

IN THIS ISSUE

Five Cultural Workers 1
 Editorial 2
 Cultural Policy 3
 Cultural Animation 4
 Network News 6
 A Report on Open Dialogue II 12

CULTURAL DEMOCRACY

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This October in Chicago, the annual conference of the Alliance for Cultural Democracy will bring together once again a motley crew of artists, organizers, teachers and other cultural workers who, for all their differences, share a vision that some day all the democracies—cultural, political, economic—will become a daily habit in this country. The theme of the conference is self-determination, democracy as participation, not (mis)representation, and how this propels our imagination.

Here, five cultural workers describe how what they do creates/finds/gives/redistributes/shares/ (em)power(s) themselves and the people where, for, and with whom they work. These five are not comprehensive of all the communities or types of work in ACD, but they are representative.



Until Democracy Becomes a Daily Habit: Five Cultural Workers Talk About What They Do

GudePounds:

No one can say a true word alone

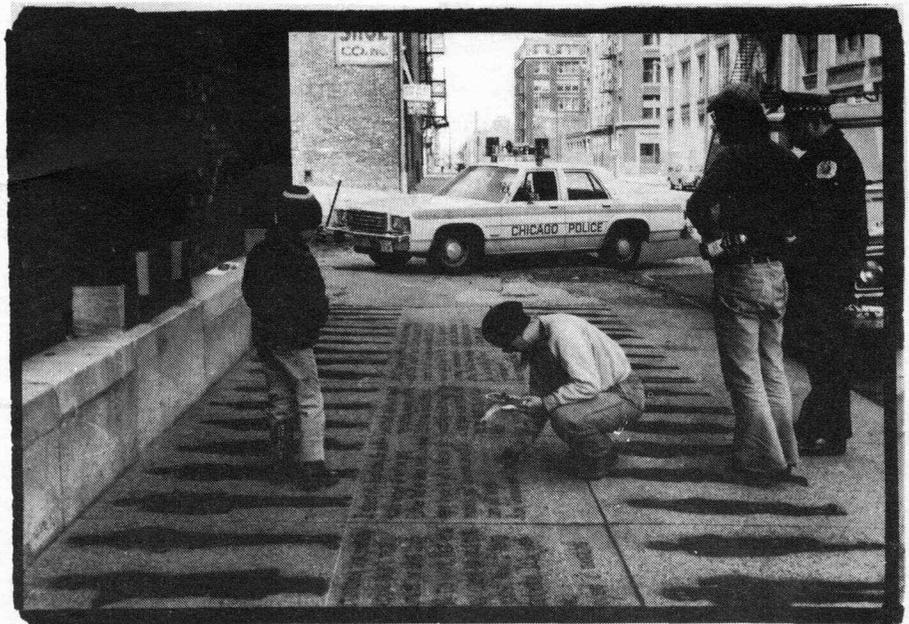
Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which people transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn appears to the namers as a new problem and requires of them a new naming. People are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection.

But while to say the true word—which is work, which is praxis—is to transform the world, saying that word is not the privilege of some few people, but the right of every person. Consequently, no one can say a true word alone. . . .

—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

WE exist as artists in a society in which art is not generally considered to be important or central to people's lives. Because we exist in a world of hunger, rampant militarism, racism and hosts of other

continued on page 8



PHOTOS BY JNO COOK

In the editorial slot for this issue of CD, we have chosen to amplify the issues of cultural policy with three short examples from our experiences with the existing and destructive but unnamed cultural policy in this country. We are not only talking about the policies and hy-

potheses of the NEA. We are talking about policies of government which affect people and their communities, their homes, land and livelihoods, their right and access to effective means of expression, and, as Lucy reminds us with her questions, their very survival.

EDITING THE PERSONAL AND THE POLITICAL (in Cultural Policy)

Charles Frederick

EVEN while it was happening, this story was told by people as though it were a myth.

I grew up in the Hudson Valley, a valley carved out of New York State by what remains for me a godlike river. The cliffs seem old stories of cataclysm, the verdancy of the valley seems like what wealth should mean. Near the south end of Rockland County—our part of the Valley—there were a set of hills, that you passed on the highway, a mound of wet, colored clay that seemed to be carefully remoulded with fecund detail by many hands each year. We took the hills for granted. People were said to live there from when people had first arrived from Europe.

There was a large lake—Rockland Lake—that spread out at the foot of the hills like the gathered train of a wedding dress. The town hung on to the hills. In my parents' childhood, men cut huge blocks of ice from the lake to sell. This, with the farms, some old stone factories, and brickmaking created the small wealth of the County.

Then, like pallid hands with gaudy and cheap jewelry, the suburbs began to claw their way up the Hudson Valley, knifing the land with cement thruways (the old highway had followed the shape of the faces of the river's cliffs; the new roads broke through the hearts of the hills). Houses were thrown over fields like Monopoly pieces. We became a bedroom for somebody else's community.

And then one day, the huge powers in Albany and New York decided that the land was beautiful, and that the People in the City needed a Park. From an aerial photo, it could easily be seen that the least developed spur of land in the valley was Rockland Lake. So they seized it (by Law) and called it a Park.

When I was a kid they told me that the land had been "condemned" so the State could take it. I had no other reference but my Catholicism. If the land was condemned, then it was Hell, no? What about the people who lived there? Well, the people had to leave.

My mother grew up in the marshes of the Hudson River (where the catydidts gather and quarrel with each other in the willows). In the summers, since Rockland Lake became a Park, she sometimes has worked taking tickets as the buses enter the lot.

Abigail Norman

MARYO EWELL asks on page 3 whether our country has a cultural policy. I'd argue that we do; that our task is to understand it and describe it as we figure out what we want instead.

This year I have been working on a statewide study of public access television—channel time on Cable TV set aside for public use. This ill-publicized niche is virtually the only place on TV where anyone—children, community groups, artists, neighbors and show-offs—can say what they want to say. The existence of public access and the threat to end it define, together, a moment in U.S. cultural policy—not labeled as such, yet as good an example as any.

Our study finds that the public now puts access shows on over 50 of the 170 cable systems in New York State. In over a dozen places, access has built a noticeable, substantial community presence, bringing people live coverage of town meetings, exposes on public affairs, local talent and avant-garde art rarely seen elsewhere.

