an art exhibit leading up to the 2004 presidential election—“Elect This!”—SPARC asked artists to examine the state of American democracy, speaking through their art to the issues raised in the election. At a discussion held in conjunction with the exhibit, SPARC’s director told the assembled that she had been cautioned against sponsoring such an exhibit: in the midst of the War on Terror, friends feared it might endanger her nonprofit organization. In this climate, the risk of self-censorship is perhaps greater than that imposed by the state. That it is being counseled so vigorously and also vigorously resisted are both characteristic of our thematic universe.

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9 Aidan White and Ben Hayes, *Journalism, Civil Liberties and The War on Terrorism*, International Federation of Journalists, 2005, p. 56.
Development

"Development" is a prickly concept. In the 1960s, the rubric "underdevelopment" came into use to describe regions suffering the after-effects of colonial domination: poor infrastructure, inadequate economic opportunity, weak educational systems. Colonial powers had used countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America as repositories for raw materials and low-cost labor, extracting their vital natural and human resources to sustain colonizers' own standing in world trade and politics. The pejorative cast of this term led to a change in nomenclature from "underdeveloped" to "developed" and "developing" nations, hopefully marking the poorest nations less as left behind than as works in progress. But not all have been helped or allowed to progress, and in recent years, "least-developed countries" has come into use as a more accurate designation for some nations.

No matter what terms are used, the underlying questions are still the same: what does development mean? How is it judged and measured? Who decides? For most of the 20th century, the primary yardstick was economic, and the standard toward which nations were developing was that of the industrialized countries of North America and Europe. To develop meant to acquire manufacturing capacity, including the needed telecommunications and energy apparatus, to produce the needed skilled workers, to establish markets for manufactured goods and thus to map out a trajectory of ongoing, self-sustaining economic growth. As progress was made toward these aims, social development would also rise, reflected in higher literacy rates, life span and household income.

The United Nations uses a "Human Development Index" to rank nations' position on a matrix involving Gross Domestic Product per capita, life expectancy and several indicators of literacy and education. Its 2005 report indicated that the Index continues to rise in most regions while falling in sub-Saharan Africa and the former Soviet regions. The ten lowest ranked on the Index are former colonies in Africa; nine of the ten highest are in Europe and North America (the tenth is Australia).

For decades, the principal actors financing development—agencies like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund—promoted a highly economistic definition of development, with results decidedly mixed for those nations and regions perceived to be developing. Assistance often came in the form of loans that could never be repaid, sometimes because the funds were misspent by corrupt authorities, sometimes because investment was insufficient to reverse crushing poverty. In the 1980s, lending agencies began to
impose “structural adjustment programs” calling for huge cuts in public welfare spending, stressing export and resource extraction (which did nothing to strengthen local economic capacity) and requiring initiatives to attract multinational investors. Thus, programs that were ostensibly devised to stimulate positive development exacerbated underdevelopment. The classic illustration depicts farmers who used to raise their families’ food facing a terrible dilemma: cashing out the coffee or sugar they now grow for export to buy expensive imported food for their own tables, a net loss in so many ways.

There are signs of change. In June 2005, G8 finance ministers (i.e., Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States) agreed to forgive US$40 billion of debt owed by 18 countries to the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the African Development Fund. Other international bodies have responded as well. UNESCO’s current position on development asserts the critical, central role of culture in changing notions of development:

Development models produced since the 1970s have clearly failed, despite constant revision, to live up to the expectations they raised. Some would claim that this is because development has itself been defined far too exclusively in terms of tangibles, such as dams, factories, houses, food and water, although these are undeniably vital goods. UNESCO defends the case of indivisibility of culture and development, understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means of achieving a satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence. This development may be defined as that set of capacities that allows groups, communities and nations to define their futures in an integrated manner.10

Precisely the same integral view—that tangible development and cultural development are integral and inseparable—pertains to community development within nations. As Dee Davis, Executive director of the Center for Rural Strategies in Whitesburg, Kentucky, observed in his essay “Why no ‘Marshall Plan’ for America’s rural areas?”:

Of the 250 poorest counties in the United States, 244 are rural. Rural households average 27 percent less in earnings than their metropolitan counterparts, and the poverty rate is 21 percent higher. The suicide rate for males over 15 is 80 percent higher, and the rate of alcohol and drug abuse is significantly higher among rural young people. Rural eighth-graders are 104 percent like-

10 From the introduction to UNESCO’s Culture and Development portal: go to <http://portal.unesco.org/culture> and click on “Culture and Development.”
lier to use amphetamines and 83 percent likelier to use crack cocaine than
their peers in metropolitan areas.

Rural residents are more likely to be victims of violence than urban
Americans. Rural areas have just half the number of physicians per capita,
and rural school spending is 25 percent less per pupil. Forty percent of the
rural population has no access to public transportation, even though half of
the rural poor do not have automobiles to get them to work or to the doctor.

These conditions exist for a significant number of Americans. There are
more rural Americans than Iraqis. The 56 million people who live in rural
America, if counted separately, would rank as the world’s 23rd largest nation,
just behind France, Italy and Great Britain. Yet as a nation, we find difficulty
acknowledging that the challenges rural Americans face are national chal-
enges, let alone national priorities on a par with rebuilding the infrastructure
in Iraq.11

In rural communities and depressed inner cities, domestic community
development programs have given as little consideration to culture as the World
Bank at its worst. As UNESCO’s policy statement implies, the driving ques-
tion is self-determination. When integrated development is properly under-
stood as “that set of capacities that allows groups, communities and nations
to define their futures in an integrated manner,” it becomes inarguable that
development must grow from dialogue and collaboration. The clash between
those who desire this collaboration and those who see their own interests as
coming first is one of the sharpest in our thematic universe.

Globalization and Privatization

Many of these conditions can be understood as phenomena of globalization,
the increasing irrelevance of national boundaries and interdependence of
worldwide trade, capital and population. While some have gained from the
forces of globalization, many have lost:

Over a billion poor people have been largely bypassed by the globalization of
cultural processes. Involuntary poverty and exclusion are unmitigated evils.
... [A]ll too often in the process of development, it is the poor who shoulder
the heaviest burden. It is economic growth itself that interferes with human
and cultural development. In the transition from subsistence-oriented agri-
culture to commercial agriculture, poor women and children are sometimes
hit hardest. In the transition from a traditional society, in which the extended

11 On the Center’s website at: <www.ruralstrategies.org/issues/marshallplan.html>
family takes care of its members who suffer misfortunes, to a market society, in which the community has not yet taken on responsibility for the victims of the competitive struggle, the fate of these victims can be cruel. In the transition from rural patron-client relationships to relations based on the cash nexus, the poor suffer by losing one type of support without gaining another. In the transition from an agricultural to an industrial society, the majority of rural people are neglected by the public authorities in favour of the urban population. In the transitions that we are now witnessing from centrally planned to market-oriented economies and from autocracies to democracies, inflation, mass unemployment, growing poverty, alienation and new crimes have to be confronted.

As a result of accelerated change, the impact of Western culture, mass communications, rapid population growth, urbanization, the break-up of the traditional village and of the extended family, traditional cultures (often orally transmitted) have been disrupted. Cultures are not monolithic and the elite culture, often geared to global culture, tends to exclude the poor and powerless.

Globalization's most obvious impacts have limited the ability of the poor and excluded to earn decent livelihoods. But advanced development thinkers such as the economist Amartya Sen have made it clear that impoverishment and exclusion are not matters merely of economic power. It is well-established, for instance, that life expectancy and health do not correlate neatly with per capita income: the citizens of Kerala, in India, have higher literacy rates and longer life expectancies than inner-city African-American men, whose average income is substantially higher. Sen's Nobel Prize-winning work on the causes of famine demonstrated that free access to communications media is a most effective way to prevent such human disasters, because an informed population will be able to learn and therefore address the causes of food shortage, almost always a problem of distribution (i.e., caused by political corruption or market abuses) rather than one of supply.

Yet the forces driving globalization are preeminently, almost exclusively, economic: the push to open new markets and to consolidate and dominate those that have been established. Every element of globalization has this dual aspect: while new information technologies hold great promise to increase communication around the globe and thus expand cooperation toward greater freedom, for instance, their distribution is determined largely by market forces, creating a growing digital divide between haves and have-nots.

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12 Our Creative Diversity, p. 30.
In this climate of inequality, the question of how to distribute social goods so as to advance the aims of global inclusion—among them, freedom of expression and association and the right to culture, with all it implies—are not on the agendas of transnational corporations. Indeed, the global trend is toward privatization, with formerly public responsibilities devolving to the private sector, following the American model. As the late C. Wright Mills pointed out, the problem is treating the “public issues of social structure” as if they were “personal troubles of milieu.” Every day we see public issues treated as personal troubles, as when young people struggling with urban poverty slip into illegal activity to help support their families and society’s response is to condemn them for criminality and throw away the key. For those who benefit from the status quo, dismissing public issues as private troubles has been a winning strategy with intractable consequences for the rest of us. As Mills wrote forty years ago in *The Sociological Imagination*:

In so far as an economy is so arranged that slumps occur, the problem of unemployment becomes incapable of personal solution. In so far as war is inherent in the nation-state system and in the uneven industrialization of the world, the ordinary individual in his restricted milieu will be powerless—with or without psychiatric aid—to solve the troubles this system or lack of system imposes upon him. In so far as the family as an institution turns women into darling little slaves and men into their chief providers and unwaged dependents, the problem of a satisfactory marriage remains incapable of purely private solution. In so far as the overdeveloped megalopolis and the overdeveloped automobile are built-in features of the overdeveloped society, the issues of urban living will not be solved by personal ingenuity and private wealth.\(^4\)

Weakened public sectors seldom demonstrate the will or ability to effectively address problems of social inclusion, despite considerable popular sentiment in favor, as demonstrated by the vocal opposition to globalization-as-usual that surfaced with the November 1999 World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle and has continued with each subsequent meeting around the world. In large part, it has been left to the third sector of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), religious organizations, foundations and unions to seek a balance between the private pursuit of profit and the public good. Yet the complex point is frequently made that the transnational anti-globalization alliances that have become so visible in recent years would not be so strong and vibrant—would perhaps not exist—without the globalization of communications.

