

A Report on ACD's 1983 Annual Meeting

CULTURAL

DEMOCRACY™

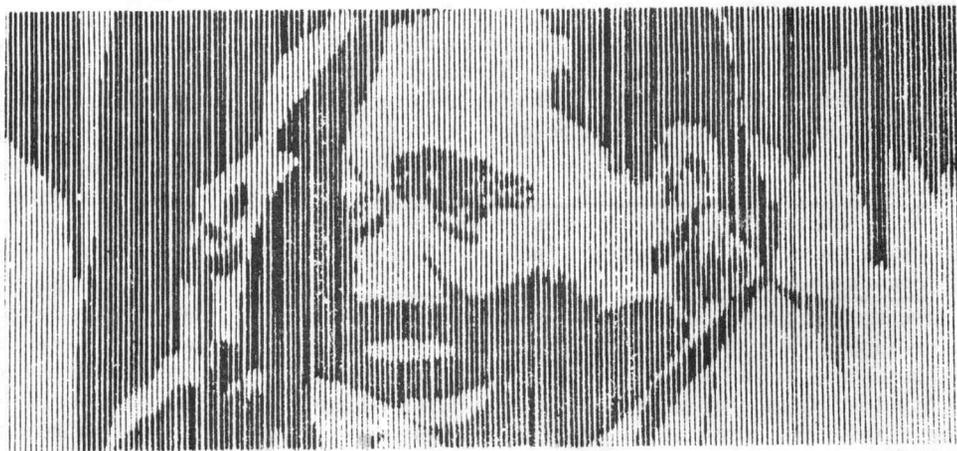
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This issue of CULTURAL DEMOCRACY is devoted to the highlights of the Seventh Annual Meeting and Conference: "Inheriting our Past/Creating our Future." It was held at the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta, Georgia, Sept. 29 - Oct. 2, 1983. In addition to the five central panels transcribed in summary here, a number of workshops, events, and performances took place. Fifty-six people attended. Now membership-governed and Board-administered, the Alliance is going through changes, but it remains a unique and necessary national liaison. We felt, as we did after the 1982 Omaha conference, a renewed inspiration from and dedication to the movement for cultural democracy.

The King Center provided a moving and symbolic setting for the conference, emphasized when Coretta Scott King appeared at the end of one session and spoke to us. The Freedom Hall Complex officially opened its doors on January 15, 1982 (the 53rd anniversary of Dr. King's birth) and includes an Exhibition Hall, Learning Center, auditorium, screening room, the King Library and Archives, conference hall and meeting rooms - all centered around the marble crypt and its eternal flame standing in a reflecting pool. Nearby are the Ebenezer Baptist Church and the King Birthplace.



CULTURAL DEMOCRACY means that each person and each community has the right to a culture or the cultures of its choice and access to the resources for its expression; that cultural values and policies should be open to public debate; that government does not have the right to favor one culture above another. Culture is a part of our common wealth as a people, and the Alliance for Cultural Democracy emphasizes the integral relationship of cultural democracy to the struggle for an economic and political democracy.

THE ALLIANCE FOR CULTURAL DEMOCRACY (formerly NAPNOC) is the nationwide, non-profit organization of community-based arts programs and community cultural workers. Our 200 members are visual artists, theater workers, crafts workers, media artists, dancers, arts administrators, educators, musicians, writers and community organizers in 37 states in urban, suburban, and rural settings.

IN THIS ISSUE

The Role of Criticism in Community Cultural Work	page 2
Cultural Policy in the U.S.	page 3
The History of Community Cultural Work in the U.S.	page 5
Successes and Failure in Community Cultural Work	page 8
Forging a Bond with Progressive Political Activism	page 10

CRITICISM

Its Role in Community Cultural Work

Moderator: Liz Lerman, Dance Exchange, Washington, DC; Charles Frederick, Contributing Editor, Theaterwork, New York; Lucy R. Lippard, Political Art Documentation and Distribution (PADD), Heresies, New York. (Lippard's talk was taken from her essay "Headlines, Heartlines, Hardlines: Advocacy Criticism as Activism," forthcoming in Doug Kahn and Diane Neumaier, eds., Culture in Contention, Real Comet Press, Seattle, 1984.)

Lucy R. Lippard: Within the mainstream of western visual art, criticism is seen more as a reviewing service to the market, or a superior intellectual commentary, than as a socially engaged activity. Writing from a base of "deeply held beliefs" (a euphemism for Left politics) is suspect. "Good criticism" is supposed to provide an objective look at specific objects, bodies of work, or trends, *not* to reflect in any direct or, god forbid, subjective way the writer's political views; certainly not to focus on the social, economic and cultural forms in which the art is located.

What I call an advocate critic avoids starmaking or promoting any single style, openly supports art that is also openly opposed to the political powers that be (whether through experimental form, community outreach, or directly agitational imagery); and perhaps most importantly, s/he tries to innovate the notion of "quality" to include the unheard voices, the unseen images, of the unconsidered people.

I see advocacy criticism, like activist art, as an organizing tool as well as the source of esthetic expression or provocation. It is for me a means by which to raise public consciousness about the role of art in social life and to affirm the connections between artists and the Left and a variety of cultural communities. Advocacy means taking a stand, arguing for an esthetic or a value system. It denies neutrality and false objectivity and forces the hands of those who prefer to take no position. As we know from so many other contexts, "apolitical" stances simply reinforce the status quo

In the dominant culture, critic and artist are theoretically pitted against each other instead of acknowledging our common manipulation.

The best of Left and feminist criticism does not limit itself to any single style, nor does it claim any particular piece of turf within the mainstream. On the contrary, it makes its selections of "good art" from many different levels of cultural production, from a cross-racial, cross-cultural, cross-class reservoir, respecting the locality from which it comes rather than trying to wrench it into the dangerous flow of the dominant culture.

In the dominant culture, critic and artist are theoretically pitted against each other instead of acknowledging our common manipulation. Collaboration and collectivism are ways activist artists have challenged the divisiveness and compartmentalization that are capitalism's prime props. The notion of critic as parasite on the artist disappears when "criticism" is redefined in terms of exchange.

