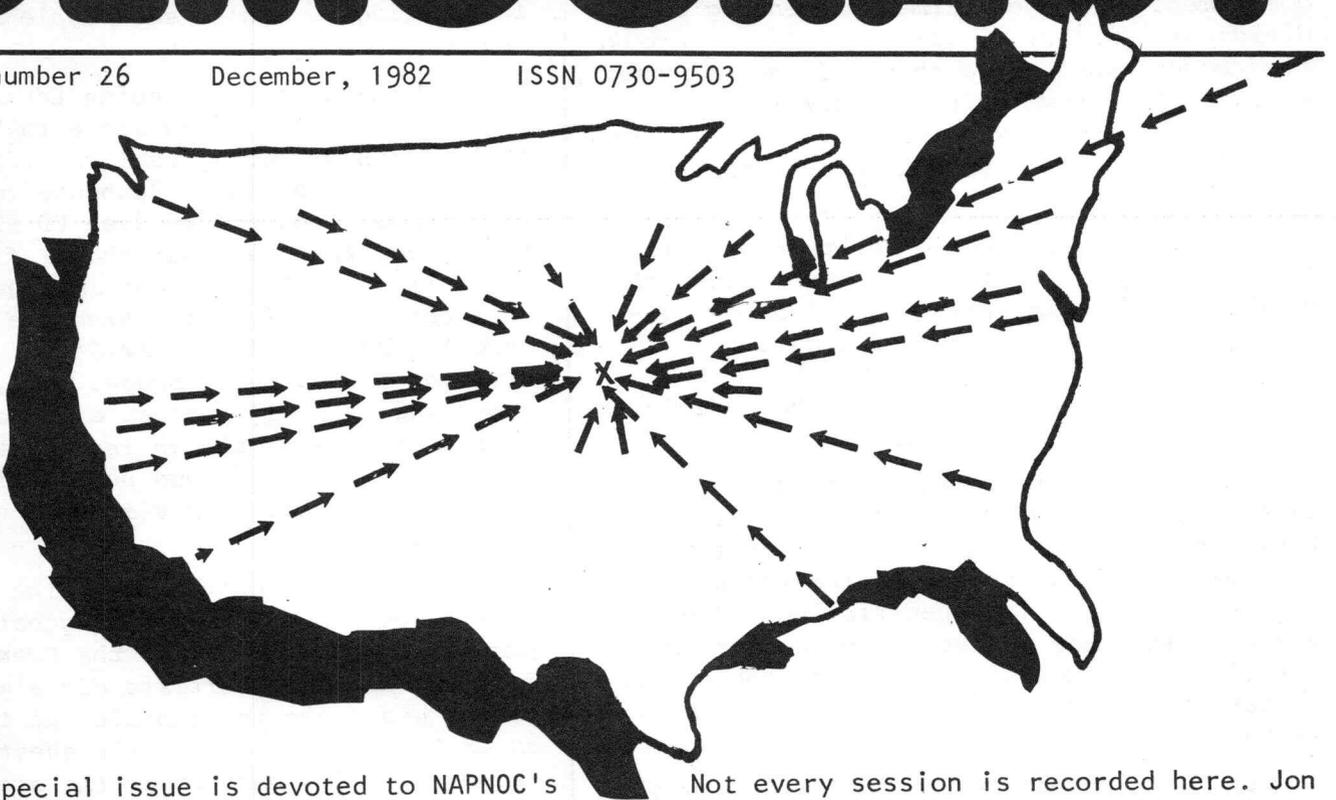


CULTURAL PRACTICING DEMOCRACY™

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This special issue is devoted to NAPNOC's 6th Annual Conference, held October 15-17 in Omaha, NE. We think this issue stands by itself as a record of issues and concerns within the movement for cultural democracy in the U.S. Use it as a spur to discussion and a tool for educating others who might join us. Please contact us about bulk orders.

The basic principles of cultural democracy formed a background for the discussions, coming through loud and clear: cultural pluralism, community democracy and self-determination; culture-building, not just culture-consuming; and a useful, valued role for artists in community life. One other theme was equally strong: Integration of conception, execution, distribution and reception of community arts work — where the establishment arts world sees these as discrete concerns. The same is true for theory and practice: you'll find little abstract theorizing here. Principles are only useful to the movement if they pass the test of practice.

Not every session is recorded here. Jon Spelman of Washington, DC, and Loren Niemi of Minneapolis led a story-telling workshop. Aleane Carter of Omaha led a workshop on the solo performer and offered a shorter version of her show "Rosa Parks & the Montgomery, AL, Bus Boycott." John O'Neal of New Orleans presented his one-man show "Don't Start Me Talking or I'll Tell You Everything I Know." Roger Schmitz of Minneapolis' Blue Heron Productions showed their film "The Gathering: thoughts of harvest, acts of planting." The Conference also featured a session on British community arts by Andrew Duncan of London's Free Form Arts Trust — we'll run a story on Andrew's talk in Cultural Democracy #27.

NAPNOC extends thanks to Doug Paterson and his colleagues at the University of Nebraska at Omaha's College of Fine Arts, Department of Dramatic Arts and Dramatic Arts Student Organization, whose work made the conference possible; to the Nebraska Arts Council for its support; and to all the Conference participants, who spent time and money getting to Omaha and made the event a real success.

Organizing in the '80s

"There's an identifiable movement developing in the '80s," said Jim Murray of Cultural Correspondence in New York City, "which has at its core the idea of cultural democracy. I believe that the strength of this movement is that nobody wants to say exactly what it is....The components of it are grassroots commitment — the commitment to ending the divisions, whether we call them form/content, mind/body...whether we think of them in those ways or whether we think of them in terms of the social divisions, class divisions, sexual divisions, racial divisions of the society."

"The people we are trying to reach are there, and they are eager for this organizational form," he continued. "That's the other thing that's important: the idea of culture being organized, and of a cultural vision...of antihierarchy, and all these other things — all the values that are in some combination in everything we all say."

There were a great many ideas shared by participants in NAPNOC's Omaha meeting about their sense of what is important for the movement Jim Murray described in the years to come. A number of the specific ideas that people expressed are listed at the end of this article. But some of the things people had to say about what lies ahead don't fit neatly on a list.

Our "outside observer," Andrew Duncan of London's Free Form Arts Trust, advised meeting participants, "I think it's not a case of waiting for the 'right climate.' You are actively engaged in creating that climate and seeking those opportunities. That you present a united face, start making inroads into the media, into whatever forms of exposure you can -- I think that is essential and to not just sit back."

"It's very important that we create our own history, that we record it ourselves..."

"I feel that being able to present some united face is fundamental to develop this sort of work. That doesn't have to be a complex thing: I mean, you and I, we are artists that believe that what we're doing is essential to social development."

Fred Whitehead of Quindaro and Midwest Distributors in Kansas City said, "I think that what we need to do at some point is elab-

orate a social strategy that includes politics and includes art. We need to start electing people who'll be on our side, and we'll be on their side. If we see ourselves continually in isolation, as individuals or smaller groups, powerless — we will be powerless. Once we start linking up with other forces, it's amazing — you'll see people sense their own power as it grows."

David O'Fallon of Continuing Education in the Arts at the Univ. of MN spoke to "Reaffirm that notion of having real specific goals," recalling the Artists' Response to the Nuclear Arms Race conference (see CD #25): "One of the things that came out that I find real illuminating is that one can imagine a world, or a period of time, in which the defense budget, for example, is 1/10th of what it is now, and the cultural budget is 1,000% or something. But I'm not sure we've really done that — even though individuals, and various groups, and some publications have done this — that this vision is very commonly held."

This spurred John Weber of the Chicago Mural Group to say, "On this question of vision of the future: One of the French muralists and community artists did a mural a couple of years ago in Grenoble, at the central union hall there. One of the questions he raised to union members in the area was, 'What's your vision of the future?' And he said they had very little to say about it. He said, 'A few years earlier, somebody would have come up with an image of a brand-new tractor, and a rising sun behind it and so forth' — but that they didn't have any imagery about the future at this point. I think that we're at a similar point."

In describing how communication among people doing cultural work is a goal of Theaterwork, David Olson of St. Peter, MN, said that "It is very important that we create our own history, that we record it ourselves and give it the shape we want to give it. We're concerned that there be a body of accessible, readable records of what we have all done."

Martha Boesing of the women's theater At the Foot of the Mountain in Minneapolis saw this need for an educational process within the movement in saying, "The danger is that the powers-that-be in this country really help us begin to think that we're in isolation — by, first of all, dividing us in com-

petition over the funds; and secondly, by erasing our history; and by telling us the reason we're not getting funds is because we work for a very special little group of people. I think it behooves us to erase that myth and constantly make that paradigm shift of noticing what John was saying: that we do work very much in an historical context."

At many points in the discussion in Omaha, people emphasized the importance of taking this sense of direction among cultural workers and making strong alliances with others doing related work. John Weber pointed out that this would call for innovating in the kind of work we do: "You've got to be looking at a whole wide range of formats. We've got to re-think a lot of stuff that we're doing and reinvent in order to stay active in the next few years, and to make sure that our base is still there — that we're still with our base — when more funding will be available."

Many talked about ways they are making working contact with other kinds of community groups: David O'Fallon talked about one example: "There are groups of adult educators who have a very radical vision of what this country, and education, ought to be. They're looking for connections, because they feel

"We can't afford to wait for anyone's permission to do these things; we can only grant permission to ourselves."

the absence of that kind of image-making, and the tools that are present in this room, in their own work. I emphasize again that some kind of platform — vision — some identification of where we are headed — would be really useful because it would show similarities with so many other platforms that other groups have already put out."

Lucy Lippard of New York City's Political Art Documentation and Distribution (PADD) spoke about the need for structures of some kind: "An artist friend of mine says he makes art out of a desire for something that isn't there. And for the same reason, you make networks, you make structures, you make theaters and groups and so on: because obviously we need to find each other. But how do we interlock?...The interlocking of all these things now — how do we do the next step of the interlocking? Maybe that should be the next 'brainstorm' topic."

David Olson spoke up at this point to agree and say, "We can't afford to wait for

anyone's permission to do these things; we can only grant permission to ourselves. I look for examples to our brothers and sisters in places like Nicaragua. The 400 years of colonial domination of that culture haven't disappeared because they've had the revolution; the power of Somoza hasn't disappeared because of that; and the power of the United States — the same government we feel hangs over us — hangs over them, stronger in some ways. And yet they go ahead and plan, and project, and work together as cultural workers.

"That's what binds us together: we're cultural workers. This organization is the only one that I find that makes sense to me, in terms of being a cultural worker who's looking to work with others who call themselves that same thing. So I've come to this meeting to assert the fact that we need to grant ourselves the permission to do the kind of work that we want to do — to expand our work in such a way that it becomes inevitable."

BUILDING AN AGENDA:

Participants in the Omaha meeting identified a wide range of things that could be done to help advance cultural democracy. Some of them are items for NAPNOCs' agenda. Others may be tasks you could take up in your own community. The important thing is doing all we can, where we are.

DOCUMENTATION David Olson of Theaterwork said, "I want to make a strong case for the importance of documentation...There's work for a team of documenters that could go around." David stressed that documentation meant not just a statement of philosophy, "which is wonderful too," but a clear picture of what's going on. He asked for people interested in documentation to get in touch with Theaterwork; 406 S. 3rd St.; St. Peter, MN 56082. 507/931-3810.

REPRINTS Doug Kahn from Seattle Xchange emphasized that "I think all these publications around the country serve sufficiently distinct audiences that reprints (of articles) can work very importantly." Doug urged people to act as intermediaries, approaching local publications to have articles from CD, Theaterwork, Community Murals Magazine, and other publications reprinted.

