

“Connecting Californians”

**Los Angeles Area Focus Group
Cornerstone Theater, Los Angeles, California
November 18, 1999**

Bill Rauch: I'm with Cornerstone Theater and it's our space that we're sitting in. I have to say, it's a special thrill to welcome you all here today, because as I told a few of you, when we were talking, for eight years Cornerstone worked out of a 400 square foot room that we had eight desks crammed into and we had storage spread out all over the city...in Pacoima, Watts, in East LA and we were really scattered. We've been in this space for nine months and to have a home where we can have everything under one roof - and to be able to invite people into our home - is a very, very powerful feeling for us - for all of us. So, on behalf of our ensemble and the staff, we welcome you.

Craig McGarvey: My name is Craig McGarvey. On behalf of the Irvine Foundation, one of the partners in this inquiry, I also wanted to offer words of welcome, thanking Cornerstone for hosting us today and thank everyone for coming.

Lying at the heart of this potential work - this potential project - from the very start, has been the notion of collective inquiry. People coming together from various perspectives to explore the question of how we use story telling and story hearing to build our communities. This is one of the very first major conversations in the inquiry and I'm very much looking forward to the discussion today. My own first, full personal partner in the inquiry is Dudley Cocke, and I will turn the microphone over to him.

Dudley Cocke: What we're going to do today has two parts. We're going to have a story circle first. That's a particular methodology that Roadside uses in a lot of ways with our plays. Sometimes we use story circles as a way to build plays. Often we use story circles as a way to comment on plays.

So, for example, we made a play - several plays - with an African-American company from New Orleans. It's about black and white working class history and struggle in the South. The object of the play is to bring black and white working class folk together. In other words, rednecks and African-Americans which, as we know, there's a huge wedge that's been driven there.

The is a musical. Often when we finish the performance, the audience will be invited to spend an hour or two in story circles talking about the themes prompted by the play in their own lives and in their own community.

So we're going to be doing a round of story, which we're most keen to hear. And we've got these - we'll be recording them. Then, we will transcribe them and get the entire day's discussion to you all so that you'll have it for your record. You'll have a chance to comment, just like any commentary.

Please feel free to say anything, nothing will be disseminated beyond this group without your permission. As Craig said, part of our quest here is this learning, to build learning about this work. So that's our reason for the documentation.

Then, in the afternoon, we'll be having more discussion in the circle, but it will be discussion as opposed to story.

Before we move into the story circle, though, let's go around and everybody introduce themselves and their affiliation. I'm Dudley Cocker with Roadside Theater, Appalshop, in the Appalachian coalfields, on the Cumberland Plateau, in eastern Kentucky.

Erica Kohl: My name is Erica Kohl. And I'm pleased to be invited by Craig to come along as an observer today. I've done some theater. I've done some organizing. I've done some community building work, but never all of them together, so this is an incredible, fascinating project for me, as I decide how to marry those in my own work in the future. So...I'm here to observe.

Bill Rauch: I already said, I'm Bill Rauch. I'm with Cornerstone. We've got a show that opens in two days. [laughter] My mind and hearts are a little split this morning, but actually everything we're dealing with on the show is, is the things that we're talking about here. So, it's actually very appropriate.

Maribeth Larkin: I'm Maribeth Larkin and I'm an organizer with the Industrial Areas Foundation, working here in Los Angeles. I am also a Roman Catholic religious sister, a nun, as they say. I've been that for 30 years. I've been organizing about 22 years. Last 15 of them in Texas, so I've just come back to LA in January, and focusing my work along with about ten other organizers in the LA area. My focus is mostly south central and Compton.

Leilani Chan: My name is Leilani Chan and I'm a performance artist and also Artistic Director of TeAda Productions, which is an organization that's kind of new and was born out of the work that I've been doing with the Hawaiian community in Los Angeles. I've done a lot of work with the Asian-American Theater and the Performance Art community in LA.

Martin Hernandez: My name is Martin Hernandez. I'm an organizer with Labor Community Strategy Center, a civil rights and environmental justice organization. My main project here in Los Angeles is called the Bus Riders Union. As a sideline, I'm also part time critic with the LA Weekly. I do theater reviews and thanks to the work we've done with Cornerstone on some other partnership regarding teaching other people how to organize through theater and doing theater on busses, we're going to keep that going on our own and that's going to be the main

focus of my work. That's the discussion we're having right now. I'm like the artistic director of the Bus Rider's Union Theater. So... [laughter] I also wash the dishes at the center, too.

Josephine Ramirez: My name is Josephine Ramirez and I'm currently doing grant giving at the Getty grant program. It's mostly local grant giving and funds for cultural internship programs in Los Angeles. The reason why I'm involved with this, I think, is prior to being in the grant program, I was doing community based arts research for the Research Institute at Getty. I was involved in The Participation Project for my first few years at the Getty in a project that looked at how community art making supports a social fabric.

Sam Woodhouse: I'm Sam Woodhouse. I've been the artistic director and co-founder of San Diego Repertory Theater since 1976. Amongst the many things we do, what we call the Califia initiative, which is a bi-national initiative dedicated to the forging of unlikely partnerships between artists, educators, and activists to create new works of performances that speak about our part in the world, is, I think, why I'm here.

John Malpede: I'm John Malpede from the Los Angeles Poverty Department, which is a theater that works a couple blocks from here, in Skid Row. So, it's comprised, mainly, of people who have lived or do live in that neighborhood. Usually, we usually make up original shows...together, and perform them in the neighborhood and other places. We work with drug rehab programs in the neighborhood. Originally, we were housed in a free law clinic. So we've always worked with a lot of different legal, social services, substance abuse, all kinds of different partnerships, you know, some of which are very activist oriented. Some of which are very religious oriented. Some which are both. It's a broad spectrum.

Participant: No more coffee for you. [laughter]

Solomon Rivera: My name is Solomon Rivera and I'm with the Community Coalition - the whole long name is Community Coalition for Substance Abuse, Prevention, and Treatment. We've been in South LA for nine years. I started out there as a volunteer. I've been an organizer - and am the associate director - I have these administrative roles, but I'm mostly an organizer there for the last five years. We've done a lot of different organizing around crime and public safety. Done a lot of work around liquor stores and crime spots in some of the neighborhoods. But we've done some really good youth organizing in the last five years that's really taken off. We also started organizing around welfare reform. Which has been a critical issue for the last couple years. We're doing some neighborhood development, right now. We're experimenting with that, involving folks, involving organizing in that. We do a skit every now and then, but we haven't been real effective in using story telling or political theater. Some of the youth stuff has blown me away. Where they put a lot of work into it, but it's really delivered the message of their

organizing and campaigns leading other youth into action and to just delivering, overall, kind of political content to what we're doing. So, I'd love to hear from some of the expertise in the room, people who have tried organizing and otherwise... It's a real pleasure to be here today.

Jerry Yoshitomi:

Jerry Yoshitomi, formerly the Executive Director of Japanese-American Culture Community Center, which is about three blocks west of here. Basically working independently and trying to really look at issues of change [unintelligible] I worked for 17 years in an organization and I realized that we accomplish a lot, but also did not accomplish a lot. Sometimes, it's necessary for them to step outside and figure out, kind of what to do next and how to do some strategic... And, actually, we're interested in using the story theater process in a couple of projects that we're working on. I'm a big fan of Dudley's now for years. It's been remarkable to see the impact of [unintelligible] assessment of this program called the "Art Partner Program," and just looking at the impact of how community relationships are actually - the projects have actually changed institutions as they - as people have gone out and actually develop a project. What they've done, is they've actually begun to reassess the entire programs because of the fact that they actually started talking to people. When they started talking to people and [unintelligible] "If you talk to these people, then why do you want to talk to these people?" [unintelligible] I think it's a...not so much a project, but the idea that [inaudible] change the process by [unintelligible]

Ky Lam:

Hi. My name is Ky Lam. I work with Craig at The James Irvine Foundation. I am here to observe and record. I wanted to add that if you needed to use the restrooms, straight down, that door, to your left.

Craig McGarvey:

Craig [McGarvey] once again. At Irvine, I have responsibility within the program we call Civic Culture, which is community building out of diversity in California. I come to the idea of community from my work in partnership with many of the organizers here. Over time, it had always interested me that whenever the organizers talked about their work, they always said that they started in one-on-one meetings with people to get to know those people very well. To get to know their hopes, their desires, their fears, their visions for the future and for their families and their communities.

They were always - every one of them - quite articulate about the use of story there. They used that language. They'd say, "What we're trying to do when we get to know somebody is get to know their story." And then, as they talk about bringing people together, they're quite consciously trying to develop a collective story, for people to hear one another and to begin to see their connection and interaction, to move a story forward. It's always interested me.

Also, along the way, I had been exposed to a number of theaters, because we're a multipurpose Foundation at Irvine, a number of theaters that seemed to be doing the same thing from their own perspective, wanting to make themselves of, by, and for communities in which they were located; working with folks in the communities to help them tell their stories and turn their stories into public presentation.

I had heard of a couple of very powerful experiences in which the creation and the telling of the story, through collective engagement of just regular amateurs in the community had been able to move the community forward. That is what has brought me to this inquiry.

Dudley Cocke:

So now we're going right to story. Not everybody is going to be in the story circle. So, those who are not can move out and we will commence.

What is the...first thing of story circle we do is just make sure that we're kind of configured so that we're comfortable and we can see each other. So, make sure you can see everybody telling and that you're kind of comfortable.

This is the old campfire technique. The second thing is that you can just take all your pads and stuff and stick them under your chairs because there's no note taking. The thing about a story circle is that it is actually more about listening than telling. Often that is a relief to people, that we'll be doing a lot more listening than telling here. It's trying figure out how to listen, for a lot of us.

So, what will happen is someone will start and then we will move to that person's left around the circle. If you're not ready to tell a story, feel free to pass, it will come back around. So, there's no pressure in this, really. It's a pretty loose thing. We're going to take, oh, about, think of your story in about a ten minute time period - a little more or less is fine - just because we want to make sure to get all the way around.

Also, when the story starts I know that everybody has probably got the story they're thinking they might tell in their mind. Feel free, though, to jettison that as you hear John's story to...if it prompts another story from you to build on, because sometimes, the circle will deepen, as people are listening and coming off, sort of rippling off another story. It is fine to go with that flow.

Was it fairly clear what our theme is? We wrote it out, and I don't remember exactly what we wrote, but the gist of it is a story from your work, somewhat recent work. We're thinking of story, not so much an analysis, but you know, who were the characters? What was the plot? What's the page-turner in it? We're thinking of story that way.

So, a story from your work and it doesn't - no need for it to - as we know, great drama and so forth is not built on the pat - it's always built

on the imperfect, conflict and struggle. So, it's fine to talk about that part of your work, and where it hit a wall. In fact, a lot of that's those tensions. I know tension is consciously used in organizing - we use a lot of it when we're on strike in the coal fields. We also use it in theater. So, that's fine. I know you all are experts at this anyway.

Any questions about how we're going to proceed? Whoever starts, then we're going to move to the left. You have ten minutes. You can pass and it will just come around. We'll see if we can make a go of it. Oh, I should say, silences are fine. We can sit here silently for five minutes and it's fine - really. And after a story is told, if you feel like you want to reflect for a little bit and you're next, just feel free.

Solomon Rivera:

I can go ahead and start. I think I heard what we were supposed to do. I just heard about it yesterday. It was clear, but for some reason it was...one of the things - and this isn't such a story as it is kind of my musings - but I was just thinking of something in my work that's been challenging. And I just kept coming to storytelling.

As an organizer, there feels to me this kind of inherent tension between what I do with storytelling and the work I do, which has to be really organized. Like, analytic. So, I wanted to write an outline, by the way, of what my story would be. That's a natural tendency. [laughter]

I heard Craig heard me thinking that and said, "Don't write anything down." So it was kind of struggle. I kind of had this outline in my head, that's why I wanted to go right away. [laughter]

But I like things very tight, outlined, if not scripted out. I even train people to do that - and I think there's some shortcomings to that - but it's proven effective in our work, and there's a lot of models for organizing that kind of promote that, you know? As part of developing a leader - preparing what you're going to say.

But, you know, I really appreciate good storytelling. One of my little secrets...one of my little secret things is this Saturday radio show called, "This American Life," and it's just people telling these great stories. People that, you know, it's like, I got no connection with, but I can really appreciate their stories. It's kind of the magic of radio.

So, I was thinking about this and, and for some reason, what came to mind was there's some real differences between me and my wife. This woman I married a couple of years ago is just so different from me. You know, it's one of those - one of those matches where it's those difference that make us a really good couple.

She's a really good storyteller. She has a story about everything and she's constantly telling stories. I don't even think she cares if I'm listening or not. She'll just tell stories. [tape glitch] you know, there's

often, you know, we're driving along or sitting at home and there's a little silence...I don't have to wait too long before she says, "You want to hear a story?" And, it doesn't matter if I say, "Yeah," or "No, no," or if I don't respond at all, she'll start telling her story.

Usually, there's a great point she shares about the day or she's sharing something about her life. I can't do that. I really kind of, I really admire that she can do that. Then, of course, I've known lots of people that can do that - tell a story like at the drop of a hat. I've just heard incredible stories in my life and I've never felt like I could do that. What I've been kind of trained to do and what I do, is I just kind of give you the facts. I'll tell you what you need to know. You know? What you need to do - and that's - that's kind of like how organizers think, I believe.

So, it's kind of funny. In fact, my wife was - she was - she's getting her Ph.D. in psychology, so she's got this really intense case load in her training right now. She was telling me about this woman she's been struggling with as a patient who...she'll ask her a simple question. My wife will ask her a question she needs some information on, and it takes this woman will take ten minutes to answer the question. She'll go on telling this whole long story to get to the point or just to answer - you know, what I would say is like, yes or no, or, you know, very few words.

My wife was telling me she realized after a few sessions with this woman - it just kind of struck her during one of these stories - she goes, "Oh, my God. This woman talks just like me." Then she thought about me and how I sometimes - I'm not always listening to her enthralling stories sometimes. I'm spacing out. She said, you know, she was telling me this, "I do that to you all the time, don't I, Solomon?" "Yeah, but you know, I love your stories, so don't trip out about it. Don't stop telling me stories because I really appreciate them."

So, that's my intro. I just kind of feel, you know, part of this today is that you - there doesn't have to be that tension between...I think we don't have to be so...so...rigid about, you know, this is how you have to present information. Because then you get dogmatic. You don't have to always have everything outlined.

You get into some scary territory in organizing when you're not sure the message is going to be delivered, because it won't take people to the action that they need to do - and so on. So, the other part of my story is, a little bit about how I got involved in coalition and it kind of shows the challenge and then the message being delivered to me.

So, where I worked in south LA for the last few years, I actually worked in some high schools down there and then began working with this organization about five years ago as they were ready to develop some youth organizing. I thought I was ready to for the first time in my life, do

organizing as a job, as a profession, take it seriously, put my heart into it and start this new project.

But I'd been involved as a volunteer. I actually got involved when I went through drug rehab myself in '91. I was part of the problem; I was out there in the streets, acting like a fool for several years - getting into some serious trouble. But usually, slipping away by the skin of my teeth.

When I got - and I had also been running around doing some kind of crazy far-left politic stuff. I was running around MacArthur park, hitting the pipe, and then sometimes I'd be trying to get people to start to riot about something or another...the cops, immigration, whatever.

So, I hung out with a bunch of people that were revolutionary. I wasn't sure if I was one, in retrospect. But if it happened, I knew I was hanging out with the right people. [laughter]

Then, when I got into recovery the cloud started lifting, as we say, and I thought about how I believed in social justice. I believe movements change things. It took education and organizing - things didn't just happen. People in power didn't just conceit that there's a problem and come up with some great solution to change. They don't just give up the seat on the bus.

So, I saw this organization and went to some early meetings. Now, I've kind of lived around east Hollywood for all my years in LA, like the last 13, 14 years. But about this time, I was living in the West Adams area, which is kind of the edge of South Central. It's actually in the bad part of West Adams. There's a nice part of West Adams with fancy homes and there's this strip by Crenshaw, which is just horrible. Even though there's nice homes there - I lived at a real blighted place...

And I was getting involved with this organization because there's a lot of people in recovery. They were going to tackle the problem of drugs in south LA - in a whole new approach. It was progressive. They were looking at the war on drugs and how it was really repressive. There's battering rams - I think even though Daryl Gates really wanted a real tank...he had one that looked like a tank with a battering ram; there were sweeps and raids. And it was all about law enforcement. It was really repressive.