Advocacy criticism has two major problems: The first is to avoid a moralizing or preaching tone that the converted don't like any more than the unconverted. The second is "conflict of interest." I often find myself writing about friends and/or people I work with, about groups and events which I support or helped to organize. My life is centered on the development of a responsible and responsive Left culture, on cultural democracy. But if I exercise my expertise (if I write about what I'm doing as well as what I'm looking at), I'm caught in a bind between conviction

and "promotion." When the *vox* of advocacy becomes too clear, too *vociferous*, it is dismissed as propaganda — a term I've perversely embraced because I find it poetic. To propagate means to seed, to spread the word — functions I want very much to fulfill in my writing. The word implies *belief* as well as dogma, and both activism and advocacy are rooted in belief.

* * *

Charles Frederick: First and foremost the criticism we need is different from mainstream criticism. One, there is no distinction between art and criticism. The act of criticism is involved in the making of all our work. So I see criticism as a function within all of what we do, be it artmaking, community work, whatever, rather than as *ex cathedra* statements, aloof and infallible, alienated from the work. Secondly, it's my particular slogan that criticism is the political edge of imagination.

Certain things we have to keep in mind about the differences between our criticism and the mainstream's. One question is that of accountability, which is not about selling the work, but is a principled notion of people and a notion of progressive change. It's about the work for what it means, not about creating stars or careers — but it's tender with ego. We also have an accountability to our audience: on the one hand being able to work clearly so we communicate with our audience, but we also have a leadership position in cultural work. Cultural work creates articulation.

Any artwork, any cultural work, is a very, very dense activity. There's always more to it than can be described in any one shot at talking about it. There's always more to it than the people in it even know.

Another accountability — and this is particularly true for collective and community work, is internal criticism in the group. By doing that we save ourselves from a major worry on the Left — political correctness, which we won't have to worry about as much if we have built into our process an ongoing political critique of all that our work might communicate.

Any artwork, any cultural work, is a very, very dense activity. There's always more to it than can be described in any one shot at talking about it. There's always more to it than the people in it even know. So the critical work is to try and be able to be as conscious as possible of all of the constituent elements of this incredibly complex universe. The fact that it's complex is what makes it enjoyable, why human beings love doing it, and why it's so essential we keep doing it. It is as dense as history and as dense as people, and artwork articulates that human density on many levels at once.

Next we have to look at the intention of the work, and thirdly we have to look at location — historical, geographical, and how it locates itself vis-a-vis mainstream culture. Such an important part of the dialectic of our own work. Additionally, it's very important for anyone engaged in critical work, and that includes people within a group, to develop self-critiques. Otherwise you will be tyrannized by your own taste. It's necessary to have investigated clearly what you like and don't like and absent yourself if you don't like something on questions of taste alone, not political judgment.

continued on page 3

CULTURAL DEMOCRACY

Editors: Lucy R. Lippard, Abigail Norman, Charles Frederick (New York). Thanks to: Caron Atlas, Debra Wise

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CULTURAL POLICY IN THE U.S.

Moderator: Dudley Cocke, Appalshop, Whitesburg, KY; Hugh Southern, Deputy Director, National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, DC; Don Adams, past Co-Director, Alliance for Cultural Democracy, San Francisco, CA.

Hugh Southern: In a society that is relatively democratic, there has to be some trade-off: OK, you get money for your big symphony orchestra. Then we who are artists not institutionalized in the same way want a share of those resources disbursed in other directions. That has led to a sometimes uneasy and sometimes quite enlightened cooperative agreement between different sectors of the arts community, which has resulted in amazingly pluralistic funding and an amazingly broad range of interests, even in public agencies where you would, on the whole, expect the opposite.

I think the Endowment has contributed to this more or less social contract in the arts community: if you will recognize the validity of my art form, I will recognize the validity of yours. And to a certain extent those agreements have been accompanied by allocation of public resources which do recognize those different interests. Folk Arts, for instance, now is a program of the Endowment, which some people might have thought was terribly inappropriate just a few years ago.

If there is a contract, it is in a continual state of modification, debate, refinement. We would very much oppose anything tending to stratify the arts in this country in a rigid and quasi-permanent fashion, such as the designation of National Treasures or National Landmarks that would receive a fixed amount into perpetuity. That's exactly the kind of cultural policy we don't want. It would turn the arts community into the haves and the have-nots. Once you got into the National Treasures category, it would be very hard to get an institution out of it, and, conversely, it would be very hard to get new members into it, because members of the club would possibly see a threat to their share of the cake.

I think that the goal of national arts policy is to keep pluralism alive, and to keep it flexible, to be constantly questioning what an agency like ours is doing, to refine what we do to allow and encourage new voices to make themselves felt, and if that results in the perpetual growth of a mosaic that doesn't seem to make much intellectual sense, then so be it. It still looks a lot like the map of this country, very much in the spirit of this nation. I don't think we're very good at academies and intellectual consistency. What we are very good at is somehow keeping the patchwork quilt together.

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Don Adams: Cultural policy should not be some kind of esoteric arcane notion that is difficult to comprehend and difficult to discuss. And it should not be a question of a social contract within the arts community, as Hugh described it — a specialist preserve within the government that looks out for the concerns of professional artists, existing arts institutions, to the exclusion of the public.

It is important to develop a formal cultural policy because it provides us with a vocabulary, and a framework for discussing important issues in our lives. Cultural policy is a place where the fragmentation of our society is pulled together and unified so we can look at the very large picture of the quality of life and discuss it in terms that should be accessible to us all.

In the early days of the NEA, inside the arts community, there wouldn't have been much support for folk arts. But certainly amongst the *folks* there would have been support. A public

forum in which to talk about what is important in cultural life and what are the cultural values we want to protect and promote in our society — that's cultural policy's important function. Therefore it's important for us to demystify cultural policy. As Hugh said, currently we have a policy which says, "We have no official U.S. cultural policy."

An important development in world cultural policy since the mid '60's has been to break up art patronage traditions, to work for what is called in other countries of the world "cultural democracy."

Our country's approach to cultural policy is not even the predominant one in the world. It's not just Reagan's policy. The Livingston Biddle Endowment in the Carter days was saying the same thing. Even in the '70s, there was a more generous definition of what the role of a National Endowment for the Arts could be and should be. An important development in world cultural policy since the mid '60s has been to break up art patronage traditions, to work for what is called in other countries of the world "cultural democracy." A group called *The* **continued on page 8**

CRITICISM

— *Continued from page 2*

It's also very important in all critical work to have a detailed study of the medium. We call ourselves cultural workers because we work a medium. It's an honest day's work. Any honest worker makes something that lasts, that holds, that can stand up, that can hold people. Part of that, for me, is a real knowledge of formalism. Our particular social era rationalizes the materials of the society — people and their production — in forms, so formalism in art has a political content. Of course, we have to politicize formalism, but formalism is an authentic, essential knowledge, a cogent metaphor of our historical moment.