BRAINSTORM Several participants encouraged people to participate in national brainstorms and debates as they come up. Community Murals Magazine is currently conducting a national brainstorm on the women's movement and its

AGENDA, Continued

relation to progressive artists. Write for a copy of the fall '82 issue to find out the terms of the brainstorm: PO Box 40383, San Francisco, CA 94140; or call Tim Drescher at 415/285-6192.

WRITE All of these publications need articles about your work, your ideas, your community. Liz Lerman of Washington, DC's Dance Exchange suggested on way to encourage more writing would be a "working conference. We might meet somewhere for 3-4 days and set as a goal material to be reprinted when we're finished." Any ideas?

WORK FOR CULTURAL POLICY REFORM In his session on UNESCO, Dave Forsythe talked about ways that NAPNOC members might use the Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policies to push our government forward. Lee Hawkins of Cherry Creek thought NAPNOC might become a "consultative agency" to UNESCO, and we're looking into that. He also suggested that "NAPNOC and member organizations have a task force that would initiate cultural policy proposals." Is anyone interested?

WORK WITH UNIONS Lee also proposed that people in NAPNOC who are interested in working with unions "do some kind of publication sent out to leadership and education departments of unions, so they know there are cultural workers that are interested in working with unions on a local basis." Write to Lee at Theaterwork's address, above, and check the article on Working People's Culture. later in this issue, for other ideas.

PREPARE AN INFORMATION PACK Andrew Duncan showed us an 'information pack' on community arts prepared by Britain's Shelton Trust. NAPNOC is looking into creating the same kind of document for the U.S. movement — something that introduces newcomers to the kind of work that's going on in our communities, and the resources for it. Any ideas about funders for such a project?

LANGUAGE: Does "CULTURAL DEMOCRACY" Fit?

Last month's CD featured an article by David Forsythe on the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies held in August in Mexico City; so we won't recap his Omaha presentation here. The discussion which followed it was the occasion for some lively interchange on the meaning and applicability of the concept of cultural democracy.

David Olson, of Cherry Creek and Theater-

work, noted that "in our area, we had no trouble helping people know what cultural democracy means, just by linking it up with specific situations. There's a town which will probably be changed beyond recognition over the next 10-15 years by the fact that a silica sand mining and cleaning plant was allowed to build within 200' of the city limits...It's a 24-hour-a-day operation, and because of the lights it requires, the town is illuminated all night long, and so on. The only recourse the people had was to fight it along the lines of property rights. Economic development rights came in and superseded everything else.

"I was at a meeting and just dropped the idea of cultural democracy — how they had a right to this place in which they lived, to which their dreams are attached....It made every bit of sense to them. They moved on to talk about the need for a cultural policy...that would protect cultural rights. These are people who are stonecutters and farmers, and loved the idea."

John O'Neal of New Orleans' Free Southern Theatre didn't find the terminology so sympathetic: "When I hear new language, I want to know what it contributes to clarification over the language it's replacing....I see this term 'cultural democracy' and, for myself at least, I haven't heard anything that convinces me that it's anything but another set of bureaucratic-generated language to describe something to make it convenient for the bureaucracies to deal with us. I think there is an historic definition or description of the work we do; and I think that is 'people's art, people's culture.'"

Lee Hawkins of Cherry Creek suggested "cultural democracy" was necessary new language: "It made clear to me that there is the idea of economic democracy — which is being able to have enough food on the table, able to pay for those essential things. Then there's political democracy — that people should be able to shape the world in a political sense. And the other missing link... is cultural democracy — the idea that you should be able to shape those elements.... 'People's culture' doesn't communicate all that."

To Don Adams, NAPNOC's Co-director, "Cultural democracy" is the description of an ideal. It's not the description of a category of cultural work, but a goal toward which a great variety of cultural activities could lead — including what's called 'people's

art.'" Andrew Duncan, from Britain's Free Form Arts Trust, joined in: "In Britain we use words like 'cultural democracy' very much for the reason that David says: they are words that people understand....When you're confronted with a situation where 98% of arts funding is going to 2% of the population, you are involved in a struggle. And one way of expressing that is through terms like 'cultural democracy,' and the need for cultural democracy." In response to the charge that these terms are "bureaucracy-generated," he added, "In Britain,... bureaucrats tend to pick up statements that have been part of someone else's work and start bandying them about. And I think it is vital to be at the forefront of those debates."

John still thought it sounded like pandering to the bureaucracy: "It seems pretty clear to me that to the extent that the aim is to influence the establishment of government policy in the so-called Western democracies, it's very unlikely they would endorse a policy framed in the terms and context of 'people's art, people's culture.' I can see the likelihood of a win on something called 'cultural democracy' or 'cultural rights' or something like that. But...what we are doing is game-playing....What we are talking about is making strategies to go around obstacles the government represents."

Don didn't agree: "We should not fool ourselves. The National Endowment for the Arts received a proposal to adopt a policy of cultural democracy and they fired the consultant who suggested it — they got rid of it. We should recognize our concrete situation, and see that for our government to adopt a policy of cultural democracy would be a giant step forward. We may sign a UNESCO document that says 'cultural democracy,' but we're a long way from having one."

Some of the discussion focused on whether or not the Mexico City Declaration, issued by UNESCO and signed by many world governments including ours, was a useful tool or just another piece of paper. Dave Fortsythe suggested that "NAPNOC and other groups might use the Declaration vis-a-vis the United States by saying that, 'Look, you voted for this and now it's a UNESCO guideline. It says that States must do things to bring about cultural democracy.'"

"The language is there for those that wish to seize it and use it....Groups like NAPNOC can now keep this language alive and beat the NEA and NEH and the State Department or the Congress over the head with it." Andrew agreed: "I hope that we'll respond to this document in Britain...confront people with it: 'Well, what do you actually mean by this? What are your intentions? What are you going to do?'"

DISTRIBUTION: DO IT YOURSELF

The conference session entitled "Dilemmas of Distribution" focused on the problems — common to artists of all disciplines — of getting the work out, of getting it seen and also sold. Besides just the "how-to's," there are other issues: getting into the mainstream distribution systems, pro and con; doing it yourself; or creating alternative systems.

Cricket Parmalee of Los Angeles' Provisional Theatre talked about the "Mainstream question": "The mainstream version of touring is having an agent. We tried that. There is only one agent in California that handles anything like us; and the bottom line for us is the first year we had an agent is the first year we didn't tour — and touring is the kind of thing you have to stick with; it's a progressive kind of thing....Another question is the different levels of performance circuit. We were on a middle level where we could get a certain kind of fee and play in a certain size house. Part of what

the agent was trying to do was move us to a higher level — a larger house, a bigger fee. Our conclusion was it would take a number of years to make that kind of shift and that, moreover, that wouldn't correspond to the nature of our work."

Cricket offered a couple of "success stories"—the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the Pickle Family Circus, also based in San Francisco. "The Mime Troupe, which was kind of a prototypical touring theater during the '70s, very successful in terms of turning out large audiences, working with schools, earning money from tours...The Mime Troupe had a falling off of touring, I would say, a few years ago and are now starting to build up again—have found a number of organizations in different parts of the country to present them. ...The Mime Troupe has also built up a very local base, so they'll do a run at a large-size theater in San Francisco, then they have their performances in the parks in the

DISTRIBUTION, Continued

summer, and then they have touring; so they have pretty much covered all their bases....

"A really interesting model is the Pickle Family Circus. They have a show they present with community sponsors. The sponsors give them some kind of guarantee; the community earns its money back, not just through box office, but by running a midway—games, food, additional money-making things. The Circus helps them set it up and has been able to work with a lot of nonprofit organizations—schools, hospitals, community groups. They've put together a huge packet of materials that goes to sponsors, which explains step-by-step this whole midway and different ways of working around it. So that makes it an event that's very different from a simple theater event, where you're just trying to get a body into a seat. It's a whole 'nother way of generating income."

Catherine Jordan from WARM Gallery (Women's Art Registry of MN) in Minneapolis, talked about the acute problems of distribution for the visual artist, as they relate to WARM. The collective, begun in 1973 "because women artists were having a very difficult time showing their work in the gallery system...banded together and started meeting in their houses to find a way of exhibiting their work." They started with exhibits in educational institutions, later moved into their own space with mixed results: "We have some of the best walls in town,...a good place for the visibility of visual artists. However, we're not selling work. We're almost turning into a museum in that sense. We're getting funding to present visual ideas of these artists,...but the work does not support it. It's not being sold. And it's not just an issue for women artists; it's an issue with all the visual artists in town."

Catherine recounted horror stories from poster distributors that discouraged WARM from pursuing that avenue of earning income; the problems of supporting WARM's Journal—in short, the difficult economic situation for an alternative gallery. "So WARM's forecast is making handmade postcards and selling those for a dollar." But in sum, "the original work which we want seen, and also sold, is being seen; but it is not supported."

John Crawford was wearing two hats—small press publisher at West End Press in Minneapolis and partner, with Fred Whitehead, in Midwest Distributors in Kansas City. He talked about a time when small press publishers

were beginning to get public funding, but the problem of distribution had not yet been addressed, when the NEA started "to do funding for distribution projects....They were pouring a lot of money into these small press books, which don't sell well; and they got to the next stage—'How do we get them out?' The presses were very bad at distribution; they had never done it before." John says that the current small press distributors "could not exist without funding from an arts agency of some sort. Distributors have a hard time breaking even under, say, a gross of half-a-million to \$1 million a year....You get 10% of the price of each book that you distribute; and that's just not enough to be able to get by, unless you have a real good volume. These distributors will be a real thing of the past, I think, within another year or two, unless they're very clever about doing auxiliary programs that bring in more money."

"I decided the only way I was going to be able to survive past the boom of the grant period was to start looking for other ways to be more viable."

John described activities that can increase distribution: "As a small press publisher, I decided the only way I was going to be able to survive past the boom of the grant period was to start looking for other ways to be more viable and long-term...and the thing was to get out a catalogue...that you could get around to the bookstores.... We could also go to book events—small press fairs of various kinds....But very quickly, we started moving into other areas like networking. What we found was that tying our efforts to the efforts of other cultural organizations was probably the most effective thing we could do. So, for instance, for 3 years, we worked very closely with Foolkiller in Kansas City—they're on the regular folk circuit, and they have writers that read and they do drama....We would have book tables up, with books of songs but also connected with literary stuff....Lastly, is a newsletter that West End Press has been putting out 2-3 times a year. If I had to sit down and say which of these things works, I would say...anytime you have a dual way of getting your work before a larger audience, it works better...."

"If you're working with writers who are also connected with some movement—the best example here would be Don West, whose book

we did recently. Don has been a Southern organizer, he goes back to the Southern Tenant Farmers' Association in the '20s....With Don, there was an advance sale of his book of around 1,000 copies, just from his getting a newsletter out to people that he knew and worked with in the South....And the attitude is so wonderful: Many writers seem to be alienated from the end process of their own work. But Don feels that it's an integral part of his life. He'll take his book anywhere; he'll read from it—he doesn't worry about how it looks to anyone; he sells his own book....Meridel (LeSueur) does it a great deal....She will get 10% of the print run in books,...so she becomes a distributor. She does her own promotion, her own distribution; and she gets a lot of gigs. She makes more off the books than the gigs."

Doug Kahn of Seattle Xchange described another small press strategy: "I have a working relationship with a couple of small presses. The strategy they're both employing is to have some books that are real hot sellers that support the rest,...that won't bring that kind of immediate return."

Some participants doubted that they'd have a chance to use this strategy; but Doug wondered if this wasn't a kind of self-censorship endemic to the movement: "There are people with integrity who are doing some stuff on a mass basis....It's possible that all you have to do is ask..."