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It appears that globalization cannot be stopped nor, given its positive effects, do many people wish the increasing interrelatedness of the world's people could be undone. Whatever else it is reputed to breed, familiarity seems to engender awareness and often, caring. Yet we have no indication that globalization will somehow bring about the reversal of its own destructive effects or even the amelioration of such effects. Rather, this would require us to exert powerful countervailing pressure, demanding pluralism, participation and equity. As Indian writer and activist Arundhati Roy has said, the response to globalization begins with awareness:

Mass resistance movements, individual activists, journalists, artists, and filmmakers have come together to strip Empire of its sheen. They have connected the dots, turned cash-flow charts and boardroom speeches into real stories about real people and real despair. They have shown how the neo-liberal project has cost people their homes, their land, their jobs, their liberty, their dignity. They have made the intangible tangible. The once seemingly incorporeal enemy is now corporeal.

This is a huge victory. It was forged by the coming together of disparate political groups, with a variety of strategies. But they all recognized that the target of their anger, their activism, and their doggedness is the same. This was the beginning of real globalization. The globalization of dissent.\(^{15}\)

Community cultural development efforts constitute one such response, making democratic counterforces of many of the same arts and media tools elsewhere used to promote global saturation of commercial culture.

CHAPTER 2

Unifying Principles

Over time, practitioners of community cultural development have adopted certain key principles to guide their work. There is no universal declaration or manifesto. Rather, each of these seven points has been given a multitude of different expressions in practice.

1: Active participation in cultural life is an essential goal of community cultural development.

2: Diversity is a social asset, part of the cultural commonwealth, requiring protection and nourishment.

3: All cultures are essentially equal and society should not promote any one as superior to the others.

4: Culture is an effective crucible for social transformation, one that can be less polarizing and create deeper connections than other social-change arenas.

5: Cultural expression is a means of emancipation, not the primary end in itself; the process is as important as the product.

6: Culture is a dynamic, protean whole and there is no value in creating artificial boundaries within it.

7: Artists have roles as agents of transformation that are more socially valuable than mainstream art world roles—and certainly equal in legitimacy.
1) Active participation in cultural life is an essential goal of community cultural development.

Authentic citizenship requires action: social intercourse, forthright exchanges on the subjects that matter most to us and to our societies, satisfying experiences of working together to make things happen. I am convinced that active participation in the life of one's society is a self-evident social and individual good, one that ought to guide every culture that values democracy. But vast numbers of my fellow citizens have opted out, and so I find it necessary to justify this principle.

My own conviction was formed in the 1960s through reading writers like Paul Goodman who took citizenship seriously. This is from the preface to his 1962 book of essays, *Utopian Essays and Practical Proposals*:

The idea of Jeffersonian democracy is to educate its people to govern by giving them initiative to run things, by multiplying sources of responsibility, by encouraging dissent. This has the beautiful moral advantage that a man can be excellent in his own way without feeling special, can rule without ambition and follow without inferiority. Through the decades, it should have been the effort of our institutions to adapt this idea to ever-changing technical and social conditions. Instead, as if by dark design, our present institutions conspire to make people inexpert, mystified, and slavish.¹

What would Goodman make of Americans' pervasive sense of being overwhelmed by events and information? Of the widespread desire, as one friend described it to me, "to stick my fingers in my ears and sing la-la-la until it all stops"? I imagine he'd describe it much as he did forty years ago in his essay "The Psychology of Being Powerless," which first appeared in the *New York Review of Books* in 1966:

People believe that the great background conditions of modern life are beyond our power to influence. The proliferation of technology is autonomous and cannot be checked. The galloping urbanization is going to gallop on. Our over-centralized administration, both of things and men, is impossibly cumbersome and costly, but we cannot cut it down to size. These are inevitable tendencies of history. More dramatic inevitabilities are the explosions, the scientific explosion, and the population explosion. And there are more literal explosions, the dynamite accumulating in the slums of a thousand cities and

the accumulating stockpiles of nuclear bombs in nations great and small. The psychology, in brief, is that history is out of control.

But the degree to which the phenomenon has deepened over four decades might be hard for Goodman to credit. He wrote about television, but he did not know, as we do now, that the logical end-point of consumer culture is the "couch potato," the individual who has succumbed to the virtual existence available via remote-controlled television, eschewing the flesh-and-blood contact of social intercourse and direct participation in community life. By definition, mass media substitute vicarious exposure for actual experience: instead of sitting in the bleachers, you watch the instant replay in the comfort of your own living room, cheering your team and heaping abuse on an inch-high unhearing referee on the other side of your TV screen. Instead of sorting through the multiple layers of information one derives from real-life encounters, deciding for oneself what to treat as figure and what as ground, the couch potato orders from a limited menu cooked up by TV programmers and advertisers, with all information predigested for ease of consumption.

Could Goodman have imagined the now-ubiquitous sight of a child hunched over a small box, jabbing his thumbs at it hour after concentrated hour? Since Goodman's time, a limited type of interactivity has been built into entertainment media to keep consumers engaged past the point they might have grown bored with merely watching. Among the most common problems addressed by child development specialists and other advice-givers in the industrialized world today is how to cure kids' addiction to video games. "I can't get him to look at me or talk to me," the parent complains, "he doesn't do his homework or play outside anymore. He just presses those keys all day." The National Institute on Media and The Family website <www.mediafamily.org> lists these symptoms of video game addiction:

For children:
- Most of non-school hours are spent on the computer or playing video games.
- Falling asleep in school.
- Not keeping up with assignments.
- Worsening grades.
- Lying about computer or video game use.
- Choosing to use the computer or play video games, rather than see friends.
- Dropping out of other social groups (clubs or sports).
- Irritable when not playing a video game or on the computer.
For adults:

- Computer or video game use is characterized by intense feelings of pleasure and guilt.
- Obsessing and pre-occupied about being on the computer, even when not connected.
- Hours playing video games or on the computer increasing, seriously disrupting family, social or even work life.
- Lying about computer or video game use.
- Experience feelings of withdrawal, anger, or depression when not on the computer or involved with their video game.
- May incur large phone or credit bills for on-line services.
- Can't control computer or video game use.
- Fantasy life on-line replaces emotional life with partner.

Entertainment is a fine thing, necessary and delightful leavening for existence. But a core point of critique in the community cultural development field is that an excess of such passivity is antithetical to civil society. The muscles of cultural participation atrophy with chronic underuse, leaving a population in thrall to urgent-sounding messages beamed over the airwaves.

Viewed globally, it makes no difference whether such social passivity is promoted in aid of selling products or inculcating an official worldview. As Hans Magnus Enzensberger has written, it

...is essentially the same all over the world, no matter how the industry is operated. ... The mind industry's main business and concern is not to sell its product; it is to "sell" the existing order, to perpetuate the prevailing pattern of man's domination by man, no matter who runs the society and no matter by what means.  

But however diligently the mind industry husband its crop of couch potatoes, the harvest is always smaller than hoped. Human resilience and ingenuity cannot be undone by television broadcasts, as demonstrated by the many ways artists and activists have employed television imagery to subvert the aims of advertising. Indeed, computer-based media have begun to blur the boundary between passive consumption and active participation.

There is already an impressive body of evidence hinting at the interactive potential of such technologies, from their use by insurgent movements like the Zapatistas to the sort of interactive portrait of a people typified by the “place

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for collective memory and cultural exchange” of the Kurds created by photographer Susan Meiselas at her website <www.akakurdistan.com>, to the way minority cultures have used computers to maintain a sense of present-time community in diaspora, as demonstrated, for example, by the Overseas Filipino Workers Online website <www.theofwonline.com>, each page headed by the slogan, “Bridging the gap to bring us all closer.”

Still, there is a huge chasm between these technologies’ potential for interactive, multidirectional communication and the massive and dulling social impacts of the actual existing broadcast media. More than seventy years ago, with newborn awareness of the power of electronic communications media, Bertolt Brecht wrote:

Radio must be changed from a means of distribution to a means of communication. Radio would be the most wonderful means of communications imaginable in public life ... if it were capable not only of transmitting but of receiving, of allowing the listener not only to hear but to speak and did not isolate him but brought him into contact.³

Enzensberger makes the point that this presents not a technical difficulty, but a failure of social will:

[E]very transistor radio is, by the nature of its construction, at the same time a potential transmitter; it can interact with other receivers by circuit reversal. The development from a mere distribution medium to a communications medium is technically not a problem. It is consciously prevented for understandable political reasons.⁴

With computers’ interactivity, we now have the means for communication rather than mere distribution, and for some people, this has opened the floodgates of social imagination and democratic creativity. Yet considered as a whole, most of the Internet is used to distribute commercial messages, and most of its interactivity consists of clicking “Buy now!” The remarkable democratizing potential of the media is so little developed, and the forces exploiting the media for commercial ends are so powerful, that it is naive to suggest (as some cultural studies theorists have done) that the system can be effectively overturned by the individual agency of its consumers, deploying their power to concoct contrary meanings in their own minds. Nevertheless,

there is hope in new media, hope that they can be turned to genuinely multi-directional and interactive ends.

In using those new media and in promoting initiative, creativity, self-directed and cooperative expression through other cultural forms, community cultural development practitioners hope to shatter a media-induced trance, assisting community members in awakening to and pursuing their own legitimate aspirations for social autonomy and recognition. That requires active participation, getting up off the couch and interacting with fellow citizens. I'd like to think it was self-evident.