There is another elusive category of critical consciousness. To my mind, there is never an accident in artmaking. Everything that is left there, you chose to leave there, and it's either conscious or unconscious. There is intuition; there is imagination. So basically criticism also involves making a critique of the unconscious. . . .

I would say that critical consciousness in the artmaking process takes three forms. One is craft, how to work the medium. The second is to anticipate how the audience will create meaning from the experience of the work. (A performance is never complete until an audience has thought about it; an artwork doesn't exist until it's imagined in the mind of someone who has seen it.) And third, it's very important that we have a clarity about our politics. We must know how points of politics and morality both combine and contradict. In our art world, creating community is a work, and in our artmaking we are creating communities to make art for our communities. And that's an important part of critical understanding, that our greater intention is the creation of a new, progressive culture. Within this, it's also important to be able to criticize, to understand very carefully, the distribution of the work. Where is it going? Who's enabling it to go? You have to make principled choices about both the production and the material infrastructure of progressive culture.

continued on page 4

Criticism

— Continued from page 3

Discussion

Liz Lerman: It's an outrageous idea that artists and critics could be one and the same, or on the same side! Several artists came up to me as moderator of this panel and said, "Are you sure you're going to cover the artists' side in this?"

I'd just like to speak briefly to those of us who are teachers as well as performers. My work in the community is first as a teacher, second as a choreographer; ultimately the people I'm working with become the creators themselves. My experience has been that criticism is practically useless. I can hardly remember a teacher of a critic ever saying anything to me that was helpful.

* * *

Phyllis Jane Rose (At the Foot of the Mountain, Minneapolis): Much of our work in At the Foot of the Mountain is collaborative, so criticism is part of that process all along the way. One bottom line is getting to a radical analysis of whatever the subject is. Another is that we have to create our own vocabulary. It took me a long time to understand that. I don't know why I assumed that a critic in the community who had no interest in the background to our work would necessarily see what it was, spontaneously, with a full-fledged vocabulary. We found we were responsible to create a critical vocabulary that we can share with critics who, by virtue of our success, our longevity, our audiences, can't deny it. They're much more eager these days to use the vocabulary we use.

From Around the Country

- Received: a birth notice for PEOPLE's THEATRE EMPHASIS, c/o Dory Sokol, Dramatic Arts Dept., University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, NE 18182. More bad
- More bad news on the Office of Management and Budget's directives for Nonprofit Organizations, an earlier version of which raised hackles all over the country. This one scales back the most controversial aspects of the original A-122 proposal, almost completely dropping its "radical taint" theory (also known as the "Wall of Separation") but making lobbying and advocacy only "not unallowable." For further information contact *OMB Watch* in DC (202) 822-7860. With the advent of a recent directive for NEA employees (forbidding association with subversives and sexual perverts, among other pariahs), proposals for more "efficient" FBI/police surveillance and other Reagan responses to the specter of opposition, it seems crucial to keep up the monitoring.
- Invisible Performance Workshop is a center for arts located near 149th St. and 3rd Ave. in the South Bronx, NY. It sponsors often progressive dance, drama, music, poetry and performance art as well as ongoing classes for community residents. For information, Malka Percal, 558 Melrose Ave., Bronx, NY 10455 (212) 665-0384.
- The PADD Second Sunday on June 12, 1983 was on Cultural Democracy. Goldbard and Adams spoke; the video "Last Train from Washington" and the film "The Gathering: Thoughts of Harvest, Acts of Planting" were shown. An article by Adams and Goldbard appears in PADD's publication *UPFRONT*, no. 8, out in January. (PADD, 339 Lafayette St., New York, NY 10012; \$2.)

John Pitman Weber (Chicago Mural Group): But I think artists have to take the stand and say: I want to write about this work which I see as important. I'm writing about it as an artist; don't call me a critic, or a writer. Everybody has plenty of periodicals out there, and that's where we need to be putting our words.

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Abigail Norman (Community Media Project, New York): The Community Media Project involved a tremendous amount of sitting down before and after with people, and we invited evaluators to discuss what we were and should be accomplishing. The video project I'm involved in began by establishing a network of people we did and didn't know before to discuss our ideas, find interview subjects, show our work-in-progress to on a constant basis. Both these experiences were amazingly positive elements and should go on more often.

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Frederick: That time of discussion, of sharing, of understanding, is an essential human occupation.

* * *

Arlene Goldbard (Past Co-Director, Alliance for Cultural Democracy, San Francisco): I don't feel that criticism is often invited in an open way and for me that's a terrific obstacle. Don (Adams) and I work with so many different groups. A lot of people want to be reviewed. But there's a distinction between being reviewed and being criticized. They want to be reviewed by the mainstream press because it will bring audiences, but I can't tell you how many times we've seen a work once or several times and tentatively offered some feedback, both positive and negative, and not had it greeted with any kind of openness. So some of this discussion about an artist writing about another artist is objectification. And in that relationship there's only so far you can go.

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Weber: Speaking from our involvement in public art, the Chicago Mural Group has had virtually no written criticism. The main purpose of criticism is to reach the arts community, so we've been consciously building bridges the last couple of years. For about five years we were cut off, excluded from the art schools, the local art press, the art columns in the daily press. We have to accept some responsibility for that ourselves, because not enough of us were willing to write.

* * *

Herb Perr (New York): Part of my experience with PADD is a certain breakdown between art and criticism. I think of criticism as taking place before the work actually begins, essentially taking place in the mind of the artist and in the artist's lifestyle. That criticism is the prevalent value-structure of the artworld or the alternative world artists guide their work by. Written criticism, after the work is finished, is a kind of footnote.

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Don Adams (Past Co-Director, Alliance for Cultural Democracy, San Francisco): It occurs to me we tend to think of a work as an end or finished thing, and what's the use of talking about that? If the artist thinks of it that way, the artist isn't going to ask you what you thought of it. But if we think of a work of art as part of an ongoing process, if the artist thinks that, and if the critic also thinks of it that way, then there is probably some purpose in saying something about it.