So, we did this huge survey and people were looking at other sources of the problem. Liquor stores was a huge issue that there'd been some work done on - just alcohol availability, the number of liquor stores, and the kind of problems that can surround one that is poorly operated, with poor standards. People just don't care. It's just about profit.

That sounded like a really good idea, because I definitely had hung around lots of liquor stores and hotels and bars and stuff. I knew how it works.

So, I got involved in that. Where I was living, I was - it was pretty blighted. There was actually a group of these, these guys. I think they did video. They were like these artists that were complaining about a particular bar. This bar was crazy. It had a - this crowd, it was a lot of immigrants - the cowboy type. They liked to carry guns.

There was something about - the story I heard was there were bar girls and the guys would get pissed off because they would realize that they just got ripped off for \$200 while they were drunk. They would go shoot their guns in the street. It wasn't like shootouts, like gangsters and stuff, but they would shoot their guns a lot. You know, it scared us. It's like, you know...

I never saw anyone, you know, get killed, but it was a lot of gunfire every evening. The funny thing is were some of the artists guys who filed a claim with the city - and this really complicated stuff. The stuff I work on to this day, to understand city land use and zoning, and these processes that you can use to clamp down on the problem businesses like that. There's corrective conditions, public hearings - this whole series of things that increases people's participation in government in controlling their own communities, and fighting crime without it getting to the point of a 911 call and the LAPD is going to come in and, you know...kick some butt.

So I was going to all these meetings in south Central about this whole new approach. It ended up being a very effective campaign over a few years. The civil unrest changed the campaign into another campaign where we kept a whole bunch of liquor stores from rebuilding, bringing the number - the total number from 700 to 500. But during all my work, for a couple of years, because I was a really was a volunteer, very active member, I never thought of the place on my street connected to that campaign. So I never went to public hearings about that or wrote complaints or petitioned or organized a house meeting. I was willing to do it for people down the line on Main Street in Manchester, but never on my street. That was just kind of like, it's not in my neighborhood. I never connected it to what they were doing.

So there was kind of some failure there. I was telling people, "You've got to do something about this. You got to get involved. You'll go to the City Council. This will be great!" And there it was, like, you know, a real hot spot right out my door. I just wasn't connecting.

So, I don't know if it was me - the synapses weren't still firing right at that point or something about how the Coalition was doing their education then; or I wasn't connecting it right. But I thought it was kind

of funny. There might have been some creative things that could have been done to make the point... Because we were getting people involved and had a lot of people involved. They were motivated and would come out because they wanted to deal with the problem on their corner. And there are a lot of people - which is a beautiful thing for me. They just got involved or stayed involved.

Their corner was fine. They wanted to improve the larger community. That's what impressed me. They wanted to do it without clamoring for more LAPD. They wanted to do it in a way that they understood local government better, where they could control things in their neighborhood. It didn't take some, you know, planning person at City Hall to figure this stuff out. They could figure it out themselves.

But, so my story is just how...how, in the silliest way, I wasn't making the connection between the organizing I was doing and conditions in my own life. I was so caught up in the larger community, everybody else. So, there's some moral in that. I'm not sure what it is.

But going back to what I started with, I just kind of feel like we could be more creative in delivering all sorts of messages that are pertinent. In organizing, we just have to let go a little of some of the rigid methods of how we talk and educate and share information. Hopefully, for me, this is the start of letting go of some of that.

Bill Rauch:

I have to do an intro, too. I really struggled with this. I struggled with it last night. I struggled with it when I woke up. [laughter] I mean, actually, I walked in the door here at 9:45, but I was kind of pacing around. It's, you know, I appreciated you saying that it should be relaxed, but I really struggled.

I think part of it is, is that it was so beautiful, the way you worded it, you know, how it was organized? What did it accomplish? And how it fell short of the ideal?

I've got projects that I would love to share with you guys from ten years ago, from three years ago, where I've got my little - I've got my story. I can wrap it in a little ribbon and put it in the middle of the circle. It felt - it just kept feeling wrong to not talk about the thing that I'm in the middle of now. I have no idea the thing I'm in the middle of now, what it's accomplishing. I mean, I have the hopes and I've got fears about how it's falling short of the ideal. So, that's kind of what I've been struggling with.

So, I, I guess my preface is that I feel like I'm going to have to share some scattered impressions about what our company has been going through for the last couple of years in this, this play that we're performing right now - tonight - that a few of you are going to get to come see tonight.

So, that's the intro part.

So, we...almost two and a half years ago, there's a guy named, [José López], who some of you know, who's a Cornerstone Associate Artist. He's a lighting designer. He grew up in Boyle Heights. He still lives in Boyle Heights, a neighborhood that's just east of downtown. José said Cornerstone should really do a play in my neighborhood and please come and do that.

Over the last bunch of years -actually, for those of you who don't know what Cornerstone does, we collaborate with people who live in that community or who are part of that community, however that community is defined, on stage, backstage, you know, in the building of a play. So, we started to explore collaborating with people from Boyle Heights.

At the same time, we were thinking about how economic diversity fit into what we did, because there was kind of an unwritten - literally unwritten - commitment to lower income communities in the work that we did. We were talking a lot, kind of, as a company, as an ensemble, as a board, about economic diversity and whether that - what kind of role that played in what we were doing.

Somewhere along the line, somebody pointed out that Boyle Heights and Beverly Hills had the same initials. That was so stupid that we couldn't kind of turn our backs on it. There was something beautifully stupid about that.

Then somebody else pointed out that Baldwin Hills had the same initials. And meanwhile, we had been talking about with Chay Yew, who runs the Asian Theater Workshop at the Taper, about doing a collaboration with Asian-Americans in LA, with Chinese-Americans, in particular. And, of course, some other clever person pointed out that the main two arteries of ChinaTown were Broadway and Hill. So, if we really wanted to stretch it, we suddenly had four community cycle of projects.

It started - the formal work - in Boyle Heights, which was the first community we thought we were going to start in, in August of '97. As I say, I feel bad that I don't have a ribbon story...but it's been a really hard two years. It's been two and a half years. It's been extremely painful, but it's also been really healthy.

We have, over the course of collaborating in these four neighborhoods, have gone from perceiving ourselves, as a company, as being a young company, full of young people, to being a middle aged company full of middle aged people. [laughter] That's - I mean - that's essentially kind of true. So that's good. That's really good, but getting there was really hard.

We collaborated with a lot of guest artists, a lot of people who - both as writers and directors - who had their perceptions about how, what it meant to collaborate with the community. So, all this kind of - all this... "Wait, wait. This is how we do things." "No, no, no." "That's like some rule. You know? We can't make rules. This work isn't about rules."

And so, time after time after time, that caused a lot of pain. But it pushed envelopes all the time, in terms of how we learn from the community and what we brought to the table, in the work. Because there were five plays that were built in four of these neighborhoods, there's so many stories and that's one of my struggles. I don't know how to - I don't know which, what one of them to share.

But two and a half years later, we're working on the Bridge show, which is called, "Broken Hearts." It involves artists from every one of those five plays that we created in the four neighborhoods.

I was... Oh, this just happened, what you said, which is you know what you're going to tell, but then a new story happens. OK.

I was working on a play in Pennsylvania, out of town. It was called, "Steelbound." This past summer. It was a collaboration with - in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Bethlehem was the home of the Bethlehem Steel home plant, that employed 30,000 people in its heyday. It suffered a pretty painful death over the last two years. The final leg of the operations, the Coke plant, shut down in 1998, - a year before we did our play.

It was - there were 56 people in the cast. More than half of them worked at the steel. It was galvanizing, you know, was the word that kept coming up because the closing of Bethlehem Steel, whether you worked there, whether you had a relative who worked there, or whether you just noticed that suddenly the plant wasn't operating any more. It-it changed everybody's life in this community.

This play was produced in the empty Iron Foundry of the former steel plant. It was a huge event in the life of the community and changed all of us - all of us who worked on it, people who watched it. It was very, very emotional...

Now, I came back to LA, having experienced the pain of the two years of BH projects and scared about embarking on this BH work show, because I thought - Cornerstone's roots are rural, in terms of our first five years. We worked in mostly small towns around the country. And having this just, incredible affirmation of the power of the community getting together and telling a story that was deeply rooted in the community; to see the transformative power of that - the transformational power. It was - and then to come back, and just this like, "Wow, it

doesn't work in LA." It doesn't work in LA. And, "What are we doing in LA? What am I doing in LA?" And, you know, hating my big, fat, white ass and [laughter] you know? It's all of that.

I...we, we had - with Broken Hearts - we've been - the cast has been going to - we've gone to each of the four BH neighborhoods every Sunday and spent the day with the people who live in the neighborhood. We've done, you know, a tour of the neighborhood and then we've all shared food together and done some kind of cultural activity.

And less than a week ago, we did a round table, which is, I think, our version of a story circle. We did a round table where everybody in the cast and crew was asked to just say a line or a moment in the play that they connected to. They could talk about why they connected to it or not, whatever people wanted to say.

It was...healing. It made me realize that that impulse of these four BH neighborhoods and all the pain of the last two years and all the kind of fears about it (it's arbitrary; it's whimsical to choose communities by initials) - went out the window, because to hear people talk about what this play meant to them and what the last two years have meant to them, made me realize how... That the things that I was thinking about weren't important, but that, ultimately, they were kind of selfish, my concerns. And that's - and I felt, really happy. That's the end of my story.

Maribeth Larkin:

I came back to Los Angeles in January, working as part of a team of organizers who are trying to rebuild networks of relationships within church and congregation, neighborhoods, and schools. Literally, my work for the last ten months, has been one-on-one conversations. I've done about a 1,000 of them. I was thinking last night, how to focus in on some of those conversations. There's two conversations I'd like to share with you.

I have met with a lot of parents who are real concerned about what is happening to their kids in the public schools. One particular mom I was meeting with in south Central - this was last spring - told me about her six-year-old. His jacket got stolen out of the coatroom. Another boy took it. He confronted the boy but couldn't get him to give the jacket back. He was real concerned that he was going to get in trouble when he went home, if he didn't bring his jacket home with him. So he went to his teacher.

He said to her, "A boy took my jacket. He won't give it back to me. What do I do?" His teacher said, "That's your problem. That's not my problem." He came home and he told his mom.

The mother was alarmed by the teacher's lack of response. This child is six years old. He needs to see adults like his teacher as a resource to help him figure things out. She (the mom) wanted to be a different kind

of adult, one who would not say to a kid, "That's your problem," but one who would try to teach that kid how to think about his situation and help him figure what he could do about it.

She was sympathetic, in some ways, with the teacher. She probably had a million of those kinds interactions with kids that day, that week, or whatever. But the mother's conversation was about the kind of adult she wants to be, and the kind of adult she wanted to be around the kind of adult she hoped she would be in the life of her child and the children of that community.

She told that story to some of the leaders that were part of a collective in a church that she belongs to there. That prompted a whole, bigger conversation about, what we as adults do - or not - to become either part of the problem or part of the solution? She's become a real agitator to other people as she tells that little story; she talks about how she wants to change. How she wants to become a responsible adult who is willing to help kids figure out how to become responsible.

Another person that I've been meeting with and getting to know over the last few months is a woman who lives in the West Athens neighborhood, down by Imperial Highway. She's a fairly accomplished leader, I think, in her neighborhood, at her school, in the church that she attends. She's somebody who has learned how to tell her story.

She's from Mexico. Her family speaks Spanish. She's lived here in the US about ten or eleven years. She has six young kids, all under about twelve years old.

She described herself to me as somebody who was a spectator to her life, to her family's life, and to the neighborhood and the community. She said, "You know, when I first came here, I just watched everything happen. I watched my kids come and go. I watched my husband do his thing. I watched my neighbors. And I, I was just the audience. Now, I've begun to be an agent, an actor in my life. And it's me now initiating conversation with my kids. It's me now doing what I do in my church or at my school. I'm a whole different person because now my life is mine. I'm not just watching.

That conversation, that insight of hers, has given rise to a lot of conversations with people about how we move from being spectators to being actors and being engaged in what's going on around us; and having confidence that that our acting can make a difference.

Leilani Chan:

Intro also...I, right now, where I am, as an artist, I do a lot of work with the community. I'm feeling a tension between my growth as an artist, where I want to go as an artist, and the work that I'm doing with my community.

My community and my work - it's very blurry, which is which. But the best that I've been able to articulate to myself is that, in my work, I'm able to do what I want to do; express it the way I want to express it; deal with the issues I want to deal with, in the way that I want to deal with it. In the community work, it's more about giving a voice to a community; giving them an opportunity to perform, to explore theater as an art form; to find their voice; to tell their story. That's more of my community work.

Of course, I was a Director and as a workshop leader, you know, subliminally, you might, you get it in there somehow, but very, very, like, it's under there. But more so, it's the community members who may be acting for the first time, who may be thinking politically for the first time, or thinking, you know, socially, politically - and also interweaving traditional arts because they - there's a lot of hula dancers who...or, use a lot of people from the community, who do a lot of work with more traditional performance. Now, they're doing theater.

So, I guess the only story that I can tell is looking at my work, I'm in a very complicated place right now. I've done three years of work, specifically, on what I call the "Kalo Projects," where I teach free theater workshops for members of the Hawaiian community. Then we do a performance at the Pacific Islander Festival, which is this - the biggest gathering in Southern California of Pacific Islanders. It's an outdoor festival. It's a traditional arts festival.

Then, after that, we go to a theater space and perform. So, the idea is that we expose performance art and theater to the Hawaiian community, and then we also bring them to a theater space so they also are...

So, I mean, they've come to spaces they've never come to before, like having this performance space. They're getting sent to a museum. Last year, we did a show at the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center (JACCC). So, so that was the initial goal, in the beginning.

In the beginning, again, it was just my project. I had a grant. I did it. We - I did the workshops. My initial idea was we were invited to perform at the Hawaiian Village at the Pacific Island Festival. And so, "OK. We'll perform." I mean, this is a booth at an outdoor festival. There's Tahitian drumming going on in the background. There's a big - we weren't allowed to get on the stage, because the stage had to be for traditional arts only. So, you know, it was hula dancers. It was Tahitian dancers. It was Maori dancers.

So we were in the booth, doing these sketches that we had done during our workshops, that we had created in the workshops that dealt specifically with the Kalo myth, which is the name of the project. Kalo is the name - is the Hawaiian word for Taro, which is - which makes poi -

which has its own mythology and its own political history. It's a whole other story.

So, these plays were dealing with contemporary issues- kind of mixing up the mythology with – to contemporary lives of the Hawaiian people living in Los Angeles today.

So, by doing those scenes in that booth were really good for the performers in the sense that they learned how to project. They learned how to - what it meant to have a presence, because everybody was just walking by. So they learned focus. But it was not the most ideal thing for a first time performer. But, by the time we went to Highways Performance space, when they performed in that controlled environment, they were like, they were so - they were huge. You know? I mean, everybody was like chicken skin and crying and, you know, everybody was...

And people were so excited that first year to finally hear their voice. I think everybody was just so excited to finally see their stories being told, because we also conducted a lot of oral history interviews, along the way, as well - and we video taped them. But in the end, it was the story of the participants that came through, mostly.

So, with the success of the first year, I got a couple of people that, "OK, what's next?" So, so...I have got - my organization has been growing.

Our second year was different. I decided not to do the performance – we decided to do the performance installation at the Festival, but this time, they wouldn't let us in the Hawaiian village. We had to get our own booth, but they let us have the booth for free. So, we had our own booth.

We're like, "OK, what are we going to do?" So we did a performance installation where we had volunteers play three different characters. People had to go around and vote for the character they thought was the most Hawaiian [laughter]

So we got - one person was just in a Aloha shirt with a coconut shell and sunglasses. The second person was a Hollywood hula dancer with the grass skirt, the coconut bra, and you know, fake leaves. And then someone was just in regular clothing. People would just write down what - you know, they had to write down a sentence answering why they thought a particular character was the most Hawaiian.

The whole community was really confused because they were, "Who won? Who won?" Well, no one really won, because we kept changing the actors and the costumes changed a little bit. It was more about what, you know, the responses were and what people thought.

We specifically did a Hollywood hula dancer because there's so many misconceptions of what a hula dancer is. Like the grass skirt, isn't from Hawaii. So, you can put that down. We had a little - if they wanted to, they had a little program to look at what, you know, little hints about why we had chosen those costumes.