"...distribution is an integral part of the creative process...I don't think that we can expect that anybody else is going to do that for us..."

"It has to be stressed that there's a reciprocal legitimacy in that situation. Since the American Writers Congress, Meridel has recognition she didn't have before...It's not like there's one umbrella being held up for people to climb under..."

Roger Schmitz talked about Blue Heron Production's adventures in trying to get The Gathering film out, emphasizing the high cost of seeking distribution—the necessity to have several prints in circulation at potential distributors' or buyers', and the high level of competition for buyers or exhibitors. Roger emphasized that the considerations of distribution have an impact on the decisions that go into shaping a film: "For cable TV, we would have to have something around 30" and it would really be to our disadvantage

if we went much longer...and if it goes to school systems, if it's a format of around 30" it can be fit into an hour study plan."

Roger said they'd thought of finding a distributor, but "the way it's turning out, we're distributing it ourselves. We approached New Front Films, and it would be almost 60% of profit that would go to them (commercial distributors commonly take 80%) and they'd basically put us on a newsletter and some catalogs. As far as up-front costs, we'd have to have a dozen prints....So we're showing it around, putting it in some film reviews,... looking into European sales,...film festivals....For a year and a half, we're putting time and energy and our own money into it...and we have fulltime jobs doing something else."

Katharine Pearson, president of Appalshop in Whitesburg, KY, jolted this gloomy atmosphere with another way of looking at the problem: "I think one of the biggest mistakes of the whole movement is the failure to recognize that distribution is an integral part of the creative process....I don't think we can expect that anybody else is going to do that for us, unless you do get into these relationships where you're necessarily setting yourself up to be exploited—or to feel that you are being exploited...I would suggest that the whole distribution process, regardless of the medium, rest with the people that are creating the piece....The question that's most important is are we willing to do the kinds of things that need to be done to get the work out? A lot of times, I see that answer being 'No.' And then I've heard people crying about not getting their work seen...."

"Too often this connotation of 'artist' carries with it the failure to recognize that this artist cannot finish his work, and then expect some drone to pick it up and get it out. I think that's the most elitist point of view when it comes to making art...."

"You can look at the people that are doing it well. New Day Films is one of the best independent distributors. They demand that the filmmaker sign up to participate for a year in their collective in order to distribute their own film. They will not just take your film...I think you'll find that success is tied to the integration of the whole process."

Katharine talked about Appalshop's experience: "We market June Appal records primarily through distributors all over the country; and then the musicians account for a big percentage of sales, in their own concert tours; and then we have a direct-mail marketing process

Distribution, Continued

that returns better than 5%....Our two best-selling records are by musicians who do extensive touring, and that is their edge:... They take their records everywhere they go. ...But heaven knows, we haven't solved the dilemmas of distribution. We need to find out more and more and more...."

Holbrook Teter from Zephyrus Image in Healdsburg, CA, stressed that it was also linked to other factors—like need: "The San Francisco Mime Troupe, in the beginning, what they were doing almost didn't need distribution:...it was the most important thing that was going on, so that everybody in the Bay Area that was concerned...always went to see it. They has visual artists doing costumes, and the first lightshows I'd ever run across were their productions. And political organizers worked with them....What I'm suggesting is two things: One is that people were all working together and contributing what they knew how to do, from a wide variety of interests and skills; and that really helped define what was happening and how it was going to get distributed....And the second thing was that there was an undoubted need."

Cricket seconded Katharine's view, but acknowledged the toll it took: "In theater anyway, there is no one you can hope to turn to as a distributor. You can only do it yourselves...That means, within your organization, there have to be people working on that—maybe several. The cost of the thing then includes not only all this rehearsal time, but all the time that has to be put into distribution, both before and after it's made. Part of the consequence of what Katharine is saying is that the amount you're going to produce almost inevitably has to be very small, because such a large proportion of your time has to go into distribution."

Doug Kahn closed the session by noting that deciding to do it yourself opens up a whole range of considerations: "A lot of folks associated with NAPNOC have very clear notions of constituencies; but the middle ground between constituencies and distribution is somewhat foggy. And really, when you're making your work, you're doing everything at once: the terms on which you make your work encapsulate the terms of distribution—and to a certain extent, that's how people consume things."

PUBLIC FUNDING - Determined Realism

Money is always a topic when community arts people get together: Why haven't we got it? How can we get it? What would we do if we got it? The usual topics.

One conference session followed up on the "national brainstorm" that appeared in CD #23. The topic: finding financial support for progressive cultural work in the United States. Although this is supposed to be the Era of the Private Sector, most people were interested in talking about the problem of government funding.

To begin with, Fred Whitehead of Midwest Distributors discouraged the group from giving up on public funding, decrying the "defeatist attitude about such things. Rather than feeling isolated and alienated and in despair, we should say, for example, that the military budget belongs to us, and we want it transferred—we accept that as a political goal.

"We need something like a new WPA," he said, referring to the Works Progress Administration of the '30s. (Fred's proposal for a national brainstorm on this topic will appear in CD #27.) "We need some public works

works projects, not only for artists, but for everybody else—to rebuild the cities, to have decent housing, have a good school for your kids...It's just the same as having good art—it all fits together. We do pay the taxes—let's not forget that."

John Weber of the Chicago Mural Group agreed, but with reservations: "To a certain extent, we do have to write off government funding. Not that we shouldn't continue to fight for it; but we shouldn't be making compromises over the next few years for that. The military budget is the central issue now: as long as that amount of resources is being spent on arms, no other problems can be solved.

"At the same time, we shouldn't underestimate the flexibility of the system. We're a long way from achieving many of the basic, ordinary sort of social reforms that are current in almost all European countries at this point...We should be planning for a new era in government—perhaps not a radically new one, but at least a different administration. We should be dreaming dreams, reaching out to a younger generation, and

being ready to play an active and much-expanded role a few years from now."

As to the short term, "We do have to be prepared to carry on work with little or no funding, in many cases," John said, "and certainly this is a question of linking up with other forces. But if you're talking about concrete cultural work with a lot of active forces, at the moment you're not going to be able to get funding for that."

Fred suggested you shouldn't wait for it either, by telling a "little story to lighten the moment. Utah Phillips is, as many of you know, an IWW singer who goes around the country. He'll play the guitar, then he'll say something. He said, 'I go around the country, and I ask people "what's happening with culture?" And they will tell me, "We're waiting for the grant."'"

Nancy Timmins of Omaha's Metropolitan Arts Council thought neighborhood artists could move government by exercising influence in local politics. "Because we work with community groups, we have a very unique kind of power. And we're willing to use it—often. We look at the pie to be divided up. In the immediate future, we're not going to have any real impact on how much the symphony gets; but we can have a great deal of impact on how big the pie is, so that our 5% is worth a lot more. Unlike the symphony...we

deliver voters—...for any City Council meeting, with 15 phone calls, we can deliver 200 bodies, with no questions asked....And I think that's a particular kind of power that everyone in the community arts movement has; and I'm not sure that we have used it to the extent that we can—in the public sector or the private....I don't care if it's about funding or facilities or a permit to use a park—or helping the symphony get bigger bucks so that they in turn don't fight about our 5%; but it's power."

Arlene Goldbard volunteered to be "a little bit of a pain in the ass, and say that I have put a lot of time into doing that kind of work, and a lot of rich people get money out of it, and my group didn't. I find that the establishment arts institutions exploit community artists—especially minority people—by trotting them out once a year when it's time to get more funding. And that's the last time you'll see them 'til that same time next year."

So the consensus on public funding is this: Try as hard as you can afford to. Don't let government off the hook. But don't put all your eggs in one basket, either.

WORKING PEOPLE'S CULTURE

"An Approach to the Working Class"—this was the title of a workshop offered by Fred Whitehead and John Crawford, partners in Midwest Distributors in Kansas City. Fred opened the session with some background: "The union movement is in trouble....Consciousness II is still in charge, even though the New Deal has given way to the Raw Deal. Where there is now massive unemployment, there are no substantial organizing drives underway."

"At the same time, there are some signs of a response. Solidarity Day last year was the largest labor demonstration in American history. The peace demonstration that followed this year was the largest in American history, and there was substantial labor involvement in that. Recently, the steel workers' union voted for the nuclear freeze resolution—which of course is unprecedented. These things should not be overlooked. We don't want to miss this chance...."

"The main thing to me is to have a long-term perspective and a tenacity about it. One thing I've noticed in working with labor people is that one must first give before receiving. They're used to having all kinds of people show up and try to hype them....Certainly there's a wariness there that's quite understandable. In my own experience, I had to go out on a limb; in fact, I've spent quite a bit of my own money and time to do something I hope will eventually prove worthwhile...."

"One thing I've noticed in working with labor people is that one must first give before receiving."

"We have a situation where the leadership will sometimes want to help, but they don't have the money for what they basically want to do anyway...."

WORKING CLASS CULTURE, Continued

"I feel that our art must be lively," Fred continued, "it must have ideas, it must deal with great themes and issues such as justice, love and beauty, and should never have any type of condescension—because everyone senses that right away. In this connection, I would like to cite the Roman poet Horace, who said that art has two purposes: to delight and to instruct...In this connection, I would recall the IWW (the International Workers of the World or "Wobblies"): One of the great things about the IWW was that they sang like crazy—when they were in jail, when they would go to prison—and we need to recover that tradition, and to write our own songs."

"...we have to remember that we're working in a context of cultural genocide..."

John Crawford picked up the thread with a description of a project they were trying to put together. "Our idea started about 6 months ago, when I met a woman named Eva Mack who is a writer for Solidarity, the magazine of the United Auto Workers. She had written an article on the books that had come out of working class culture in the 20th Century... It was combined with an issue consisting of writings and poems by auto workers. We thought, 'Wouldn't it be fine if we could get some of our books together, and put them in a format like this, and get them out to union people?'..."

"The distribution idea we were most intrigued with was a book club—set up by, say, a national union, with their cosponsorship...The work of getting the word out about the books would be the union's, dealing with its own membership. There would be an advisory board for the selection of the books. The advertisements would come through the union newspaper....We got some interest from some union people; but we've had one devil of a time trying to get through to the right people to give permission to do any of the projects we have in mind.

"I think it all comes back to what Fred was talking about: that in order to start that kind of project, you have to prove not only your good intentions, but that you're willing to give up something of your own—willing to work hard and make it succeed."

Fred ended the opening presentation with this bit of advice: "If you approach local unions, or you approach the city labor council, or the state AFL-CIO leadership, I'd

suggest maybe doing a workshop at their convention or a meeting—on poetry, or murals or whatever. But please—for free. Because if you say, 'Well, we won't do it unless we have \$500,' they'll say, 'Bye.'"

Doug Kahn of Seattle Xchange talked about one of the issues that arises in discussions of working with unions: the "critique of the strong trend of relying on folkloric tradition in working class culture—that it was stifling working class culture because, although it's real basic, it's anachronistic...."

"As far as an approach to the labor movement, I think it's very important to hook up contemporary idioms, innovative-type things, with the labor movement. One of the more successful things happening with the Seattle Labor Theater...is that they have a clearinghouse, sort of an intermediary between labor and the theater community. One of the more popular things is getting one of the several improvisational theater groups to do benefits....There was a demonstration in Olympia, the largest labor demonstration in Washington history, and we got improv theater groups to play at these feeder rallies and it was very good."

John Crawford wasn't altogether comfortable with this criticism. "I think we have to remember that we're working in a context of cultural genocide...things have been erased on purpose....The reason I resist the thing about nostalgia to a certain degree is that I think the problem is the thread of continuity has been snapped. The IWW is not particularly significant to the modern worker because the worker doesn't have the history, is not taught it...."