2) Diversity is a social asset, part of the cultural commonwealth, requiring protection and nourishment.

As movements for civil rights and equality in society have gained momentum, on a parallel track, diversity has been problematized, with one widespread line of opinion suggesting that if people just downplayed their differences, we would all get along much better.

Even some thinkers who recognize and value cultural diversity have come to advocate a laissez-faire model of cultural interaction, one that counsels us to relax and enjoy consumer culture. Consider this passage from “The Case for Cultural Contamination,” an essay by Kwame Anthony Appiah appearing in the New York Times Magazine on New Year’s Day 2006:

“When people talk of the homogeneity produced by globalization, what they are talking about is this: Even here, the villagers will have radios (though the language will be local); you will be able to get a discussion going about Ronaldo, Mike Tyson or Tupac; and you will probably be able to find a bottle of Guinness or Coca-Cola (as well as of Star or Club, Ghana’s own fine lagers). But has access to these things made the place more homogeneous or less? And what can you tell about people’s souls from the fact that they drink Coca-Cola?

Despite such voices, in some important places, diversity has increasingly been valued, as has the need for protection against the onslaught of mass commercial cultural products. This is effectively illustrated by UNESCO’s 2005 cultural diversity convention. It elaborates on principles put forward in the “Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity,” adopted in November 2001. Article 1 asserts that cultural diversity is the common heritage of humanity, explaining
Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations.

This is an exciting and new point: that humanity’s heritage and glory is the diversity of cultures itself, that the point is not the particular achievements of any individual or society, however beautiful or remarkable, but the whole colorful, generative, constantly-renewing complex of cultures. This awareness is the big news of our era, still sinking in. This understanding in no way diminishes any artist or creative work; to the contrary, it is a majestic truth that enhances the meaning of all creative expressions.

Community cultural development practice is predicated on this very different paradigm—that what is needed is not a masking of real differences, but understanding, appreciation and respect for them, as this community artist suggested:

An issue that remains completely unresolved is race relations—interracial and intercultural issues. So many schisms in this country have to be addressed and art is a useful platform to address and find solutions to these dilemmas. Cultural programs are great mechanisms to articulate problems and to seek alternative solutions. The mainstream art world is in denial about these national crises; and many alternative organizations need ... help ... so they can develop networks, exchange information, find new ways to create work.

Community artists’ investigations of cultural difference often reveal deep commonalities within diversity: every culture has ways, however distinct, of encountering the universal in human experience from birth to death, and many of these resonate across cultural barriers. But grasping such commonality always begins by encountering difference—whether based in place, ethnicity, age, orientation or other life condition—and framing it as something to treasure.

We [who live in the United States] have a unique opportunity as a country to show how diverse people can live in a global culture. We have more cultural diversity than any other country. To be civilized in the next century, we need to learn to deal with other cultures.
3) All cultures are essentially equal and society should not promote any one as superior to the others.

The “right to culture” is an artifact of the 20th century, established through the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the foundational text for all subsequent articulations of cultural rights: “Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community.”

While this statement may seem unobjectionable at first glance, it has far-reaching and controversial implications, as was pointed out in 1970 by René Maheu, then Director-General of UNESCO:

It is not certain that the full significance of this text, proclaiming a new human right, the right to culture, was entirely appreciated at the time. If everyone, as an essential part of his dignity as a man, has the right to share in the cultural heritage and cultural activities of the community—or rather of the different communities to which men belong (and that of course includes the ultimate community—mankind)—it follows that the authorities responsible for these communities have a duty, so far as their resources permit, to provide him with the means for such participation. ... Everyone, accordingly, has the right to culture, as he has the right to education and the right to work. ... This is the basis and first purpose of cultural policy.5

Two objections to the essential equality of cultures seem to be evergreen. Elitists protest that the achievements of cultures they see as preeminent should not be on the same plane with those they dismiss. In what sense can there be equality, they ask, between the culture that produced Shakespeare and the crude artifacts of some least-developed country? At the same time, progressives ask whether apartheid or other racist ideologies ought to be respected and granted the same scope and autonomy as cultures asserting universal human rights. Aren’t there good and bad cultures?

From what perspective are such questions asked? There is nothing in the overarching principle of equality to deprive any individual of the right to make value judgments, to render aesthetic judgments, to prefer the expressions of one culture over another. But should the right to judge be granted to states? Which of us would wish it to be in someone else’s power to rank the cultures of the world, assigning each its proper measure of respect and support? From that perspective, such questions are red herrings.

5 Augustin Girard, Cultural Development: Experience and Policies, UNESCO, 1972, pp. 139-140.
How is Shakespeare diminished by the ghazals of Hafiz or folktales from Mindinao? It is hard to see what injury inheres in treating cultures evenhandedly, for instance by extending the same copyright protections to all publications or by making a municipal theater space equally available and accessible to symphony orchestras and jazz ensembles. But it is easy to see the inherent slight in allocating the lion’s share of grant funds for music to symphony orchestras while expecting a community chorus to get by on bake sales; or in awarding medals and prizes to master sculptors while master basket-weavers collect food stamps.

Neither does prizing diversity cancel human rights. The nations of the world have the means and ability to assert the basic commitments of human dignity and challenge each other to live up to them. In Article 4, “Human rights as guarantees of cultural diversity,” the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity states:

The defence of cultural diversity is an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity. It implies a commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the rights of persons belonging to minorities and those of indigenous peoples. No one may invoke cultural diversity to infringe upon human rights guaranteed by international law, nor to limit their scope.

The limits of cultural diversity are set in place by international law’s guarantees of human rights; no one—not apartheid, nor National Socialism nor any of their contemporary counterparts—has the right to transgress these in the name of free expression.

A tenet of community cultural development practice has been to demand public space, support and recognition for the right of excluded communities to assert their place in cultural life, to give expression to their own cultural values and histories. In the decades since the onset of the mid–20th century domestic civil rights movements in the United States, much of this activity has centered on the struggle for recognition of minority cultures and for evenhanded treatment of those cultures’ expressions in art and community life. Above all, it asserts René Maheu’s point that the right to participate in the cultural life of the community carries the “duty, so far as their resources permit, to provide…the means for such participation.”
4) Culture is an effective crucible for social transformation, one that can be less polarizing and create deeper connections than other social-change arenas.

Marxists used to speak in terms of “base” and “superstructure”; community organizers often distinguish between “hard” and “soft” issues; and in the electoral arena, it has often been a commonplace that voters will be moved more by money than by meaning (which was why “It’s the economy, stupid!” was the watchword of Bill Clinton’s first campaign for U.S. president). But things are changing. Even in mainstream politics, we see signs that culture is beginning to be recognized as a significant factor. In the American elections of 2004, for example, pundits discovered “values voters,” seeming to take in for the first time that many citizens vote for the candidates most nearly reflecting the bedrock values they cherish.

Whether the topic is money or values, though, the dominant model of discourse is almost always a contest between fixed positions, the kind of irreconcilable point-counterpoint that television loves: a tennis match with words instead of racquets. In meetings and debates, on op-ed pages and in blogs, people rehearse intractable differences, rarely discovering a mutual meeting-place.

Many community artists see another way. In practice, people speaking a cultural vocabulary—describing the social values that animate their communities, explaining how they mark and honor milestones in the lives of individuals and in their joint histories, telling true stories of lived realities—can sometimes reach a point of mutual comprehension seldom achieved through conventional debates over “hard” issues.

Here’s how Michael Rohd, artistic director of Portland Oregon—based Sojourn Theatre, put it in a June 2005 panel discussion on his company’s “Witness Our Schools” project, a two-and-one-half-year-long project designed to stimulate face-to-face dialogues on public schools. The performance incorporated the words of teachers, parents, students, politicians from every location and every perspective, taken from more than 500 interviews:

If you’re going to make a show that opens a space for dialogue, you don’t want homogeneous audiences at all those dialogues. Which means you want people from all over the political and ideological spectrum involved from the beginning, so this type of diversity knows it’s not only wanted, not only welcome, but respected. Which is tricky. You have to find groups, and individuals, who are coming from a strong, sometimes extreme point of view maybe different from your own....
We believe that polarization and ideological stalemate, nurtured for political gain, are central to our nation’s inability to move forward on important social justice and economic justice and human rights issues.

Creating a cultural container for dialogue can give people the chance to encounter each other as human beings, to consider before they speak the effect their words may have on the listener, to speak from the heart. Not all differences can be resolved this way, of course. But this path almost always leads to the possibility of a world that can contain real differences without bursting apart at the seams.

Think about it in family terms. Friends of mine told me about a recent visit with strongly conservative relatives who absolutely oppose abortion. After listening to a great deal of anti-reproductive choice rhetoric, my friends pointed out that cousin Mary, laboring to support a too-large family on a too-small budget, had chosen to have an abortion. Would the family shun her? “Of course not!” came the reply. “She felt backed into a corner, she didn’t see any choice—it was Mary, for goodness sake!” Not every family would have responded the same way, of course, but many have found ways to accommodate even profound differences between individuals with known faces, known hearts. This is the condition to which community cultural development-based dialogue aspires.

Among allies, cultural action frequently serves as a form of rehearsal for social change. Perhaps the clearest examples derive from the Forum Theatre practice invented by Augusto Boal (described more fully in Chapter Five: Historical and Theoretical Underpinnings), whereby community members use theatrical techniques to plan, rehearse and refine strategies for action taking place beyond the theater’s doors. The theatrical form invites the whole person into the encounter. Workers contemplating a strike can rehearse what it might be like to confront the boss or to attempt persuading others to join the cause. If anger rises, if tears flow, that foreshadows the anticipated experience much more deeply and fully than a dozen carefully agendized planning meetings. The process reframes possibility, as this forum theater practitioner explains:

I don’t think of politics as being different from theater. We are masks in the world. It’s all about enriching the theatricality of daily life. It’s a huge improv. This understanding really helps people decide how to act in the world. I used to think about politicizing theater and now it’s the theatricalizing of politics. ... We can quickly get to community urges and needs and get to problem-solving. ... This kind of theater is so accessible, so public and it engages everybody, whatever way they want: just to watch, to get involved. It’s real pedagogy, real community learning.
5) Cultural expression is a means of emancipation, not the primary end in itself; the process is as important as the product.