We took those responses and put together...we had slides of the people that were in the costume and we matched them up with the responses. We put them together in a performance piece. That was one of the pieces that we did at the Getty Center Museum.

So, in the third year, we decided to do it again. This year, we had to pay for our own booth. We had to have our own booth and we had to pay for our own booth. What we did, instead, we just - it wasn't even a performance installation. We just had a talk story booth where people - there were like six questions, like, why are you here? Where do you come from? What does it mean to be blank (whatever ethnicity/ies you are? What is your ethnicity? Because the Hawaiian community is multi-ethnic and spread out all over. So there are pockets lots of Hawai'i people live, but mostly, the whole community is spread everywhere, so you can't really deal with one neighborhood.

And that's one of the problems that I've been experiencing in my workshops is that people can't come to the workshops because if I conduct them wherever I conduct them, there's a bunch of people who can't come. So, I've been doing them at the JACCC, which is downtown. It's central, hopefully, for most people.

Then, also - most of the people in my workshops are 20s and 30s, because the older generation, definitely, can't be putting in, you know, the driving time and the time in the workshops. They're just not willing to make that kind of commitment, but they've got a lot of stories to tell.

So that's where we woven in the oral histories that we've conducted with elders in the community. So, this past year, what we did, was use the stories from the videos and also from those questions where people answered with little pieces of paper - we used all of that; did improv exercises and came up with performances that we did at the JACCC.

So, the whole history of the three years is what I'm looking at right now. It's, kind of, actually just ended this year, in May - no, June. Now, I'm taking a break from that funding and using it as an opportunity of, "Well, what am I going to do next? What have I learned?"

It's been really interesting to see the relationship... In the beginning the community was really excited and happy. Now, they got used to it, so now they're more critical. They're starting to see those little undertones

that are in there. They're also starting to see my professional work and not being able to differentiate between my professional work and my community work. And my professional work is definitely much more controversial and provocative. So, I've seen a drop off in the people in these established Hawaiian community wanting to get involved with the projects.

But, at the same time, there are people who are in the Hawaiian community who, kind of on the side tell me, "keep doing that, we like it." You know? Because there are other people who have felt empowered by the work that I'm doing. So, it's its been a successful project and I'm really proud of the work that I've been doing and the shows have been great. The workshop participants who have participated all have gotten something out of it, and the audiences have gotten a lot out of it.

But I'm - I think that the questions that were on that piece of paper were all very provocative to me. You could go with many different directions.

I guess one other thought was using traditional - being a non-traditional artists and working with...with communities of color, and especially with the community that has a history of their culture being appropriated...and all but annihilated and bastardized; to be a non-traditional artist who, by being non-traditional, I want to embrace, you know, Hawaiian traditionalism - because there's also tension in all of my work - and in working with the community, that specifically is where the tension is right now, is that, you know, "Hawaiians wouldn't do that. Hawaiians wouldn't say that." It's just like...aargh. So...that's my story.

Martin Hernandez: There are so many different stories that we can go with. So I was thinking about where in the world stories helped move something in the work that I've done. And what I've come upon is a situation. It's a few years back.

Just as a little background. The local county metropolitan transportation authority - for people who aren't aware of what's going on here in Los Angeles - has spent billions of dollars on a subway system, that probably wouldn't be so bad, except that they've used money from the bus system to pay for a lot of it.

So, as a result, the buses have deteriorated. Buses are breaking down. The majority of people who take those buses are low-income people of color.

So, when we founded the Bus Riders Union about six years ago, we started doing work on the buses, organizing a small base. Then, a few years later, the MTA made an effort to raise the fare and eliminate a monthly bus pass that people used just to get on the bus and ride pretty much all over the place. They (the MTA Board of Directors) voted to do that - that's a whole other story - but eventually, the board voted to raise

the fare and eliminate the bus pass, which was a very major part of a lot of working class people's lives who take the bus.

A week later, because there was such a budget crisis, a week later, they voted a 125 million dollars to start a rail project up towards Pasadena. So, there's a contradiction. We've taken it out of poor people and putting it on this rail project to benefit a lot of contractors.

So, we filed a civil rights lawsuit against them, about the use of public funds - especially federal funds in discriminating against the people who use the bus, which are 81% people of color. It's transit-racism because as a lot of our members pointed out, if these were white corporate executives using the bus, you wouldn't have the bus system breaking down. Right now, we'd be in a whole different situation.

So, to make a long story short, we walked into court to file the papers for the lawsuit on September 1, 1994. It was also the same day that they were going to eliminate the bus pass and raise the fare. The judge gave a temporary restraining order halting that fare increase that very day. Within a week, the bus pass was still in existence. They raised the fare; they raised the bus pass a little bit later on.

Later on, when we settled the lawsuit, they brought the bus pass down. They promised to reduce overcrowding on the buses, a lot of different things were promised in this court settlement. We won a Consent Decree that that was being overseen by the gentleman who helped negotiated it. The Consent decree is monitored by a Washington D.C. based attorney named Donald Bliss.

A few years later, the MTA, as another cost cutting move (because they didn't have any money for certain things), decided to cut service at night, which for a lot of people, this is like from midnight to five, it's a lifeline service for a lot of janitors, hotel workers, people who have no other way to get around because they're working at less than minimum wage or at minimum wage jobs.

And, the majority of them, again, people of color - security guards...I found so much...it was like totally foreign to me because when I used to organize on the bus, it was during the day. It was a whole different world - it was an eye opening experience for me - to get out there at 2:00, 3:00 in the morning with some of our members to go talk to people, because they had certain lines that they were cutting - and actually had cut.

We challenged it in court. We filed papers against it, hoping against hope, because we had no other recourse, because we had this new document (the Consent Decree) that we'd been able to win a lot of things out of. So the...the Special Master, who is like overseeing this case... It's kind of weird talking to a Special Master overseeing...you know? [laughter] It was strange.

But...he said the MTA couldn't just cut service like that. They had to give out some kind of alternative or some kind of replacement service for these folks because it's such a lifeline that they can't really cut that service. If they didn't, he would restore all the service unless the Bus Riders Union and the MTA negotiated something.

So we went out on the buses and talked to the people who had gotten their bus cut. I called one of our members who was a janitor, Rosa Ayala, very active in her union, who happened to live down the street. You know? So I went down to her building, I called up, "I got to talk to you - I've got to find people to give us testimony," because our lawyers were saying, "We need to hear stories. We need to hear what's really happening to them." She said, "Meet me at 10:30, I'll bring some people."

So I met her at 10:30. It was at her jobsite. She said, "Come back at 2:00 when I get out." So, there I was at 2:00 in the morning. Talking to her, some of her people. We went down the street. Went to Seventh and Broadway and it's amazing how many people are out there at 3:00/4:00 in the morning waiting for a bus, especially when it's not coming.

That's what happened to one woman that worked at this - this janitor, this other janitor. At Rosa's office when she was cleaning up, was this one woman, I was driving [Elsa] home after one of these night. She was standing on the corner, hadn't heard that they had cut the bus service. She'd been there like for an hour, two hours, was in tears, crying, "Where's the bus?" "Well, haven't you heard?" So we drove her home. She became another witness to what was going on because we were trying to find witnesses to go to court and tell the lawyers their stories, and also find other people on the buses, to hear their stories.

So, we got a couple of members - actual members - Bus Riders Union members - who went out with me and a couple of other people and went on these buses at 4:00 in the morning - lines that had been cut.

So if somebody had to take like a half an hour trip over here, they had to go the whole circuit to get around. So, it increased their trip by an hour. If they missed the bus, they had to wait another hour, because it only comes once an hour.

So we talked to guys who worked in restaurants, bus boys, waiters. I ran into a security guard who was saying, "Yeah, we can't find some of these guys because - I know other guards who this happened to - but they've lost their jobs because they couldn't get to work." He told me all sorts of stories. It was just, you know, these heart wrenching stories - about a guy who when he got off the bus, had to take a cab to get home because it was a very dangerous neighborhood down in south LA, because if he walked through this gang, in their territory, he feared for

his life. So he had to pay like \$7/\$6 bucks a night. He was a cook in a restaurant who was making minimum wage and it was like, an hour of his wage. You know?

...and here I am trying to like get all these stories together, take them to do depositions, getting witnesses to do depositions to take back to the court and say, again, hoping against hope that we'd able to get a good deal out of this.

So, eventually it put a lot of responsibility on us to make sure everything was correct, everything was right - because we were carrying the message back to the court, because a lot of the folks - we had like four or five actual witnesses who got the call, but there were some other ten, fifteen, twenty people that we talked to at night who wouldn't be able to come to court, but their declarations or their statements would be used in court. So, we had to be very conscious of having them being correct and being right. It was a big responsibility because we were trying to get people's service back and they giving us their trust. It was a major responsibility.

So we turned all this stuff back to the court, had the witnesses. It went back to the Special Master again. At the same time, we were trying to negotiate a...a...a compromise to get most of the service back. The way the Special Master was writing his opinions, it looked a lot very good for us. So, we were able to get about 90% of the service reinstated, which was good for a lot of the people, but then for other people, it wasn't because they still...we tried to find the heaviest lines and..that's a whole other story.

But the one woman who helped me the most - Rosa - who lived down the street from me, she was great because her line was cut. She had a line that she had to take and she had to walk. She used to walk a block. She ended up walking about five blocks, which in our neighborhood is kind of like, spooky.

But it was very interesting because she said, "OK. Well, my line's cut, but that's fine. But the people on - down on Wilshire on the west side - who she works with - they've got a lot - they got their line. There's more people on there than there are on my line. So, that's fine. We'll get them the next time."

The solidarity that she had was OK, "Hey, I still fought hard for it. We didn't get my line. I wasn't fighting just for my line. I was fighting for my line, but this is the best thing that we could get under the system and under this court case."

Which is another dilemma that we have, is that we should never have been in the situation where they cut any of the service. In fact, we're trying to fight for more night service and that was the problem. The issue at that point, was, they still get bus service at night and during the day and everything like that.

So, here we are with this court order that's got a lot of good things for us, but again, is a compromise. The MTA gets stuff. We can get stuff. In an ideal situation, we would have had everything back and [our fares] decreased. But there was one woman who was like, "Hey, I'll walk my three blocks, four blocks, five blocks at night and...but, my comrades, basically, they've got some more better service."

And then, the members of the who Bus Riders Union came a long and volunteered - "Sure, no problem." You know? Pick them up at 2:00 in the morning and meet them at a particular line and they were taking down people's testimonies. It was real invigorating for me and we did really good work at that point and was able to win something back. Hopefully, later on, as the struggle continues - knowing it's a long-term struggle - and just like the janitor Rosa was saying, "It's a long term struggle. We win some, we lose some - but it's the goal at the end that we're looking for."

So, that's my story.

[Continuation of Side B & Overlap Point...Begin Second Tape]

Josephine Ramirez: And now, for something completely different!

Three and a half years ago, I got this wonderful gift, and that was after consulting for two and a half years where I was not really paying my bills and getting into debt, but having a really good time producing all kinds of weird art projects and consulting with community based organizations, the gift was that I got an offer to go be a researcher at the Getty Research Institute. Because I needed the cash and because the particular opportunity was so compelling- it's been one that has consistently seduced me in my career - which is to work for an organization that has a tremendous amount of yet who also have what I call, the ghetto jobs. The ones where you don't get that much of the total resources, but you get to do these really interesting things. You get to pursue what it is that compels you in your life, in your mind.

So, they asked me what I wanted to do. I said I want to look at this thing that's been bugging me for ten or fifteen years working in the arts, at that time. And that was, the problem of "audience development." In arts, that's usually means people are asking, "Why isn't anybody coming? What are we doing? Why doesn't anybody pay attention to us?"

This came from a very frustrating experience I had previously with a major theater here in Los Angeles, where the difference of opinion between me and the other leadership involved had to do with the theater's lack of connection to community; the lack of communication between those of us in the arts and "non-arts" people. What is this thing we call "art" to them?

So, in that previous theatrical life, I was trying to use some community based techniques to get people to influence and to begin to own the place that I worked. And when it came right down to it nobody at the theater really wanted to hear it. So I quit and did my own thing for a couple years.

Then, back to this gift, the offer to become a researcher - I got this opportunity to look at the issues around audience development in a way that I always wanted, which was, that it's not really just about audience, it's about culture and civic society and about some stuff similar to what Maribeth was talking about; that horrible disconnection and isolation from life - me as a participant versus me as a passive observer - which a lot of what we do in the so called arts world encourages and nurtures. "Come and see the people who know how to do it, (and pay to see it)...and aren't they great? You can't do it yourself, but you can sit and watch really creative and talented people and be amazed and entertained by them instead."

This kind of thing always makes me want to throw up. So I embarked on this research project to explore the everyday, "everyperson's" active experience of arts and culture. In my little corner of the Getty Research Institute with my relatively tiny budget, I was able to, because of these ideas, start talking to more and more people. With the help of my partners, which were Self-help Graphics, Proyecto Pastoral at the Dolores Mission, and the Urban Institute in Washington D.C., we built our coalition and we were able to enhance, document and provide a little analysis to what they were already doing in the east LA neighborhoods. And through the research project budget, give Self Help and Proyecto a little bit more resources so that they could engage more people in making art for themselves. We stayed away (all respect and praise to artists) the idea of the artist as the center of creativity and action, and put non-professional artists, "regular" people as the center of creativity and creative action. We tried to see what power there is in collective creative activity to build community because often it's about safe, shared spaces, and about consensus building. It's about telling, painting, sculpting, expressing individual and collective stories related to community. Each of these creative processes is an interesting parallel to a democracy-building process.

So, it was fascinating work – made all the more special because of our ability to use the Getty's resources in a direction it doesn't often explore.

So what I was able to do at the opposite end of the spectrum of endeavors that the Getty engages in was really important, but yet we had very little money. At the same time, I'm pretty proud of being able to take even the small steps that we did.

What happened after the three years after that project was over was that structures and people changed at the Research Institute and my job began to be a lot less interesting.

So, I was quickly kind of trying to figure out what could I do? At the same time I was becoming more and more pregnant, [laughter] so, I figured that I couldn't really just. So, God presented me with this other opportunity in the same place, to make another Queen of the Lateral Move [laughter] over to the Grant Program.

The struggle for me there is to figure out how - trying to learn another system so I can manipulate it towards - basically, similar means, similar ends (civic society and its intersection with arts and culture), because I have had this same passion for arts and education all my life. So, it's sort of like being - having been there for a month, now trying to figure out, OK, how do I translate, again?

You know, you have certain skills as a person of color - in my case, as a Latina - that you cultivate all your life about making yourself fit in so that people feel comfortable with you and begin to listen to your ideas. Persuasion is a very powerful thing.

So, I'm kind of in that process again, remaking and retooling where I'm at. I have a couple of apertures and it's exciting to be in a place where my job is to give away money. At the same time, there's all of these constraints and things that I have to deal with. It's challenging because I have this...substantially different definition of art in society than most of the colleagues I work with. So, it's always a constant friction. That's my - very different - but complete story.

Sam Woodhouse:

The more I listen to you, the harder it is, I find, to listen to my own voice. This very experience today is a story for me or a small version of what I've been trying to do for the last five years. There has been this tension between listening to what I would call the artistic voice and reaching out and embracing my community.

I've been spending a lot of time in Mexico City, where a lot of very intellectual artists have told me, you know, "Americans are so fucking hung up. They're doing theater as civic act, where's the art? Art is not a political thing. Art is art. Politics is politics."

The Anglo-American Cultural Attaché of the US Embassy in Mexico City said to me a couple months ago that we should make a play about

fear. Because Mexicans are very afraid that the American pop culture will transform their values forever, irrevocably. A lot of people in the United States are very frightened that the influx of values from the south will transform American culture forever, irrevocably.

Last spring, we were putting together a budget for a show that will go to Tijuana, to the cultural center which is just twenty-five minutes from here. He budgeted per diem and housing. I said, "Why did you do that?" He said, "Well, this is an international tour, right?" [laughter]

I did an informal poll of the people who work at my institution and 80% of them had never been to a cultural event in Tijuana, which was 25 minutes away.

Three years ago, I went to Tijuana and hired a bi-national consultant who was very connected to the arts - and said, "Could you invite the artists of Tijuana, come together and meet us and talk about whether we could make art together." 275 people showed up. They said, "No one's ever asked us this question before." I said, "What?" They said, "No one's ever come from San Diego to Tijuana, across that border, and said, 'Do you want to do something together?'"