In the 1970s, cable had grown enough to irritate the networks. The Federal Communications Commission responded with regulations to rein in its competitive potential. All but the smallest cable systems "must carry" all broadcasts within a certain range and set aside channel time for access. Since then, cable has grown; so has corporate cross-ownership between cable and other communications interests; and so, therefore, has the power of the cable industry. Last year, when Congress passed its first legislation over television in half a century, it allowed cable companies to revoke access channel time if the public does not use it. And now, cable companies have

CULTURAL DEMOCRACY

CULTURAL DEMOCRACY means that culture is an essential human need and that each person and community has the right to a culture or cultures of their choice; that all communities should have equitable access to the material resources of the commonwealth for their cultural expression; that cultural values and policies should be decided in public debate with the guaranteed participation of all communities; that the government does not have the right to favor one culture over another.

THE ALLIANCE FOR CULTURAL DEMOCRACY supports community cultural participation. We believe in cultural pluralism, and understand the necessity to integrate the struggles for cultural, political, and economic democracy in the United States. The most important initiatives for cultural democracy take place on a grassroots level in communities, neighborhoods, and among activist artists and other progressive cultural workers.

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opened a series of court cases, arguing that all "must carry" rules abridge their freedom of speech. This year or next, the Supreme Court will address itself to these cases and decide whether to accept without irony A.J. Liebling's observation that freedom of the press belongs to those who own presses.

Public access is vulnerable by its very definition, as a channel owned by a corporation yet forced by government to remain open for public use. The cables for cable transmission are company owned, although they run through public spaces. When the means of telecommunications are privately controlled,

continued on page 11

CULTURE:

THE POLITICS OF POLICY

This is the first of what will be a regular column on cultural policy, At ACD's conference this October, participants will start on a year-long project: to create a Cultural Bill of Rights for this country—to envision the cultural policy—or policies—that would move us toward cultural democracy. There, we will formulate propositions and questions to take back to our communities, our colleagues and constituencies. At the 1986 conference, cultural workers will meet to draft the document which will articulate a collective vision.

Maryo Ewell has been one of the prime movers in our discussion of cultural policy. Here, she encourages readers to bring their ideas to the conference to begin the process of imagining the cultural policy we want.

by Maryo Ewell

DO we have a cultural policy? Everyone I've spoken with agrees immediately that we don't. But it's too complex a question to merit such an immediate and simple answer.

First of all, "cultural policy" in regards to whom? Or what? Are we referring to *artists*—all artists—no matter their discipline, training, cultural background? Or are we referring to the *works* they produce, and the circumstances under which the public gets to know these works? Or are we referring to questions of access by *audiences* or the broad *public*? Access to what? To whom? Maybe we're really talking about arts *organizations*, here, and what they can and can't do.

Anyway, why is "policy" singular? That's simplistic and naive. The issues are too complicated and our cultural backgrounds too diverse for that, aren't they? Aren't we talking at such a level of generality that to turn a singular policy into action can only be meaningless and worse than nothing?

And who is "we"? Are we talking about local, state, federal, or international governments? Are we referring to legislation and ordinances such as zoning, censorship and grantmaking? Easy to see how these affect public life, production and acceptance of works, opportunities for artists. But isn't public policy equally shaped by private patrons and their tastes? And much implicit policy is shaped by lingering sociological habit, as women artists and artists of color especially can attest.

Yes, people will say, there are cultural policies in Europe, in small countries which have a commonality of heritage and tradition, impossible in the U.S. We're just too diverse. We'll have to go with the flow and react, in patchwork fashion, as the fancy takes us, not *act*.

Besides, articulating a cultural policy either means legislating morality or condoning anarchy. Doesn't it?

During the months and years ahead, ACD will be working to articulate questions to form a possible and appropriate starting point for



The hammer and hand was the symbol for the General Trades Union of artisans in 1936.

an analysis of what cultural policies exist. We will work on how those questions can best be answered and by whom.

We recognize the task is mammoth. Yet more and more we are hearing the question raised of what our cultural policy is in this country, and we hear it too often glibly answered.

The question is not simple. It's not a matter for glib response. We hope to begin, perhaps to facilitate, a collective discussion among public and private organizations, "liberal" and "conservative" points of view, artists and patrons. We don't believe that the appropriate questions will be so enormous that we have an excuse to do nothing. We believe that dialogue and conversation must begin, and must lead us on a path to understanding and action.

We will need your thoughts, words, commitment, action. We will need to share this work with many other people and many other organizations—governmental, service organizations, funding sources, arts-producing organizations. We will need to listen hard to one another.

We hope to begin this process at the meeting that ends ACD's annual conference this Fall in Chicago. Plan to come. To share. To inspire. To listen. To suggest. It will be important. ■

Maryo Ewell is Director of Community Development at the Colorado Council on the Arts and Humanities and is on the Board of Directors of ACD.



Mural in Willimantic, Conn. Social Services Building painted by its clients and ESL students (photo by Judy Branfman).

In Cultural Animation People Are Not Cartoons

TWO hundred and fifty million people (the population of the U.S.), more or less blind, stand around in a circle. The elephant they are quarreling over is the *e pluribus unum* of communities in the U.S. What art do we need so people will no longer fight with one another, blind to one another?

We know that if people are not actually being “disappeared” here as they are in some parts of the world, still the identities of people and their communities are often being erased by practices of government and the economy. And without self-recognition, how can they communicate who they are and what they need to others? How can people cooperate without shaking hands and exchanging names? People are being forgotten and forgetting themselves as they slip down the Reagan river of Lethe on rafts of Coca-Cola culture.

So we agree (no?) that the most profound innovations in art-making and other cultural creation must have at their base not hysterical formalisms or nihilisms (Art for Money’s sake), but a renewed identity for art as a naming of people, their histories, herstories, fantasies and agonies. Both remembering names and adding new names. There are so many

ways to do this, and in a time as uneasy as ours no one has the aesthetic edge; we should welcome and nurture all the ways, forms and practices of enlightened and popular cultural work. Where “popular” is a political, not a box-office word that means identifying with the needs and the necessary struggles of people. Brecht always warned against those who self-righteously claimed an authentic “community” base to their uncritical art, cautioning (at the time of incipient Nazism) that such practitioners were often shallow mystics, nostalgic for an existence of a community that no longer exists—if it ever existed—dupes for the coming terror.