Some community cultural development projects are entirely oriented to process, focusing on transforming participants' consciousness as they discover and express their own cultural values. Others give equal emphasis to outcomes such as the creation of a CD or video. But whereas outcome is everything in many conventional arts approaches—all that ultimately matters is what winds up onstage at curtain time—here, product is not permitted to overdetermine the nature of the project.

In part, this conviction is grounded in the understanding that direct, hands-on participation moves people more than anything else, enlarging their vision of possibility much more immediately than might be achieved through mere observation. Most people have seen this in action, but may not have transposed the learning to the larger social arena. For instance, when a child learns to play an instrument and performs a first, halting solo at a class recital, few of the listeners (other than the parents, perhaps) are likely to be moved by the power of music to alter their own lives. But the life story of almost every professional musician incorporates a moment like this in which the experience of making music, however imperfectly, set the course of a life.

In community cultural development practice, participants' experience of their own creative imaginations and expressions is understood to be intrinsically empowering. What gives the experience the most meaning is ensuring that the project's approach and aims are entirely consonant with the wishes of the participants, as this practitioner describes:

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Everybody brings something to the table and we need to help people figure out what that is, so they can have ownership. ... [T]he arts allow us to imagine how the world could be different. ... Quality involves the project leader's willingness to take risks and create partnerships that don't result in easy dialogues—real border-crossing, and they give a lot of credibility to the ideas participants are bringing into the project and provide a lot of tools to participants, so at the end they can make a space for themselves.

The product/process question is not entirely settled, however. Occasionally, one hears it framed as "community versus quality."

On the grounds that beauty knows no class boundaries—that everyone deserves to experience work created with skill, ambition and intention—some community artists strive for the highest available production values, creating
end products that compare favorably with the work of artists more conventional in approach. From this perspective, to demonstrate that the lives and stories of ordinary people can be the basis for skillfully executed and powerful art works makes a strongly positive social statement. It also recognizes that in the industrialized world, most people are accustomed to dealing with high production values, having so often seen them wrapped around schlocky commercial cultural content. (Alas, the even more challenging skill inherent in this approach—protecting and promoting community participants' equal authorship of a highly skillful artistic result—is often invisible to viewers of the end-product, who may simply assume the work was made by a professional artist.)

In contrast, on grounds rooted in a different sort of class analysis, other community artists reject end products they consider too slickly produced, too aesthetically similar to their art world or commercial counterparts. From this perspective, a homemade or “folk” aesthetic seems most in keeping with community-based work, because it presents no barriers to comprehension, carries no off-putting social codes: community productions should look funky and approachable or else they risk looking intimidating. When the folk or homemade aesthetic is organic to the work—for example, when participants are using vernacular forms to convey new content, as in some of the challenging, issue-oriented altars created in recent decades to make use of and refresh the Mexican celebration of Días de los Muertos/Days of the Dead—it often adds to the power of the resulting work. When it is imposed, it sometimes seems silly or condescending.

The community/quality dichotomy invites posturing and polarization, supported by a thin reed of substance that almost topples under the weight of rhetoric it is made to carry. I see it as a false choice. No one sets out to make bad art. Using whatever means are accessible, most community artists aim to make the products of their process-oriented work as good as they can be, judged by the criteria appropriate to the intention. To consciously execute something with less skill than one actually commands on the grounds that this is good enough for community work—surely the insult inherent in such a decision cancels any democratic intention that might motivate it.

What's more, the dichotomy itself implies a fixed idea of what is good or beautiful, some readymade standard that community cultural development work can either pursue or reject. But many community artists have learned that the quality of engagement alters the quality of result: more striking, effective or beautiful works of art can arise from the process of deep engagement with other community members. What is learned in process deepens our collective understanding of quality as well as community. Choreographer

Liz Lerman summarizes this in her essay “Art and Community: Feeding The Artist, Feeding the Art” in Community, Culture and Globalization:

What happens to the performance ability of a dancer asked to research stories about a time and place, live with these stories over the course of a year, work with people in many settings to aid them in discovering their own stories, perform these stories in a house and on a stage and in a place where the actual events happened? I believe that the accumulation of physical, emotional and historical meaning leads the dancer to a new level of investment and a different understanding of what the movement itself might mean and convey to another person. In a world as abstract as the world of movement, such experiences carry enormous weight.

For me, an excellent dance performance includes the following: the dancers are 100 percent committed to the movement they are doing; they understand why they are doing what they are doing. And something is being revealed in that moment: something about the dancer or about the subject, about the relationship of the dancers or about the world in which we live. Something is revealed. Too many dance concerts lack these elements. When I think about our dance training, I realize how little time and encouragement we receive to develop our skills in finding such meaning in dance.6

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6) Culture is a dynamic, protean whole and there is no value in creating artificial boundaries within it.

The red-carpet arts’ status derives in part from epic efforts at purification and classification, segregating those enterprises deemed to be “high art” from the vulgarity of popular entertainments. Not much more than a century ago, a typical concert in a major American city might feature an operatic aria alongside a comic poetry recital and an instrumental rendition of a piece of Romantic music; most museums exhibited a hodgepodge of painting and sculpture alongside curios and oddities—a piece of petrified wood or a fossil, a two-headed calf. Boundaries were put in place near the turn of the century by tastemakers anxious to shore up elite culture against an onslaught of immigrants. For instance, this argument was asserted by Henry Lee Higginson, 19th century founder of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and a driving force behind purification from the orchestral repertoire of popular entertainments, who exhorted fellow plutocrats to “Educate, and save ourselves and our families and our money from the mob!”

Such distinctions persist today even as postmodern esthetics have clouded them in the arena of advanced art: Damien Hirst’s dead cow preserved behind plexiglass was placed in the category of art because the arrangement and staging of the carcass expressed an artist’s intention, whereas a taxidermist’s staging of a two-headed calf was deemed to express only unfathomable Nature. Among installation artists, it is common to borrow from consumer culture to make statements about high art. For example, Isaac Julien’s 2003 project “Baltimore” unites music and imagery from “blaxploitation” films of the 1970s with depictions of art museums, using visual perspectives “quoting” Italian renaissance painter Piero della Francesca.

Community cultural development practice is marked by an even more expansive willingness to draw on the entire cultural vocabulary of a community, from esoteric crafts to comic books—whatever resonates with community members’ desire to achieve full expression. For example, here’s how former Philippines Educational Theater Association (<www.petatheater.com>) artistic director Maribel Legarda described a project based on the form of a radio talk show:

In 1998, PETA launched a project entitled “Tumawag Kay Libby Manaog” (“Call Libby Manaog”). This production was part of a larger campaign, the National Family Violence Prevention Program (NFVPP). “Libby Manaog” is the story of a radio-show host: many women call her program to talk about their issues. Three women who are experiencing different forms of domes-
tic violence—physical, emotional and sexual—become the main voices that shape the stories. We hear advice from experts such as lawyers, psychiatrists and social workers. The scenes are woven together with songs and dances, and the characters are all performed in a broad acting style with much humor.7

Distinctions between high and low art, commercial and nonprofit, vernacular and elite forms—although their meanings are intensely contested in mainstream art and funding arenas—are essentially irrelevant to community cultural development practice.

7) Artists have roles as agents of transformation that are more socially valuable than mainstream art world roles—and certainly equal in legitimacy.

The proper role of the artist is much debated, almost always focusing on whether the artist should remain an outsider and observer or engage actively in the issues of the day. The mainstream version of this debate is the ongoing controversy over Hollywood activists, whose qualifications to speak out are often questioned, especially by those who disagree with what they say. For community artists, there is no controversy. Without exception, they recognize an obligation to deploy their gifts in service of larger social aims as well as individual awareness and transformation. In fact, from a community cultural development perspective, this is the natural choice. Adopting a more restrictive notion of one's artistic identity and aims indicates a deficiency in understanding, as this commentator explained:

It is unfortunate, but probably true, that the best reaction many North American mainstream artists may hope for is that a painting will sell or a performance piece will be reviewed. This is a less satisfactory response than the attainment of the more ambitious goal of the activist: a profound cultural impact outside of the art world. The question of why many artists settle for less than being understood, and for merely a career, may have something to do with their inability to conceive of themselves in historical terms and therefore to understand the world as a political structure.8

In the more narrowly focused continuing debate between community artists and the arts establishment, the theme has been whether community cultural development practice deserves the label “art” and therefore whether practitioners are worthy of being called artists. The sense is that by choosing to partner with non-artists and by focusing more on institutions of the larger society than on acceptance by or participation in arts institutions, they have wandered too far beyond the conventional boundaries. It’s not clear how much force this argument would have if money weren’t attached; but if one must compete for scarce arts funding in the United States, it is necessary to assert one’s standing as an artist, something community artists have been attempting to do since the 1960s. The trouble is, they don’t want to do it by giving up their larger commitments and settling for the much more narrowly constrained roles conventionally reserved for artists.