I have this theater. Two spaces, a six million-dollar facility, owned by the City of San Diego. It's a nice place. Six miles away there is a community that I would occasionally drive through for reasons I can't even remember. And I used to see this garden. There was this big sign saying, "Community Garden." It had this giant 12 foot painted plywood carrot as a sign or billboard.

One day I said, "I wonder what that is?" I saw all these people who looked like they were working this garden. So, I went and stopped.

The people in charge of the garden were a Laotian man who used to work for the CIA, who had been air lifted out of Laos, so he wouldn't get killed. And an Anglo librarian. They were having a lot of trouble with this garden, which had been created from this grand vision of a rainbow community of togetherness. Their image was that people from all over the world, working side-by-side, planting and growing and harvesting would create a metaphor of community partnership in the garden.

The leaders told me, "The problem is that the Cambodian farmers here don't trust the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese don't trust the Laotians. The Laotians don't trust the Cambodians. And the African-Americans that we invited don't want to work here. The Latinos are interested in a whole other approach. They want to make money. The garden concept sucks. It doesn't work. [laughter]

Now, that sort of interested me. I said, "Well, this is an interesting place." So I started trying to make artistic projects in this community,

which is called City Heights, where there are 72 dialects spoken and 32 languages.

San Diego is different than Los Angeles. It's a very Balkanized place. There are neighborhoods in which a certain kind of people live here and another kind of people live over there and these kind of people live over here. There are a lot of borders. You know? They're not exactly like the Tijuana border, but they're a border.

When there's an international crisis, three weeks later; people from that country in crisis arrive in City Heights as refugees.

So, we started to work in City Heights with artists of all different cultures. People in the community that we were working with - educators, activists - people who were trying to start performing art spaces; organizers were saying, "Well, who are you, why are you here, what do you want from us?"

I've been struck today listening to the pain in reaching outside of oneself that you were speaking of.

I would say that for me, the hardest shows I've ever had to create were these works we called, "Around the World in a Single Day." The idea was really simple, "Hey, we'll get some professional artists. We'll recruit performers in the community. We'll partner up with educators and activists and organizers and we'll make a play about City Heights."

That was the hardest kind of work to do. People come to the table with such radically different priorities and mistrust of each. We made three world premier shows in three years. For the third one, I decided to mandate that the theme would be dramatic stories of change and community transformation. "There's the theme, folks. Got that?" [laughter] "Now write a play on that theme."

Now, I look back at it and say, "boy was that pretentious!" You know? The Chicanos/Chicana Studies Department faculty at San Diego State University said, "We'll come in and have 75 of our students go into this community of City Heights and do 75 interviews."

The community activist connected through the senior citizen agencies that were serving a lot of senior, Asian immigrants, said, "Great, we'll hook them up with my people." I said, "Yeah, this is great! This is it! We've got educators. We've community action. We've got arts." You know?

Well, the students - who were mostly Chicano - went to do the interviews and failed. You don't say to a person who is a 75 years old immigrant from Laos, "What's your name? How long have you been here?" [laughter] That was the entire interview.

We commissioned Culture Clash, the incredibly brilliant and experienced, artistic anthropologists to do a play about our region. They went to Tijuana. They came back stunned, saying, "Well, we don't know what to say about Tijuana." "We are Chicanos." [laughter] They were stunned. They were in culture shock after spending a week in Tijuana.

Culture Clash said, "we can't really write a play's about Tijuana, we don't know Tijuana. It's too different from what we know." They were honest enough to say that. So we put that in the play.

I don't know if this story has an ending... [laughter]

I'm personally fascinated by the role of art in the transformation of community and the way Americans look at art.

One of the biggest problems in our project with City Heights was transportation and food. We had to create Jack-in-the-Box food budgets for people because when we tied them up in a workshop we had to take them out of a job.

I live in a place where borders and are every where - psychological and physical. Twenty minutes away we have the biggest and most famous one in this part of the world. But there are a lot of other borders in my town.

We made this for three years, this play called, "Around the World in a Single Day." For three years. Three totally different plays. Each one was a nine-month project with four months of rehearsal. With a very, very different group of people each time. In the third year, I said, "I'm tired of the shitty artistic quality of this work, coming from this wonderful community." The work wasn't that good. But it was a wonderfully celebratory thing that people were doing. People saw it as a great community event. As a piece of art - it wasn't very good. I'm an artist. It's what I do. I thought, "Am I going to stop being an artist because I'm now trying to transform my community? No. I'm an artist. That's what I do. So let's do this community work in an enlightened, beautiful way. Let's make good art for a change.

Indeed we did. The community theater project became a powerful piece of art - the third time around. Because at heart, everybody really wanted to make an artistic show that everyone could brag about, as a way of showing how deeply they cared about the community.

I guess the conclusion to this story, is that the perform - two things, I guess...that memories in that show, that the art and the, if you will, the community change action that we were trying to [inaudible] or at least celebration of the art community. The problem with City Heights is

when you have this many cultures, this many languages and this many tragedies; there is no "there-there."

In the third year the city government built a theater and we got to christen it with our production on *Around the World in a Single Day*. The performance was like a town hall meeting. You couldn't tell the difference, really, between the audience and the actors because the people in the audience were making as much noise as the people on the stage, which was really cool.

And...and...and I don't know the conclusion to the story.

I think this subject for me, is not hard to talk about, but very hard to do...hard to do.

If we're talking about art and we're talking about community change and transformation, this is very hard work to do.

John Malpede:

OK. Everybody pays lip service to community art but it's a code word for "bad art." And art is about hierarchy, that's just what it's about, you know? And one time I was on an organizing committee for one of the LA festivals and it was one of the last ones that had less money and more inclusion of local artists, you know? [laughter]

In a meeting of local artists – myself included- people were saying theater should be more inclusive of local artists, at which point I said, "Well, you know, if all us local artists were included, we wouldn't even want to be in it because one reason we want to be in it, a big part of it's cache is because it's exclusive and other people are not in it."

What's fortunate - is that you can go - you can go to Highways and you can see stuff by community artists and you can go to Highways and see stuff done by artists who came out of some art school and get really confused about who's an "emerging professional" and who's a "community artist."

You know, and it's totally random as to which is going to be better. You can go to The Taper and see trash that's won five awards in New York. You can go to The Taper and see good stuff. You know? That's very wonderful.

So, but in terms of the whole hierarchy of the way it's all built, championing community based art is worst than Sisyphus, you know? Trying to push the rock uphill.

I did a show in Amsterdam last year with people who were seeking political asylum in the Netherlands. The way this happened is LAPD did a show in Amsterdam years ago, with homeless people there, which - because they actually have a social system there- was like, hounds teeth,

really, trying to find people that were homeless. It was the needle in the haystack. [laughter] Fortunately, with globalization progressing, now you can see a lot of people sleeping in doorways in Amsterdam. But in the early 90s, you really couldn't. [laughter]

Anyway, I ended up going back there and doing some teaching at an art school in Amsterdam. Then a graduate student came over and did an internship with us and then she went back and started working with refugees. She invited me over there to make a show with these people that she'd been working with.

In Europe, you know, that's...political refugee is a huge issue in Europe, you know, right now because - especially, you know, well, it's a huge issue everywhere. The more liberal your democracy is, the more difficult and thorny the issues is because on the one hand, you have to be more open to accepting political refugees. On the other hand, you don't want to. You know?

So, of course, in the Netherlands, has a reputation of being a very liberal democracy, which people are very proud of. So, the situation, it's actually a lot like the welfare system here in LA, which I know because I used to work for Legal Aid for four. I was an evidence gather for cases against the County welfare system. And here in California, the County - to shift channels here - the County is mandated to - or, at least up until recently - the County was mandated to provide for the indigent. This translated into a general relief project, into giving people Welfare, but with as many obstacles built in as possible so that people couldn't actually get it. That's how the budget was balanced.

So, in the Netherlands, this same sort of the same approach is taken with refugees. It's like, "Welcome, welcome, welcome. Come on in and then prove that you're a political refugee and not an economic refugee." And so people came from - from all the...world hot spots - Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Ethiopia, Congo, Macedonia, you know, Bosnia, etc., etc. And they're put - they're housed in former Army barracks. Then, they have to prove, in order to get a permanent status in the Netherlands, they had to prove that they were political and not economic refugees.

So, this was very hard to do because a lot of the people who...because the people that were political refugees, you know, had been tortured or they left without their papers, were involved in secret organizations, of which, yeah, there was still people back there that they're worried about, etc., etc.

So, it was a very hard...it was a very hard thing to do. And the thing that people were afraid to do because...because they didn't know who was really going to find out, about what was told, and what the implications were going to be.

So, anyway, the upshot of the whole story is we did do a show that was in...it was in...I'd say it was in order of frequency of words, I guess it was in English, Pharisee, Dutch, and French. You know?

And what happened in these camps, is a lot of people were grouped around national...national origin. So there was a lot of mistrust, blah-blah-blah. So, one thing that happened was that we built a community in the center where people were, like, really connected with other - that they didn't connect with before.

And they got to tell - like there was on vignette in the show where these two Macedonia girls got to rank all the - they ranked all the...their family had been in eight different places in eight different years, in eight different of these camps - so they got to rank the accommodations while they were waiting to find out whether they got to stay or not.

I was in Amsterdam again last month and I was at the theater where we had done the show, so one of the guys from the show came to meet me and ... and last year, he was Rabeh from Algeria, when - that's when he was living in the center. Now, he had moved out of the center. Quit trying to get legal status and he had just gone underground. Or, you know, was just living in the city and working illegally.

So, the first thing he said to me, he said, "Well, I'm actually Hassan from Morocco."

So, I think that's the end of that story - but there's more. So then I came back to LA. Actually, so that reminded me of another story, which was when I was working for legal aid.

My job was to get the witnesses for these class action suits against the County. So the idea - because we were also going to be in front of the judge - the idea was to find the...the...you know, the white guy who was not mentally ill, who had a separate professional career, who wasn't a substance abuser, who could represent the class of individuals. In this case, the class of homeless peoples being discharged from the County hospital to the streets.

So I found this guy. He was an efficiency expert. He was from Michigan. His father had actually been very high in the Ford Motor Company. So, because he was an efficiency expert, we ended up taking him around to the offices and he was analyzing the efficiency of the welfare offices in the County. Because he was from University of Michigan, because of his father, he was well connected.

Michigan happened to win the big ten that year and they were going to the Rose Bowl. So he said, "You want to come to the Rose Bowl? I can get you some free tickets." I said, "Yeah, cool. Let's go."

So, he was staying over in east LA at the Catholic Worker House. So a bunch of us got in the car. We went over to pick him up. He couldn't go. He was sick. He couldn't go. But he said, "Just go - just go to the Will Call Ticket Office and ask for Dr. John blah-blah-blah, who was giving out the tickets, and [he'll give you the tickets to get in]."

So we went. It was cool that day. We parked the car and walked three miles. We got to the ticket office, "We want the tickets for Roger D." He said, "I don't know. No tickets for Roger D." I said, "Well, where's Dr. John blah-blah-blah? Can we talk to him?" He said, "Whose Dr. John blah-blah-blah?"

So, anyway, so...so there were not tickets. There was no John blah-blah-blah. There was no Rose Bowl.

So, two of the three people that were on the LAPD staff - had come up through the company - and in these two months that I had been in Europe directing the show with political refugees, one of them had a really long history of diabetes and was in line for a transplant.. She was living alone. She went into a coma and wasn't found for about a day or so, so she was in the hospital for a very long time. When I got back, she was in the nursing home.

And then went I to see Sonya, who was in the hospital. She was in the nursing home over on...near Adams and Grant. So, I was going - so I walked in there to see her. This looked exactly like other nursing homes that I've been to, to see other people. In fact, instead of her being, sitting on her bed, someone else was sitting on her bed. That was Sunshine, who was one of the original members of the company and Sunshine had been thrown out of a window ten years before.

So, many times I had gone to see him during his recuperative process in a room that looked exactly like that. Ten years before...so, I walked in this room. There - he's sitting on the bed rather than her. It was like a complete, you know, time travel sort of thing. At the same time, it was like a really, really beautiful thing because I hadn't seen him in a long time. I stay in touch with him, but I hadn't really seen him in a long time. And, I felt a sense of family, because I also, I had a bunch of operations a couple of years ago.

So it was sort of like, even though we're all sort of like deteriorating, the machinery is breaking down, you know? And middle aged, you know? I mean, the material's breaking down - the machinery - and these various kinds of imperfect communications, including, you know, the trails and disasters and tragedies...happened, happened, happened.

At the same time, there was this - I just really - I just value sometimes being there so very much. And then in the midst of all this fragility, that

there actually - that there was this also kind of intrepid, you know, like, like, scabs healing.

Dudley Cocke:

Well, I was planning to just keep this seat warm for Gene Williams. But Gene's not here, so...

One of the things that I've been wrestling with in the past year is issues around space. Performance space. The configuration of the space. The regulation of the space. The protocols of space. Our work has always had this problem to deal with - what is public space? You understand we're after a working class audience.

Sometimes, what is designated as public space turns out to be very private space. I've seen it flip-flop both ways. I'm to hear some of the organizing experience with space, because I feel like it's something that I, as an art maker, can always learn more about.

One recent wrestling match with space occurred in a project, a four-year project, we were doing in the valley of Tempe and Phoenix. It was the "Untold Stories Project." We were working with Arizona State University, and working with untold stories - both on campus and in the community.

So, as part of this unfolding project, we - there were five companies of guest artists doing work, people you all know - Esperanza, Liz Lerman, John O'Neal, Junebug, and a Native American company from campus and community Pueblo-Zuni, New Mexico - Idiwanan An Chawe. We were all out there with our partners and as one of many events we had a performance to make at the Kerr Cultural Center in Scottsdale.

Now, Scottsdale is a wealthy with many retirees. The Kerr is a lovely little space. It was the private concert hall for Mrs. Kerr. She was - she didn't play fiddle, but she did play violin - a Scottish woman. This was her private concert hall, now given to the University as a public space.

The performance that I was making, both scripting and directing, involved Roadside, the company I worked with; 17 people from [the Pima] reservation - mostly youth, all but two teenagers; my friends from Idiwanan An Chawe, members of Pueblo in Zuni, New Mexico; and Zarco Guerrero, who is a visual artist, performance artist and mask maker.

So here are these four distinct cultural entities, going to come together to make this performance at Kerr. Now, we didn't have but two hours of - two and a half hours - to put it together. Each part had been rehearsing their own piece. Then, in two and a half hours, I would stage it with a fairly simple script, get all the markings on the lights and so forth. So this - as anybody in theater knows - it's a quite a hustle here. [laughter]

Now in this, people are on different clocks and they have different schedules, and just to get the 17 kids from Pima, you know, that's quite a round-up. The transportation alone - that's an effort. In theater, we have stage managers and assistant stage managers who handle casts even smaller than that. This day there was me - that's grassroots theater for you!

So, you never know how it's going to work - and we hadn't had word from the Pima folks. They hadn't emailed us or faxed us that said, you know, anything. But, of course, they showed up an hour before they were scheduled. Without hesitation, went right into the space and rehearsed their part. Then, went out and fed all the kids. The Zuni group was there, did the same thing. Zarco came - everything flowed together in terms of making this production.

We finished on time. A big sigh. Then, the real trouble started. It's now about 6:30. It's 8:00 curtain. Some of the - while the Pima children had eaten, I noticed that back stage, the staff of the space hadn't provided anything for anybody to drink. These are teenage kids, now Zuni and Pima - no snacks, nothing to drink. Older people drink water and coffee too. So I've got to take care of that.

Next thing I notice is that there are people who have arrived early because - people tend to not arrive on time in a lot of cultures. They'll arrive two hours early or they'll arrive 20 minutes late.

And a number of people had arrived early. [It's about 7:00]. So I said to the staff of Kerr, "It's a little chilly. Can these folks come into the lobby?" "No. The doors never open until 7:30."

So, you know, you start wrestling with that. So, then I feel obliged, instead of worrying about the six other things I'm supposed to be worrying about, to go warm these people up with some conversation and at least bring them back to meet the cast - you know, something. So that's now going on.

Then the next thing I encounter is that the cast is fooling with props, tuning instruments, one thing and another. In our way of making theater, that's fine for the audience to see that, to come in and be part of that. In fact, it breaks down the barrier between the stage, the performers, and the audience. But Kerr staff wouldn't hear of that. They now couldn't let the audience in even at 7:30, unless the space was perfectly set. Everybody had to exit and go back stage.