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Rose: In the Twin Cities we're never really criticized, we're always reviewed. The work we do is posed against work that is

continued on page 5

THE HISTORY OF COMMUNITY CULTURAL WORK IN THE U.S.

Moderator: Doug Paterson, Drama Department, University of Nebraska, Omaha, NE; Arlene Goldbard, past Co-Director Alliance for Cultural Democracy, San Francisco, CA; Mark Miller, Kentucky Arts Council, Frankfort, KY.

Doug Paterson started off this session by arguing that the definition of community in "community theater" has changed fundamentally during this century. "People's theater history," Doug argued, "almost all tends to be in terms of workers' theaters and the movement that came out of the workers' movements of the 1920s. The Workers Theater League of 1926 is one of the first examples we see of a theater that is socially conscious and involved in the community in an active way. Then after the Second World War, there tends to be a transformation. In the late '50s and '60s, theaters began to represent specific communities of people — the women's community, the Black community, the Chicano community, the gay community, the rural community, and not the working class community."

Mark Miller described the work of Chicago's Baker Brownell, who focused on small rural communities in the 1930s and '40s. Brownell and his followers "believed in organizing people to speak for themselves and saw culture and art as one of the most powerful tools to enable people to avoid manipulation, to get used to the idea of being active rather than re-active, active rather than passive."

Brownell, a philosopher at Northwestern University, "thought that every community is a work of art, most often an unconscious one. He saw it as a weaving of people, crops, animals, buildings, artifacts, all working together in response to the challenges of a particular environment. He wanted to make people conscious of the art they were working every day. His school of community development, called the Self-Study Method, involved

organizing a community to come together for a period of weeks to study itself. As a final product of that process, he often encouraged communities to express their social history in the form of pageants."

These two threads — the heritage of working class theater and the populist ideas of Brownell, Bob Gard (proponent of the "Wisconsin Idea" of the whole state as the "campus" for public universities) and others — bear a certain relationship to elements of community cultural work today. Doug asked whether "the particular development of women's theater, Black theater, rural theater, Chicano theater, or very specific political theater, like the San Francisco Mime Troupe — has broken some bridges to historical links with the working class? And how do we re-forge some of those links?" In contrast, Mark Miller suggested that the work of Brownell "pre-echoed a lot of what we're talking about today."

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Arlene Goldbard put her finger on the rift in intervening history, characterizing the past 20 years as "a project of reconstituting community cultural work out of the wreckage left by McCarthyism and the mobilization for World War II that destroyed cultural work in the '30s. This is not a project," she said, "of identifying a community and relating to it, but a project of trying to help build community."

"In this period of 20 years, the primary impulse that the renaissance in community cultural work drew off of was the minority cultural movements — that is, when Black people of this country, for example, began to say, 'What I stand for is on equal footing with the dominant culture, and maybe our values are even better than the values of the dominant culture.'

continued on page 11

Criticism — continued from page 4

considered contentless. So because our work has identifiable content, the whole discussion is always on what the play is about. It's artistry — the way it moves people, and moves — is never discussed. So I would look to the Alliance to help us build a critical theory. Criticism is part of movement building, whereas reviewing is audience building.

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Bob Feldman (United Mime Workers, Champaign, IL): One strategy that the United Mime Workers has tried is to be interviewed before we come to a place, instead of reviewed. That gets an audience to the show, but it's also *us* speaking. Another strategy is that we deny use of critics' quotes. We try as much as possible to use our own words. The other thing is, if there's some way we can show people that criticism is enjoyable and that we can learn from it, that would really be helpful, because most groups do not invite criticism.

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Bill Pratt (Montana Arts Council, Missoula, MT): This has been a real important panel for me. It's brought out some unresolved conflicts that I didn't know were conflicts, and I didn't know they were unresolved. I'm talking about community organizing, which I see as my creative canvas. How do you make a group do what it needs to do? I figure I was there sort of like a cultural midwife, to help give birth to their idea, but it was kind of sani-

tized. There was no fun involved in procreation. So more and more I've been saying things. . . . Did I actually tell the successful children's theater that they're doing children's theater for adults? The reaction has been real interesting. Oh-oh, you're stepping out of your role — especially from people with a vested interest in those groups. OK. There's a thing called Tough Love. I'll take criticism from people I trust, who are giving me criticism because they care about me and they want me to go further. I'm suspicious of criticism from people I don't know, whose motivation I suspect.

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The session ended with Lerman's call for suggestions for a plank on criticism in the ACD platform. The suggestions were, in summary: sharing critical evaluations of our own work with each other; supporting organizations going through change or rough times by *positive* criticism; understanding the critic as part of the artmaking practice; developing an awareness of the process of criticism as it relates to the growth of the community; articulating our own ideas and developing an educational function within the movement *and* for the dominant culture; giving criticism itself some criticism. John Weber ended by underlining that the key to criticism is the dialogue with audience: we have to grasp the magnitude of the historical task in front of us. We really have to believe that we are of importance to each other, because otherwise we're unwilling to do the extra work and accept the extra pain of struggling with our own egos.

REGIONAL REPORTS:

Bringing the Alliance Closer Together

Georgia: In November, the Atlanta chapter co-sponsored with Art Papers and Artists Call a performance event calling for an end to US intervention in Grenada. Artists involved included the PAND Band, Acme Theater, Sisters of No Mercy, Steve Seaberg, area video artists, and Alan Sondheim, who showed his film on chemical warfare. The chapter is also working on two ongoing projects, one building links between Black artists and white artists and labor to create a second annual "Art for the People's Sake" festival, this time co-sponsored by ACD, Clergy & Laity Concerned, and nine other local groups. Leslie Withers is community coordinator, and poet/playwright Alice Lovelace of the Southern Collective of Afro-American Writers is the artistic director. The second project is a program in progress with Atlanta political groups to adopt a sister city in Nicaragua.

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Minnesota: The Twin Cities chapter has formed an alliance with a cultural workers newsletter, through which it hopes to organize for ACD, and with the Victor Jara Fund, which sponsors events around Central American issues and raises money for progressive cultural work. The chapter is also involved in Artists Call planning for a January 22 event, and to create a network of sponsors for a Fall series of events. Coalition building includes work with a group sponsoring a national conference on peace education, to be held in Minneapolis in July. For more information on the conference call Catherine Jordan at (612) 340-9462.