One reason longtime community artists have seemed to be winning the argument lately is that other artists working from within the “mainstream” arts world—whose credentials, presuming they have acquired the proper signifiers such as degrees, a gallery or a good theatrical venue, are seldom subject to the same sort of scrutiny—have been adopting elements of community artists’ approaches. For instance, increasing numbers of prestigious gallery artists and well-known performing artists are incorporating the work of non-artists into their productions. One veteran community artist, frustrated by this development, voiced concerns shared by many about the impact of inexperienced, personally ambitious people entering the field:

Funders are not going toward uniquely creative work and now we’re seeing bullshit work by people migrating into the field … without the same heart for the work: they’ll paint at any cost. … You find municipal arts administrators and funders doing their own [public art] processes. They look at successful projects like ours and try to replicate them, but they almost never allow for the flexibility the artist needs: they misunderstand us and leave us our … commissioning more decorative work, with no contact with community people. … What made it really work is the artists and the organizations [like ours] that came from the grassroots.

For community artists, there has been some serendipitous benefit—an ironic sort of coattails effect, considering that it results from art world denizens borrowing community artists’ own methods—in the art world’s recent interest in participatory approaches to art making. But market-driven art thrives on novelty. It is likely that the art world will take another turn and non-collaborative modes of painting, sculpture and playwriting will once
again occupy the anointed cutting edge. When it does, community artists will continue to assert that their work constitutes a valid, meaningful alternative life for the artist. The effort of going against the grain may take a toll, but for most, it is more than balanced by the work’s rewards: delight in discovery, connection and co-creation.
CHAPTER 3

A Matrix of Practice

It would be easy to create a typology of prestige arts projects, because they can be described in terms of end product: plays, ballets, symphony concerts, solo exhibits and so on. But no really accurate and useful typology of community cultural development work can be created. Its crossing of arts discipline boundaries, improvisatory nature, emphasis on process and impact in wider social arenas create too many variables.

Where would you situate the George Moses Horton Project of Chatham County, North Carolina? In 2000 a middle school, a local historical society and many community members joined to honor a 19th century poet who was born into slavery, yet managed to publish extensively and give many readings even while enslaved. Project elements included a play, a poetry competition, a quilting project, a work for chorale and piano, a song cycle and a public art project. Conventional arts categories don’t fit a practice that encompasses such diversity of form and expression. Instead, community cultural development work can best be understood as existing within a matrix of options such as the program models, themes and methods listed below.

PROGRAM MODELS

Potentially, all of the elements described below are compatible. Any of these program models might employ any of the themes and methods outlined. Each
project incorporates a different constellation of such options, shaped by the participants’ desires, their skills and aims and the context—the circumstances and issues—in which they operate.

Structured Learning

Many community cultural development projects are built around learning experiences. Overall, the aim is to transmit arts-related skills while helping to develop critical thinking and establish a clear link between both capabilities—thought leading to action.

For example, Fringe Benefits Theatre <www.cootieshots.org>, based in Los Angeles, conducts “Theatre for Social Justice Residencies” at schools around the U.S. In the 2004-05 school year, they worked with ninth grade students at Animo Venice High School. The year-long program of weekly workshops focused on students connecting past civil rights history to their own present-day realities. Participants were introduced to civil rights issues and movements, highlighting the role of the arts; they read and wrote about their own experiences and took part in theater exercises, particularly Augusto Boal’s

Scene from New WORLD Theater’s “Project 2050 On the Frontlines: Sex, War & Lies.”
Photo: Edward Cohen 2005
techniques (discussed in Chapter Five: Historical and Theoretical Underpinnings); and they interacted with guests from civil rights and arts groups. In the course of the year, participants wrote and presented four interactive plays addressing discrimination as it affects their own school community.

Using a different model, since 2000 the New WORLD Theater <www.umass.edu/fac/nwt/> at the University of Massachusetts has sponsored “Project 2050,” described as:

[A] multiyear exploration of the year when it is projected that people of color will become the majority in the United States. Addressing the issues driven by response to these changing demographics, the project engages professional artists, youth communities, scholars, and community activists in civic dialogue and artistic creation. These creative processes and performances actively create forums for intergenerational, interracial, and cross-cultural dialogues in community and university settings. The project promotes the creative imagining of a near-future when it will become imperative to address issues of race construction, ethnic balkanization, social equity, and power.

Each iteration of Project 2050 results in performances created by the young participants, incorporating elements of contemporary youth culture such as hip-hop dance, music and visual art.

Community-based cultural projects commonly begin with research, most often with participants learning more about their communities. Sometimes participants start with their own direct experience, bringing to awareness and articulating internalized knowledge of their surroundings and neighbors, thereby coming to recognize the wealth of information already in their possession.

But research via introspection eventually reaches its limits. No individual’s experience can stand in for collective reality. Community artists have devised research approaches that are dynamic, interactive and open to wider community involvement. For instance, project participants are often armed with media equipment—cameras, audio and video recording gear, sometimes with colorful props and costumes or portable displays to attract attention—in order to gather observations and stories from family members, neighbors and passers-by. One aim is to acquire information; a second equal and integral aim is to offer members of the community the opportunity to speak their own truths, to play important roles in articulating the collective realities of their community. By pursuing deep learning at every turn, participatory action research of this type ensures that community cultural development projects are grounded in real, local concerns.
Dialogues

When communities are split over contentious issues, community cultural development projects can sometimes create opportunities for dialogue rather than the type of debate that leads to greater polarization. Many different arts media can be used to articulate opposing views in ways that feel fair to the contending parties. Not every conflict has a win-win solution; interests are sometimes genuinely irreconcilable and in the fullness of time, someone must prevail. But if compromise solutions can be found, dialogue that avoids objectification and posturing is essential as a means to that end. Often, the experience of genuine, inclusive dialogue refreshes a sense of possibility, leading to more openings for real exchange.

For example, consider the “Witness Our Schools” project by Sojourn Theatre <www.sojourntheatre.org>, mentioned in the previous chapter. Beginning in March 2004, this multiethnic, multilingual ensemble theater company conducted interviews with students, teachers, administrators, activists and citizens involved in Oregon’s beleaguered public schools. Their aim was to include all voices and all sides of the contemporary education debate in a theater piece to be performed for—and discussed with—community audiences throughout the region. The dialogues were popular and enthusiastic, impressing educators by opening up the possibility of true exchange on issues previously thought intractable. A new round was planned for the following year. Sojourn was asked to take part in a new advisory committee to define a policy for arts in education and in a new visioning process for Portland’s five-year plan, because the company has demonstrated the ability to listen deeply and to reflect what is heard back to the community in a way that advances real dialogue.

Documentation and Distribution

A great deal of community cultural development work is grounded in the desire to unearth realities that have been obscured by suppression, denial or shame. Frequently, projects aim to create some sort of permanent record that can challenge the official story, whether in print, moving-image media or visual arts installation.

who sustained garment manufacturing in the Northwest—shared their personal stories through oral history interviews, video, archival photographs and artifacts such as workplace equipment and clothing. In 2005, as part of its New Dialogues Initiative series, an exhibit entitled “30 Years After the Fall of Saigon” created space for Vietnamese Americans of all ages to cross class and ideological lines in sharing their experiences and opinions of the historic event that precipitated mass migration to America. In contrast to an official view of history that asserts the primacy of a single preferred meaning, the project makes the point that the same events can have very different meanings, even within a cultural community. As Wing Luke’s materials explain:

For many older Vietnamese who experienced firsthand the trauma of war or as political prisoners, April 30th is considered a ‘holocaust day,’ and an occasion to mourn the loss of their country and denounce communism. For many younger Vietnamese Americans, April 30 is also an occasion to reflect on their new homeland and a celebration of their survival and success in America. These differing viewpoints manifest to this day, as two separate events were held on April 30, 2005 in Seattle to observe the anniversary.

Community artists work with other community members to enliven and present such materials in every medium that can be imagined: in publications and exhibitions; in murals; in plays produced for theatrical and nontraditional settings; in documentary or narrative film and video programs; and in computer multimedia.

**Claiming Public Space**

Members of marginalized communities lack public space for their cultural expressions. Speaking concretely, they seldom have institutions, facilities or amenities equal to those available to more prosperous neighborhoods or communities. In terms of virtual space, they are likely to lack equal access to mass communications media and therefore to any meaningful opportunity to balance the sensationaly negative pictures of themselves pervading commercial media. Many community cultural development projects take this as their starting point, aiming to improve the quality of local life by adding self-created amenities to their communities or by building visibility for their concerns.

In the late 1980s, Lily Yeh worked with residents of an inner-city neighborhood to create the Philadelphia-based Village of Arts and Humanities, through which local residents converted empty North Philadelphia lots into
parks and gardens, celebrating their achievements with multi-arts festivals. The Village's immediate neighborhood includes nine parks and gardens and two alleyways featuring murals. Angel Alley includes nine powerful Ethiopian angel icons; Meditation Park was inspired by Chinese gardens, Islamic courtyards and West African architecture; the Vegetable Farm was the first step toward a community sustainable-agriculture project; and the Youth Construction Park, created with a group of young people, features a pair of cement and mosaic lions guarding its front entrance.

In 2005, Yeh's new project, Barefoot Artists <www.barefootartists.org> inaugurated its two-year Rwanda Healing Project, one element of which is the Survivors Village Project, which works with local children to paint murals on housing constructed for survivors of the genocide whose own homes had been destroyed, thereby making this new place their own.

Appalshop <www.appalshop.org> in Whitesburg, Kentucky, is a multi-media arts and education center begun in 1969 with funds from the War on Poverty to finance job creation schemes for young people. The intention was to train Appalachian youth in media skills they would then use to find work in the film and television industries, escaping the poverty of their home region. Instead, the young filmmakers chose to stay home and make their own films, telling true Appalachian stories to counter media stereotyping. Appalshop today has a theater company, a cultural center, a filmmaking and
distribution program, its own TV series and a radio station, among other initiatives. Through its Appalachian Media Institute, succeeding generations of young people from the region have learned to use video cameras and audio equipment to document their communities' traditions and the complex issues they face. The following is an excerpt from AMI participant Natasha Watts' commentary on an early 2006 mine disaster in West Virginia in which a dozen miners, trapped underground, lost their lives:

In West Virginia, the media will leave in a matter of days. Yet the people there will forever feel the effects of this disaster and the ones to come. Some of the losses don't get much attention but they continue to occur. We can hear it in the raspy voices of retired miners with black and rock lung. It's easy to forget how dangerous mining is. To me mining is just something that takes place everyday in the place where I grew up.