Well, OK, we get past that. Then, the next thing that happens is, all these kids come in that we've been working with at the Boys and Girls Clubs, and they are most all from foster homes. We've been making original theater with them all year. They are so excited to be at this performance. They have dressed to the nines and they're looking great...and they're

put in the bleacher, way in the back of this intimate space. I'm saying, "Why is this? I mean, can't we bring the kids down closer? They're so enthusiastic." And I'm told, "No, they're there in case they misbehave so we can jerk them out the back door."

So, by now, it's really...getting stressful - and the patrons are coming in. They are in this odd reversal. They are in the pit surrounded by raked seats. Of course, it's - they're all white folks, and they are surrounded by people of color. They were right close to the stage. Everybody else is ringing them. There's a lot of excitement going on because people across these communities are meeting each other for the first time. So the whole theater is abuzz. The kids are being introduced, and then a group of ASU plumbers and electricians and clerical workers, who we just helped make a play from their stories, they're having their cast reunion. So that's going on.

Then, about a third of the audience hasn't arrived. Right? Because of these different time clocks. I know they're coming. "No. The play must start at 8:00 sharp." You know? It just - this absolute...So, it starts at 8:00. It cut short all of the conversation, which is as important as anything that was going to happen on the stage.

The finale was - was real telling. At the end of the performance, the Zuni and Pima Native American dancers and singers invited the audience up for a circle dance. The kids quickly came forward from the far back. Man, they shot up there. The sides came down. And the Kerr patrons, who only had to stand up and take six steps to be part of it, just sat there.

It was at that moment, I mean, with all the other, that I knew in some really significant way, the event had been a failure. It had successes because it was the only time that this diverse community had stepped into Kerr. But for this group of regular patrons, the process had not been constructed so they could participate. They weren't that far off physically, but they had been segregated. They had segregated themselves, and the space protocol had segregated them. You could feel them sort of straining to meet those kids who were so wonderful; or to meet Mr. White that's Native - an elderly man, 70 some years old, singer/drummer from the Pima tribe who had a vision two years before that he would see the Pima children doing their traditional dances in public, off the reservation - and here it was.

So there was all this it had all of this charisma and presence in this space, yet the inside group was left on the outside.

So, we've been around the circle...I was watching last night for the first time on Japanese television, Sumo wrestling. I had never seen this before. Have you all...? I was transfixed. I could hardly go to sleep watching this. And the way they come and get down and then they look at each other; and then they get up and slap their fat...it's just ...

So, what it put me in mind is that we should end story telling circles by all putting our hands in here and...saying, "Alright, thank you, wonderful."

All: Thank you, it was wonderful.

Dudley Cocke: Now it's lunch. [laughter]

Dudley Cocke: It's 1:00 o'clock now. Us geese are going to fly at 3:00 is the deal. So there are two things that we know we'd like to get accomplished. One, we want to hear your comments from the written material. I think we're going to save that for the last gasp.

I am thinking of just moving around the circle now, and each of us will have an opportunity to throw out an issue, a question, a problem, or a piece of analysis that they want comment from the group on.

And if nothing is coming to mind, you can certainly pass. So if I give a problem, statement, or some issue, then we just take comments on it for a little period of time until we feel somewhat satisfied that we've at least got the beginning of an answer to work with. And then we'd move to my left, and Jerry'd throw something.

So does that seem like what we should begin doing? Or do people have some other proposal to make for what to do right now?

Okay, so let's go with that for an hour or so, and where we're at. So again, anybody who wants to begin, we'll then move to the left.

Martin Hernandez: I think you raised an interesting thing about space, the closing off of space. Our issue is the closing off of public space in a lot of areas around, as far as organizing, and now as we move to moving more theatrical stuff, doing more theater stuff.

And more often than not, the buses--we think of it as public space, but it's like you were saying, we're finding out that it's not as public as we'd like it to be, depending on the driver, and also some of the stations are not as public, that is, we thought [unintelligible]. If you do stuff, like if you're organizing your community or theater-wise, what you find as far as, if you see that situation happening and how to counter that, the closing off of public space, that's the thing we're seeing right now, even

at some of the public meetings we're going to, the board is kind of clamping down by using security guards and police, not just on us, but on everybody.

How do we counter that, if everybody has those issues--?

Male voice: I'm not sure I understand exactly what the--you mean security guards are preventing you from staging events in public space? Do I understand this right?

Martin Hernandez: Sometimes public testimony at a board meeting, it just seems to be more and more that spaces that we thought we were able to use before are being closed off to us.

I'm just throwing that out as an observation.

Dudley Cocke: Anybody what to follow that up?

Sam Woodhouse: Well, I'll make a comment, which is just a comment, it's not really a direct response.

This project I was referring to, called Around the World in a Single Day that we did for three years in a row, in the first two years, we didn't have a space as it were. You even referenced it in your opening comments today. I walked in a door, and I said this is so great, Cornerstone's new home. Because place and space is really important in theater.

Frankly, public space can be a bit of an impractical fantasy. For the first two years, we did our show at a street fair. We did five performances during this one-day street fair in the community. They closed the biggest street in the middle of the city for this street fair.

They put up a stage with my two microphones, and said, great, here's the perfect place to do your show about our community. Well, you couldn't hear the actors. No one paid attention to the performance. And there was no sense of occasion.

The only interesting part of this experience was that during the first production, in year one, we ended the story with a wedding onstage, I remember two Cambodian women wandering by during the show and thinking that the actors were actually getting married, that this was a real wedding ceremony. They knelt down on the ground, and began to do some kind of ritual response to what they thought was an actual wedding ceremony.

In the third year, a local foundation build a theater in this community, and for a lot of the community people, not just the artists, suddenly there was a place that people could be proud of. They could come to honor, treasure, celebrate, and say, "it's ours."

This gets a little bit to what you're saying; it's who controls the space, who owns it.

With this issue of a community and artist working together in and for the community, *where* that happens is a big deal. In our experience, the place where we worked for two years wasn't really a 'place'. There literally was no "there there."

City Heights had no community center, no city hall. The center of this community was the police station with a basketball court behind it. Until this theater was built and suddenly there was a "where" to be proud of.

Josephine Ramirez: I hear what both of you are saying in different ways about the need for space and I'm going to have a little bit different take on that.

In your work, Martin, this need for public space is so distinct and necessary. And in the global society that we live in, that space is shrinking and shrinking and shrinking.

About that I have to ask, well, how can this happen? Why are we losing true public space? It couldn't happen to the degree that it's happening, and at the speed which it's happening, if the public was more animated and activated about its responsibilities, and its ownership of space.

I'm looking at a different ways of addressing of the problem than Martin does, about the need for individuals to become more connected to their creative capacity, and their power to be active citizens that could in turn collectively change the situation.

That's a very hopeful and general statement. And that's not to say that more specific and direct work, like Martin's is not necessary. There are some very real things that have to happen, have to be organized, whether or not the creative capacity and power of the people actually happens in society. But that is sort of a conceptual or theoretical response to what Martin's comment was.

And then with Sam's statement, I understand artists' need to have space in which the work can be respected and all that. At the same time, I think when you're talking about a community, you need to see what is already an asset, and what is already happening in that community, and where people are already meeting, and start there, rather than coming in and saying, "we have to have a space."

The people who are living everyday in the neighborhood will tell you where people hang out, or where is a good place to go, or where is a good place to avoid. And then if through a process of utilizing existing

spaces and resources, the community becomes engaged in discovering its own resources and articulating them, then maybe one of the things that happens is that the people who live in the neighborhood decide that they want a space, a special space, in which things can happen.

But there has to be something that happens way before that is about individual/collective engagement with one another. Maybe from this discussion, animated by creative activity, people decide a space is necessary or not.

What I think we're concerned about is what happens on that "lower end" side of the spectrum of cultural activity, from the very informal, nonofficial, non-trained, quote amateur level that only sometimes moves to a different part of the spectrum (With a very few people moving all the way to the professional "star" part of it.)

We're focusing, I think, with this whole- part of the spectrum, where culture and creativity are activated in the community and asking, "how is that sustained?"

And in community based theater making techniques, it is sustained. Something happens there with "regular" "non-artists' folks. But it doesn't necessarily at its inception happen because there is a space. It happens because there is a place that people choose to make it happen in.

It happens with people making something together first, and then they identify where and how they want their collective work seen. Sometimes they don't. Some of the most successful ongoing community based work, done by artists, has been done by companies without a "home" space, who go and who never have a place, or they have a steady place.

Male voice: I think a place in the community, having a place in the community.

Solomon Rivera: For youth, there's so much attached to their school, it symbolizes so much to them. It's not just this institution where they learn. For some of our folks doing work, the liquor store means a lot to them. They have a vision of what it could be. They have memories of what it was in the hearts of their lives.

I hear the point you're making, but there is definitely the power of certain places in a lot of hte organizing realms.

Erica Kohl: A project I helped organize is similar to what you are saying. I worked with a bunch of kids in the Western Addition neighborhood in San Francisco, who were exploring their neighborhood, interviewing people from all sides of the community; similar to an asset mapping. We eventually made a great resource guide and map.

It was important that we started without an issue, without a direct "ask"; it was purely building those relationships, identifying those places, and maybe having a product out of it, but that wasn't the goal. The goal was to make new connections and build the confidence of the kids.

When the students wanted a large public venue to perform in, they had already identified possible spaces through this neighborhood research; they had talked to so many people including staff at the Fillmore Auditorium. So when the students wanted put on an interactive-poetry slam they imagined how great it would be to perform at the Fillmore. And the Fillmore Auditorium, because the kids made such an impression and sold them on the idea of a Fillmore hosted student-community show being a good cause, a good marketing event, and a historic thing in the neighborhood, they let them use the venue for free. This was the first time the Fillmore ever donated the space for a free event. The kids walked by this place everyday on the way to school but never even went inside. So this was pretty great to them.

The students also identified other places they loved in the community, like churches, centers, safe places, local leaders - and invited the people that frequent these places into the Fillmore for the event. On stage they had local musicians and rap artists backing them up, and it was really powerful. It was incredible.

It was identifying those unlikely places, doing that community building before even having a product or event that made it successful. But one of the challenges that came out of this experience is how you sustain these new relationships? The venue might not donate such a huge resource every year. And those people that came together from all the different pockets of the neighborhood, or different pockets of the city. They don't work together normally, so how are they going to stay connected?

The second thing that has been nagging at me, in relation to this inquiry, is that this particular effort worked because it was art and expression, without an organizing agenda. And the places where it became sticky, (with school principals and some of the teachers) was when the kids got up there and starting improvising, expressing rap stories that got closer to controversial issues- the more issues addressed, the harder it became.

So in listening to all your stories, my question really is how do you unite those issues with the art effectively? Because it seems like you can get more resources, more spaces, and build relationships when the community engagement is an open process but that doesn't let the controversial or hard issues enter that stage.

And to me, that is so important. But that is the challenge.

- Participant: It seems like what you're saying is how to be open and inclusive and then focus in?
- Erica Kohl: Yes, in terms of the expression, yes. But also in terms of the partners that you want to mobilize in the audience.
- Leilani Chan: Space is something that Bill said earlier, about being frustrated with LA. And I have a similar experience in that when I teach workshops or when I do shows, people don't want to come from East LA to Santa Monica, or they don't to come from Carson to downtown, or from the Valley. And people won't even do that.
- But then I did a show in Massachusetts, and people drove from--because there are so few Hawaiian events going on in Massachusetts, and I was in Western Massachusetts, people drove two hours from Boston or two hours from further inland to come and see my performance.
- And that was such an amazing experience. There was this one popular song in Hawaii that I was dancing to, and people in the front row were singing along and crying. Because it was just so powerful to have taken myself from my space to that space.
- And then I also last year, in honor of the 100th anniversary of the annexation of Hawaii, needed to do some kind of performance visual, because I was not able to join the March in D.C. to bring attention to the illegal annexation of Hawaii.
- So what I did it, I teamed up with a Chicano muralist and buttoh dancer in San Francisco, and we did a performance ritual on the corner of Mission and 24th, on top of the BART station. It was an all-day ritual. We had people coming and drawing the chalk. They painted my face. And part of the ritual was painting my face with Hawaiian tattoos.
- And we were exploring colonization on our bodies and imperialism and all that. And this is a neighborhood where the bus stop is right there, and all these aunties and uncles are sitting there. And that just seems where they collect in the afternoon.
- Watching this go on all day, speaking Spanish, not knowing where we were from, what we were doing. And to me, it was a really incredible experience. Because this is an audience who would never have come to see my show in a theater, any theater, no matter what neighborhood, would they have paid to come see my show, because they wouldn't know that this was something they could relate to.
- And at the same time, these are people who were--they could have been indigenous people from Mexico. So they really had a connection to the issues we were exploring as far as colonialism and imperialism and oppression.

And so that, as far as alternative space, for me as an artist, really gratifying to know that I could have that exchange, and that level of education.

But then again when we talk about space, it's also we talk about economics. As an artist, I can't--I mean I did that just because I had to something on that day. I had no grant funding. I didn't do any press releases. I called as many people as I could. But it was something that I needed to do. And it was one of the more--I mean, I think the audience got a lot out of it.

So my question is, I guess, in a theater space, as an artist, you're given all these things that you can do stuff with, in a controlled space, but people have to pay for the tickets, and what kind of space you're in depends how much the ticket is going to be, depends what kind of audience you're going to get.

So I'm kind of both for a space and kind for not a space at all.

I need them both.

Bill Rauch:

The show that we produced with Chinatown in Chinatown, there was a discussion. And Chay Yew, the director - it was a pretty provocative piece in a lot of ways. And this man, in a post show discussion said, "I seen this in a regular theater, I would have been really angry, and I would have been really threatened. But because I saw this in my community sitting in a cafeteria at Castelar Elementary School, I laughed and I cried and I just" -and that was- just the sacredness of space.

The steel project that we did in Pennsylvania, on opening night I was just standing around meeting some friends in line. And this woman turned to one of my friends and said, "I'm really nervous right now, I'm really emotional, because my father was killed in the iron foundry, and women were not allowed in this building, and I have never been here. I've never been in the room where my father was killed. And now I'm going to go watch a play there."

That was the event, going into that building, was such a huge part of the event of what was happening. How much space affects content and the ability to experience whatever the content is.

Sam Woodhouse:

A friend of mine called me yesterday. He's starting a new theater company in San Francisco, and he said, "what do you think of this idea? We're thinking of changing the name of our company from Fog House Productions to foghouse.com." I said, "what do you mean?"

He said, "well, we don't have a home space. We're going to produce in many spaces. So our 'home' is our web site."

Participant: I don't know what to say.

Martin Hernandez: Sounds great.

Dudley Cocke: Did you want to throw out a question? I know these will all be incomplete answers.

Josephine Ramirez: What about training? There are a lot of issues around that. The people with the right kind of skills to be civic and cultural organizers are few. There are a very few special people, cultural organizers that really know what they're doing. And they've had to learn about the civic part of it.

Or you have civic organizers that have to learn about cultural organizing. Of course there is a lot of overlap, because organizing in some way is always going to be organizing. But organizing cultural events with civically involved goals probably means both sides have new skills to learn.

What are the mechanisms that are already in place that could enhance, that could help train and produce people - either cultural organizers to learn a lot more about civic initiatives, or civic organizers to learn about cultural issues.

And then also, what as arts professionals can we do to influence the field and academia so that people who are being trained as artists receive a new way of perceiving and dealing with the issues represented in community based work. The current paradigm and training forces the issues that thoughtful artists like Leilani and Sam were talking about. You want to do your own art, but then you have this responsibility toward community, and somehow these two endeavors are separate – producing tension.

Well, to me there's some paradigm that produced that tension. We are taught to think that to be a "real" artist you have to do it "this way", with the weight and the privileging of the word "artist" on the professional, product-oriented side of the spectrum, not about community.

And you guys are fairly evolved, okay? What about the people who are not? And I have worked with them. There is a real disconnect in the way that we're brought up as artists to think about community. And it leads to there not being ways for people to learn about the power of arts and culture to help civic change, or the power of civic change to connect up to culture.

So what are those complicated threads that need to be pulled on in order to figure out a better way to address this issue?