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Massachusetts: The Boston-area chapter has made organizing for Artists Call its central activity. Events planned include two exhibits of Nicaraguan posters and of work by local artists, multicultural poetry readings and musical jam sessions, to bring together different communities of artists, and a series of five performances donated by area theaters and musicians. After February, Boston-area Artists Call and the local ACD chapter will merge to continue to sponsor events, including forums on progressive cultural work and a symposium to coincide with the ACD Board meeting, to be held in Boston in early June. Debra Wise is also organizing for ACD through a general meeting of the Massachusetts Cultural Alliance, which is composed mainly of fairly mainstream groups. The January meeting of the Massachusetts Cultural Alliance will be on cultural policy, and will include a showing of Windward Video's excellent documentary on the subject, "Last Train from Washington" (to order, call (808) 579-9313).

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California: The first regional meeting in California will double as a symposium on training community cultural workers and heightening skills in community cultural development. Ken Larsen needs someone to share the responsibility of coordinating that event and other Alliance activities in the state. In the meantime, Ken presented information on the Alliance at the recent California Rural Economic Development Conference and the Community History Conference. Anyone interested in helping Ken can reach him at Rural Arts Services, Box 1547, Mendocino, CA 95460 (707) 937-4900.



save it-stop c

Other Regions: We'll report on developments in other regions as the news breaks. If you have reports or announcements from your region, send them to *Cultural Democracy* at P.O. Box 50137, Washington, DC 20004.

FROM THE EDITOR

Ideas for two seminar conferences emerged at the Atlanta meeting and will be held later this year: (1) Progressive criticism and community cultural work; (2) Racism and Culture. For further information, contact Ruby Lerner, Alternate Roots, 1083 Austin Ave., Atlanta, GA 30307 (404) 577-1079.

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A number of ACD members recently went to Nicaragua in a theatre group. They worked and traveled to the front with the cultural brigades. Other members have been there at other times. In the next issue we hope to have a discussion of Nicaraguan cultural policy.

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We have omitted the news and resources section in this issue of *CD* because the space seemed best used to cover the conference panels, already woefully synopsisized. Do send us your news, however, and we'll cover it in the next issue.

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CULTURAL DEMOCRACY, Number 30, will appear in April-May on the theme "The Local Seeds of and Needs for Cultural Policy," which will take off from some of the controversy raised by the Southern/Adams panel on page 3. Number 31 will appear in the summer and will probably cover either one or both of the planned seminar-conferences listed above. Submissions on any of those topics are eagerly invited.



cruise & Pershing II

Peter Gourfain

FORGING A BOND

Across the country, alliances of artists have been forming for political projects. In particular, lately, Artists Call and the AD HOC ARTISTS in the November 12 Coalition have brought artists together to respond to the situation in Central America and the Caribbean. The Alliance for Cultural Democracy, with its new regional organizing efforts, can provide a name, a local structure and a national context for these groups so their members can maintain their ties with each other and not just disperse, atomized. In Boston, Artists Call will merge with the Alliance for Cultural Democracy after January. Similar groups in other cities and regions can be encouraged to do the same.



WHAT'S HAPPENING AROUND THE U.S.

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENCE DIRECTORY OF ARTS ACTIVISM will be available in February for \$3, from CC, 505 West End Ave., New York, NY 10024 (212) 420-8196. It includes listings of individuals and groups and will be updated as the movement for cultural democracy grows and changes. ACD has had a lot of input into this directory and it will be a valuable outreach tool for all of us.

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ANOTHER REMINDER: although Adams and Goldbard are not ACD directors any more, their incomparable services are still available for free-lance speaking, writing, research and consulting services. For information, P.O. Box 21089, San Francisco, CA 94121 (415) 681-4305.

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ARTISTS CALL Against U.S. Intervention in Central America began organizing out of New York last summer and is now happening in a number of different forms in 23 cities across the country. Activities begin in and focus on January (Jan. 22 is the commemorative day for the 1982 massacre in El Salvador). They range from over 30 spaces for special exhibitions and benefit sales; performance, video and film festivals; music, poetry, and theatre events in New York to 20 spaces in Chicago and 15 in San Francisco, at last count; there are public performances, banner exhibitions, publications, forums, etc., planned elsewhere, from Burlington Vt. to Houston, to Seattle, as well as in three cities across Canada. Magazine covers and coverages are also continent-wide-and-deep. The goals are to raise artists' and public consciousness, to change public opinion, and to raise money to support cultural groups in Central America. Important byproducts are networking, organizing in places cultural workers haven't previously gotten together, and international solidarity among artists. Claes Oldenburg designed a poster, Peter Gourfain designed a button, and additional graphics are being produced locally, everywhere. For information, 339 Lafayette St., New York, NY 10012 (212) 242-3900.

GOING THROUGH CHANGES

The sense of community that members of the Alliance feel is built upon personal relationships and a shared value system. With the reorganization of the Alliance, a number of former participants have not renewed their memberships or subscriptions. In order to reduce this attrition and to stimulate new membership, Alliance members have volunteered to coordinate meetings of local groups involved in neighborhood and community cultural work. In addition, they have agreed to contact former members and to encourage them to renew their participation.

Bill Pratt has sent lists of non-current members to all regional contact people to help them in their tasks, but he also urges all Alliance members to contact new people, tell them about the Alliance and ask them to join, and to talk to former members and ask them to renew. If ex-members do not want to continue to participate, it would be helpful to find out why and communicate the reasons to Bill at 727 S. 3rd West, Missoula, MT 59801.

Community Cultural Work SUCCESSSES AND FAILURES

Moderator: Bill Pratt, Montana Arts Council, Missoula, MT;
Dudley Cocke, Appalshop, Whitesburg, KY; John O'Neal, Free
Southern Theatre, New Orleans, LA; Phyllis Jane Rose, At the
Foot of the Mountain, Minneapolis, MN.

This session consisted, by and large, of stories from experience. John O'Neal marked the midpoint of the session with the observation that "you have to succeed at something in order to stay alive and examine — but failures are what give us an opportunity to learn and test our knowledge."

* * *

Phyllis Jane Rose manages At the Foot of the Mountain, "a women's theater of transformation, celebration and hope," with a mission to empower its audiences "to participate in the generation of a just and joyous world." She told two stories of how two plays failed, one in terms of its process of creation and internal company dynamics, and both in terms of artistic quality.