Residencies

Long-term community residency models such as the "town artist" approach (discussed in Chapter Five: Historical and Theoretical Underpinnings) have evolved abroad, where public agencies have seen community cultural development work as a legitimate, effective way of advancing their educational and organizing aims. The town artist concept came into being to assist residents of purpose-built new towns in post-World War II Europe to put their own stamp on otherwise anonymous structures and public spaces. In this model, an artist would be employed by public authorities to live and work in a community at the service of the community. David Harding, generally recognized as the first town artist for his work from 1968 on in Glenrothes, Scotland, describes how the role was understood as integral and ongoing:

When I came to Glenrothes, I was employed, as it were, as a civil servant in the town under a contract with retirement at 65. There were doubts about where to place me, and I suggested I should be part of the Planning Department. This was a sensible idea because it meant that I could attend planning meetings and be involved in early discussions with planners about the shape of the town. After a couple of years, I feel an historic decision was made in the town. It was part of the planning briefs which came out of the planning department to the architects and engineers. It contained a clause which said that "the artist should be consulted at every stage of the development." That was an ideal, of course, but it was something that one could fall back on if wanting to make a fuss. I decided to live in a housing project in the town because it was important to experience the kind of environment one was contributing to. I
set up my workshop in the city’s Direct Labour yards. Also, after a couple of years I joined the Builder’s Union because I realized that most of the work was taking place on the building site, and that identifying myself with the men who were working on the building site was politically very important. I tried to create opportunities for the building workers to display their often latent skills by using only the materials of the building site, so much so that many of the works were executed or completed by them.1

Because the United States has seen no equivalent of a local development authority willing to subsidize long-term, open-ended, artist-community relationships, U.S.-based residencies tend to be briefer, more narrowly focused and more outcome-oriented. A typical residency project in the United States would link an artist with a school for a single term or less or subsidize an artist or company to work for a few days, weeks or sometimes months with the clientele of a particular institution (e.g., a senior center) to create a specified product (e.g., a mural), rather than provide for development of ongoing, open-ended, collaborative relationships between artists and other community members.

Glass panel mural at Kawabe Memorial House in Seattle, a collaboration between artist Rene Yung and older residents. Photo © Rene Yung 2005

Nevertheless, some artists and sponsoring groups have been able to find the resources to sustain longer collaborations. “Postcards in Time” was a community-building art project commissioned by the Seattle Office of Arts & Culture Affairs ARTS UP (Artist Residencies Transforming Seattle’s Urban

Places) program, a collaboration between sound, media and visual community artists and the residents of Kawabe Memorial House, publicly funded elder housing in Seattle’s International District. Using images and text culled from extensive interviews with residents, artist Rene Yung created a set of 16 multilingual postcards. For example, one card shows two images of a man’s hand gesturing toward his body, one upturned and the other turned toward the ground. The text by Taek Sang Jung, who was born in Kangwon, Korea, reads, “Everything is different (in America), even gesturing to come.” The postcards were widely distributed; recipients were encouraged to inscribe them with their own experiences, then send them back to the project. Images from the postcards were rendered in architectural glass panels situated in the Kawabe entryway, where visitors could also interact with a listening station offering the elders’ oral histories and their chosen music. At this writing, additional components of the project are in process.

Unfortunately, the resources to sustain ongoing collaborations are scarce. One artist involved in such open-ended community work explained how funders’ lack of commitment to long-term work has put a brake on possibility:

> We know we have a long-term commitment to a community, but we have to say to local people just how far we’re able to commit. … If we made a longer-term commitment and the funds broke down, it would be counterproductive.

**THEMES AND METHODS**

Using many different art forms, community cultural development projects often focus on key themes relevant to community identity and mobilization.

**History**

Official histories reliably leave out many of the most resonant truths of marginalized communities—the reminders that sustain pride and hope. When such things pass from living memory, they deplete the stock of images and ideas from which an imagination of the future is constructed. As John Berger has put it,

> The past is never there waiting to be discovered, to be recognized for exactly what it is. History always constitutes the relation between a present and its past. Consequently fear of the present leads to a mystification of the past. The past is not for
living in; it is a well of conclusions from which we draw in order to act.²

Often, mainstream histories privilege the actions of great heroes and villains along with monumental public events—battles, treaties. A strong through-line in community cultural development practice has been to add human-scale information and meaning to the official record by sharing first-person testimonies and the artifacts of ordinary lives.

Oral histories have formed the basis for countless plays, publications, murals and media productions. The impact of such projects is described by this director of an organization that works with teenagers:

Oral history: now that's really relationship building. It brings the generations together. [An oral history project] was the most amazing project I've worked with. A young person, in their 20s, fresh out of college, interested in the kind of work we're doing, had a group of kids [to train and supervise for project work]; some who'd been hanging out here, flipping rubber bands and not doing much. I saw these kids really change. We gave them pads, tape recorders, cameras and sent them out to gather stories from people in [the neighborhood]. Turned out most of them were from there, though we didn't realize it before. In a very short period, we saw them changed, transformed—from hangers-out to producers of a book, an exhibit, performances. . . Now I'll be talking with them about their goals and ambitions and they'll say, “Maybe I should get into theater” or museum work, or "Could I write a book?" And you must understand these are kids who are struggling with their adjustment to this country, as well as young people trying to figure out what they can do.

In another example, community artist Ellen Frankenstein <www.efclicks.net>, based in Sitka, Alaska, has worked with local young people to create video and still photography projects depicting their experiences for members of the larger community who may otherwise dismiss them as "just kids." No Loitering is a collaboratively created film that intercuts video shot both by teens and the filmmaker, working together to address the dearth of expressive outlets for youth in a community marked by ubiquitous “No Loitering” signs. “Eyes on the Wall” is an ongoing project with local high school students to create archival black-and-white portraits of Alaska Native artists and elders. Students interview as well as photograph their subjects and write their own reflections on the process. In 2005, a selection of the portraits and other project materials traveled to cultural centers throughout Alaska. Project participants describe their goal this way: “to change the ‘eyes on the wall,’ those looking

“No Loitering” is the title of this production about young people’s lives in Sitka, Alaska. Photo: © James Poulson 2000

our at us, to reflect who lives in and leads the community.”

Similarly, rescuing folktales and other storytelling traditions from obscurity has been a way to assert cultural continuity and use the wisdom of heritage to inform choices about how to move forward. Describing her own inspiration to enter the cultural development field, one community artist credited

My abuelitas—grandmothers, great grandmothers—my father. ... They’ve shared their singing and dancing and stories. ... Our sharing of our stories, telling about our joys and fears, telling of how we survive, who we love, how we hate, how we deal with attacks towards our lives, how we celebrate—todos estos cuentos are the secret of our survival as gente. ... We need to tell the real story of our people and rid ourselves of the negative stereotypes. All our lives, through television, newspapers, radio, movies, songs and stories, we’ve been told that ... our community is lazy, dumb and smelly. ... What we don’t hear is the truth and the only way to hear the truth is for each of us to be able to tell our stories. By telling our stories, we challenge stereotypes.

Identity

As wielded by mass media in the United States, cultural identity has long functioned as a blunt instrument, with two main categories—“white middle-
class” and “other.” With growing diversity, there has been greater differentiation, but the categories are still broad: Asian, Latino and so on, each subsuming a multitude of specificities. No one's heritage can be adequately expressed by categories as wide as continents such as Asia or Europe. In actuality, we are Sicilians or Latvians, Punjabis or Tamils, and even within those categories, we have our distinct stories of family heritage and intermarriage, our connection to a particular place on the land or to a particular system of belief or practice, our condition of life informed by class or gender or level of physical ability. You could say I was white, or Euro-American, but what would that reveal about my lived experience? Saying I am first-generation American, the descendant of Russian and Polish Jews fleeing unbearable conditions in the places of their birth—that will get you a few degrees closer, but still very far from particularity that is mine.

Very often, community cultural development projects are predicated on a kind of reclamation work, with participants discovering and claiming their own ethnic, gender and class identities as a way to recast themselves as makers of history rather than its passive objects. Grounded in the specifics of identity, individuals and communities can meet as equals—different and yet the same.

For example, the Shigang Mama Theatre Troupe was an outgrowth of the work of Taiwan's Assignment Theatre, founded by Chung Chiao, with women in a traditional Hakka village devastated by an earthquake. Using techniques devised by Augusto Boal (see Chapter Five: Historical and Theoretical Underpinnings), the women of Shigang and Chung Chiao created their 2003 production, River in the Heart, based on discussions and experiences in a protected workshop setting, enabling them to transcend Hakka taboos about women speaking out. This project surfaced unspoken realities about women's roles in that tightly bounded culture as Ronald E. Smith wrote in his paper on the project:

In the Shigang workshops, Chung Chiao merged together exercises and dialogues that were intended to awaken the Mamas' critical social consciousness and lead them away from their traditional roles as passive, voiceless observers towards becoming active participants for change within the Shigang community.

Here are the play's opening lines, depicting grim reality in poetic, evocative language:
There is a river that flows through my heart
I remember, I shall never forget
In those days, youth accompanied me
My eyes are like the first glimmering of light
I am awake in a meadow
My dreams are waiting for the serene cool nights
Leaves shine like the stars in the sky
Time and youth pass by,
Same for all the women of this world,
They light a candle by exhausting their bodies. 3

Cultural Infrastructure

Marginalized communities lack cultural infrastructure as surely as they lack economic infrastructure. Just as economic development aims to stimulate the flow of capital and goods within a community and between it and other sources of prosperity, community cultural development aims to stimulate the flow of cultural information and resources. One way this aim can be advanced is by training people to deploy cultural tools for social change, asserting themselves as artists within their own communities and winning recognition for their contributions to cultural capital.