- Solomon Rivera: That is the big question. I think one simple obvious thing is a lot of partnering that would happen which increases capacity, but I think that tension would exist.
- And I kind of feel like, say, I'm the organizer, and you're the artist, and doing something collaboratively, there are all these decisions where there could be tension. And I feel like, well, he's got his agenda, and I've got mine. Both could be towards social change on this project, but we just kind of come out with different world-views.
- And when there are decisions to be made, it's like no, this is what we got to do. This is what we got to do. So it's a good question.
- Sam Woodhouse: I use the word "community" often when I write about the work of my theater. I was talking to my staff the other day, and I said, "I have to remind you all that just because I use the word 'community' with pride, doesn't mean that many other artists in the world that we work in look at the word with pride. Because it can often mean "amateur".
- This is a challenge for professionals who use the word 'artist' working on activist civic art.
- One of my personal agendas is to elevate the word 'community' to have the same status as the word beauty when I'm talking about art. That's actually one of the things I've been trying to do in my writing, with the people that I work with, and in my art.
- But I come from a tradition in professional theater where the word community theater means amateur. And frankly, to be even more blunt, it means you're doing a play, such as, Remember Mama; written in the 1950s and performing in a corner theater in a tiny suburban mall. Southern California has hundreds of 'community' theaters that don't do work anything like the work we're talking about today.
- John Malpede: Well, the good news is that those distinctions are even worse in other places. Like in Europe, they have schools where you can go to an amateur theater school as opposed professional [unintelligible] amateur theater festivals. So it can be even worse.
- Dudley Cocke: Well, one thing that the theater company that I work with is, is a folk theater company, in that all our training came from the culture in the community, not from school, not from fine arts training.
- And we're constantly looking at that continuum of professional to amateur, and looking at where and how it blurs. And of course one place it clearly blurs is with folk and traditional artists, which arguably represent some of the highest degree of excellence in the world, if you look at cultures around the world, because the training is so good. If you

look at dancing in Bali, or Zuni in New Mexico, the training begins very young and is very constant. The eye looks relaxed, but it's --

So there's that sort of continuum. And it's so interesting that amateur has lost, really, to my study of theater in this country, it didn't lose its standing until after the Second World War. Amateur actually had much more standing in the artistic world.

And I was thinking, when I was thinking about this the other month, how p.o.'d we got when the USSR, the former, used professionals to the Olympics. It was like, get rid of these professionals. Forget these professionals.

And I, myself, will choose to go to a high school game in preference to see even Michael Jordan because of a different set of values and beauties and truths that I'm concerned with, and that are just more filling for me.

And so I think it's kind of an open thing that has gotten locked, and this question of how to negotiate these different value-laden agendas. And the constant thing we heard from the organizers, the community organizers, is that they're afraid the artists will just get the applause, that's all they care about, and run off, and leave the action agenda somewhere wilting as the lights dim.

So I don't know, in this role that we're talking about, how do we manage that negotiation? Or how do we break that paradigm that has put us in this place where we get uptight? How do we break out of that paradigm, as you put it?

And that's why I think that the amateur connects to the professional. Because of trying to break and shake a new frame for what we're doing. I don't know how, but that's central to the investigation of what we're trying to figure out in this project.

John Malpede: And the point you make is a really great one, I think, that the valuation of amateur is in a certain way an index of the value that people place in a sense in the active sense of community. So that even like what I just reported about Europe is probably a complete misread on my part based on my coming from here.

Josephine Ramirez: I just want to say to both of you guys in a loud voice, what is wrong with amateur? What is wrong with, quote, bad theater, if your objective is organizing?

Participant: But that's not the objective of this conversation.

Josephine Ramirez: But you're looking at it from the artist's perspective. If you're an organizer, then you're looking at it from the other side.

Obviously the ideal is that great art and organizing will mesh. But all I'm saying is, in any kind of dance, you move back and forth and you compromise, and you're flexible to definition. If there are amateur schools--to me, I think, that's great. Because then that means there's activity along the spectrum that is being nurtured. It's not just sort of left to be done by "those people" by "those people" who have not the talent to do what the famous people do.

And I think it will be a much healthier society as a whole if there were training and focus on all different kinds of levels, and there was no shame--if you were in an amateur company, there wouldn't be this sort of premium on, that it was good enough to go to Broadway, or that if it was even looking at Broadway.

John Malpede: And an argument could be made that if the resources in Los Angeles were distributed along a continuum between the pinnacle, the top institutions that represent high culture, and the base of the pyramid, if that was treated slightly different, we would actually have a better culture.

And I was in San Francisco the other day, and I was reading something in the newspaper, they are predicting what San Francisco life was going to be like in 2020. And I forget who it was, but this guy said, in 2020 San Francisco will be a consumer of culture but not a producer of culture. Because it's getting to be such an expensive environment, that no one is going to be able to produce culture there.

So in another way, all the emphasis here in LA over the last 15 years, when a lot of it has been to create the world class institutions. So that we can really point to people, foreign visitors, and say, see, we have world class culture here. Then the question is, what is that worth versus getting the buses rolling?

Sam Woodhouse: Although combining these two, I just want to throw out the idea that if you were able to do a politically action oriented, or civic action oriented piece of tremendous quality in Disney Hall, you might be ringing multiple bells. And that's different, I'm just going to say it's different than doing it in the local school.

No value judgment, but it's [unintelligible] you can see what I'm trying to do. Like the show that I keep referring to, we also do it on our stage, because the people in the community said is, one thing we want is, we want to go downtown and play on the big stage. They said that. I didn't say that; they said it. Okay, great.

Participant: It seems what the issue is not so much amateur or professional, but the actual issue of impact. Several people have used the word,

transformation. To me it's not so much the quality, but what happens as a result of the performance? What transformation occurs?

So the transformation can be in the individual person that I am transforming. Because I've seen the piece, and my view of the world is different. Want to get a public opinion. A public policy person transforms because they're going to vote a different way tomorrow because of some action that was taken today.

It seems to me that what we're talking about are these kind of two different ways. Instead of looking at the whole community organizing with the theatrical groups, the [unintelligible] go by the same end.

So if we focus on these parts, that's where the paradigm problems are. But if we focus on here, and what we want to be talking about is really civic change, social change, social transformation. We're not talking about, I don't think we're talking about about [RSN] in itself. RSN is only important in my view if it actually transforms. If it has in fact transformed.

And I think organizing is the same thing. And it seems to me that what we are talking about is in fact transformation, and we need to train for transformation, and everything else is technique.

Erica Kohl:

I've been thinking the same thing throughout this conversation. Not coming from direct-action style organizing or directly from the arts, the way I read this, and why it's so exciting, is that the project purpose is to open up creative opportunities of the unknown, where you don't have strictly defined outcomes or goals.

But what you want to do is create a whole new public dialogue or venue, something that brings together the best strategies and all sorts of people, from both worlds. The cultural/ civic organizer helps to bring people out of those very important but sometimes isolated worlds they work in, and say, "what is it that we want to create together that might spur some unanticipated positive consequences? Something each partner might not of otherwise had the chance to test out?"

So you're still doing your organizing, you're still doing your art, you're still doing everything that you must and have to do. But you are now also creating new types of telling and listening in public. How can you most provocatively create that?

Martin Hernandez:

Yeah, some of the dilemmas we found in some of our organizing, a lot of it is dry, and a lot of it is, here's a flyer. And how do we be really creative, and how do you make it provocative?

We went to an MTA board meeting awhile ago, and they were talking about fare hikes we turned it into a circus. We had people dressed in sardine costumes.

[Laughter]

These people come from the base, so it is from the community. A lot of these ideas are like, yes, we had training from Cornerstone, which was excellent. We wouldn't have been able to do a lot of the stuff we were able to do without that. But it's the people who came and were part of it, actual bus riders.

So yeah, that was--because we were stuck in a rut. We're not getting new members. What do we look for?

And this meeting we went to, we had one of our white members come up, and in a suit and tie, and pretended to quote the guy, and said, yes, we need to raise the funds because you got to get these people off the street. And all sorts of -- to the point where the chairman was like, oh, yeah, I understand what you're saying.

[Laughter]

--this is a joke. Mafia, like gangster people, like we're going to raise the fare and it was done in Spanish and English. We portrayed MTA board members as gangsters -- "sticking up" the Bus Riders by raising their fares and giving the money to construction contractors.

And I'm just amazed at how we've been able to find creative ways to put the message across, and do the organizing. But at times we try to be as artistic as we can. But then at other times, and it doesn't have to be--we try to be artistic on the street. But sometimes it doesn't have to be. It can be funny if it's just like improv.

Mary Beth Larkin:

I'm just thinking about how much the experience in organizing that I've come out of really has to do with helping people understand how to get a place, a space, a stage, that they can then proclaim and make a statement and tell their story, and draw the attention, which hopefully does in some way transform those who see it, which I think is what theater was about.

I was in San Antonio last Sunday for the 25th anniversary of the COPs organization, which is the first organization that Ernie Cortez put together, and the oldest in AIF's modern history.

And besides the fact that they had 6,000 people crammed into this auditorium that holds 5,000, so it was packed, and the space was just electric with energy, and people feeling good about what they've doing for 25 years, a lot of storytelling, and a lot of kind of memory being laid out.

But the issue that they put forward in terms of a public action was the creation of a human development fund for San Antonio, which would set aside some tax dollars for education, getting kids into college, and allowing people that want to upgrade their skills or job training to have that kind of resource.

Lots of other kind of human development strategies that would be woven into this. And they got the Mayor of San Antonio, who at the time was kicking and screaming about being there, let alone being asked publicly, on this stage, to support the human development fund, they ran a little action on him inside the meeting.

And he said, having been worked over a little bit by the COPs leaders and some business allies that were there and some other political allies that were there, he got up there and said, I'm in favor of this, and I look forward to the time when San Antonio can be known as the home of the human development fund rather than the home of the Spurs.

That comment brought the house down. But the importance of capturing the public stage and the transformation that takes place when people see that possibility, and they're part of it. That's what organizing is about.

And I think it has enormous parallels. Because organizing is an art. And it is not a technique. It is an art. And it engages people in the process of acting and transforming at all kinds of levels, as does any good art.

John Malpede: Art in a lot of ways is becoming too much about technique, and not about--I mean a lot of the judgments, I think, that occur, I think they have to do with the --the academy is actually about technique, not about art. So I was interested to hear you say that organizing is--I mean in a sense there's a potential flip going on here, that the real art may be the organizing. The art field may be just spending too much time worrying about technique.

Sam Woodhouse: I'll be honest with you, this is the first time I've met anyone who said, "I'm an organizer", with such overt pride. I hate to tell you that, you organizers, and it's great.

I was listening to what you just said. As a person who makes theatrical art, I sit and I look at the way something is, and I imagine the way something might be. Then I go and organize a ton of people and money and energy towards a vision of the way this something might be. Maybe that's a little philosophical. But it seems to me our processes may be very similar - in our day-to-day work. My people are always telling me, "come on, Sam, talk about the vision."

Leilani Chan: I think I'll try--in the idea of--because I'm kind of not talking about anything specific. Because I'm coming from, what specific experience

are you talking about, I guess, as I'm listening to people. And I think we're putting on a transformative experience creating social change.

And I think where I've come to, and I keep talking about this over in different ways, but for me, community--meeting artists at my community are together, and the tension I mention is because that's how I am as an artist, is that I work with--I can't create my art without some connection with my community.

But where I'm at now is, having worked with my community, feeling that censorship is strongest within my community, that when I work with Chicano artists, they're like, "Yeah, say it." But when I work with my community they say, "don't say that, don't tell other people about that, you don't want them to know that." Or they are threatened by what I'm saying.

So I think my question is, in the organizing, you're trying to create a social change. You're usually one in like 100 people who think the way you think. So as an artist, you're trying to create this transformative experience. And that's really the tension that I'm walking through, and that I feel this discussion keeps bringing up for me, is that, okay, well, yeah, I want to continue working with my community. I want to work with organizers. I want to do that kind of thing.

But a lot of times also community, community development, audience development, means, in the theater world at least, means butts in seats, ticket sales. You know? And it's like, well, then I'm creating my art for them, and I'm coming back to a place where my work is--I'm being encouraged to create work that is not transformative, and is not encouraging social change.

And so that's my tension with community and organizing.

Solomon Rivera:

I'm going to share something that, is it Meredith, talked about organizing being an art. And it has to be. There has to be some creativity, and there has got to be some things that are pretty fluid.

But there is definitely like a method and a science to it. And I think in each of our organizations that do organizing, there is like a textbook way of doing it that comes from stuff in the civil rights movement, some stuff environmental maybe, some stuff more reformist. But there's like this model that we operate off of.

And even in like labor organizing, there are certain things you do that are to win a campaign, and then there are certain things you do that are about the ongoing organizing. Since all our work, like every worker in our organization works off these charts, which are broken down in those two basic areas.

So the campaign could be about buses, improving certain conditions. The campaigns come and go. But the organizing is meant to build like power ongoing where it's lacking.

And I think that's where there is more opportunity. Because in the campaign for organizing, there is always, we would use theater or video or storytelling strategically toward our end. And there's where the tension would be greatest.

In organizing there is a little more space. Like the average day of the organizer, they're doing the 1,001 meetings, we have like this science of personal visits, and there is a script that builds a tension leading up, will you do it, will you get involved, kind of thing. There is a science.

But there isn't the campaign pressure, like, we have to have this community meeting with the decision-maker there next month, and we can't mess around with no art. We got to deliver the goods here, or people are losing out, and they're suffering another day.

So in the organizing, in a lot of social justice work, there's campaign work and there's organizing work, they get a little more flexibility, and the space to use theater storytelling.

The other night we took a bunch of our youth to see a movie, *The City*, which is incredible. And I'm thinking, anybody doing the work of garment workers, shows these short stories in New York. There is the day laborer, the garment worker, a couple of others. But anybody who knows garment works, or anybody who knows day laborers, they should use this as a tool. Very emotional powerful piece.

And you could just draw out all sorts of important political discussion, as an organizer, leading to, this is what we got to do, guys, we got to go, you know, creating policy about day laborers and their conditions, or garment workers and what they endure.

So there is some real powerful stuff. But when we're in campaign mode and thinking of what we got to win, this policy, these decision-makers, this battle, it's going to come down to this battle, it's a little tougher.

Thinking of the other stuff, that's always ongoing, the campaign is going to go, where organizing always happens, until we are all free and equal, which ain't anytime soon.

Participant:

I was thinking of a nice clear way to put it. And I think you, the artist, have given the clarity, can work on both parts of that equation. That I

think artists can work on a particular outcome and given themselves to that, which you know has that terrible ring in the artists' community now, it's just agitprop.

But I think if artists are clear in that use and they believe in the outcome, that they can work, you could use them as a resource.

And then the ongoing I think is definitely something that is at the heart of the work.

John Malpede:

For me the terrible word is not agitprop, the terrible word is, artist as closer. Or the art of organizing as the art of salesmanship except you're selling ideas rather than automobiles and washing machines.

So I think, and this really does come up for me, I think I would love to put out the transformational experience, and then let everybody else around the table whether they're going to close on it themselves, rather than me saying, okay, now you're going to close on it.

That just seems to me to have to do with--it's attached to freedom in its root sense, and integrity, and freedom of space to operate like autonomous individuals. But that really does come up for me, all that stuff is triggered for me when I hear you guys talking about--sounds a little bit like salesmanship.

Bill Rauch:

Your comment and the last couple are just getting me to think about measurable outcomes. Increasingly the grants want to see how we can measure our outcomes. And this old story, 10 years ago we did a production of Romeo and Juliet in Mississippi, and at that time we really measured Cornerstone's success partly on how many plays happened after we finished, that that was key.

And this was a production in which the Montagues were played by African-American actors, the Capulets by European Americans, and it was a big event in the life of the community, this particular show. There was one interracial play that happened after our show, and then stopped.

And I thought, we really failed. And it was a big deal not only in the community at the time, but also for our company. And a lot of good things came to us as a company because of this project, and I thought, we have failed the community, because there isn't more interracial theater that is happening.

And I went back about three years later, and I was pulled aside by about 20 different adults, black and white, who all told me the same story, which is that Port Gibson had become a Mainstreet USA town, which was a federally-funded program for small towns to revitalize their main streets, and they had just gotten this big national honor as having

the most racially integrated board of any Mainstreet USA town in the country.

And the story to me was, "don't you see, it's because of the play? We all met and we all became friends when we started working together through the play."

And that was just like, I realized it's so stupid that I think it's about how many plays get done. And that if the work has integrity, that you can't measure the transformations. You can try.