Lee Hawkins from Cherry Creek theater in St. Peter, MN, talked about experiences in his own union, a project "that's just in a germinal stage right now. I belong to an AFSCME (Affiliation of State, County and Municipal Employees) local in Minnesota. They got the right to strike through the state legislature a couple of years ago, and they used it only once, and didn't get very far with the strike itself--and that has a lot to do with economic dynamics, state and federal. The problem is the people who belong to the union now think that it would be useless to go on strike because they wouldn't be able to get anything. And the education and leadership department of AFSCME feels it's their fault because the people who belong to the union have no sense of what it is to be a worker....."

"So what I'm trying to do is talk with some people in the education and leadership department about starting up within each local a cultural committee that would have as its major task to formulate a year's activities that would not only be rallying around the issue of labor, but also about the community of people that are there. The interesting thing about the strike was that there was a real sense of solidarity during the strike...people were there, some 24 hours a day, and there was a lot of talk. ...But nobody was there to take and shape those stories at the moment, and there was no history within AFSCME about the union itself.

"So one of the things that I'm proposing is that people who belong to NAPNOC and are interested in this work could do some kind of a publication...so the leadership and ed-

"I think it's very important to hook up contemporary idioms...with the labor movement."

ucation departments know that there are those cultural workers who are interested in working with unions on a local basis. Our union, for example, I think raises about \$6,000 a year that they keep, and that usually goes to politicians' campaigns. There's a sense that that money is kind of wasted --there'd be a much, much better use...And the people on the local level are really interested...."

"I think it's really important not to go necessarily towards the bureaucracy.... There's a lot of potential jealousy that can happen in the bureaucracy (over who gets credit), that's why it's really important to go to the grassroots level. They have meetings, generally, once a month, and they're dying for something different than the usual agenda."

John Crawford had his doubts, though: "The problem with going to locals is that you're going to wind up getting shut out of the process very fast, because if the bureaucrats are jealous of anything at all, it's somebody trying to run one past them. You do have to deal with the power realities of the union."

"Sure," replied Lee, "but what I'm trying to say is the locals have funds of their own. If they're interested in a project, they know enough about the people making decisions above them to know what their terri-

tory is— they're not going to allow someone to come in from St. Paul, and tell them, in St. Peter, 'No, you shouldn't do that.'"

Others also had encouraging stories about local developments. Hobrook Teter from Zephyrus Image in northern California talked about the public employees union of which he is a member: "We joined with a coalition that was started by our union and the California Teachers' Association branch, with peace and anti-nuclear groups, women's groups, a wide variety of groups concerned with social issues. We're a small union in a very conservative county, and have not had any impact at all in terms of some of the issues we're concerned about. We figure if we all work together, we will be able to accomplish some of our goals. And we asked the head of the county cultural planning project, an artist, to join; we're hoping and expecting to work cooperatively with the artists."

There were debates over the terms of the discussion. Arlene Goldbard, NAPNOC's Co-director, said, "So far this discussion should be called 'Working with the Unions,' which doesn't encompass all my interests under the heading 'working class culture.' Only 20% of workers are organized into unions, and... when you talk about those who are not unionized, you find things are different. The question of nostalgic, folkloric aesthetics that Doug brought up is not so much of a problem. While unions tend to be engaged, for lots of good reasons, in a self-conscious process of creating a cultural history to be shared by their members, they're continually drawing on the past. Whereas in my experience, a great many working people look toward the future, culturally and in other ways....There's not that feeling that all we can do in the future is replicate the past--that our goal is to return to the Golden Age of Union Organizing or whatever.

"When you talk about this larger working class, you see that a lot of the groups in NAPNOC have working class audiences. Those theaters that have done audience surveys, for example, come up with like 80% of their audiences making less than \$10-15,000 a year, 80% in blue and pink-collar jobs...In many cases, they're speaking to a working class audience with work that is formally very innovative and in theme extremely current and relevant to the great themes, as Fred said, of the movement."

David O'Fallon, head of Continuing Educa-

WORKING CLASS CULTURE, cont'd

tion in the Arts at the University of Minnesota, wondered about the phrase "working class": "My wife is a nurse and has a union and so forth...It's partly, I guess, that sense of how you think about your work, how you approach it, what you think your identity is with. They're very aware, for example,...of the raw deal they get. But they don't see themselves as being in the same ballpark as a steamfitter or an industrial laborer...I guess that's why I'm tangling with 'working class,' because it's used so broadly, I think it lack potency."

Fred Whitehead didn't think the unions should be underestimated: "We don't want to get too hung up on the unions, but on the other hand, the point about the unions is that they have generally been defense mechanisms, so you don't get totally robbed by your employer...So they have a defensive mentality for the most part;...we need to realize that. At the same time, they're the major form of working class organization, in the U.S. and in the world. I would urge people, for example, to get reviews of your plays and other artwork in the union newspaper. Set up special rates through unions, or union nights. Try that; those kinds of things can really begin to break down these feelings of alienation that people have talked about."

"If the bureaucrats are jealous of anything at all, it's somebody trying to run one past them. You do have to deal with the power realities of the union."

John Crawford suggested that perhaps unions weren't the problem as much as our own lack of organization parity: "We may very well need an organized artists' and writers' movement in the U.S., as there was in the '30s, in order to be able to deal with an organized labor movement. It's a reciprocal process, and if we're organized, it's a whole lot easier to work with people who are themselves organized."

Doug Kahn said, "Another part of this is organizing artists to become engaged in working class culture. One thing about a lot of young artists is that they're working class and they don't know it--but they're gonna be working class for a real long time." He described Germany between World War I and Hitler's rise as the site of a "fusion I

don't think ever happened in the U.S....intellectuals and artists of all types who engaged directly with the working class movement." He emphasized that it "was not only a vitalization of the working class movement, but also a vitalization of the artistic practices of the time. And that's another thing that has to be stressed to practicing artists who are getting politically engaged--show that it's not some type of dutiful relationship, but actually a vitalizing thing if they can integrate it."

Bob Feldman of the United Mime Workers in Champaign, IL, noted that "there's a tendency in this country to isolate people, groups and organizations...After a lot of our performances, people will say, 'Well, how does the working class relate to your work?'--as if many of them weren't part of the working class. One of the forms of isolation is the view that the working class is just the hard-labor industrial organizations...One of our tasks as artists and cultural workers can be to broaden the idea of what the working class is. The larger we can make it, the less isolated that image and idea will be."

Liz Lerman of the Dance Exchange in Washington, DC, added, "A group of people who are incredibly strong about this work is the retired and old population....Although a lot of us tend to view them sentimentally, they do not see themselves that way at all. They want to conserve culture, but are also at a point in their lives where they can say 'I'm willing to try anything.' It's a terrific place for artists to be with people, also pretty cross-class, except for the very wealthy who are very isolated... But once you've gotten to middle-income and below, they are all together and really willing, not only to be the receivers of culture, but to be the givers of culture... What's true is what you've said about unions: you have to give. You may have to transport them at the beginning, literally, to get them where you want them. They're a terrific resource...because they certainly have stories to tell."

John Pitman Weber of the Chicago Mural Group added this: "Certainly...making the approaches to the unions, as they evolve, is very important. But we can't always be waiting on finding that sympathetic ear in the union bureaucracy...to be dealing with the working class in terms of their struggles (continued on page 26---)

Rural America: A Sense of Place

"It's hard for me to see 'rural America' as a very homogeneous unit," remarked Ken Larsen in the "Rural America and Cultural Democracy" session of NAPNOC's Omaha conference. "I think there are many, many rural Americas--though it's very easy to overlook that fact."

This diversity of place was a central theme throughout the discussion. The three speakers whose remarks opened the session exemplified it: Katharine Pearson is president of Appalshop in Whitesburg, KY, the seat of Letcher County in the heart of the Appalachian coal fields; Bill Pratt is the Montana Arts Council's community arts coordinator, working with isolated groups in a state of fewer than 800,000, but encompassing nearly 150,000 square miles; and Ken Larsen directs Rural Arts Services, a technical assistance coalition serving the diverse rural regions of northern California.

Katharine talked about the importance of place: "I think that place -- this description of place and this recognition of place-- is the most important special consideration in describing what rural arts work is about. I think that rural arts work becomes an expression of place more than just about anything else...We figure that if you're sure enough about the place that you come from, then that's going to mean something to somebody else, because it will strike chords of a universal nature by speaking of what's immediate around us."

All the presentations emphasized specific projects and situations, seeing this as the clearest way of understanding the complex issues of rural cultural work. Not all of the projects people described were success stories -- even the most established programs face money problems these days, and many promising project ideas fall to other obstacles.

Bill Pratt opened the discussion by pointing out how little attention has gone to the peculiar needs of artists and cultural groups in small places. "Most of the information is coming from the large urban areas. It's real nice to know the way the big people do their planning and their marketing. But a translation of that into a rural context is perhaps most difficult because rural people think

differently. Their situation is different. The social pressures are often different. The way they communicate is different."

Some of these differences were reflected in the story Bill told of a cultural project in Wyola, MT, a town of 300 on the Crow Indian reservation. Wyola has a school, a motel and a gas station. "It's lost much of its economic base," Bill explained, "Big ranchers are buying up the land and Shell Oil is mining coal in the area."

But for three years, a potter-in-residence named Maggie Carlson went to work in Wyola. Community people had approached the state arts council, saying "We want to create an arts center in Wyola." Bill said, "They did it, and it was very successful, as long as they had money."

Initially supported with NEA Artists in Schools money administered by the state council, no new sources of financial support have been found to replace the NEA funds after the 3-year grant ended. At the same time, the lack of administrative expertise meant that a good deal of this work fell to Maggie Carlson, cutting into her artistic work, a condition which "got real old after a while," according to Bill.

Though the Wyola project's future is up in the air, Montanans for Quality Television, a community tv group in Missoula, spent several weeks in Wyola, producing a videotape on the project. Proceeds from the rental of the tape will go, in part, to a fund to support continuing cultural programs there.

Ken Larsen was next to speak, and assured Bill that he was not the only one sharing examples that didn't quite work out. Stressing the diversity of communities within the large area served by Rural Arts Services, Ken said, "There's certainly no self-conscious movement for cultural democracy in the areas I'm familiar with. There are lots of independent struggles, but they operate very much in isolation, and not thinking of themselves necessarily as political struggles."

"Their situation is different. The social pressures are often different. The way they communicate is different."

These facts are rooted in the character of the region. With a population of around a million, the area north of Sacramento and San Francisco covers some 45,000 square miles.

Coastal mountains and the Sierra Nevada range make travel difficult. The people who live here are "as diverse as any city of a million people," Ken explained, with sizable Latino and American Indian populations. Old time residents, mainly involved in the historic but now declining economy of extractive industries like fishing and lumbering, have been joined in recent years by many ex-urbanites, notably young people heading "back to the land."

Ken talked about three projects. First was a mural project in Susanville, where the Indian rancheria suffers from tension between generations. "Some people got the idea that the main focus for the community that crossed generational lines was the gymnasium, a very old building, and that there should be a mural commemorating the athletic exploits that had occurred there over 50 or 60 years. First came the gathering of oral histories from the older members of the community who had participated in some of the early athletic achievements there in the '20s and '30s. These histories were taken by some of the kids who felt very alienated from the older folks. In the final mural product, there was both the history being recounted and also the process of the youth taking the histories from the elders."

"Random arts grants" were another unique program developed by a county arts group as part of the state arts council's "State-Local Partnership Program." "One of the re-

"If you're sure enough about the place that you come from, then that's going to mean something to somebody else...."

quirements is that each county body will set up some grants mechanism, even though the counties themselves may have no interest in making grants, may want to support cultural development in other ways," Ken observed.