There is however a complex activity of art and culture—cultural animation—that is directly concerned with questions of community and the democratically expressed identity of a community. We have been talking about this form of art/cultural work in the Alliance since we began organizing and networking as neighborhood and rural grassroots artists. Recently among the membership the debate has frothed up a bit more. I am not talking about the debate over the name itself, I am talking about the political and cultural principles which must provide the base of the work. What is the real work of animation?

What are the critical questions for fledgling animators concerning their training, their intentions for and with the community, how they go about the work, and how to judge the result? What structures the activities of cultural animation and what are the standards of accountability?

Cultural animation is not just something which warms the cockles of the heart. It is—as with art work—involved with the *risk* of new knowledge, *empowering* the community to new action in the world, perhaps part of the process itself, perhaps the result of the community’s self-reflection the work creates.

When Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard were the organizers for ACD, they published in *Cultural Democracy* several articles on cultural animation. To remind people of the history of the discussion, we are excerpting here (with their permission) from one of these articles which presents a broad definition of cultural animation and shows how this concept propelled the international discussion of cultural democracy.

The excerpted parts published here present cultural animation specifically defined as a possible cultural policy. We did not have room to include in this issue of *CD* two very important questions which are discussed in

the original article: training and accountability. Since in most cases projects of cultural animation are sponsored by agencies or institutions who are not part of the community where the work is going on, to whom is the

animateur accountable? The community or the funder? What are the tensions between the two? And, how is it that not just anyone can become an animateur—what are the specific artistic, pedagogic and community

organizing skills that are needed for the job? And how does a person come about them? We hope we will be able to address these questions in future issues of *CD*.

—Charles Frederick

Animation: What's in a Name?

by Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard

IN the international sphere, where serious discussion of cultural development has been carried on for some time, the word used to describe this profession is *animation*.

Animation and its variants—"community animation theater," for instance—have lately begun to be used by North American arts workers, borrowing from Europe and the Third World, where the term is in common usage. *Animation* is derived from the French *animation socio-culturel* and refers to the work of the *animateur*, a community worker who helps people to build and participate in community life, to articulate their own grievances and aspirations in a public context, and often, to make art from the material of their daily lives.

Working for Cultural Democracy

Needless to say, animation work was going on long before the term came into use. The concept *animation socio-culturel* became current when researchers and policy-makers began taking community cultural work seriously and debating its importance to society.

[Two] contrasting themes—democratizing existing arts programs and promoting cultural democracy—underlie most cultural debate around the world today.

Here's how Augustin Girard (a French cultural official active in UNESCO) has explained the first concept: "Two assumptions are implicit in the idea of the democratization of culture: first, that only high culture of sacrosanct value is worthwhile; secondly, that once the (undifferentiated) public and the works are brought face to face, cultural development will follow. These two axioms entail as a corollary that priority should be given to professional writers and artists and to decentralization of the major cultural assets."

Girard notes that this policy "results in the creation of vast 'machines,' whose 'operators' acquire excessive influence and whose fixed costs eventually dictate the nature of their artistic output; we have seen this with opera houses throughout the world and with a great many national theatres."

The alternative policy is to build cultural democracy. Francis Jeanson describes this in another UNESCO-published essay "On the Notion of 'Non-Public'" (by which he means those who don't form part of an audience for establishment culture): "[*Cultural Democracy*] points to a culture in the process of becoming, as opposed to one that is stagnant, already there, ready-made, a sort of sacred heritage which it is only a matter of conserving and transmitting. It even rejects—or at any rate goes way beyond—the naive idea of a more just, more 'egalitarian' division of the cultural heritage, so far as the non-public distinguishes itself precisely by its more or less marked indifference to 'cultural values,' which do not seem to bear the slightest relation to its actual problems of existence.

"But, all the same, it doesn't go so far as to condemn out of hand a cultural past on which it is itself dependant and whence it draws its deepest motivations. On the contrary, its aim is to arrange things in such a way that culture becomes today what culture was for a small number of privileged people at every stage of history where it succeeded in reinventing for the benefit of the living the legacy inherited from the dead."

The Cultural Commonwealth

All of these projects [of cultural animation] share certain characteristics: They encourage critical thought and action, whether the

object is to remedy the lack of play areas for children or to raise consciousness among poor working women. They are based on the idea that ordinary people can take an active role in building culture; they take it as a given that culture is dynamic and non-artists can't be consigned only to consumption of professional arts events and mass media entertainments.

They see the artist's role as social—not as a person set apart to be admired from a distance, but as someone with special skills whose own creativity and commitment can find expression and meaning working with others. And these projects have continuity: a single event or exhibit is not animation. All of the projects described aim to be integral, ongoing parts of community life. ■

Reprinted from *Cultural Democracy* #19 (Feb. 1982). For more discussion of cultural animation by Adams and Goldbard, see *NAPNOG Notes* #7 (Dec. 1980), *Cultural Democracy* #22 (May-June 1982) and #27 (Jan#Feb 1983).

Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard regularly write about culture and cultural policy. Currently they are working on a book on these issues.



SUE COE

NETWORK

THIS article began in Washington at the ACD conference last fall with talking, found its next step in a proposal for an ACD Task Force to continue talking, and has continued since with some letters and some more talking among a few ACD members, under the guidance of Robin Lewy and Sharon Grady while they were at the People's Theatre Program at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Although we all look forward to the day when we have regular access to more frequent and widespread public forums and other publishing outlets for theoretical and critical propositions about the work in culture ACD represents, it does seem fitting that an initial discussion of the language most useful to describe our work should take place in the immediate form of letters and simple talking to one another. Not that most of us are all that "folksy"—in the stereotypical, anti-intellectual, derogatory sense—but we do have a sense that culture and art should be something so readily available to people that it becomes part of daily life and does not need formidable special occasions and special publications for ideas to float around. And, whatever room there must always be for the elegant, deeply reflected-upon essay, it will also be nice when talk about art is as intense, casual and prevalent as all other gossip.

Robin, Sharon, Olivia Gude and Debby Langerman all wrote letters which we have excerpted. The initials of the author of each statement will follow her words.

Cultural Democracy

Cultural democracy had a great impact on me when I first heard the term because it seemed to stand for a philosophy of cultural activity that didn't constantly make distinctions between "high art" and lowlier forms of art... it challenged the facile association of complex or subtle with difficult or inaccessible...