Participant: But you'd be underestimating.

Bill Rauch: You'll be underestimating. And in the same way, there is always damage that the work can be doing, that you also don't know about either. And that is something that I have been thinking about a lot over the last ten years, too, is not only, what is the good that you are doing, but is there damage that you're doing that you don't know about.

Dudley Cocke: Do no harm.

Participant: Like what kind of damage?

Bill Rauch: Speaking very personally in terms of Cornerstone, when the company started, it was an all-white ensemble, and we did the work for five years with an all-white ensemble and I got to the point personally where I felt like it was possible that all the people getting the paychecks and all the people with the decision-making power being white, that it was actually very possible that that was causing more damage than good, in terms of a child of color, or any child, walking into a room and seeing that separation, that that could be more destructive than the good of, we all made this beautiful play together.

So that's just one kind of crass example.

Dudley Cocke: I wanted to give maybe a quick example of the long-term organizing and particular action. We did a project for three years in Montana as part of a statewide festival. It was organized by The American Festival Project, a national coalition of which Roadside is one member.

There was a particular action; we had a gay and lesbian story project. The outcome that we were after was overturning a piece of legislation, because there was no way that anyone was going to be able to win it in the court. And we had to get the legislation struck. It was very punitive, and it had gays and lesbians in that state hiding out.

So in the course of this project, over a couple of years, people began to tell the gay and lesbian stories of Montana. It was quite beautiful; the

presentation of these stories, and it was a partnership with gay activists and artists. So the telling, the presentations, were very well crafted.

Several people lost their jobs because they came out and their picture was in the paper, and they were fired and so forth. The point is, at the end of this 2, 2-1/2 years, part of the effort ended on the statehouse steps, at a big rally, in which the legislation was struck. Victory.

What also spun out of the project was an ongoing organization in the gay and lesbian community in Montana that is remaining vigilant on all of the issues related to its community.

So it really was a win-win, and the artists participating in that action, if you will, felt no lessening of their creativity and their aesthetic sensibility, whatever, in the producing of that project.

So I know from my own experience that there can occur this marriage. Not that there aren't fights.

Craig McGarvey:

Just picking up on a couple of the past few comments, Bill, you were talking about mistaking what the real outcome could be, and maybe there is even a way to mistake it for how great that performance of Romeo & Juliet was, and how much applause it got, and how close it got to truth and beauty at that moment, as compared to the long-term outcome that you mentioned.

And Solomon, your point about the art and the science, the work of organizing versus the campaign. I think it might be the exact same thing as when the theater folks have to get the butts and seats. The organizing goes on forever.

Eugene Williams from Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches has just arrived after a family emergency with many thanks. In my own work, when I talk to my colleagues, and to our board of directors about community building, and about what social capital means, and what's important over the long haul, let me tell the story in the way that I talk about Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches (LAM).

LAM didn't exist three or four years ago. They didn't exist. And over the past three or four years, very low-income small African-American congregations have come together. And they've been organized in common action. I've watched Gene work. He doesn't get in the center of the room. He's always back in the corner of the room, and it is other people who are taking responsibility, sharing the experience of identifying the issue and making the plans, and implementing the plans together.

They are building relationships. As they go, they are building the skills, they are building their own knowledge, they are developing attitudes.

One of the particular issues LAM has been focusing on, is this relationship between lawlessness and literacy - so many people who get themselves in trouble with the law can't read. And what is it, 70 percent of the recidivist population, they just can't read.

LAM has been working on this issue, and turning it into legislation, and helping to get the legislation passed. Sacramento has passed legislation now that makes it a condition of parole, a condition of alternative sentencing for nonviolent crimes, that you have to get your GED. LAM's congregations are turning themselves into places that people can learn to get their GED. So the congregations are effectively schools in their community.

So you can bet that I have said to my board, look at this outcome. This is an important outcome, the policy has been changed, the campaign was successful.

But I also go on to say that what's really important is the fact that these people did it themselves. It's the act of doing it themselves that really builds the community.

The organizers have to have a campaign to go for, just as the theater artists need to have a performance to prepare for.

But if the organizers set the policy change, and haven't helped anybody to build a relationship with somebody else, haven't helped anybody to build their skills, anybody to build their knowledge, they would have ultimately failed. That is the dichotomy--I think this is your point, Josephine--that you shift the ground.

The ground gets shifted to the participation, to the engagement, to the civic action together. You reach toward excellence, you reach toward truth and beauty in the art, you reach toward change in policy in the organizing. But what you're really trying to do is change the culture itself through the shared experience.

Martin Hernandez: That's a constant. Because we're always trying to find new leaders, where are the new leaders coming from? It's not only organizing trying to win better bus fares or a lower fare, but also trying to build a campaign, an institution, that's going to be long term.

Our vision is of course to be dealing with all sorts of different issues. Whether we ever get to that is another problem, because a lot of groups are small and don't have the resources.

But the other part of it is, how do you create other forms of leadership? One of the goals of a theater group is to find people, leadership that way. And in organizing, we're trying to find people who are--you were

saying, one in a hundred, I think it's like one in a thousand, in a lot of ways, someone who is going to get involved.

And also we train people to become leaders, and to become stewards of the organization, and they have ownership of it.

So the campaign is the long-term goal, and the short term, what kind of things--the long term is finding leaders to keep the organization going.

Participant: This truth and beauty--

Craig McGarvey: I got it from my compadre here, Dudley.

Sam Woodhouse: I was just trying to think if I could remember this moment in time where perhaps a multiple of these things occurred, and I think I might be able to. It didn't happen the way I think we're talking about it happening here today exactly, but it happened at a performance of this show that we commissioned called "Culture Clash in Border Town".

The process of the creation of this show was driven by 100 interviews with people in San Diego and Tijuana. This was the means, the process. A way of the community coming together. There was a huge amount of testimony occurring, which is the word we used.

But in the final revision, the central question became, "what the hell were we trying to say about San Diego and Tijuana?"

After we did all this, show about this part of the world on the border, we created the name, Border Town, what's the penultimate statement? And you struggle with that so deeply as to living in an immigrant part of the world, where not only are a lot of people from the South, people from East. San Diego, you know, its like one in ten people is born there.

Everybody is an immigrant. So nobody really gives a shit about the place. You ask someone who lives in San Diego, where is your home? They'll never say 'San Diego'. They'd say: Michigan, Guatemala, Sonoma, New Jersey. So we tried to do a piece about a place with no sense of home.

We ultimately made the decision that it was the individual investigator/actor, who was going out into the community who could say, "I am the bridge." The crisis of the play was reached when he asked, "where is the heart beat of this community?"

At the final moment an actor playing an 85-year-old had a sudden heart palpitation. She said, "Ohhhh- there is a heart beat here after all." The heartbeat was discovered inside the heart of the actor/investigator who is committing the act of investigating his community.

At that moment, in the audience, were a group of citizens who had come through a gift from our theater to a community organization. Backstage were the members of Los Cabrones Motorcycle Club, a local Chicano gang that informally patrols Chicano Park, one of the great public art venues in our city that no one knows about. Los Cabrones were backstage guarding the Harley Davidson motorcycles that they had loaned us for the show. These guys were really proud to be a kind of hero, the sergeant at arms or federales of the backstage.

In the post show discussion, the memorable moment came. A woman raised her hand. She was an Anglo, from Tierra Santa, which is a very artificial neighborhood. She was crying. I said, "why are you crying?" She said, "I never knew my city was such an interesting place to live. Tonight I feel ownership of my city for the first time in my life."

One has to have moments like this to keep on working.

Dudley Cocke: We'll we won't get around the circle, because of our time, so anyone maybe should feel free, whoever wants to throw out the next question for us, please do.

John Malpede: I have one or two. Which is about, what are some of the different distances at which artists, art organizations and organizing campaigns can function effectively together.

And one thing that I think I mentioned earlier about LA poverty, is we work with--we've been able to work successfully with a lot of different activist groups, social service groups, whatever, in downtown LA, which separately have really different agendas.

So we've been able to position ourselves so that we found even if we're not allied with them on every aspect, that we found some point of mutual respect where we can go forward with something or another.

And sometimes we've done a summer program where we invite all the artists and activists, and it turned out to be like university professors who came, and we put them up on skid row, and we gave performance workshops in the morning, and we got them trained by homeless advocates and poverty lawyers.

And they 'd be out doing--we were trying to go beyond cultural tourism, and really getting them into doing provocative stuff in the community. And the trajectory of their experiences, oh great, we're really going to do something fabulous. Then they get here and they're confronted with skid row reality, and they go, what the hell did I get myself into this is horrible.

And creating these things where they could actually fight for somebody's case at the welfare office, and then see that person walking

down the street three days later, say, hey, this is what happened, that they would really leave feeling like, yeah, I could actually do something.

But anyway, so one year, one of the religious missions was moving, and there was another visual artist who had contacted us, he was doing some work in the building, he was going to generate some stories that would be printed onto the walls. And he wanted our company to sort of like interact with the people staying there and get the stories.

So this was right when we were having these summer people come. So I gave them the assignment of, go to the Mission, negotiate with the staff there, and work it out so we can get this job done.

So many of the young artists who were in our summer group were skeptical about the possibility of working with the missions, thinking, "these guys are like these really rightwing missions, and they're very conservative, blah blah blah, and we're not going to be able to do theater workshops with the residents and get the stories we want."

Starting from this place of doubt and disrespect, I knew nothing was going to happen in that way. But they did go to meet with the mission staff. And eventually it was figured out. And the mission staff surprised them and gave them quite a bit, these artists. And through dialog, they did find a place of mutual respect, and the workshop finally went forward.

So well that's an example of--for me, I think you don't have to have everything in alignment with the people you're working with. You have to find that place where you can really respect what they're doing, even though they're coming from a completely different place. When you see that they are really contributing to solving a problem, and then go forward from that.

I guess I'm giving my own answer, so I don't want to do that.

So how do you find the people who are most different and work with them, because there is still something you're trying to do together?

Participant: Repeat the question. I heard the tail end of the question.

Participant: The question is, how do you build the most unlikely alliances possible? Or what is the right distance between you and the other organizations that allows you to do that?

Sam Woodhouse: We try to pass on cash to arts groups who form 'unlikely partnerships'.

Bill Rauch: I think for us one thing has been that we've done a lot of original plays, oral history based plays, but we've also done a lot of adaptations of old plays, and I think there is something difficult about just sitting down in a

room with a lot of unlikely partners, to use your phrase, and saying, "okay, what should we make a play about, just from scratch." We've done it, but there's something about, let's take this story, this story is a given. Maybe it's a story we all selected together by sitting around and telling a lot of stories. We picked this story.

Now it's a given that we're doing this, we're telling this story, and we're making this story our story. How do we do that? That act, of how do we take this story and make it our story, allows the kind of unlikely alliance to take off and to gather momentum in a way where if it's like, okay, what do we all care about together from scratch, it can just freeze everybody.

Josephine Ramirez: I would think that that is somewhat of a luxury--would be somewhat of a luxury to an organizer group. Because to think of something that you--it seems like you would have an agenda. You wouldn't have the luxury of coming up with a theme.

It seems like you have your themes because of the agenda and the campaigns that you are involved in, that you would have to deal with, because that is your job. In the collaborations that I have been involved in where there was sort of an organizing principle, and a cultural-art element to it, the challenge in the collaboration was about not being so literal.

We want better schools. We want some--and you don't want to go in and make a play where you're just, talking about, we want better schools. You have to, one side has to open up to the other in coming up with the kind of dissection of that theme adequately, so you come up with themes or metaphors that draw the story in a way that ignites people's imaginations and gets them invested with their own stories in the agenda.

And to me [unintelligible] because it seems a little bit like the group has the luxury of deciding out of thin air what they are going to do. And if you are engaged in an agenda-making process.

Bill Rauch: That is a great distinction. I think what I'm trying to get at more is when you have lots and lots of competing agendas, how do you begin to find a place where all those competing agendas come together.

Erica Kohl: I think unlikely partners come when good organizers leave room for open dialogue, for new ideas and new partners to emerge. Like if you look at the history of the Civil Rights Movement, and how the issue became literacy, when there was open dialogue around what's going on. What's going on in the Africa American community in the south? How are we going to get the vote? Or wait- we need to get serious about the fact that we need to know how to read, now. Out of these kinds of conversations and flexibility in strategy, literacy became one of the galvanizing wings of the Civil rights Movements.

All of a sudden, schoolteachers became an instrumental part of movement, and that was because there were places like the Highlander Center and other places that allowed open free dialogue outside of the realm of the hard work of action strategy building.

And I think as an organizer, it's not a luxury, I think it's essential, to have that kind of creative dialogue.

Martin Hernandez: Part of the success of what we've been able to establish was to train people to do better organizing with Cornerstone, giving training in improv and stuff like that, how to make better organizers, how to get our members feel comfortable getting up and organizing in different situations.

But part of it was from our political perspective and from our agenda, it would be give or six pages long or something, and it would have been 10 or 15 minutes. And being open, and because I come from a theater background. My major was in theater. And so I came to organizing secondarily. But I've been able to meld the two.

But working with Armando and saying, you've got to be short, you've got to be quick, and we've got to be open to like, okay, we can't put everything, we can't put the kitchen sink in this thing. We've got to have one or two main points. If you're going to go on the bus, maybe five to seven eight minutes of people's attention, depending on the ride. And even if it's at a bus stop, it's got to be even shorter, two or three minutes, [unintelligible].

And we had to like, okay, let's pull back. We can't control this process. It's got to be collaboration on both sides. Because we came up with the politics, and there was a technique, but there was also a melding of the two. Because we came up with ideas, and the [unintelligible] came back from the other side. And try and let them do stuff.

Because it's an experiment. If you close off, and say, no, we have to have this, we have to have this; we have to have this. And then getting over to someone who has had experience in the theater, quick quick quick, you're going to have a short time, and how do you get the most points out.

Eugene Williams: Is the question really, or is the assumption that organizing is a science? I guess that would be one question. Because for me organizing is an art.

It really is an art. Especially if you are blessed to have the opportunity to go in and do it from scratch. Because there are so many alliances and twists and turns that you don't know. And if you don't start out with narrow lenses from the beginning, it really is an art form.

It's like jazz. A friend of mine had a rap song, he said, rap is an art. And I'm like Picasso. Really every time we're going to do some organizing, what I'm trying to do is to paint a new picture. And I know that I've got to have a brush, and I've got to have paint and some other things. But it really is an art.

But what's the thinking? What I found is that when organizing begins to act like a science, it's dead from the moment that it says, we want to do these things, and here's the methodology and here's the--because God continues to reveal him or herself all the time. And so things are going to change.

And so the intersect may be just simply to ask another question. What is the picture we want to paint?

Maribeth Larkin: One of the things I learned from Ernie Cortez over years of organizing is that periodically you've got to--usually the best time to do it is right after some very significant victory, you've got to really decide, should we declare victory and go home and end this and stop, because we've all worked hard, and we've all got pressures, family and job, and everything else. And wouldn't it be nice to just stop, and appreciate all the good things, and go back to--and then people re-decide, no, we want to do this. And we can't do it today the same way that we did it yesterday or five years ago.

So how do we do it different? And what new relationships do we want to go build? How much power do we now have, and how much are we going to need, and what relationships will have to be part of that?

And I've worked alongside Ernie for practically--well practically the whole time I've done this work. And he stops, and he calls for everybody to stop, regularly, to decide if we still want to do this, and how do we do it differently.

Josephine Ramirez: I wonder if artists stop regularly and reflect . . .

Participant: I know they think about it more.

Participant: John, your question about unlikely alliances, and what's the distance, how do you find the common ground who work with folks who might have different agendas, different missions, different points of view on the world, it has taken me back to your comment, along about the folks within your community who say, don't say that. We don't anybody to hear that. That's for us.

And Dudley's story this morning about why that performance failed, because it had failed to reach the blue hairs in the front rows. And that somehow these issues of making it tough on yourself, going past the

hard part for yourself, and reaching beyond the boundaries that are easy for the group, is essential.

John Malpede: Transformation can't be something you're doing to everybody else.

Participant: I can go with a certain idea, you meet with people and things change.

John Malpede: You can't be asking people to do stuff unless you're making yourself do that too.

Participant: So that's [unintelligible] your community is telling you, don't do that. How do you transform them to change that way of thinking?