One county group decided to get around this requirement by developing a unique program. "They treated it like the bumper sticker contests that you find on most radio stations, Ken explained. "Anyone who wanted to enter simply had to send their name to the radio station. It was promoted for 2 or 3 months, and then at the end there was a big drawing. Everybody whose name was drawn was given \$50 vouchers to buy art from

anyone in the county they wanted to. As I understand it, there was no predetermined notion of what art was."

Another county tried a similar thing, but was "even more random," according to Ken: "It was done on the radio, but they simply went through the telephone book and pulled people's names out. The scheme was that this would give incredible visibility to the Arts Council and to the artist. What they didn't realize was that, because of the distressed economic situation of the area, what this really did is added to the identity of the arts as a frivolous activity. There were incredible editorials in some newspapers and speeches by politicians, saying, 'Well, this shows that these artists are a bunch of flakes. They're throwing money around while people are out on the streets starving.'"

Ken's third example was in Mendocino, the coastal town where Rural Arts Services is based: "A woman went to the local grammar school and set up a community tapestry project. Rather than embody the history of the community as a whole in the tapestry, the idea was actually to create a community around the tapestry and to have that history recorded in the tapestry itself.

"The whole tapestry product was created from raw materials of the area. It turned out to be a really incredibly boundary-crossing experience for a lot of the people involved because it involved taking kids (who even though they live in a rural area live in small towns for the most part and don't get out to the surrounding ranches), out to see the wool being sheared, and making contact with the sheep ranchers, many of whom had really no appreciation for the artistic community that's developed around them.

"Then making drop spindles, going out to the mills in the community and seeing where the wood comes from and working with woodworkers to fabricate them. At least in our area, working with fabric is a 'women's job,' but since this was done in the schools, across all classes, boys got involved too. Spinning materials had all been prepared using local natural dyes and learning about various botanical things.

"There was then a Navajo-type loom created, and it was done with a simple kind of double-weave process. People would come in and select from the materials that were available. They would have a section assigned, and they could on the spot create their own

design to embody whatever they recalled from the whole process of creating the tapestry."

Over 100 people participated in the Mendocino tapestry project. But the school administration got increasingly uncooperative as the project proceeded, Ken concluded: "It was the basic struggle that happens in most schools over whether art is a basic skill or not. Even though this had involved so many classroom disciplines, it still was not very apparent to the principal, and he made it very difficult for the teachers who wanted to continue the project into the next year; the School Improvement Council, which wanted to fund it; and the artist to come back to the school. The whole success of the project was also its downfall."

Katharine Pearson began her remarks by describing her region: "Just about every-

"It was the basic struggle that happens in most schools over whether art is a basic skill or not."

thing that happens around Whitesburg is somehow related to the mining of coal. This one-industry economy makes the whole fabric of the society a little bit different than a multifaceted environment, whether it's a larger town or urban environment. Another thing that's peculiar and specific about the place I come from is that it's very largely descendents of Scottish, Irish immigrants, with very small pockets of other ethnic groups...It's what gives Appalachia its uniqueness, its strength on the one hand, and also what causes it to be seen in outside terms as being a stronghold of white working class or middle class Americans.

"But the other thing that's important about the place that I come from is just the geography. The mountains there are very steep, very closed-in, and when you go into Whitesburg, you feel as if you're entering a place that's totally enclosed by the mountains around you. There are no flat places--this causes housing shortages. If there's a little flat space, there's a bunch of houses there. And you're just strung out into all the hollers--anyplace there's a flat place or water is where people will be living. So it gives rise to the back-holler communities that are maybe 15, 20 people--then you have a big city like Whitesburg at 1200, county seat of a county of 47,000."

Unemployment--a common denominator of the

whole central Appalachian region--hovers around 25%. "That makes what we're doing a whole different ballgame," Katharine said, "In that kind of rural America, it means jobs. It means that your cultural work in essence is putting \$1 million into our local economy that is not related to the mining of coal. We see that as one of the major contributions we can make to the community: we employ almost 30 people on a full-time basis and work with another 20-25 people on a part-time or contractual basis."

"I think that's why I have a kind of hard time with the concept of 'artist.' You should consider your role as an economic factor; you have a chance to make a bigger impact as a workers, as opposed to being just an 'artist.' What we're really doing here is a specific kind of work that happens to be the making of films and theater and records and video and these things."

Appalshop began in 1969 as apart of the "War on Poverty," with funding from the old Office of Economic Opportunity to train "minority young people" (then a term which included white Appalachians) in broadcast media production. "There was no booming industry in television and film in Whitesburg," Katharine related. "That meant they would have to leave the region and go off to Chicago or New York or someplace to get these jobs. So they said 'That doesn't sound right, so why don't we stay here?'"

"For a long time, there was resistance within the community to the concept of what these people were doing. Nobody understood it; nobody knew exactly what it was to take control of images--they didn't make things, express things, like that." Besides, people at the 'Shop were "young, hippie-like children of the post-'60s," in Katharine's words.

"In September of this year, Appalshop dedicated a new facility. We had been scattered out in several different locations through the last decade, and then in 1978 the auguries pointed to a propitious time to move into a facility--one being the availability of certain money to do it. So we purchased a 50-year-old warehouse and renovated and restored it.

"At the dedication, Herb E. Smith spoke for Appalshop --he's a filmmaker who has there since 1969, and grew up in Whitesburg. He got up and basically said that what we believe in, and what we dedicate this building to, is the old-timers-- the old-timers

RURAL AMERICA, cont'd

that at a time when we were struggling to figure out what this area was about, took us into their homes and showed us how to make a chair, showed us what their basketry was like, and how they made their fiddles, and talked to us about the history of the region.

"And the dedication ceremony featured, for the first time on Appalshop's stage-- or anywhere else--a representative from the Whitesburg City Council, Joanne Collins, and she got up and said three sentences: 'I was wrong. I did everything I could to try to stop Appalshop from being what it is today, and I just wanted to tell you I was wrong. And I'm here to say that I'll do everything I can now to help it remain a part of the community.' I'm telling you about the dedication because I think it's illustrative of a kind of coming of age in this particular movement."

To close her remarks, Katharine pointed out the special importance of continuing to make a case for public cultural money: "Without public money, a lot of these programs in rural areas could never have gotten started or could not continue to exist. And that is our money. The people who live in rural areas deserve as much a part of it as the large areas. Whatever successes we may have had are still tenuous in these hard economic times. In spite of what programs we can get going and that seem to be working, that money is frighteningly hard to find."

Everyone talked about how different were the alliances that could be made by people doing community cultural work in rural areas. Owing to Appalshop's status as a major figure in Whitesburg's economic life, Katharine explains, "We have formed alliances with people like our bank--they're one of our prime lenders and we're one of their prime clients."

Ken Larsen said, "I hope we can talk about groups within rural communities and their differencing involvement in cultural democracy, their differing commitments and differing cultural needs and situations. One of our allies in the struggle, or movement, or whatever, really is the traditional right. I would certainly hate to see the movement for cultural democracy become solely identified with what it's easy to label as 'progressive' or 'left' politics. I think there's a kind of populist sensibility that

can be real helpful to this movement."

Katharine agreed that there were alliances "that are really made in rural communities that seem not to be made in urban communities. In our own location, I would describe them as people of older traditions and older values. I think that part of what's happening in rural America is that younger people are discovering some of the values of their grandparents and parents, and we're finding new ways to make these alliances in our communities."

Someone asked for advice for artists touring or working on a short-term basis in rural settings. Bill Pratt pointed out that even "conversation is about different things. An urban person will get right to the heart of the matter: 'What do you want to do about that?' A rural person might find out how things are, how this is happening, and what's going on over here -- and 'By the way, how did that work out?' Katharine agreed: "As you're leaving, 'Oh, by the way...'"

"Without public money, a lot of these programs in rural areas could never have gotten started or could not continue to exist."

In his own work as advisor to rural people doing cultural work, Bill says, "You try things out tentatively. I've gotten into the habit of not making hard-and-fast statements. You throw things out, and sometimes people will respond right then, and sometimes they won't -- maybe they'll respond a year later. It's a long haul, and I don't think you can just go in for a day or a week or a month."

For touring artists, whose stays in rural communities are always this short, a variety of advice was offered: Katharine suggested going to the "natural gathering places" in a small community rather than trying to "impose a gathering place and trying to get people to something. In a small town, that's going to be in churches and in grocery or general stores."

NAPNOC Co-director Don Adams recalled his early cultural work in Vermillion, South Dakota, a community of 5,000 where touring artists were taken to the National Farmers' Organization meetings: "That taught us that you just can't bring anybody into an NFO meeting and expect it to go okay. Some artists aren't interested in that kind of work; they don't respect the people they'll meet

there, and their work doesn't respect where they came from."

Artists wanting to tour to rural communities must take special measures to be successful. Katharine stated that *"it's especially important in small communities that the sponsor development--helping them develop the event and then following up on all that--is just as much a part of the act as the show itself."*

Ken suggested studying back issues of the local paper to get a better feel for community life and seeking out "natural allies" like schoolteachers who can provide entree to the community.

Don recounted talking last spring with rural groups in South Dakota preparing for residencies with the Dakota Theatre Caravan. Some of them were concerned that previous visits from Minneapolis' Guthrie Theater had killed interest in theater because *"it had nothing to do with people's lives. We see so much about how people live in different places, and so little about how we live where we are."*

Ken pointed out a problem faced by people wanting to develop a more indigenous kind of cultural activity in rural communities: *"The people who support theater, at least in our region, tend to be the kind of business and professional people who think of themselves as being 'enlightened.' They're in the theater in large part to consume 'culture,' with the stamp of external reality,"* he explained. His region has no theaters developing local work in the manner of the Dakota Theatre Caravan or Appalshop's Roadside Theatre.

David Olson of Cherry Creek theater in St. Peter, MN (pop. 9,000), brought up a final point: *"It's important to find ways to make long-term commitments to working with in these areas as well. In our 9-county area, there are about 250,000 people living within 50 miles of us, and so far we're the only identifiable arts producing organization that's not associated with a college. A lot of our work is ground-breaking--developing a context there."* David and others are working to provide a context not only for Cherry Creek's work, but also to support outside artists who come to the area.

Ken seconded this feeling: *"That sense of long-term commitment really has to be there. There's a point where you can be an institution--where people do say, 'There's our Ap-*

palshop,' or 'This is our arts center,' and 'This is ours, we own it, and we've got to keep it alive.' Maybe someday you'll be on the same level as the Masons and the churches and the Grange in really being a community fixture."

New Wine, New Bottles: Questions of Form

The usual questions about "form and style in community arts work"--the title of one conference session--are put rather simply: What place does formal experimentation have in community arts work? Can you "go too far" for your audience? Is it always necessary to draw on traditional form and motif?

Some outsiders dismiss the movement as pretty nostalgic, but the practitioners who participated in this discussion counseled something quite different. Martha Boesing, artistic director of At The Foot of The Mountain women's theater in Minneapolis, cautioned against putting new wine in old bottles: *"It's fun, it's wonderful. You hand someone a pill, but with sugar coating. The danger is, as was said of George Bernard Shaw, 'he coated his pills with sugar and the audience was smart enough to lick off the sugar and throw the pill away.'*

"We did a play called "Clue in the Old Birdbath," which was a musical comedy about Nancy Drew...we made her and her two friends all lesbians...the content was very radicalHer rich father turned out to be the person who was stealing money from the poor," Martha said, *"It was such froth in this old, traditional American musical form, even the critics liked it....You can't put the new content into the old form; it does become too palatable. That was our experience with Nancy Drew."*

Martha moved on to mention "some ideas about what a new form might be for women.... One thing is that we fool around with the idea of ritual a lot, trying to draw on what we see as possibly ancient healing rituals from the witches, and also the matriarchal religions way back--what we know about or can glean about any of that, which isn't much....Within the theater, that then be-

comes our major, radical, form-breaking technique: We do almost always find some point in the play where we break it open and demand that the audience take part in the event in some way.