... However, I have great problems with the concept of cultural democracy [which] has often focused on the importance of respecting various minority cultures. It would be naive of us not to recognize that at least in this country the preservation of ethnic culture has also been associated with racist backlash movements and with a bolstering of warlike patriotism... (OG)

Cultural democracy is when the production process of the expressions (in any form) of the values in a given community is determined and controlled by the producers themselves, and the products of that process, the expressions, belong to those who produced them. There are many different values and many



TALKING

different expressions of those, and they each have the right to be heard or seen and the producers have the right to have access to the materials and media necessary to produce and disseminate them.

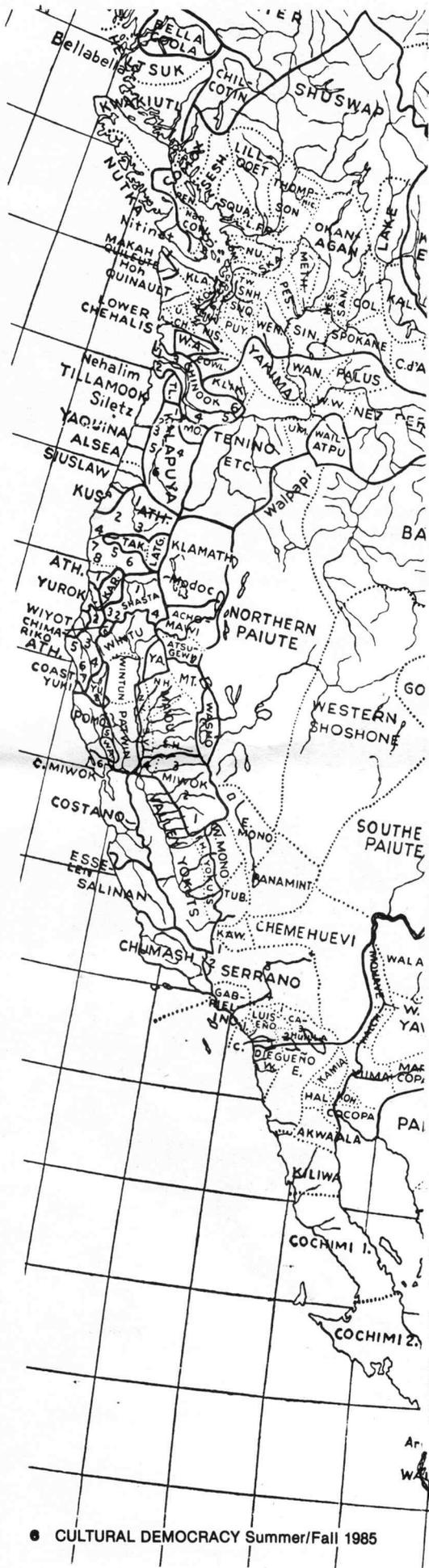
This definition would require economic democracy more than, or in addition to, our notion of political democracy... (DL)

To acknowledge cultural democracy is to stop measuring people [and the quality of their cultural work] by our mono-cultural-high-art standards and ask instead: who is it for and what does it mean to that community? ... (SG)

People's Theatre is accessible theatre. It is theatre that goes to its audience... (RL)

Cultural Worker vs. Artist

I personally don't like the term "cultural worker" very much. I understand that the use of the term is meant to suggest a connection with the working classes. To me it always sounds like a fancy theoretical attempt to deny the fancy status [non-material] that artists do enjoy in this society. Why then do I perversely cling to the fancy term "artist"? Because to be an artist means something which is understood in every culture. The meanings and associations vary, but "artist" always carries special associations about truth, and beauty, and perhaps the magic ability to actually change reality through their signs, symbols, dances, words, songs... (OG)



5 Cultural Workers continued from page 1

problems, it's sometimes difficult to believe ourselves, that art is a central need of people. Freire reminds us that the first step in creating change is to see with new eyes and to find the voice to describe what one sees.

Self-determination begins with the words, images and ideas which enable us to imagine action.

For us, a first step toward self-determination was to decide to work collaboratively and in the streets. Working collaboratively enabled us to overcome the traditional isolation of visual artists, and working in the streets gave us immediate contact with an audience as well as the knowledge that many people would see our work. In an odd twist, relinquishing some of the traditional prerogatives of the visual artist—the myth of the isolated genius and the pedestal of gallery or museum walls—made us stronger and more enthusiastic because we were able to disregard a plethora of unwritten rules which govern artistic work.

Freire's suggestion that no one can say a true word alone caused us to think about the necessity of creating collaboratively with others. *Unemployment Line Forms* was a project which came about from such thinking. Each of the 111 silhouetted figures in *Unemployment Line Forms* represented 1,546 unemployed Chicago workers. Accompanying the figures were statements selected from interviews with people standing in lines in Chicago unemployment offices in which people described how being unemployed had changed their perceptions of themselves and of their world.

As we worked on *Unemployment Line Forms*, it became clear that one of the most devastating effects of unemployment is not financial, but the psychological and spiritual impoverishment which people experience. People with whom we spoke expressed their perceptions of being isolated, shunned and demeaned by others. They spoke of their fears and hopes. We believe that the witnessing of experience is a healing process. We hope that others who saw the project were able to recognize themselves in it. Like Freire, we believe that ultimately meaningful action comes about through reflection and re-visioning the problem.