In the first instance, a new playwright, "who had joined the theater only recently, felt very strongly that she didn't have to work the way we worked. That sounded reasonable, believing in cultural democracy. But we couldn't collaborate with her. We couldn't offer her assistance by virtue of the set-up: This is mine. We felt we had betrayed not only ourselves, but the writer, by not insisting that she use us as long as she was there. We had the smallest audiences in five years, which was shocking, and I do think those numbers reflect the artistic quality of this show."

In the second instance, a local group called the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights picketed *What Became of the Holy Ghost*, a play about growing up Catholic. The League, which claimed the play was anti-Catholic, carried picket signs addressed to each of the theater's funders. It then "challenged the Arts Board of Minnesota to change its rules to say it would not fund any organization that did bigoted work." With helpful intervention from the Minnesota Civil Liberties Union, the Arts Board decided unanimously not to change its rules, but "the controversy created so much excitement that the play, which was already selling very well, spontaneously sold out."

Phyllis Jane said, "I think of this example as a very important economic success and a very interesting failure, which we almost allowed ourselves not to notice because of the public excitement about the piece." For her, the box office success was ultimately overshadowed by the play's artistic failures. The company is now re-opening the play — not because of the League, but because "there was so much of a smokescreen around First Amendment issues that nobody ever really discussed the quality of the play. Yet it was the box office success that allowed the company "the freedom to go back and work on that play and do better work."

We took the control away from our friends and gave it to people we saw as our enemies as we tried to work for our friends, which was a significant problem as we went on.

John O'Neal described two related failures of the Free Southern Theater, placing not individual productions but the theater as a whole in the context of both its audience and the civil rights movement, from which it emerged.

The two "failures" are related. The first was "a failure to reckon that we were creating a product that was a part of the economic life of the community. We set out with the notion that, since culture is a thing that comes from people, we should

not charge people money to participate in the experience. Black people in the Black Belt South was our primary audience, an audience essentially of poor people. Theater, the form and medium we chose to work in, is a very expensive form and medium of entertainment and culture. So the effect of this decision was to take the economics out of the hands of the people we saw as our audience and put it in the hands essentially of the government and foundations. We took the control away from our friends and gave it to people we saw as our enemies as we tried to work for our friends, which was a significant problem as we went on."

Nevertheless, the movement gave the theater its "bargaining power with government agencies, with foundations and so forth." People involved in the movement came to the South to work with the theater, provided support work across the country, pulled together audiences and handled logistics, gave the theater its material and offered critical evaluations of its process.

But gradually, almost imperceptibly, "the movement changed character and became instead of a focused thing a kind of diffuse thing, instead of a sharp thing sort of a broad thing, instead of a dominating force in society sort of a general background noise . . . Somehow fundraising got to be more important than it had ever been before, because it just took more time for some things.

continued on page 11

Policy —continued from page 3

Council of Europe took all kinds of audience development strategies and found out that whatever they did, most of the people were sitting inside their houses after work watching television. And that if they wanted to really develop a dynamic democratic cultural life for their people, they had to change their notion about what constituted acceptable cultural activity. And they began to take an activist stance in promoting cultural opportunities that is very different from the passive stance that our government takes in relation to cultural activities. They began to introduce the notion of animation work, where artists' roles as cultural critics were not diminished in any way by putting them into community settings. . . .

The Federal Theater Project, the Federal Writers Project, all the New Deal cultural projects in the '30s and '40s, tried to create new roles for cultural workers to take up issues that were of concern to people, to support activities that were new and that were popular — not in the derogatory sense that you frequently hear in discussions about stratifications of taste, but popular in the sense that they didn't say, "If somebody's not coming into my audience it's because they're not adequately educated, or not adequately cultured," but "I need to change my work so that it responds to the cultural interests and issues people have on their minds." We can look back on that period as much more democratic, from a cultural policy point of view than the one we have right now. And also look at the problems that emerged because of that — when the interests that really call the shots in our cultural policy now — big corporations and so forth — brought about the demise of that program because of its very powerful poten-

continued on page 9

POLICY — continued from page 8

tial to mobilize people on cultural issues that often conflict with the economic interests of those corporations.

Discussion

Maria Acosta-Colon (San Francisco Mime Troupe): What I'm afraid of is that if you try to define cultural policy, *who* is going to define it? Where are those terms going to come from? I ask not to be arrogant, but because, as a Latina, I might not like those terms, that vocabulary. I hear Don saying the NEA should have this policy. I'm saying that's impossible. To expect the NEA, as a department in our government, which is based on wealth and supports the wealth, and where all the laws in the country are built — not for us but for them . . . I'm saying we should continue to fight the government and continue to criticize the NEA.

* * *

Adams: Yes. I think it's an element of cultural democracy that cultural decision-making has to be a democratic process in itself. I don't think it can be imposed from above.

* * *

John Pitman Weber (Chicago Mural Project): What we want is the freedom to operate and to grow and the freedom to help spread our ideas and to help nurture a diverse popular culture on many levels. I don't want to see things rationalized and well-organized. Personally, I think I believe that government inefficiency and chaos, especially at the center, is favorable in all cultural areas. . . . We can and should and must raise accusations, to the extent they're legitimate, about the institutionalized racist biases that are still present in the Endowment, in the way the whole area of interest of Expansion Arts is defined — so that no matter how established a program is serving a non-white community, that program never gets out of Expansion Arts. It becomes a sort of Bantustan. . . . And I think we have to be very suspicious of the rhetoric of Western European models, welfare state, social democratic models. . . .

* * *

Kaye McDuffrie (Lansing Theater Project, Michigan): If there is no attempt to define the goals and objectives, and formulate a policy, from the bottom up, from our communities, then we're just letting whatever happens happen. Why should anyone think we know what we're doing if there's no cohesiveness, if there's no clarity?

* * *

Charles Frederick (*Theaterwork*): Time and time again we see that all the political decisions in this country are hidden within a nebulous policy. Time and time again it is our necessity to force articulation. I think that's what Don was talking about.

* * *

Phyllis Jane Rose (At the Foot of the Mountain Theatre, Minneapolis): The next step, of course, is to demand that whatever is stated also reflect what is practiced.

* * *

Adams: That's where policy is important, giving you ground to stand on.