"One of the most exciting examples of this kind of form-breaking is we took a play by Bertolt Brecht, called "The Exception and the Rule"--a one-act play--and inserted in it passages from Susan Brownmiller's Against Our Will, other books on rape, our own personal testimonies about rape. So that the economic of the 'coolie' and his master became a metaphor for the power struggle in the rape situation of women in our society. We invited the audience to at any time stand up and say 'Stop!' Everything froze and they would testify to a rape of their own. This became electrifying,...to have this experience, this breaking of the formal structure of the play--like the rules were broken, and you have to come to grips with it yourself....

"I do think you can experiment to the point of getting very precious about it. I was a member of the Firehouse Theater in the '60s, a very experimental theater; and we thought if the audience didn't like it, it was just 'cause they were dumb. And sure enough, most people who came to the theater felt that. They felt stupid and didn't want to admit that, so they said how wonderful we were. If they really felt stupid, we were even more wonderful....

"I think the secret is you can go as far as you want to, as long as what remains accessible to the heart is that you're telling the truth about yourself, and you don't ever ask anybody to go any further than you're willing to go....We're not used to seeing non-linear plays, and that's hard, asking people to come to a new idea, a new form. But if you keep connecting from your heart all the way through and really try to make accessible emotional contact in some way, then I think it's safe to go as far as you want."

Liz Lerman of the Dance Exchange in Washington, DC, spoke next: "I'm a dancer and I'd like to very, very briefly do a little dance history. I believe dance historically was an incredibly major part of people's lives. You danced and it would rain, you danced and your kids got better...that was how you dealt with things. Take a look at what's happened to dance in most western countries: what you

find is a mirror of fragmentation. You have dancercise, ethnic dance, dance anthropology, dance therapists, 'art' dance, aerobic dancing, jazz dancing, at least 3 varieties of modern, contemporary dance, at least 2 forms of ballet dancing, and I can go on.

"They felt stupid and didn't want to admit that, so they said how wonderful we were."

"What's unfortunate about that, particularly if you just extract the art dance, is that you've robbed it of its therapeutic qualities, its communal, social qualities, all the things that dance is supposed to be doing for people. You've said, 'We're only gonna talk about Art.' And that's why form gets to be such an issue, cause that's all we've got left is form.

"Even though maybe you're not dance followers, we could come up with what the aesthetics are about that form. We'd probably say skinny, white predominantly, and very, very technically capable--which is an important part of western civilization right now, so of course we need our dancers to be very technically capable. Imagine a repertory company the way you think about dance people. You would be bored out of your mind: everybody in the company is 25, white, skinny, and female.

"I think my own need to experiment came because that was an impossible plateau to stay on. It wasn't so much experimenting 'cause I wanted to experiment, it was because this was a dead end...I was brought up to be a dancer and I did all the things you were supposed to do, and it was very painful to give up each step of the way.

"To begin with, I got incredibly bored with dance, going to see dance. Part of what I thought was missing was the kinds of things that made me want to dance when I was little. My solution was to start working with people who are not trained dancers. That unleashing of their own creativity--it was so powerful and so beautiful that it would infuse any stage. And my job was to help them find and learn how to keep that moment....

"The group that I've done the most work with has been older people, in their 70s and 80s, and they are really a good metaphor. When you see them dance you cannot expect them to get their legs in the air, and cannot expect triple-turns. You can't

expect them to be thin. You forget everything you ever thought about that form and you take a look at what dancing is really about....

"The need to communicate is getting stronger and stronger and the joy of abstraction is becoming less and less. That has led me to words. Again, it's a break in the form and it horrified a lot of people at one point. But it wasn't a conscious, 'Gee, I'd better go experiment.' It was a logical development out of the need to find a way to make what I need to say come through....

"Another way, for me, has been a direct assault on the form--using beautiful dancers who aren't skinny. This may come as a shock to you, but I get reviewed on my weight. If the critic likes my current piece, he thinks I'm thin. It doesn't matter if I've gained weight or lost weight. If he likes it, I'm thin. If he doesn't like it, I got heavy again." Weight isn't the only factor. "We had a performance at the Kennedy Center...and this man I met later in one of my classes said to me, 'Y'know, I heard about the old people and I was ready to expect old people on the stage, but I didn't know I was going to see somebody wearing glasses.' So there are little ways to "noodge" the system."

Liz described one final encouraging development. "There's a group of dancers who are now getting to be 35, 40, 45, who are interested in continuing to dance and are finding that they've sustained too many injuries. They are beginning to take a look at how dancers train, how crazy it is that our 'highest' art form is demeaning to bodies, particularly to women's bodies...I quit ballet because I couldn't take the blood on my toes....My dancer friends tell me their choreographers tell them they'd better flatten their breasts--this is still going on."

Mike Mosher, a muralist from San Francisco, opened his remarks with an art school reminiscence. "I had been bringing in works that were not traditionally realistic, but were dealing with various social and political content. And this professor said to me 'Now, you can make up your mind: Are you going to be working and playing with form like this, or are you going to be a social realist?...' Those are the choices that are handed to us. It seems like our dilemma is to be the best we can be and the most advanced in both cases.

"I've always liked the quote of John Berger

ger, the English critic, who said that he evaluates work in terms of 'Will this work in any way help people gain their social rights?', though I think we as artists may be, in paying attention to our content, a little too conservative, underestimating the sophistication of so-called average people."

Mike's central question was this: "Have all those things we've learned about artists like Picasso or deKooning or playwrights like Artaud--do we have to throw all that out? Do we have to throw all the babies out with the bath water and start from scratch?....I wonder if there aren't realms of what's considered high culture, that we shouldn't examine and figure out what can be taken, adapted and animated,...used in new ways...."

Mike described a group whose work he'd recently seen at the Galeria de la Raza in San Francisco: "They're out of L.A., a bunch of painters also doing performance and have a rock-and-roll band...They were doing work with a mural, a very untraditional mural, but were also showing work--doctored photographs, performance pieces--which seemed in one way or another to be talking about Latino concerns and culture, using what they may have known from art school...They also presented an Eastern European play about repression which in that context was talking about police repression in the barrio." Mike admired "that kind of attention to art forms going on outside the traditional concerns of community artists....Formal research shouldn't be denied its validity."

Bob Feldman from the United Mime Workers in Champaign, IL, rose to speak, offering "A few ways we could all think about working with new forms....I think bringing back the idea of montage is really important...Montage, in its strength, is taking two disparate elements -- two things, activities, events, visual images, phrases, whatever--two things that aren't normally associated with each other, and finding a way to juxtapose them so a new concept comes from the putting together."

"The need to communicate is getting stronger and stronger and the joy of abstraction is becoming less and less."

Lucy Lippard from Political Art Documentation and Distribution (PADD) in New York City had opened this session with an extensive slideshow of visual arts work that illustrated

NEW WINE, NEW BOTTLES, cont'd

aspects of the theme. Now she interposed, "I always say the collage is the perfect both feminist and progressive artist's medium... the surrealists used it as the juxtaposition of two opposing realities to make a new reality, and what could be a more perfect metaphor for being a feminist in a capitalist patriarchy? We're always up against the opposite."

Bob resumed: "What the Mime Workers would like to do is show them the ground we are standing on is moving, that what we take for granted is often what we know the least about... We try to discover what we take for granted and find ways to flip it around, or just to show that maybe it's a lot more complicated than we think.... And to present something unfamiliar to people, we try to keep things that are recognizable or familiar, so that there's some grasp, but to present it in an unfamiliar way. The unfamiliar is often a threat, and this is where the danger comes...."

"Last night at dinner we had a discussion about how people know something's wrong, but they hold onto the old ideas that it can go back to the way it used to be. They still hold onto certain notions about capitalist society or about democracy that just don't hold anymore. If there's a way we could find to show that way of thinking doesn't hold anymore, we might move toward a vision of some kind of change."

"Now, ... are you going to be working and playing with form like this, or are you going to be a social realist?"

Lucy spoke up to characterize the different situation in which PADD's New York-based artists find themselves. "We have no chance of forgetting what modernism is doing (as Mike had suggested earlier). We live in the heart of the New York artworld... Total rejection of it is stupid because on one level it's ridiculous to give up the distribution system that does exist just because our politics are different from theirs... But at what point can you infiltrate and not be totally coopted? There are all different cooptations: one is when your work and you are used differently than you had expected, so that they've managed to reinterpret you for the audience... But there's

also the cooptation of letting us know that we shouldn't be in the dominant culture at all--that we are an oppositional culture and that's it....

"A lot of us in PADD have gone through a little dance about how much we can participate in commercial galleries, museums--any part of the artworld... We're now to the point where we think the worst kind of cooptation of all may be that business of throwing the baby out with the bath water--by being oppositional we have been forced by the opposition into the place where they want us, which is outside of everybody."

For Lucy, the question of audience is key. "I said for years that the worst audience for a work of art is the middle-class or upper-class educated person, because they come into it with all these bizarre notions, for instance, that artists are superior. What you (Martha) said about the audience feeling dumb -- that's just perfect... Because they've been intimidated, they're never looking or thinking for themselves. That's one reason we're doing the Printed Matter windows (display windows in an artist's bookstore in New York), and a lot of projects that kind of ease artists out into a situation where they are going to have to think for a change about a different audience... We've found that everytime somebody has been eased into that chance, their work really does change on one level or another. Some people are scared shitless and race back into the artworld; some work in communities for a while and then bring it back to the artworld, but that's still something."

Phyllis Jane Rose, managing director of At The Foot of The Mountain, spoke up for content's prime importance: "Part of our work as progressive artists must always involve analysis... As Berger and Brecht said we must show our audiences that the world does not have to be the way it is... In a way, we tend to sidetrack ourselves talking about form. Of course it's okay to use classics--anything is okay, everything is okay, as long as there's an organic conception. I think David Olson or someone at The Gathering last summer said one way to critique a work of art is to ask, 'Was it thoroughly conceived?'"

Cricket Parmalee of the Provisional Theater in Los Angeles pointed out that each work has its own balance of considerations. "We've written most of our pieces and somehow a different style has evolved for each

one, depending on what it was....One thing we didn't want to do, in trying to get the-ater out to people that aren't acquainted with it, was come up with a form that intimidated those people. One of the first pieces we did was something called "America Piece," which was very abstract...It kind of put us on the map...It was very well thought of as a work of art, but a response we found ourselves getting not infrequently was 'I really liked that, but I wasn't sure what it was about.' And you would say 'Well, what did you think it was about?' and they'd go, 'I thought it was sort of like this,' and we found ourselves saying 'Yes, that's what we meant.' But sitting there watching they felt they were not understanding... they felt themselves to be unsophisticated ...so the piece had the effect of putting them down, making them feel put down to themselves. That was something we felt pretty clear we wanted not to have happen.

"We have been forced by the opposition into the place where they want us, which is outside of everybody."

"So the one monitoring thing that we've used in terms of form is this sense of does it make people feel 'Of course I wouldn't get it'?"

Cricket also emphasized the diversity of work within the movement. "One of the things that was so pleasant about being at The Gathering was seeing how much good theater work was being done in all sorts of ways...It takes developmental groups maybe a year to come out with a new piece...You're not producing a whole lot and you don't get to see, often, a whole lot...So it's almost as if in every play you want everything to be there, you want it to solve all of the problems, to encompass everything, which of course it can't do.

"At The Gathering you could see that in fact it's not just like there's a right or a wrong way, there's this huge range of ways ...There were plays that I saw there that I liked a lot, but if I had seen them in isolation, given my opinions, I probably wouldn't have liked them so much 'cause they didn't answer everything. But seeing them there in the midst of all those other things, you could see that it was alright, they were handling their corner."