For example, in 2005, the Ukiah Players Theatre <www.ukiahplayerstheatre.org>, a community arts-oriented group in rural northern California, inaugurated The PlaceMeant Project, focusing on the meanings particular places within the community hold for people who make it their home. UPT offered writing and digital storytelling workshops, guiding participants through a series of discussions and exercises to write vivid and compelling stories about a local place of their choosing that has meaning for them. Participants of all ages included Pomo Indians whose ancestors have lived on that land for thousands of years; newly arrived members of the local Latino community, still learning English; several residents who arrived during the “back-to-the-land” era of the 1970s, as well their children, second-generation back-to-the-landers; and members of old farming and timber families. Their writings became the narration for brief sound-and-image digital stories created by participants. The finished digital stories could be experienced as computer multimedia or projected as short films.

3 From Ronald E. Smith's paper, "Magical Realism and Theatre of the Oppressed in Taiwan: Rectifying Unbalanced Realities with Chung Chiao's Assignment Theatre," presented for the Association for Asian Performance at the 2004 Association for Theatre in Higher Education conference.
Acknowledging the Ukiah Valley’s trees in the final scene of “The PlaceMeant Project: Stories of Why Where Matters” by the Ukiah Players Theatre in Northern California. Photo © Ukiah Players Theatre 2005

Subsequent workshops further developed the material into a live dramatic presentation for the community: digital stories were projected on two screens juxtaposed with live performance combining spoken word and movement, presented by a diverse cast of 25 community members. The production coincided with an important event in the life of the community: an unprecedented proposal for development was being debated in city and county boardrooms, calling for a 700-unit housing development and a super-size “big box” retail park, a potentially huge impact on a rural community. The production was cited repeatedly in community meetings, according to its organizers, helping to “focus public conversations on our collective responsibility to not only protest unwise development, but, more importantly, to work together as a community to imagine and manifest the kind of growth that allows for the development of housing, industry and jobs, while preserving the agricultural nature and beauty of the region.”

Another way to build cultural infrastructure is to link cultural development and economic development directly, creating outlets for cultural products created by community members. For instance, YA/YA (Young Aspirations/Young Artists) <www.yayainc.com> is a New Orleans-based group with this mission: “to provide educational experiences and opportunities that em-
power artistically talented inner-city youth to be professionally self-sufficient through creative self-expression." YA/YA is best-known for the hand-painted chairs young people produced in its workshops beginning in the late 1980s. Other projects have focused on clothing, murals and environments designed and executed by young people. For instance, in 2004, using skills they learned through YA/YA's Inner-City Threads fabric training program, participants worked with local artists to create the Tremé Storytelling Quilt, comprising four panels, each telling a different story of the New Orleans neighborhood Tremé, the oldest urban African American community in the United States. YA/YA's work has been successfully promoted and distributed, generating significant income for the organization and participants. At this writing in 2006, YA/YA has largely regrouped from the devastation of 2005's Hurricane Katrina, which damaged its headquarters and dispersed its members. Among its spring 2006 projects was "Katrina Storytelling Quilts," in which elementary school students in the earliest grades created one-foot-square self-portraits depicting their experiences and homes during or after the hurricane. Sewn together, the portraits became quilts which were installed at one of New Orleans' new post-Katrina charter schools.

Space One Eleven <www.spaceoneeleven.org> in Birmingham, Alabama, has established the City Center Art Program, bringing children aged 6 to 18, most from local public housing, to after-school and summer art programs. Selected graduates of the program serve as apprentices, receive stipends and work towards paid internships as artists' assistants. The largest impact on cultural infrastructure has been the Birmingham Urban Mural, completed in the spring of 2000, spanning the side of Boutwell Auditorium, easily seen from the main interstate highway crossing Birmingham. All of the 28,000 clay tiles used in the mural were handmade by City Center Art Program participants.

Organizing

In contrast to elite arts activity, which asserts the primacy of "art for art's sake," community cultural development is undertaken in aid of the larger goals of social transformation and personal liberation. In some cases, arts activity provides a sort of lab or rehearsal for social action. Of such approaches, the best-known are the liberatory education practices of Paulo Freire and the related work of Augusto Boal in "theater of the oppressed" (often abbreviated TO), discussed further in the next chapter.

El Teatro Lucha por la Salud del Barrio is part of Project COAL (Communities Organized against Asthma & Lead/Comunidades Organizadas contra la Asma y el Plomo), a coalition of South Texas community groups funded in
2003 by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) to use Boal's methods to create interactive theater experiences bringing residents of neighborhoods affected by environmental poisons together with scientists and activists to explore and address the problem. The primary community partner is de Madres a Madres, a movement of mothers and their children in Houston's near north side that offers prenatal education and mentoring, job assistance, a food bank and social-services assistance based on years of on-the-ground experience. John Sullivan, the theater facilitator working with de Madres a Madres, describes the group as "the most caring and competent community-based organization I've ever worked with; they are really a vital part of that community, almost like its heart."

To form the troupe, ten community members were trained in the philosophy and techniques of TO and briefed on the impact of lead and asthma on local communities. The project includes three phases over four years, 2003-07. First, Forum Theatre methods were used to assess community knowledge of threats such as lead poisoning and asthma and their prevention, taking cultural factors into consideration. In the second phase, the troupe created dramatic scenes accurately representing ground-level environmental facts and

El Teatro Lucha de Salud del Barrio sets up changes in the opening fluid image in Forum Theatre. Photo by Karla Held 2005
modeling successful grassroots responses. In the third phase, the same techniques would be used to assess Project COAL's partnerships and methods, feeding into a new show, “Our Neighborhood of the Future,” which will tour the community, inviting further involvement. El Teatro Lucha and its collaborators are already planning a further project focused on obesity and diabetes prevention.

In a very different model, the Documentary Project for Refugee Youth was designed as a collaboration among young refugees, the Global Action Project, the International Rescue Committee and other community organizations and artists in New York City. The 12 young refugees comprising the project’s core group live in New York; most are West African or Balkan, from Sierra Leone, Bosnia, Burundi and Serbia. In September 2001, the group began working together to share and understand their own experiences, collect testimonies from others, learn photography, write and create powerful short films that can be accessed at its website, <www.global-action.org/refugee>. As one young woman said of her experience:

I felt like there is no person who suffered more than me. But then, talking to other people and finding out that it’s not just me, that it’s half the world. Before I didn’t know there were so many conflicts and wars, and now that I know, and have the opportunity to do something about it, I want to let other people know.

In further iterations, the project is distributing its films and publications to wider audiences and inviting testimony from other refugee youth.

BOUNDARIES AND INTERSECTIONS

How do we judge the success of an innovative, transformative practice? Is the result greater if a heterodox idea permeates and influences hegemonic tendencies, creating widespread, incremental change? Or if the insurgent idea gains sufficient force to take shape as a distinct, bounded feature of the cultural landscape? From what I have observed, the most influential (perhaps it would be more accurate to say the best-timed, the ripest) ideas do both.

Consider complementary medicine—herbs, touch therapies, acupuncture and other non-Western health treatments. In a few decades, these have grown from marginal, fringe practices to billion-dollar industries with their own clinics, professional associations and journals, indeed, all the trappings of a distinct field. At the same time, chain drugstores stock homeopathic remedies
and herbal formulations while major university-based medical schools include complementary practices in their curricula, gradually integrating what was once an insurgency into the mainstream.

So it has been, albeit on a much smaller scale, with community cultural development.

For example, artists like Suzanne Lacy (<www.suzannelacy.com>) straddle the advanced art world of conceptual, installation and performance art and the community cultural development field. Her project “No Blood/No Foul” from the mid-1990s was a collaboration among Lacy, public officials working toward a communitywide youth policy, police and young people in the stressed urban community of Oakland, California. (Collaborators were collectively named TEAM, an acronym for “Teens + Educators + Artists + Media Makers.”) No Blood/No Foul was part of a multiyear series of projects each consisting, in the artist’s words, of “a performance, policy interventions, a thoughtful media strategy, and direct services to participating youth.”

As Lacy describes it, “No Blood/No Foul was an event that pitted youth against police officers in a tough, competitive, and fast-paced ‘basketball as performance’ artwork. The performance, with its live action video interrupts, pre-recorded interviews of players, half-time dance presentation, original sound track, and sports commentators, mixed up the rules of the game. Adult referees were replaced by youth referees, then no referees (street ball, where the rule is, ‘If there is no blood then there is no foul’) and for the last quarter, the audience as referee. The performance received extensive local and national television coverage, an example of the Oakland Youth Policy Initiative in action, and was attended by the mayor and several council members.” The project advanced its collaborators’ social as well as artistic goals: “Oakland City Council passed the Oakland Youth Policy Initiative and funded US$180,000 for a youth-to-youth granting program and a Mayor’s Youth Commission.”

Like core community cultural development work, Lacy’s approach is collaborative and oriented toward social change. It departs from community cultural development values in one main particular: as with conventional conceptual art, its products exist apart from the process, with ultimate validation deriving from the art world. In this case, for example, graffiti murals, a basketball court and video interviews for the project were featured in a Tokyo-based international exhibition of conceptual and installation artists. The artistic products traveled to an exhibition venue as another artist’s paintings might do, having another life of their own as part of an artist’s catalog.

Activism has also been affected by community cultural development values and approaches, although by and large community cultural development methods have been seen as ways to create practical tools for activists, rather than as a replacement for conventional means of creating change. 2006 featured a well-known workshop on the subject.