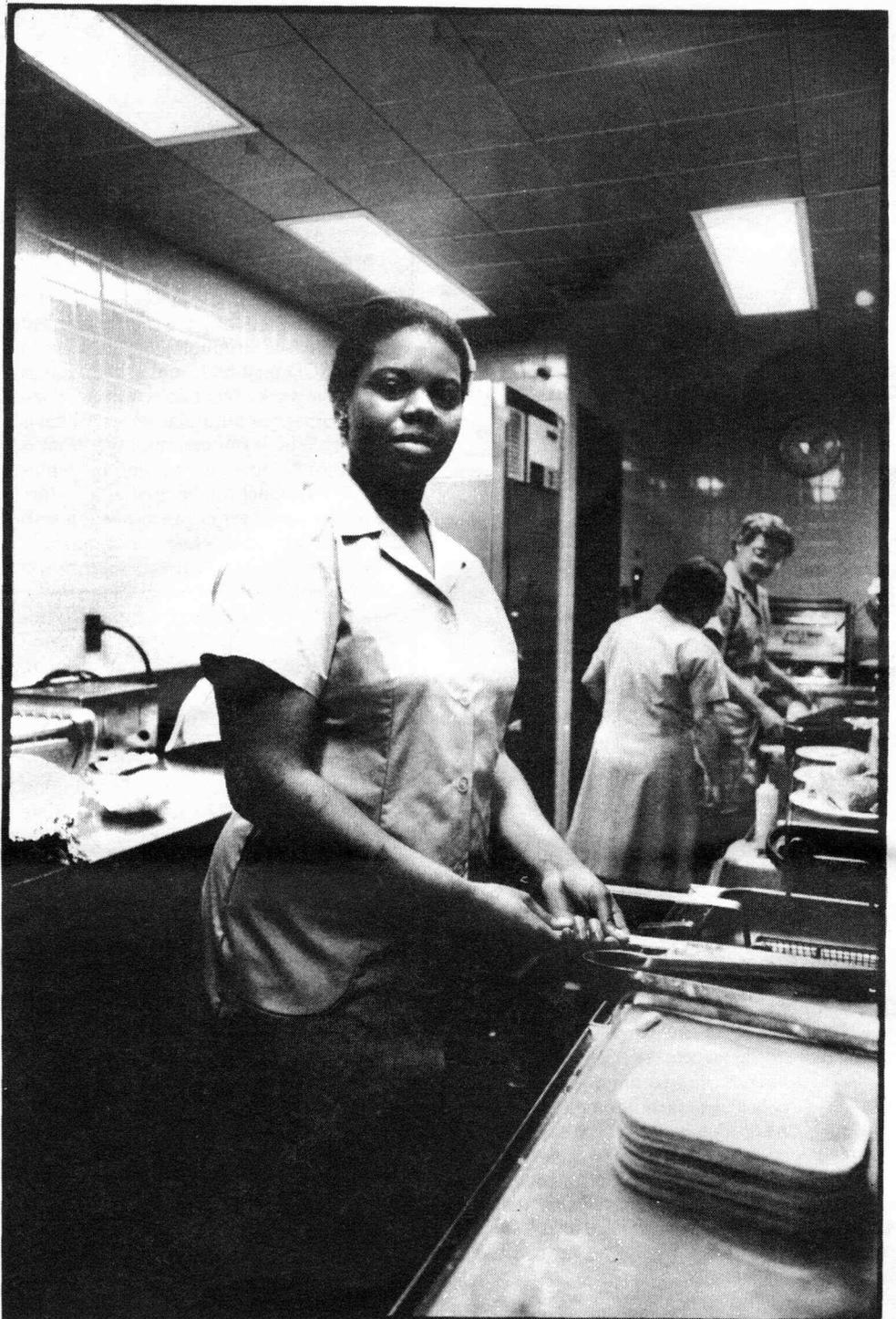
GudePounds, Olivia Gude and Jon Pounds, are activist visual artists and educators in Chicago.

Carla Katz:

The Work of Art/The Art of Work

THE all-out attack on workers' rights in the past few years has left the labor movement in a position where we can't just fight back—we've got to fight back with *imagination*.

I am an organizer for Communications Workers of America in New Jersey. I've worked on campaigns to organize non-union workers but I currently work doing "internal



CARLA KATZ

"LIKE A COUPLE GUYS TOLD ME, THEY PREFER WOMEN COOKING FOR THEM, SOME DON'T AND SOME DO. I GUESS IT'S THE KIND OF PLACE IT IS, YOU CAN GO OTHER PLACES AND YOU SEE MEN COOK, BUT NOT HERE."

MARGARET TAYLOR

organizing" with State workers, mostly women and clerical workers. In many ways, a union election victory is just the beginning of the organizing process. The real nitty-gritty work gets done when the victory high wears off. Before I talk about what I do, both as an artist and as an organizer, I'd like to give some background.

As a photographer, I've always leaned towards documentary essay-style work because of its accessibility. Plain and simple, I want people to understand what I'm saying. I never wanted to make art that my parents couldn't understand or relate to in some way. Before my "formal" involvement in the labor movement (I say formal because my "informal" involvement began when I was 17 and tried unsuccessfully to unionize a Rickels Home Center I worked in), I worked on a year-long photodocumentary. I set out to photograph and interview the women doing clerical, food service and custodial work at Livingston College. A friend and I asked these workers (whoever would talk to us) about their work, their home lives, their families and their union. We didn't just want to *document* these women, we wanted to engage them in this project. So we got together again and again with the women individually and in groups to choose photos and to haggle over quotes. We struggled continuously. "I look too fat in that picture! Use the one where I'm smiling." "I didn't mean to say that, use this." And so on. We ended up with a hundred or so photos and quotes that we could all live with: *Service Workers*.

We all ended up feeling that the process had outshined the "product." We'd become a network for information and stories. We'd made connections between women who hadn't seen any commonalities between themselves.

Once I became engulfed by the labor movement, my art and organizing became integrated work. Although in *Service Workers* my audience and my subject were one—working people—it was not part of a longer-term community-building struggle. And somehow my independence meant that I as the "artist" had more expressive power than the group of workers that I worked with.

My current cultural work begins to address this imbalance of power. It also has so little of the mainstream art world's trappings that most would not call it art. My photos now go into leaflets, local union newsletters, newspapers and on union hall walls. The workers decide what goes into that material and how it looks as much as I do. They participate in a compelling way because we are working together in the process of building the union (and building towards self-determination). The photos and design work are a small part of the organizing and even a small part of the "cultural work" done within the union. We've held sticker protests on Health and Safety issues, given the Governor a petition demanding a fire evacuation plan in the middle of his presentation to Smokey the Bear during fire safety week, had hundreds of clerical workers turn the tables on the Govern-

nor on Secretary's Day when they sent him personal cards—demanding raises, and had someone in an 8-foot turkey suit present a Butterball to Governor Kean while hundreds of others carried signs that read "IT'S TIME TO TALK TURKEY, TOM!!!" These "performances" would signal to people that their fights for better work-lives weren't isolated ones. They are part of a larger struggle....

To me, political art inherently means art/cultural work which is part of a larger community-building struggle and integrated in a real and committed way with the community with which it is developed.