Leilani Chan: I guess for me, I'm questioning what is the community. Because in my specific case, it's the established community. And what has given me the belief to go on is that I was lucky enough to be in the room with the leaders of this community who --would not let others like me speak, for the others who aren't the leaders in the community who don't get a chance to speak, who are ostracized by the established community.

So my question, there is a larger community that I am serving other than this established community, within this marginalized community. There is a marginalized community within the marginalized community, that maybe that's who I'm serving.

But one of the examples of what happened was, I did this performance, I did an excerpt of one of my performances at a conference, and they were at the same arts conference, but they were there as folk artists, and I was there as a performance artist, doing my best job as a performance artist, which is not a good job as a folk artist.

Oxymoron, not going to work. And one of their big complaints was, while I had been successful in my mission, which was to make people aware of the stereotypes in Hawaii, and the oppressive economic conditions in Hawaii, and there are quite a few--at least one character that I show that is really anti-tourist, that they complain that people were going up to them, "oh, so you don't want us to visit Hawaii any more?"

And they would really be--these elders, were really mad at me that these people were going up to them. And I was like, audiences racist attitudes toward where we come from is not my responsibility.

We're also bringing them to an awareness of what my performances do, it puts people in my community having to take a stand, and having to do things they're not ready to work through.

Was my work successful? Was it a failure?

Participant: It depends on who your constituents were.

Martin Hernandez: On the organizer's side when we'd take a particular stand, when Prop 187 was coming up, an anti-immigrant petition, there were some members in our Latino constituency and there were people on the other side, Latino, black and white, who were saying, well, it does not have anything to do with buses.

We took a stand and people walked. There were people who actually left the organization. But we were pro-immigrant. Because, yeah, how can you not organize on a bus where 50 percent of people are Latino. So that's your question: what is the community?

Leilani Chan: Because in that situation, I also looked at the conference, and said, well, I'm the only one my age here from my community, so what are my responsibilities to the people who aren't here, who aren't in the room? And how can I open doors for the next generation?

Or maybe this is just one of those between-the-generation things that, okay, if the generations before me did it with their generations before that. So this is where I'm at.

Leilani Chan: But I do have, as an artist I have the luxury of saying, okay, well, who is my--who am I serving? Who is my community? And I also have the luxury of going in one really bad direction.

Josephine Ramirez: It also brings up another set of questions for artists, (questions that always push everybody's buttons in arts). We talk about transforming the community by what you're saying in your artwork. If an artist believes that their service to the community is their art how does the artist transform what he or she says so that it can be heard?

And I think, along with that old paradigm about, "this is my vision, I'm an artist, I've got the truth, even if nobody understands me," that's part of that package of that paradigm. And if you wipe that away, you say, okay, in the service of community, in the service of change, my role with this new paradigm is about communicating over my vision and my truth as I want to say it. Then the task becomes a little different one because it becomes more about communication and process, than it does about presenting my vision.

And not to say that the questions about audience still don't exist, but it just shifts the dialog a little bit, and the dynamic a little bit. Because a lot of what you come up with in media controversies about art are based on that old paradigm: this artist wants to say this thing, whatever it is and it's art, and the artist has freedom of speech to say it, and blah blah blah, and we all kind of adhere to that First Amendment principle, etc.

But when artists start working in community, and they bring all of that baggage with them about "my voice, my vision, my art," and then they

engage in this very-different-from-the-art-world give and take environment, but they still want to operate with the "vision" paradigm, it's often too difficult to communicate, and it becomes misinterpreted. In our project, it came down to some artists leaving the workshops they were supposed to be teaching because there was a gallery show that they wanted their work in that was going up at the same time as the workshops. So they left some of the artists who were really trying to do the community-based work holding the bag because they wanted to go and have their work exhibited.

It seems so difficult to bridge those worlds. You have to decide if your work as an artist is about communicating this way or it's not. And it's a real difficult thing to have to choose, when you're trained in the "vision" paradigm and yet you have this image of yourself as an artist that is going to change the world and serve your community, too.

John Malpede:

I think so. I mean in terms of getting out of that box, I'd say, I'd say number one is, one thing is, I don't even believe there is--I'm just stupid enough, untrained enough and delusional enough, to believe that there is no difference between community art and real art. I don't really think there is any difference.

And I think the job is no different whether you're working with so-called community people, or whether I'm working with anybody else.

And again, I think it changes really by the exchange. It's not just about what's happening to somebody else. It's about you also being willing to go through that.

And I think what you were talking about God talking you to various places, and that's the art.

And I think all that story I told this morning, because I got back in town last night, and I couldn't download the files, as usual. I didn't know exactly what the job was in terms of a story [laughter].

The story was about betrayals on all levels from the physical to the spiritual. And still that there was something of deep human value that came out of there, like when I walked into that room and saw Sunshine sitting on somebody's bed. There was human feeling; there was connectedness across all kinds of unbelievable barriers.

So I feel like that's your job as an artist, whether you're doing it by yourself, or whether you're doing it--it's easy to do it by yourself, right? Whether you're doing it by yourself, whether you're doing it with a bunch of people in any community, or a bunch of, you know, artists in some hard to find place. And I think that's the way out of those problems.

Dudley Cocke: Let me ask the question: we've got about 20 minutes left together here this afternoon, and one of the things that we wanted to get y'all's input on this writing we did.

Now we can do one of two things. We can move through this quickly and just sort of hear bullet comments. Or we could skip that, and you could send that, your commentary, to us in the margins. Is everybody okay with the latter of just sending the commentary in the margin? Because we are going to keep working this document through.

We're kind of making a learning group here. So this isn't the last time you're going to hear from us. We hope if our machinery is working and that you'll get the transcript of this in several weeks.

Solomon Rivera: I have a question about this, though.

Dudley Cocke: If there are any questions, please ask.

Solomon Rivera: The way it is written, it seemed pretty dry in terms of story telling. We've been talking about community theater and some great examples. There are other mediums, like I was describing that film, what a powerful tool that could be, in organizing; and of course I'm always thinking with my organizing hat on.

I know there are other mediums, video, just strict storytelling outside the realm of theater. So was this meant to begin a discussion about other possibilities, too? Because there is plenty to discuss just in terms of community theater, and more ways of collaborating and organizing and partnering.

Dudley Cocke: I think it goes to the title: telling and listening in public. So certainly we're conceiving of that as the performing arts. We were talking yesterday with Amalia Mesa Baines, whose work some of you may know, a visual artist. And she was saying for a lot of the Latino-Chicana community, the narrative is in the visual arts; that that's a main interpreter of the cultural narrative, of the story.

But we are looking at public, and I think we're looking at live performance. We make a lot of films at Appalshop, made over 100. But I find that film is not often enough used in a public discourse. I mean you go in, you watch, and then you leave.

So we're probably not thinking of electronic-digital right now, except maybe as a tool for the live, but we are looking at other live forms. The what may come out of the planning process. Does that help?

And particularly on the outcomes, you could see that it was--there are many community outcomes, but we really need to hear from the

organizing community what those potential outcomes on your work could be. I think there are only three, and I think there are only three on the artists' side. So if you all could help us think through that, that would be very useful.

Sam Woodhouse: It's funny, just as you were saying that, I was thinking about exactly the opposite. I was sitting here thinking, one of the greatest things that happens in my artistic company is this thing called the Nations of San Diego Dance Festival, which is 2-1/2 hours of dance in one evening from 14 different cultures.

I was just about to ask the question to the organizers in the circle and say, "Hey, I have this Festival, one of the pieces of art I help make that I'm the most proud of. Here is a wonderful piece of art that is deeply rooted in tradition, is high quality, and deeply rooted in history. So today I bring it to the "civic culture table." I don't mean to pose this as a challenge, I'm just sort of curious.

And it's the opposite I think of what you just said.

Eugene Williams: You know Elijah Muhammaed said something interesting here. He said if you can describe the diameter of a man's thinking, you don't have to worry about the radius of his actions.

And that was very important in thinking about how to interconnect. Because particularly in listening to you, and you also, I interpreted what you said to me, do organizers have the luxury of contemplation? And that for me was very powerful.

Because one of the joys in anything is being able to think outside the box, right? By the time it becomes mainstream, it's over. And the improvisation is lost. I guess I would ask, how can we take those and build on them, but would there be room for experimentation, to say, here's a thesis that we want to test, and put aside a portion that would allow you to experiment with what you are attempting to say.

Because wherever you start talking, in my experience, whenever people begin to talk about, we want to achieve this outcome, then that determines for the most part how we're going to look at achieving that outcome, and organizing. But I think we ought to learn to think outside the box. So if we use measurements as guide and principle and leave room for improvisation, I think we can come up with something different.

Dudley Cocke: Does someone have another question?

Participant: I just sort of wanted to add to that. It seems to me that one of the things that we're coming to is both the end of a period of time, and potentially a beginning. And if there is a project that comes from this, this is not like a

six-month project. The people who are investing in this, it's going to be a multi-year, three years, five years.

And what it's based on is ten and twenty years of work, and ten and twenty years of professional development, and people paying their dues, and all that kind of stuff. Based on far from the organizing side, and also on the art side.

But it also is a transition. And I would pose is, and there were some comments earlier about middle age, I will speak to those, because I myself declare that I am middle-aged, and I hope I am in the middle of my age, and not toward the end of my age.

But I guess what I would pose is, how does the next ten years of our work look different than the last ten years looked? And what are the generational issues? What are the age issues? How does this get passed on?

I assume that at some point I'm no longer going to be able to do this, it's going to be taken on by the next generation of people. I just sort of want to throw out that issue of the temporal nature of this, and maybe how it looks different ten years from now.

Participant: Well, especially on the level of small organizations, first of all, let me say, the business--the crux of middle age is, you don't know whether you have like one more or 50 more years.

Participant: As I get to that point, story becomes more important to me. Story is more important to someone who is 50 or 51, as opposed to someone who is 20.

Participant: Also I think the question, especially it raises the question of organizational [unintelligible]. So on the one hand there is the notion of whatever, creating an organization that is then going to be passed on, figuring out how to make that happen; and then there is also the question about, on the other hand, are some organizations really more appropriate having a shorter life rather than a longer life, because the whole survival of the organism, just like with human beings, you don't show up, and a lot of energy can be put into merely keeping the organism alive.

Josephine Ramirez: I'm going to just say this one small piece, and then I have to beg forgiveness from all of you, because I have to leave a little bit early.

The next ten years, I'm not trying to sound Polyannish, one of the things that we did as part of the research project was, we interviewed a lot of artists about where they saw themselves on that spectrum that we've been talking about.

We didn't really talk with, because of the focus of the work; we didn't bother ourselves to talk with artists who felt like they had no responsibility to the community whatsoever. So they were sort of off our radar.

But there was a great deal of change between what the two ends of the spectrum were, the ones that we talked to, and the ones who completely saw themselves, for lack of better terminology, community-based artists, who were not engaged in work that was about being commercially viable, or being "professional."

But there were a lot more artists, younger artists, that responded to the questions about, we asked a series of questions about do you see yourself in relationship to the community? How do you--what do you think your responsibility is to it? What is your community? That sort of thing.

And there were a lot of artists who were really conflicted about what role went where. And while they were very committed to social change and all that, they still didn't know what to do with this vision that they had for their work, and they were channeling a lot of energy into both things, which in my experience, leads to a lot of burnout in about five or six years.

And so what I hope for the future is that there will be a lot more support for artists on, again, that side of the spectrum that I'm talking about, to be able to thrive in their for lack of a better term community-based work, and get their kind of fulfillment, if not anything else, material support, financial support, for surviving and working in that realm, and not have to be continually concerned about going into this studio museum world to make sure they kept their head above water there so they could possibly make some money.

That somehow we could mediate that horrible edge. And that it wouldn't be such a--there would be a more seamless way for creativity and for artists to be a part of an amateurs' community, rather than sort of trying to be schizophrenic and wondering about what their place is, to be a lot more comfortable in their convictions about community, integrated with their creativity.

Participant:

As much as things change, they stay the same.

We're at a particular place in history, never been here before. And I would liken our recent years to the roaring twenties right before the great crash. From an artist's perspective, what happened afterwards was very powerful. You got a lot of new thinking, and a new way of doing things, out of some pain and suffering that communities went through.

So I think that as much as they change, they are going to stay the same. People at least from the arts perspective, people are going to couple now what the reality is. And I think that the reality will be in some ways a lot darker period here in America. But out of that will come some richness.

I'm not so sure that everything needs to be comfortable. Because when there is comfort there is room for a sense of laziness. But in the midst of some challenge, I think that then new paradigms surface.

I go back to Harlem. There was a time when Harlem was a very segregated place, but the richness from the arts was very powerful. And the historical perspectives were very powerful. So in ten years we may be taking a look at what we did in the '20s until the period of the beginning of the second reconstruction, which was the early '30s, mid-50s, early '60s, and that may give us a glimpse of what we can expect to see in the next 10-15 years.

John Malpede:

Yesterday there was a national day of colleges, colleges involved with labor issues, it was a movement of student activists focused on like sweat shops, or livable wage on their campus, or whatever. Yesterday was a national day for college manifestations around that.

I think there is a potential for a lot of artists to do something like this too, to take some issue, sweatshops or something like that, where artists around the world could make whatever the hell response they want, by doing it in a unified way, or many other people, organizations, having a response, that they could raise their voices to where it would actually make a difference.

Sam Woodhouse:

Before you said that, I was thinking that one of the most reviled theatrical events in the not-for-profit theater world, and one of the most popular stories in the not-for-profit theater world in America is a story that will open on stage in nearly 100 theaters in the next couple of weeks. It was written by Charles Dickens as an attempt to expose the fact that children, very young in England, were being sent deep in to coal mines to work fourteen hours a day. The result of the small little book Dickens wrote, A Christmas Carol, was the passing of laws to ban this abusive child labor.

Just remember that this was the source and the root impulse of that piece of storytelling, which is now often seen as a sentimental Christmas story. That's why he wrote the story, full of anger over the death of small children in the coal mines.

Dudley Cocke:

Well, we are drawing towards 3:00 o'clock on that seasonal note. And please send in your marginalia, your comments, to us, to the Irvine Foundation. There are materials over here; there's a bibliography. We would like your additions to what we have been studying, the literature that we have been studying in the course of this inquiry about story and

community building. Also a list of the people we have talked to. If you have other people to suggest that for us to talk to, please send that.

For those of you who have trouble downloading, there are some extra copies there. Bill's play, the company's play, the community's play, is going up. There is Partnerships, a newsletter that talks about some of the work Roadside has been doing; often from the partner's perspective; they've written articles. That's all there on the table for you all.

Craig McGarvey: I just passed around a little three-sheeter for reimbursement of expenses, and for honoring your participation today. So would you please fill that out and send it back in to us. If you wish, if you want to fill it out here, that would be great. If you wish you can send your marginalia in with it.

I want to thank everybody for coming. And I want to leave one last question in your mind. This has been a lesson I've learned from the organizers

It seems to me they've always said to me, look, if you want to get to this transformation, Craig, start with the self-interest. Figure out what people are interested in doing, and try to start to work together. So I'd ask people to think about that question as we engage further in this inquiry, this conversation across lines that have been boundaries in the community, to think about what it is that really intrigues you about reaching out beyond your venue to the other.

Because that seems to me what we're going to be able to build on as we continue the discussion. What would you like to learn?

Dudley Cocke: On that note, and having seen sumo wrestling...
[End of recording.]

TELLING AND LISTENING IN PUBLIC: STORY AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

Los Angeles Focus Group Meeting

Thursday, November 18, 1999

PARTICIPANT LIST

Leilani Chan

TeAda Productions
Los Angeles, CA

Dudley Cocke

Roadside Theater
Norton, VA

Erica Kohl

Community Education Consultant
Oakland, CA

Martin Hernandez

Bus Riders' Union
Los Angeles, CA

Maribeth Larkin

Industrial Areas Foundation
Pasadena, CA

John Malpede

Los Angeles Poverty Department
Los Angeles, CA

Craig McGarvey

The James Irvine Foundation
San Francisco, CA

Josephine Ramirez

The J. Paul Getty Trust
Los Angeles, CA

Bill Rauch

Cornerstone Theater Company
Los Angeles, CA

Solomon Rivera

*Community Coalition for Substance Abuse
Prevention and Treatment*
Los Angeles, CA

Eugene Williams

Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches
Los Angeles, CA

Sam Woodhouse

San Diego Repertory Theatre
San Diego, CA

Jerry Yoshitomi

*Formerly at Japanese American Cultural and
Community Center*
Los Angeles, CA