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The winter of 2006 brought the Sabrosas Catfish by a noted group of artists as an exhibition of their collective performance work. It was a work of art intended to engage the interest and attention of the community, providing a well-known public space. The exhibit included a performance that entertained and was enjoyed by the audience.

With a primarily Caribbean theme, the exhibit was a way to communicate and share their culture with the community.
than as a type of activism in and of themselves. For instance, the February 2006 National Conference on Organized Resistance in Washington, DC, featured half a dozen sessions on visual art, poetry, theater and other ways to deploy collaborative artistic creativity for social change. The description of a workshop on “Inter-Activism Through Music” begins this way:

Ideas and thoughts presented musically may stimulate parts of the brain and psyche even the most heartfelt words cannot. The most successful inclusive movements reach both the right and left brains. This “whole-brain” interactive workshop is designed to involve participants in the immediate and serendipitous co-creation of conscious music. We will look to current events and issues of interest to participants as a way of exploring expression through ballads, chants, call-and-response and other musical forms.

Creative expression drawn from community members’ own stories has been recognized as an important contribution to health and healing, as for example in the work of Richmond, California–based ArtsChange <www.artschange.org>, which has taken this as its mission:

[T]o present innovative and artistically significant exhibitions that support cultural interchange and expression among the diverse communities of Richmond; forge a new artistic tradition between professional artists, healthcare workers and patients; and demonstrate that the arts can educate, transform medical institutions and enliven the work of healing.

The chief venues for ArtsChange’s exhibitions are local health centers. Its winter 2006 exhibit was entitled, “In Celebration of Pumpkin, Greens and Catfish Stew, Oh My/En Celebracion de Calabaza, Espinaca y Pozole, Que Sabrosa!” It opened with a film on local youth and food in Richmond made by a neighborhood theater group; an interactive healthy kitchen installation; an exhibit of works of art on food created by ArtsChange artists; a musical performance; discussion; and celebratory meal. Community cultural development influences are evident in the project’s drawing on local culture and engaging community members in exploring themes important to their own well-being; it departs from core community cultural development values in that it focuses on work that is not the product of a hands-on collaboration with non-artists.

When the present community cultural development field began to take shape in the 1960s, public funding was primary. But after decades of cuts and privatization, artists and activists are just as likely—perhaps more likely—to
work the margins of commercial culture than to look to the public sector for support and opportunity. In some cases, commercial cultural producers adopt a social agenda that motivates them to reach out for direct involvement with communities others in their industry might see merely as units in a market segment. For instance, London-based community artist Gary Stewart describes music workshops for teenagers at ADFED, the educational wing of the popular and commercial music group Asian Dub Foundation (<www.asiandubfoundation.com>):

Some of these young people are under cultural attack, and they're not actually allowed to go and do extra activities. Their parents or guardians have to be convinced that a safe place for them can be provided so that they can interact with other people without being at risk.

It's worked out as a 10-week block, and so there are specific technical headings that enable them to learn the specifics of music making. But in addition to that, other issues around racism and antideportation campaigns are discussed—they also bring up issues themselves, obviously. There are opportunities for them to talk about issues that affect them personally such as immigration legislation and more global issues, the links between racism and corporate power and Third World countries.

Basically, the music is used as a kind of metaphor. The workshops themselves are about exploring the rhythms of different sounds and exposing participants to connections. It's a bit like an extended metaphor for the connections between people, economics and history.⁴

In 2006, ADFED was one of several partner organizations (including local government and major London-based cultural institutions) to open Rich Mix, described as "a new creative space for London," a public-private cultural center in East London offering screenings, exhibits, classes and performances as well as projects such as the Rich Mix Asian Women's Creative Collective (RAW) (<www.richmix.org.uk/raw.html>, aiming to

- create an open and nurturing environment for Asian women to show cultural work with feedback from contemporaries
- open up mentoring relationship opportunities with established artists providing relevant support to newer Asian women artists
- build up a network for the sharing of ideas and creative collaborations
- open up Rich Mix's programming team to themes and talent they feel is relevant

⁴ Adams and Goldbard, Community, Culture and Globalization, p. 162.
To some extent, community cultural development values have permeated every sector. The gargantuan public-private enterprise called the Internet has opened space for countless collaborative cultural interactions, from sites where game-players collectively create interactive fantasy scenarios to sites for collaboration at a distance on visual artworks, musical compositions and literary works. This vast virtual venue provides outlets (and very often, comradeship, attention and assistance) to amateur and professional artists from every cultural background, working in every possible form and medium. At this writing, Myspace.com, a popular social networking site, hosts nearly 1,300 online discussion groups devoted to some aspect of the arts: book clubs, photography groups, places to share poetry or visual art, theater and dance discussions, regional groups for arts participants from Detroit, Charlotte, Los Angeles and many other places.

In 2004, when George W. Bush was re-elected President of the United States, a group of activists set up a website inviting members of the nearly half of the electorate who voted against Bush to post visual apologies to the rest of the world. What must that election "have looked like to the world outside our borders? America proudly re-appointed its reckless, incompetent and corrupt government. How much of America? Fifty-two percent. The rest of us are aghast and dismayed." Since then, drawing on submissions to the website, <www.sorryeverybody.com>, Sorry Everybody, a full-color, large-format 256-page book of photos was published. Each page carries several images drawn from 26,000 submitted to the site, almost all featuring one or more Americans holding text and/or graphic images conveying their apologies to the world.

When they get up from their computers, many go to coffeehouses' open-mike nights to read their work or compete in poetry slams; they take craft classes at stores selling arts-and-crafts supplies; they play in garage bands or maintain plots at community gardens; they paint and fire pottery, purchase yarn and learn how to knit at chain shops created to cater for the expanding social purpose of individual creative expression. I don't mean to suggest that these huge publics are consciously linked to the community cultural development field, but it is in part due to the field's democratizing influence that so many people now feel authorized and encouraged to explore and share their own creativity in the interstices of the public square and market economy. That they do so generates an implicit critique of the elite orientation of so much of the mainstream nonprofit arts sector, as Maribel Álvarez has written:

Nonprofit arts organizations are for the most part, not perceived as interested in upsetting the definition of who's an artist and who's not. Therefore, as one amateur actor opined, formal arts organizations are relatively "irrelevant" to
the social transactions and conversations that connect people with participatory art-making. They are just not the kinds of places to which people who want to act, sing, play an instrument, dance or paint gravitate when they are seeking avocational arts experiences.\(^5\)

But is all this community cultural development? Does it advance the movement's aims of pluralism, participation and equity? With a fluid, evolving practice like community cultural development, two opposite and equal definitional difficulties arise.

On one side is the temptation to see the practice too broadly, without standards and qualifiers. Given so many approaches, models and media, isn't it legitimate to say that any community-oriented arts activity is a form of community cultural development? On the other side is the danger of being too strict or purist, imposing an orthodoxy on an insurgent practice that always mutates beyond such boundaries.

My choice is to walk the tightrope between them. Flexibility is good, but too much leads to flaccidity. Community cultural development practice has had growing impact on other practices, from advanced art to social science; yet there are core values that cannot be ignored or transgressed without diminishing a project's force for cultural transformation. Chief among these is the commitment to genuine collaboration, to participants' joint authorship of the experience and equality in choosing its direction, in controlling the uses to which it will be put, in articulating its meaning.

In the mainstream art world, we mostly see non-artists' creativity deployed in the service of a lead artist's aims. Playwrights may base their characters on information derived from oral histories. In constructing their environments, installation artists may use narratives, photographs or artifacts provided by non-artists. Other artists may feature community members in their public performances or make use of individuals' technical skills (such as needlework or woodwork) in constructing large-scale visual art pieces. However wonderful the work may be, if the participatory elements are tightly bounded (so that a seamstress participates in an installation in the same way a plumber "participates" in laying pipe to an architect's specifications), the work is not community cultural development. The key distinction turns on the artist's role: when the individual artist's vision, that person's aesthetics, choices and vocabulary, control the work in which community members take part, the work—however strong, striking, or moving, however valid as art per se—is not essentially about community cultural development, because it violates the

\(^5\) Maribel Alvarez, There's Nothing Informal About It: Participatory Arts Within the Cultural Ecology of Silicon Valley, Cultural Initiatives Silicon Valley, 2005, p. 75.
underlying principle of equality of participation and the underlying aim of collective expression.

This is not merely a distinction of technique, style, or skill, but of core purpose. Techniques and skills cannot be separated from their critical emancipatory aims without reducing what purports to be community cultural development to a practice that might be applied toward any goal, even coercive ones.

Consider the example of international development agencies. As such agencies have learned, it may be effective in terms of health promotion to package essential information on HIV prevention or other health risks in skits, radio broadcasts or television programs that use vernacular styles, stories and tunes to humanize the information, easing its delivery to local receptors. Such an approach will employ some community arts methods: the writers and producers of these works must interact with local people to learn enough about their cultural values, vocabularies and taboos to ensure that their messages can be received as intended by the local population. But the aim is to better communicate a message from the center to the margins. As targeted commercial advertising proves, such techniques might just as well carry a message that is not so worthy, whether to drink sugary carbonated beverages instead of juice or water, to promote expensive patented hybrid seed rather than continued use of self-generated seed stocks or to introduce chemical-intensive forms of pest management.

What makes community cultural development different from clever advertising, do-it-yourself crafts kits, advanced art or inspiriting protest songs is that its means and ends are one. I see them as simultaneously spiritual and political: to use the expressive gifts that are uniquely human to convey each cultural community's special contributions to our common task, understanding and repairing the world we share. So I welcome the influence of community cultural development on every sector of society, applauding its integration, and at the same time I must insist that is insufficient. To achieve its full social impact, community cultural development must also be recognized and strengthened as a distinct, value-driven practice, which sometimes requires drawing the line, saying that a project departs too much from those core values to be called community cultural development.