* * *

Arlene Goldbard (Past Co-Director, Alliance for Cultural Democracy, San Francisco): Three groups in this room right now got rejected by the NEA even though their applications were approved all the way up through the panel system, because of the

personal taste of the one man actually empowered to make the decisions about who gets money — Frank Hodson. Now that's autocratic cultural policy. And it exists, regardless of all the dissembling that comes down from the Endowment There is an underlying assumption that the best place for the government's cultural expenditure is filling the gap between the income *earned* by the institutions that rich people want to exist and income they would *like* to be receiving. That's a cultural policy that says the culture of the wealthy is the best culture in America. Who made that decision? The wealthy made that decision. . . . So let's talk about what exists. That's how it is now. Let's talk about changing it.

* * *

Southern: Arlene, I have to disagree with you about the chairman. He has changed a very, very small number of grants. . . . Panels have to put on record some sort of affirmative reason for recommending a grant, and they sometimes don't; there's absolutely no discussion of why that particular grant should be received. . . .

* * *

Goldbard: So you do cancel all the ones where there's no discussion?

* * *

Southern: Very, very few have been cancelled out of thousands and thousands.

* * *

Goldbard: But three of them are here in this room. This is not accidental.

* * *

Lucy Lippard (PADD): I was on the phone with people from the NEA when PADD's grant was vetoed in 1982. They said it went through the panel, through the policy panel, through the council, and then Hodson said "No." Eventually I got a letter replying to mine asking for an explanation, some six or eight months after the form rejection, saying nothing about discussion, but saying in so many words "You didn't get it because you weren't good enough." Now, I understood that the panel system was set up so your peers made these decisions. Hodson is not my peer. He doesn't know anything about anything we do. No panel I've ever been on just says, "Yeah, let's just give these people \$1,800. No discussion. They just get it." . . . Then they can't figure out why they said that?

I think Don's reasons for having a specific cultural policy are becoming clearer and clearer as *this* discussion goes on. We have to know what we're opposing. Veto is a cultural policy.

* * *

Jimmie Durham (*Art and Artists*, New York): I don't see as much disagreement in this room or this discussion as it seems. I don't think our job is really to expect some new detailed cultural policy from the NEA or the government. I think we expect it from *ourselves*. We have to develop a cultural policy that we can fight for. An example: we fought and fought and fought to get a real Indian policy in the U.S. and we got one under FDR. We had a very progressive Bureau of Indian Affairs chief and he gave us an absolutely disastrous policy we're still fighting to this very day. That's what we have to expect if a detailed cultural policy is laid out by any branch of the U.S. government, or any group of people other than us people. We have to lay it out and fight hard and expose what the NEA is doing, but with a kind of skepticism. They're not ever going to do what's good for the people.

FORGING A BOND WITH PROGRESSIVE POLITICAL ACTIVISM AND TAKING A LEADERSHIP PLACE IN THE ARTS COMMUNITY

Moderator: Lina Newhouser, Community Media Project, New York, NY; Arlene Goldbard; Alan McGregor, Director, Fund for Southern Communities, Atlanta, GA; Dave Ramage, Director, New World Foundation, New York, NY.

Somewhere in the middle of this session, John Weber, of the Chicago Mural Group, reminded us that "there's a real long history of struggling to build alliances. Even the term 'community art,' I believe, was adopted by the muralists, whether entirely consciously or not, as part of a political program, building alliances with Alinsky-type community organizations. We have actually come out of political movements, out of the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement, the women's movement, and so on. And talking community art was a way of building a political alliance."

Yet, as Zack Rogow, of the Slow Motion Poetry Collective in New York, pointed out, no one was talking at this point about their experiences "approaching the left media, unions, and food co-ops in their area, approaching the left political parties they're familiar with and have worked with." Instead, participants dwelt on tasks that must be done and obstacles that must be discussed and faced *before* talking in detail about cultural and other groups working together.

Raising the "question of alliances between cultural organizations and other kinds of progressive movements," Arlene Goldbard outlined three tiers into which joint efforts fall. "One is where people do artwork for some other organization — a poster, a benefit, something like that. Secondly, there's artwork that takes up social issues in some way, so that the artwork in and of itself is another mode of conscientizing people, another mode of organizing. Then there's a third tier, and that is understanding that cultural democracy is a commitment that is one with and equally important as commitments to political democracy and economic democracy in building a new society. It is this third tier that concerns the Alliance for Cultural Democracy."

Critical obstacles to this kind of understanding, Arlene suggested, are the tendency of the Left to want measurable effects, the fact that cultural workers don't constitute a traditional power bloc that the Left takes seriously — such as Labor, and a passivity amongst artists, who "very often talk about themselves as oppressed by their situations and wonder who will come and help them."

David Ramage began the session by stressing the need for community cultural groups to band together in order to get what they want. "If public funds are going to be made available to communities on a certain basis," he said, sticking to funding issues, "there have to be clear and competent advocacy operations put together in order to lobby and deal with legislators and to know how to pull the strings of constituency organizations to produce money coming out of that public spigot." Arlene Goldbard went further, saying that cultural workers must organize, "not to say, 'I didn't get my grant! Why don't you give me a grant?' but to say, 'The way this system of disbursing money is structured is not right. We constitute a significant incipient power bloc, and we want to propose a different system.'"

Alan McGregor illustrated the low profile cultural work has for many progressive groups. Speaking as a staff member of the Fund for Southern Communities, a small progressive foundation based

in Atlanta, he said, "People like us, social change funders, don't understand the role of cultural politics in social change. At our Board meetings, when we sit down with 125 projects and we're going to give out 25 grants, we look for where they're going to be the next day in that community. Are they going to have a housing project? Are they going to have a food co-op? Not is their mind going to be changed or is their cultural life going to be enhanced. We don't deal so well with the complexities of attitudinal and consciousness changes. That's an education process that needs to come back on us."

Arlene Goldbard went further, saying that cultural workers must organize, "not to say, 'I didn't get my grant! Why don't you give me a grant?' but to say, 'The way this system of disbursing money is structured is not right. We constitute a significant incipient power bloc, and we want to propose a different system.'"

Arlene chided the funders, who "need to take responsibility to educate themselves," and then cultural workers, who must strive more consistently to "experience joint work as effective in helping their own survival, the furtherance of their objectives." She said, "The first step in making those alliances (with other political movements) is to organize among ourselves to create the kind of political power so that it's not, as I believe it is today, the powerless talking about empowering other people."