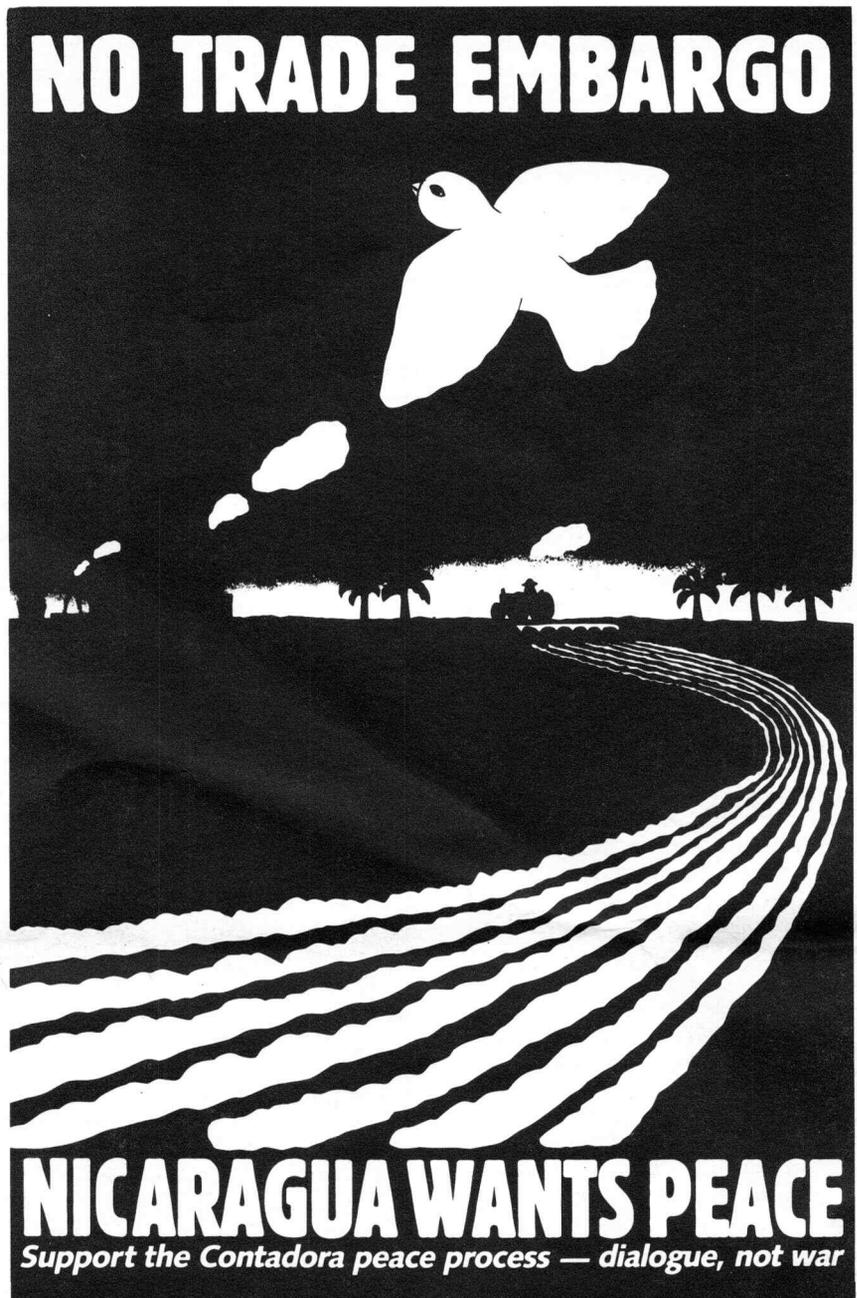
I don't like to romanticize the past, but it is the work of people like Lewis Hine, Paul Robeson, Joe Hill, Ruby McDonald, Ruby Dee, Woody Guthrie, Ben Shahn and thousands of other working class artists that have

given us the lasting feeling of the lives of working people. They lived it. We have to live it and work at it.

Carla Katz is a photographer who uses her work in union organizing.

William Alexander: Vietnam: An Appropriate Pedagogy

TUESDAY afternoon my students saw *Interviews with My Lai Veterans*. The next day, before we could start any kind of structured discussion, Mike stormed in. His English professor, returning mid-term exams, had chastised the students for parroting him. Mike had wanted to leap up and tell him that he had been parroted because he had consistently put down or ignored any student with a



LINCOLN CUSHING

view contrary to his own. After a while, I asked Mike the question he begged: Why had he held his peace? There followed an extraordinary session in which students analyzed their diffidence and in some instances their uncontrollable fear of challenging their teachers. I realized after a few minutes that in fact they were discussing the willingness of most of the soldiers at My Lai to obey corrupt authority.

In later discussions, students equated challenging other students' points of view with insulting them. They said, "We're all in this together," defending against what they see to be a competitive, judgmental environment in which right and wrong and all the rewards are handed down from above and in which they are given little real acknowledgement and respect.

Since the winter term of 1976, I have taught an elective film course at the University of Michigan called "Vietnam and the Artist." 150 students fill the course each year. In each version of the course there has been a unit on U.S. intervention in Latin America or on the arms race.

My intention is to help my students and myself overcome our distance from events like Vietnam, and I have hoped the course might help us find values and models which—if we could assimilate them well enough—would permit us at least some moderate resistance in the face of comparable events. More bluntly, I have attempted to reveal to my students things normally hidden from them, and I have attempted to start in them a process of politicization based on their own terms and experience. Over these years I have increasingly attempted to develop an appropriate pedagogy, so that my students might become more than passive receptors of my thinking and so that they may come to know personally their ability to take over a space that is normally hierarchical and oppressive.

I lecture for one hour on Tuesday and show a film that night. On Wednesday and Thursday morning student-led, ungraded small group meetings give students an opportunity to deal together with the provocative and isolating, sometimes frightening experiences they have first had to deal with alone. Then on Thursday comes a two-hour full-class discussion. In addition, and most importantly, I urge students to form special interest groups at any time, to take over the lecture and two-hour discussion individually or in numbers, and to create their own works of art or other alternatives to a term paper. I ask them to enter into dialogue, if necessary to debate, with me and other readers in weekly journals and in class, and I encourage and reward risk-taking.