Susan McCarn of Cultural Correspondence

in New York pointed out the fluidity of considerations of form; "Thinking about using old forms...there's no such thing as a form that's always been old. Every time a new form has come into being, it's come in as a radical choice, a radical challenge against the status-quo form...The two questions that always seem necessary to me are, 'What made this a radical choice when it was created?' and 'What made it an ultimately cooptable form?' When you look at something in that way you can learn what you can glean from what are traditional forms...."

Doug Kahn from Xchange in Seattle emphasized inter-relatedness. "The problem with a lot of discussion about form and content is it's contained within the art form itself. I think it should be extended to things about distribution and reception and like that. In fact, just some considerations about distribution can change the entire form and content of what you're doing. It should be seen not as isolated artistic products but as a total artistic practice within a social context...."

"In my mind, there aren't any basically new forms marching around now. The groundwork was laid at the early part of the century, and it's either recapitulation or refinement or reintegration now. Those forms first came out on a level of principle. I don't think they should exist on a level of principle anymore. It's a real mistake when

"The one monitoring thing that we've used in terms of form is this sense of does it make people feel 'Of course I wouldn't get it'?"

somebody tries to take a formal principle and run it through their entire artwork at this point. We have a much larger repertoire of formal principles to orchestrate into the artwork...."

Mike Mosher's last remark summed up the session, we think, in a way that community artists of a decade ago might have found surprising: "Let's not hesitate to really test out anything we've got to put into service."

RECLAIMING OUR STORIES

The neighborhood arts movement has seen a resurgence of interest in people's history--in the stories, images and ideas that don't appear in the "official" version.

In Omaha, some time was spent talking about this work. Leading the discussion were a variety of artists whose works speaks for the range of the movement itself: Aleane Carter, an actress whose one-woman show on Rosa Parks was presented at the conference; Doug Paterson, a founder of the Dakota Theatre Caravan, which works in rural South Dakota; Fred Whitehead of Kansas City, who showed parts of his slide-tape program on "Labor in Kansas History"; and John Pitman Weber of the Chicago Mural Group, who showed slides of visual art from all over the world.

John characterized the diverse work he showed as being produced by artists "working with a whole series of groups that have been denied the word, denied the right to name their world in our society, and who cannot relate to the mainstream structure in any way other than silence, or destruction, or aggression against it." He contrasted the way this has happened since the mid-'60s with similar work in the 1930's: "Who is telling the story has changed a lot. For instance, the black liberation struggle stands at the beginning of our movement, and then all kinds of other groups began moving for their democratic rights, a recovery of their identity and a validation of their history."

John also described how his own mural work proceeds: "I'm usually working with a team of local people--often young people. We do a lot of research and analysis of the neighborhood. We talk with people who aren't on the team. We say 'Tell us about yourself and your community. What do you know about the history? What's going on here? What do you see as the future of it? What do you see as the big, main problem? What divisions do you see within the community? What potential things can bring the community together?'"

"We've found one of the problems of reclaiming the story is that you have to excavate; it's almost an archaeological task. We don't ask community people for images--we specifically turn them down--because you've got to rip off layers of commercial imagery that people have absorbed out of

magazines, TV, movies and so forth. Our job-- not just the professional artists, but this mixed team of local, non-professional people-- is to put together the imagery and bring it back to you. Then you can tell us whether we're on target or not."

Fred shared this view and his sense of alarm at the rapid loss of recent history: "Going through the Kansas Historical Society's populist archives, you'd open a book of pamphlets and the pages would all come out--the librarian would explain, 'Well, we don't have the money.' I was researching something that happened 98 years ago, but I felt like I was doing research on King Tut, 5,000 years ago. In that short space of time, it had passed from memory. All I did was give shape to that, to what had actually happened to people who lived and breathed and fought and were confused and whatnot!"

Aleane talked about the various cultural programs she tours through schools in the states surrounding Omaha: "My work is really telling a story of the black experience. I take this story out to the many small, all-white towns and also right here in Omaha, which has a lot of black students. They are still very unaware of the black experience from a historical perspective, so it's very important to share this story with everyone--not only the white, but also the black."

Aleane told about how her work spans a variety of disciplines. Her "Soul Food Cuisine" program explains the roots of soul food in slavery times: "Vegetables were not given to the slaves in their weekly rations."

"Who is telling the story has changed a lot. For instance, the black liberation struggle stands at the beginning of our movement."

They had to go out and pick the weeds that grew wild, and had knowledge about the edible greens. We love them because this is something indigenous to our culture." Similarly, she explained the origins of rhythm and dancing traditions and the creation of games like "hambone" in the conditions that were forced upon slaves. She said her audiences "are amazed that there is a reason why these things developed. It's not just

something that was for amusement, but it has a very deep meaning. It gives people an understanding and an insight into why black people do many things--it's especially helpful for teachers or counselors who work with young folks; and it creates pride in black students themselves. It's my way of telling a story that's been untold for a long time."

Martha Boesing of Minneapolis' women's theater *At The Foot of The Mountain* said, "As we reclaim our stories, we'll need to create our heroes and heroines and find the people who we can say 'Oh, they were wonderful.' But we've got to be responsible to critique those stories from the point of view of other oppressions too. An example in this country is the suffragists, who were largely white; it's just recently that black women have begun to point out the extreme racism of such people as Susan B. Anthony. If we're going to write plays about them, we've got to expose what happened to them when they were pressed on the issue of the black vote. Similarly, I think we've got to confront the sexism of plays about oppression among the races. It's really frightening, because we want to support each other in our struggles, but I think we've got to begin to do that."

John Weber echoed this sentiment in saying, "There are contradictions there. If you just talk to somebody, they're going to come out with statements that are very progressive and full of insight at one moment--and then they'll come up with some crashing piece of reactionary cliché that they picked up someplace, that represents some effort to deal with frustration that's also really part of their consciousness. So our task is to gather up all these sparks and pieces and turn that into imagery that people will recognize as their own but that is the team's --the team of artists working with local people hoping to shape their sense of meaning. We have played a role in giving that a certain form."

John showed slides from a variety of projects done in other countries by various minority groups within the community--children, ex-offenders, the mentally ill, women -- whereas in Chicago, "They want something that speaks for the whole neighborhood, that can be a sort of consensus. Unimaginable that a neighborhood in Chicago would allow residents with a history of mental illness to have public walls to tell their story.

We do those kinds of murals indoors, where that subgroup sort of controls the space. But we can't get an outdoor, public forum for a subgroup that's really kept in silence, marginalized, to step forward and say 'This is our story--listen to us.'"

Doug Paterson picked up on this theme in saying, "In the people's cultural movement there is continually that sense of units. There's the black community, women's community, gay community, the working class community, in my case the rural community--definitely clear audiences. But the coming together of those groups in the United States

"I was researching something that happened 98 years ago, but I felt like I was doing research on King Tut 5,000 years ago."

has been, is now and will continue to be a very difficult process because it involves a great deal of interpersonal emotionality and feelings and those are hard things to deal with--very explosive, very personal. How do you begin to have genuine, human dialogue--a meeting together of the black community, the women's community, the rural community--all working together? Politically we haven't been able to do that. Maybe that's one of the reasons that we're going to have to take on that responsibility in the cultural community."

NAPNOC Co-director Don Adams shared a critique from Radical History Review which claimed that much oral history-based theater takes on the theme of "I survived," reducing everything to personal terms instead of dealing with broader social movements and presenting a more critical view of history. Doug Paterson talked about sharing critical views of community life: "Once they sense you're on their side, you can raise some prickly issues with people, as long as they believe that you are being honestly supportive. If you treat the story with respect, and if you legitimately have found the story, people have a way of hearing that!"

Doug talked about the creation of the Caravan's Welcome Home, which presented gossip as a theme in its depiction of contemporary small town life in South Dakota. "In a small town everybody talks about gossip, and they're very ambivalent about it. Everybody takes part in it, but everybody knows it's very destructive. If you reveal that,

and give a point of view on it, people are more willing to say, 'Ouch! That's fun!' We're not going to go into a small town and cure that problem, but I think that that or other stories reveal some of the town's dynamics, so it's not mystified, hidden or not talked about. Maybe something will come to the surface even though it is a thorny question."

Just as whose story is being told profoundly shapes the creation of a work, who's in the audience profoundly affects its reception. Fred Whitehead, speaking of "Labor in Kansas History," said: "When I showed it to the Kansas State Federation of Labor convention a year ago, 300 delegates gave me 2 standing ovations; those were the people I wanted to reach. When you reach them, like Doug and Aleane were saying about revealing why things work this way, it's like the scales are falling off everyone's eyes. It's enormously exciting and gratifying." The Kansas Committee for the Humanities had a very different response: "It blew their minds. They didn't know about this. They didn't want to know about it."

"We can't get an outdoor, public forum for a subgroup that's really been kept in silence...to step forward and say 'This is our story--listen to us.'"

Don reminded people that "these programs are oftentimes attacked because 'they lack quality,' when in fact, when you see who's delivering the critique, it's plainly not about aesthetics, but about the content of the work."

With time running out, David Olson of Cherry Creek in Saint Peter, MN, pointed out that in thinking about how artists can help give shape to people's stories, "We can also consider shaping the story as its being lived out in the moment. For example, Aleane's comments this morning have definitely added to my understanding in a way that I can go on and share what I've known and say something else. I'm shaping my stories.

"I think there's also room for introducing into the lives of people stories that aren't already there--not only what has happened to you, but also new stories and new ways of telling stories--what other stories there are besides your own."

Stars in Your Eyes

At one point in our Omaha discussion, John Crawford of West End Press in Minneapolis reminded people that some figures who had become well-known through the commercial culture industries -- Rosalie Sorrels, Utah Phillips, Tillie Olson, Jane Fonda and Lee Grant, for instance--should be a reassuring presence for people doing community-based cultural work: "*We lose sight of this sometimes at the grassroots level; we're not noticing the rest of the elephant, but we're definitely involved in that effort.*"

John's remark opened a discussion of the resurgent level of political activity among people in the artworld--notably, the reappearance in political work of a group of progressive "stars"--and a corresponding shift in the fashions of the artworld to a point where political artwork is a little more acceptable (see "New Wine, New Bottles" for more discussion of this).

For cultural groups that are involved in working with political issues all the time, this development is greeted with mixed feelings: on the one hand, as Chicago muralist John Weber said, "*One can't really be terribly unhappy that people are doing work for a good cause.*" On the other, as Lucy Lippard of New York PADD said, "*They come popping in to make a one-time anti-nuke piece, and then go away. And the art is very superficial.*"

For many, the problem of newly-politicized "stars" is largely one of education. As Lucy also pointed out, "*It's bad when they speak for us, for one thing, because of the educational process. They are likely to be the ones that are asked, if they're on a march, to be on television or something; and they don't say what we're there for. They often unintentionally misinterpret. They do damage on that level.*"

As far as "big names" are concerned, Lucy said, "*In the last anti-war movement, I spent a certain amount of time with a starry-eyed notion of organizing with artists who were better-known. They don't like to come to meetings, basically. They're busy. Their life is something else than what we're doing with ours, and so it's a lot of crossed signals.*"

"*I could call on them and ask them to give things to benefits and so forth. They did, and that was immensely helpful. My favorite*

way, I'm afraid, of using stars in the visual arts world is to ask them for money or work that can be sold for money. But I have become very wary of their hanging in there."