One of the big challenges, raised by John Weber and others, is to change the prejudices against community cultural work held by many artists themselves. Jimmie Durham, of the Foundation for the Community of Artists in New York, pointed out that many artists resist involvement in the community arts movement "because they think they're going to have to do not their best work, not work with the most integrity. I think there has to be some education to the effect that they would write a better novel the more connected they were to people." John Weber, describing a process of trying to get artists involved in Artists Call (see page 7), said, "We find there are a whole lot of artists who have not been involved in community work, who are very afraid of a working-class audience, who don't believe that's an audience that's going to give them a lot of strokes." On the other hand, he said, "We've found that there is a very high level of anxiety among artists, at the moment, and a desire for mobilization. They want some kind of forum in which they can declare themselves in opposition, even if it's on a very superficial level. There's a whole constituency of artists out there that we can reach out to in a very open and aggressive way at the moment." Lucy Lippard, of *Heresies* and Political Art Documentation/Distribution in New York, told a story of a well-known visual artist who came up to her after a feminist lecture and said, "I envy you. I wish I believed in something that strongly." Lucy said, "I find that again and again when I go around and talk about these things. *That's* what we have for a lot of artists."

And back from the other half of the equation, Alan McGregor remarked that the conference had changed his understanding of cultural work. "Political organizers seem to see cultural projects as tools rather than ends. What I'm beginning to see from this group is that culture is not just a tool; you're offering issues that are integral to this whole system of social change we're talking about."

SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

— Continued from page 8

PR got to be a big time-consuming thing. It got to be where we had more people in the administrative part of the organization than we had in the artistic side."

And gradually the audience changed, too. "In 1963, '64, '65, there were maybe three colleges in the South whose campuses we would be permitted to perform on. Well, by 1974, '75, you could go on almost any campus with material and information of this sort. The question got to be: is your material slick enough to win acceptance? We thought we were developing skills at promotion, and were not aware that we were shifting our focus and shifting our concern. The poor people who made up the movement had been our principal audience during the movement's high period. And now, from the mid-'70s, late '70s on, our principal audience was university students and the university student community." The second failure, then, "was the failure of the movement, of which we were a part, to survive as a movement, as a force."

Last, Dudley Cocke described Appalshop, located in the heart of the coal fields of Central Appalachia. Appalshop's purpose is "to record and explore the history, the culture and the social issues of the region," and to make that history and culture new "in order that there will be a living tradition to pass on to the next generation." Appalshop has programs in film, television, theater, print, photography, music, and will soon work in radio as well.

Appalshop was started in 1969 by the Office of Economic Opportunity as a storefront where kids from minority areas with high unemployment could get a head start in film and video train-

ing. When OEO pulled out after a year and a half, Appalshop survived because it had spent that time establishing a film foundation, teaching kids to describe their lives, their families and their environment, rather than trying to just master a style that would allow them to move to faraway cities. The quality of that small body of work allowed the organization to raise other money and build what is Appalshop today.

Dudley located the reasons for Appalshop's success in its relationship to the surrounding region. Almost all of the organization's 20 to 30 full-time employees — and 50 or so associates, who come in to work at different times — are from Central Appalachia, and most of those are from the immediate four or five county area. "The place is the real touchstone for everything we do," Dudley said.

In answer to a question about how Appalshop maintains the community's interest and trust, he explained, "With Roadside Theater (one of Appalshop's divisions), we set out four or five years ago to have the community think of us in the same way they thought of their winning baseball or football team. So if we were off performing somewhere, we'd send a news bulletin back saying how it was going. Now when we come back into town from somewhere, people know where we were and how we went, because we're a part of them, and there's a source of pride in that.

"If I were to say why the organization has had some success," Dudley said, "I would point to one key thing. It's an employee-controlled organization, so there is that sense of a chance to learn that makes for a lot of loyalty. People care about and understand and take part in formulating the continuing purpose of the organization. And that makes for the foundation that's kept us going."

HISTORY OF COMMUNITY CULTURAL WORK

— Continued from page 5

"Two things have come from that debt to the civil rights movement. One is the greatest strength of community cultural work in this 20-year history, a genuine commitment to pluralism and diversity, especially in principle. And the pitfall of the movement has been the pitfall of the civil rights movement as well, and that is striving after individual achievement at the expense of the whole."

Arlene described how the first big neighborhood arts programs started in the mid '60s, "Johnson came into office. There had been riots in different big cities the summer before. There was the sense that the long hot summer was coming." The federal government decided the rioting was being done by young, unemployed minorities, mostly men, and decided to put poverty program money toward giving them something to do in the summer.

Arlene used San Francisco as an example. At that time, some people at San Francisco State University who were interested in Brownell saw that funds were going to be available for summer youth programs. They proposed a neighborhood arts program to people they knew in City Hall, then divided the city map up into turfs based on ethnic divisions — Black, Chinese, Japanese, Latino. They appointed a big guy on the block from each neighborhood as an organizer, gave each organizer a salary and a little budget, and there were no riots in San Francisco that summer. "It seemed like cause and effect to the people who were handing out the money, and in subsequent years that amount of money was available to that group."

"The leadership was chosen not by people who were members of these incipient communities," Arlene said, "but rather by

those who were in a position to bestow resources on them. An economy was set up from the beginning where the way of developing within your turf was to be very good at your own individual project and get money for it. That's a difficult situation to organize, to build some sense of commonality in, to cross any kinds of lines in. It was hard to do a Black/Latino cultural project. You had to get two people interested in it, two sets of people to get money for it."

This "willingness to let those who are in power at the time name the leadership" has lasted, and has been compounded, in this history's double impulse toward pluralism and individualism, with "a cooptation by art world values, a sense that as people become individually successful in their work, they graduate somehow into the art world and forget about the different principles and values on which they based their work ten years before. And third, there has been no emphasis on training and proliferation of cultural work within the movement, so that there's a sense of people starting their projects, getting good at their work, getting better at their work, getting better at getting better at their work, and where is the moment when people turn around and give a helping hand to the next people coming up?"

* * *

The October 1983 issue of *Art & Artists* (published by Foundation for the Community of Artists, 280 Broadway, New York, NY 10007) features a special section on community art, with an article on Brownell by Mark Miller.

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