I wish this structure—especially the opportunity it gives students to take some of their professor's normally sacrosanct power from him—to give them a sense of their own power and their individual and collective responsibility to themselves and the course material. I wish them to learn to seek more respect, responsibility, and equality in other classes as well, and later in situations and institutions

where power is shared much less freely than I have been sharing it.

One group the first year—two veterans (one a Green Beret who learned to kill well but finished the war on a hill with opium, calling in false ambush reports; the other, an army intelligence officer who interrogated during torture sessions), an anti-war activist, and a younger man who spent the late war years at Culver Military Academy—in the first week formed an alternative small group to focus on Vietnam. Four hundred person-hours later they had produced a 45-minute videotape consisting of 4 troubling personal narratives, which they confronted us with in our last class together. I continue to use the videotape each year.

Veterans—in one case a man who had until then hid his veteran status from friends—have taken over the class and led excruciatingly honest discussions; descendants of high-ranking Nazis, of German resistance families and of survivors of the Holocaust have joined in a panel to share their feelings. The week of *No Vietnamese Ever Called Me Nigger*, a black student transformed the class by painfully describing her own invisibility, and she went off to form a study group to study invisibility, language and power.

Obedience, alienation and evasion of painful and career-disrupting knowledge run deep in many cases; more positive and cooperative stances are not easily achieved. And so no course here can easily, if at all, become in every way liberatory education in its full sense. Nonetheless, a course on Vietnam in this form can stimulate students to create events that transform or begin to transform consciousness and lead to praxis. At the very least such a course can confront students with the painful issues of the war in Vietnam and provide them with behavioral models from the past and from among their own peers. And it can initiate in students the responsibility and habit of being actors rather than spectators and teach them their own power to prevent the equivalent of such a war in their own communities, families and places of work.

(This article is excerpted from a longer version, to appear in the Winter issue of Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Cinema.)

William Alexander is a Freireian educator.

gale jackson: to find the words...

There is a story told in which anansi, the legendary trickster hero of west african, afro-caribbean and afro-american folklore first brings stories to the world: it tells of how anansi the spider spins a web to climb up to the forces that be to petition for the ownership of stories. how thru guile, fast thinking and natural wit, anansi liberates the people's stories from the heavens and brings them back to the folk here on earth.

as with every folktale, this tale has layers and layers of meaning but the one that has always struck me and that comes to mind now as i



GEORGE "GEO" SMITH

write this piece on writing and political organizing is how the act of bringing the people's stories to their own mouths is an act of liberation. and how the agent of the people's culture (anansi) not only creates (the web) but also uses that creation as a bridge to bring a sense of themselves, a sense of empowerment thru self definition (thru telling their own stories) back to the people.

for me writing (and cooking and adornment and housework and the work of friendship and...) and political organizing are real similar means to the same ends; a celebration of life, of the living, a nurturing of each and every voice, each and every person's history. i do what i do to make my life. to create my life as i should be living; with a sense of my own power. to name myself. not allowing others to name me or set the parameters for my spirit. to record the names and stories of others. to celebrate our living history and so to oppose anything, any structures that deny that. that deny life. like anansi, i instinctively know my responsibility to both tell the story and insure its continuity, its place among people. by any means necessary. and even if physically, i don't be writing at the same time i be making calls about the demonstration or working with other tenants or even cooking my dinner, it is the doing of all these things, together, that makes me be whole. that makes me be part of a continuum of progressive cultural resistance. part of a culture of survival.

to provide a way...

my grandmother and great aunts embroidered, knit sew, my mother, a working woman of the modern age, always sang while doing housework. they were and remain for me the closest links to a legacy of practical but nonetheless fine arts and creativity you gotta use for making it thru the day. this legacy spans a whole history of humanist culture in this country. it goes back even further than the enslaved african's adaptation of biblical texts to a manifesto

of revolt and liberation. back further than their 'revision' of english language music and dance to lay the groundwork for our cultural survival and for the creation of structures to maintain a sense of self, even in captivity, even without the places the spaces the objects we called home. back perhaps to the first act of sheer living defiance. back to the nerve and wit and belief it takes to live. and make a way. and lay the psychic, social, spiritual grounds for a future. for others.

as a storyteller, a poet, a writer, i come from a primarily oral tradition in which the teller takes part in continuity and change simultaneously. a tradition in which poets have always told history, serving it up as sustenance, weaving the personal, the particular, the universal into one wholecloth quilt of words in which the connections, the chains of life, are always evident. and it is a tradition in which artists did not only, as paul robeson said, "bring our culture and art to the masses of the american people." it is a tradition in which artists have also (consciously or unconsciously) been instruments for creating *new* structures (or reminding folk of old structures) for living. and this, absolutely integrally to the making of art, is an act of caring. because it matters. life matters. enough to try to record. enough to grasp. celebrate. mourn. sing it. dance it. dress it. make a way for it. save it. to give each life more life of its own. possibility. imagination. volition. potential. this is why i write. this is why i must work with others for all the things for all the ways of being we could imagine and could have. with caring. with dignity. with the fullest sense of our history and imagination. the work toward self determination is all one work. one aspect does not function without another. that the powers that be have given us this culture of separation disarms us. weakens us. forgets us from ourselves.

so i use words to build. bridges. recollection. strength. for myself and for others. knowing that human empowerment is my own.

writing is ritual. to begin you take the words and give them breath. you be like god. and still you make homage to those who came before you; fill the words with their testimony, their spirit. you clothe that in the spirit of the people of your time. you name the world in your image. you are empowered. not so much by the act of pen to paper but because you have held life's elements in your hands, connected them, made them more.

but on the flat footed side... writing is an organizing of words and image. language, the tool, a culturally specific and reflective code for the preservation of things and feelings. imagine political organizing the same but bigger. a mural to the portrait. a people's history to the biography. helping to bring together and bring back to people our stories; a collective, culturally specific expression of values that allow us all to live with the sense of our own power. the essence of our own names. ■

gale jackson is a writer, organizer and librarian in New York City.