John Weber pointed out that the "question of the lines toward which we're working, and what a star-studded group may be doing, we want to be clear about ourselves. And also win over some of the people who are newly-involved so that they will stay with it--so it won't be just the temporary thing, the year or two when it's 'alright' and fashionable--so they will stay with it. The only way we can get some of these people who are just getting their feet wet in what they think is political art--and may be--to be with us five years from now, is to get them involved with our audience. That's the only way that we're going to get them hooked. We saw that happen this summer when, for the first time in a few years, we got a couple of new artists hooked."

Doug Kahn of Seattle Xchange, a political arts group, described the development of the Seattle chapter of PAND--Performing Artists for Nuclear Disarmament, "There's an educational committee within PAND, and that seems like a very good place to raise the issues. Most of the people within that group are very eager to get educated--not only on the facts about nuclear war, but also about the history of politicized culture."

"My favorite way...of using stars in the visual arts world is to ask them for money or work that can be sold for money."

But Doug also pointed up the problem with most of the newcomers among the 350 people who showed up for Seattle PAND's organizational meeting: "The overwhelming majority of them had no activist or any type of political experience whatsoever, and have a very loose political cognizance--not even on the factual level, the issues that they're dealing with. They came in and said, 'Well, let's invent the wheel,' and systematically ignored at least 4 theater groups that had been going for years, that had been dealing specifically with anti-nuclear issues, both power and armaments."

Susan McCarn of Cultural Correspondence in New York said, "New York PAND is really an interesting phenomenon for a variety of reasons. One is that it too functions to

obliterate the history of any other kind of progressive culture, because it's built on the same kind of star system that Hollywood is built on and that's what gives it its ability to amass power--and also its ability to erase years of work and to not follow through on other people's impulse, not using others' organizing abilities, education, and things like that."

The "star" appeal of these new artists' political organizations also serves as a magnet for funds that longer-lived political arts groups have found it hard to attract. Doug Kahn said, "Xchange in Seattle was looking feverishly for some type of $\frac{1}{2}$ -time staff support, and we went to A Territorial Resource, one of those trust fund babies, like Haymarket and Vanguard. On very little resources, we have a pretty respectable track record and a lot of it verges over into activism--I mean, one of the things those funds have a sort of stigma against is funding culture; they usually just fund straight activist types of activities."

"Well, we approached ATR and they said 'Forget it.' They were actually quite rude about it. But at the second meeting of PAND, one of the announcements that was made was that ATR had read about PAND in the newspaper and had offered their money."

Despite this experience, Doug said, "There's a possibility, as far as funding is concerned, to make some demands on these groups--sort of on the level of a relationship between 'professional' and more community-based theater or other activities. In the '30s, there was that kind of relationship between people--cultural workers in a 'professional' capacity lending their skills and resources to things that were happening on a more activist, grassroots level. There's a possibility of that."

In another discussion, Katharine Pearson of Appalshop commented that "A lot of people that have become more famous in country music, Nashville variety, come from where we come from. A lot of musicians that are on the June Appal label (produced by Appalshop) have played with a lot of these people. On occasion, we've used people like that to do concerts; but it comes from a feeling that they feel a connection to the music, with the work, as opposed to their being stars or anything."

Brian Branagan of Seattle thought one way to avoid being "obliterated" by these

STARS IN YOUR EYES, cont'd

star-oriented organizations was to show "our own heroes....It gives me a sense of root and time, and a present context."

But Susan McCarn disagreed: "In a way, isn't the idea of producing our own heroes contrary to the kind of work that we want to do? I mean, our 'heroes' are dedication to diversity, heterogeneity, and ideas and commitment. A continuing commitment to that is something totally different from what a group like PAND is part of. It gives us a different kind of strength."

WORKING CLASS CULTURE

(continued from page 12---

and work. An example of that is the Pullman Project (a series of chalk murals with text, sited and timed to commemorate key events in the great Pullman strike of 1896). It would have been good if those folks had made contact with the Illinois Labor History Society, but they didn't even make contact there--there weren't any unions involved in that whatsoever. They were working with a quite conservative community organization that had rather mixed feelings about what they were doing but allowed them to do it and supported them. They took the initiative....

"I also want to say that I think the great theoretical and practical resources that I and a good many other muralists look toward is the experience of people in adult education, in particular the whole Paulo Freire kind of politicized adult education, but also the network of working class writing that goes on in Britain....That's where a mass of theoretical considerations are discussed...."

Once again a discussion came to a close on a note of expansion: Expand our definitions. Expand our idea of who to work with. Expand the resources that guide us. And, it is hoped, expand the movement as well.

Acting Up

Heresies is "a feminist publication on art and politics" with a rather unique and apparently successful method of organizing its work. Here's the description from a promotional flyer: "Each issue, focused

on a different theme and edited by a different collective, benefits from women with expertise and commitment to that subject matter. These feminist 'think tanks' have allowed Heresies to do justice, for example, to both the critical topic of Women and Violence and the cultural topic of Women and Architecture."

Heresies #18, to be published in the summer of 1983, is entitled "Acting Up!" and deals with women in theater. We just received a press release asking for contributions. The deadline is February 1. Manuscripts should be double-spaced and submitted duplicate, with a 2,000 word maximum, and accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Visual material may be submitted in the form of a slide, photocopy, or photograph, but they cannot be responsible for original art.

Some of the questions posed to contributors to Heresies #18 are: "What is it like to act as a woman? Is there an offstage?... What is your work process?...Are personal images political?...Is your work cross-cultural?...What are the strategies that women have evolved to resolve the issue of hierarchy in the theater?...How do you get your money?" They welcome 'articles, essays, interviews, journal entries, original scripts, documentation of performances, photographs, set designs, musical scores, costume designs, poetry, fiction, artwork and so on."

Issue #19 is to be entitled "Mothers, Mags, and Movie Stars: Feminism and Class." Heresies wants "cultural/social/economic analyses of the institutions that shape the mother-daughter relationship. The deadline is April 1, 1983.

Heresies is a NAPNOC member, and our board member Lucy Lippard is also a Heresies collective member, so make a New Year's resolution to write more, especially for movement publications.

Write to Heresies at P.O. Box 766, Canal Street Station, New York, NY 10013, or call 212/431-9060 for more information.

HAPPY NEW YEAR TO CULTURAL DEMOCRACY READERS! May we all find strength, imagination, and peace in 1983.

Martha Boesing, *At The Foot of the Mountain Cultural Correspondence*,
 Susan McCarn/Jim Murray
 Tim Drescher, *Community Murals Magazine*
 Bob Feldman, *United Mime Workers*
In the Heart of the Beast,
 Steven Epp/Lucinda Anderson
 Catherine Jordan, *WARM Art Gallery*
 Doug Kahn, *X-Change*
 Nannette Kiheri, *Minneapolis*
 Ken Larsen, *Rural Arts Services*
 Liz Lerman, *The Dance Exchange*
 Lucy Lippard, *PADD*
 David Olson, *Theaterwork Cricket Parmalee*,
Provisional Theatre
 Doug Paterson, *Dakota Theatre Caravan/UNOmaha*
 Katharine Pearson, *Appalshop*
 Bill Pratt, *Montana Arts Council*
 Roger Schmitz, *Blue Heron Productions*
 Beth Siebert, *Cherry Creek*
 Jon Spelman, *Washington Holbrook Teter*, *Zephyrus Image*
 Nancy Timmins, *Omaha Metropolitan Arts Council*
 John Pitman Weber, *Chicago Mural Group*
 Fred Whitehead, *Midwest Distributors*

Dear Friends,

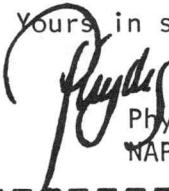
Those of us who attended the October '82 NAPNOC Conference in Omaha laughed a lot, learned a lot, and left empowered by knowing there are so many of us working for cultural democracy throughout the United States — and around the world.

We also left with an acute awareness of our reliance on NAPNOC to keep us all in touch with each other and to stretch us with radical analysis of the current economic and political state of the arts. In the past, Arlene's and Don's salaries have been funded by earned income supplemented by grants; today, the grants are becoming even harder for NAPNOC to get than for community arts organizations.

Because NAPNOC's fulltime work is an asset to all of us, many of us at the Conference decided it was to our advantage to participate in the responsibility of raising fulltime salaries. At the members' meeting, therefore, 23 organizations and individuals — listed to the left — pledged to raise \$125 each (through subscriptions to Cultural Democracy, memberships in NAPNOC, or hard cash) by September, 1983 — though of course, the sooner the better!

We encourage you to make a pledge of your own — you can use the form below, or simply send a note to NAPNOC's office. We hope to raise most monies through subscriptions and memberships — because the more members we have the stronger we are; and the more subscriptions we have, the faster new ideas and passions for cultural democracy will spread. The task of soliciting members and subscribers will also motivate each of us to talk out loud about cultural democracy in our own communities and thus make our work and our networks more and more visible.

Yours in struggle,



Phyllis Jane Rose, *At The Foot of the Mountain*
 NAPNOC Membership Committee

 I PLEDGE to raise at least \$125, or an equivalent amount in new memberships or subscriptions, for NAPNOC between November 1, 1982, and September 30, 1983.

Please send me _____ copies of the NEW member brochure.

 Your signature

I want to join NAPNOC myself, & get a free year's subscription to Cultural Democracy.

I am enclosing a check or money order for \$25 to "NAPNOC" for a year's individual dues.

I am enclosing a check for one year's Cultural Democracy subscription, in the amount of (check one): _____ \$15, Individual _____ \$25, Organizational

 name organization name, if any daytime phone

 mailing address city, state, zip

Detach and mail to : NAPNOC, PO Box 11440, Baltimore, MD 21239, USA...Phone 301/323-5006

NAPNOC IS A TAX-EXEMPT ORGANIZATION — All contributions are tax-deductible

WELCOME A BOARD!

NAPNOC's members elected six new members to NAPNOC's Board of Directors at the 6th Annual Members' Meeting in Omaha on October 17. The Board now comprises the following members:

- David Olson, St. Peter, MN — President
Katharine Pearson, Whitesburg, KY — Vice President
Lina Newhouser, New York, NY — Secretary
Bill Pratt, Missoula, MT — Treasurer
Judy Baca, Venice, CA
Dudley Cocke, Whitesburg, KY
Doug Kahn, Seattle, WA
Ken Larsen, Mendocino, CA
Liz Lerman, Washington, DC
Ruby Lerner, Atlanta, GA
Lucy Lippard, New York, NY
David B.H. Martin, Barnstable, MA
Daniel Nachtigal, Washington, DC
John O'Neal, New Orleans, LA
Cricket Parmalee, Los Angeles, CA
Doug Paterson, Omaha, NE
John Pitman Weber, Chicago, IL

* * * * *

NAPNOC's members have also adopted a new schedule of organizational membership dues:

MEMBER DUES

Individuals: \$25/year (includes CD sub'n.)

Organizations:

With annual budget under \$50,000:	\$30/year
" " " " \$100,000:	\$45/year
" " " " \$200,000:	\$60/year
" " " over \$200,000:	\$75/year

INSIDE:

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- 4—Language: Does 'Cultural Democracy' Fit?
- 5—Distribution: Do It Yourself
- 8—Public Funding: Determined Realism
- 9—Working People's Culture
- 13—Rural America: A Sense of Place
- 17—New Wine, New Bottles: Questions of Form
- 22—Reclaiming Our Stories
- 24—Stars in Your Eyes
- 26—Acting Up

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NAPNOC welcomes letters, comments, suggestions and articles. Please make sure that NAPNOC is on your organization's mailing list.

Cultural Democracy is distributed to all NAPNOC members. Subscriptions are available to other individuals at \$15/year (6 issues); and to other organizations and institutions at \$25/year. For further information, please write to NAPNOC, PO Box 11440, Baltimore, MD 21239; or call 301/323-5006.

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NAPNOC

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national organizing committee

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