Editorial continued from page 2

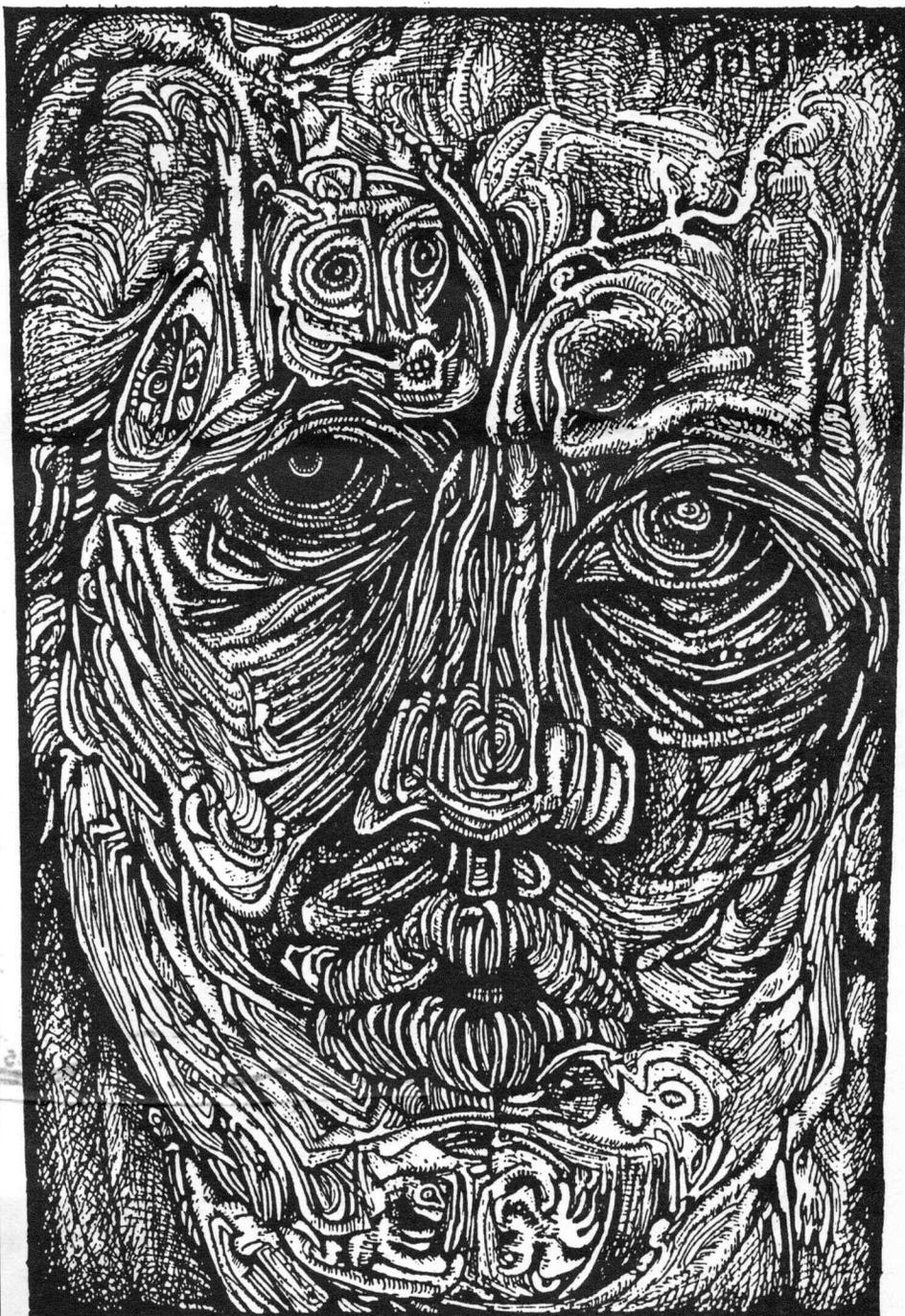
what are our options for supporting vulnerable aberrations like public access cable, and for imagining and creating other structures less vulnerable, still viable?

Lucy R. Lippard

THE notion that there is no cultural policy in this country grows from the false separation of cultural policy from the culture itself, and from its politics. Isn't it cultural policy that leads the chairman of the NEA to veto grants awarded by its panels to a political art group, a rural community arts group, a radical theatre—and, within two

years, to veto four groups belonging to the Alliance for Cultural Democracy?

Isn't it cultural policy that leads the Reagan Administration to aid a Guatemalan government in the process of wiping out the indigenous population who maintain the vestiges of the great Mayan culture? Isn't it cultural policy that internationally advertises freedom of expression in our Great Democracy and then denies the artists of Nicaragua materials and freedom from war, denies the artists of Chile *all* freedoms, and backs a Salvadoran president who has presided over the total destruction and four-year occupation of the National University, as well as the murder of its rector and students? ■



JORGE SOTO

THE MINORITY ARE THE MAJORITY

A REPORT ON OPEN DIALOGUE II

MINORITY artists, race, poverty, the Third World at home and abroad. Many people involved with community/activist arts are recognizing that cultural policies (often hand in glove with economic policies) must respect and provide equitable material support to the majority that word minorities actually means.

NALAA, NAO, and ACD have all made it a mandate that the question of race and culture must be addressed concretely with more diverse recruitment, principled dialogue among cultural communities, and a concerted effort to work on issues facing different communities—on terms articulated by the particularly affected community. Somewhere a clock is running backwards, and we must confront directly the divisive issues of racism if we are to amend the failure of U.S. democracy.

Another effort with this historic problem was reported to us by Donovan Gray from Oklahoma City and Ann Dabovich from San Antonio. OPEN DIALOGUE II, a conference held in San Antonio, Texas this past May gathered 350 people, overwhelmingly from communities of color, largely blacks and Hispanics, but also Native Americans, Asians, and whites. A carefully balanced steering committee planned the conference and the major organizing work was done by black arts administrators. People from the Hispanic community in San Antonio did much of the conference's administrative work. A great deal of cultural work from many communities was part of the dialogue of the conference.

The agreement was that there must be change and that people from communities of color must be aggressive in organizing to reformulate policy to meet the legitimate needs of their communities. No one should be denied the right to have work supported because of its social content; evaluation of work must consider community context and must be based on standards of quality from a variety of cultural traditions.

It was advised that arts groups and cultural activists should review the composition and policies of local arts councils to see if they are in compliance with non-discriminatory regulations of Federal guidelines. The overall feeling was that if people organize, they can have programs and artists their communities need. And the effort is proceeding: contact Dr. Barbara Nicholson, Deputy Director, D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities, 420 7th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20004, (202) 724-5613 for more information. ■

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