



Cultural Democracy

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Imagination

Charles Frederick

Rich and poor, race, class, sex, and sexual identity, rural and urban, elitism and militarism. We called the 1985 conference of ACD, "Imagination," and we planned it to be a way to get all of us to look farther afield, to confront directly the cultural, political, and material divisions that weaken this country and rob from us all our full humanity. After all, these divisions in a fundamental way *are* the dominating culture of the U.S. and curdle within us all in hidden places whether or not we are the easily apparent victims.

To reach a new imagination of our potential unity, we had to experience concretely the force and significance of the differences in this country. To take this on is risk feelings of alienation, but without this struggle we will never know how to celebrate truthfully our diversity and our imagination will be hypocritical. We needed to break out of our habitual ACD network, inviting people from a more disparate range of communities to share their work, and maybe to invite them to work with us, all of us changing ourselves by changing whom we work with and, hence, what we know. The nine articles that follow were whittled out of the three days worth of presentation and response that resulted from this intention.

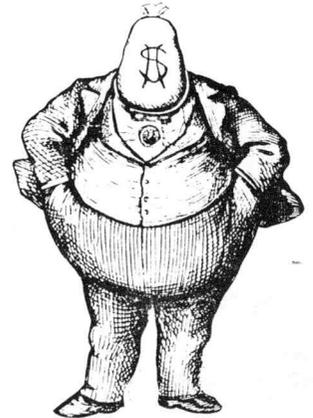
What is left with me most strongly from these pieces is the recognition that when we talk about a new and different imagination, we are not merely mouthing a slogan. God, it is often so frustrating to carry on the work we have chosen with all of its political and social responsibilities. So difficult to trust our vision when we do not have full confidence in our art. And that frustration cannot be satisfied just with correct political and social awareness. Correct politics are joyless politics and contradict the complexity of human experience.

The fundamental faculty of the artist or cultural worker is imagination and its sensual expression. More even than resolving the problems of bread and bombs, we want the freedom to imagine the most powerful possible — even impossible — human reality, crafted in forms beautiful, elaborate, and true. This is our work.

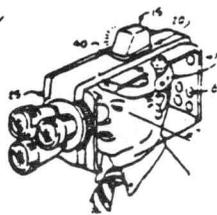
What these articles tell, over and over again, is that none of us is alone in this wish. We may be caught in a temporary warp of history, but its overall motion is with us. We are part of the new future that is only beginning its articulation, nowhere near yet to its fulfillment — but we are part of its imagining. Something is dead or dying, however mighty it may be, and we have recognized that. We have found it within our own imaginations and have joined with others, the other deprived and disenfranchised peoples — the vast majority of the world — to imagine something else. And we have begun to find the specific craft, means and forms to release the imagination of a new world, the first step to bringing it fully into existence. This is how we will find the confidence in our art, a confidence resting against standards of evaluation as innovative as our understanding that the most powerful imagination in the world is in the potential of the disenfranchised, not the powerful, in the world beginning, not the one already in place.

Sometimes from this identity and authority we create our work alone, in a studio or at a desk. Sometimes it happens in the new artistic craft of facilitating the collective expression of a community, transforming a pattern of relations within a community, something never before called "art." Something far too democratic and participatory. Something far too subtle for the market.

Imagination, and its collective expression, culture, is the most profound and most intense activity that signifies us as human. What I get from these articles is that we on the periphery are moving in. The new imagination, this time recognized as a *universal* human faculty, a democratic phenomenon, is rising, getting stronger — a garden overrunning the old dead embers of the center.



One of the Striking Miners Took Some Equipment And Started Filming What Was Going On



Helen Lewis

I live in Virginia and I work in Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, and southern West Virginia, in a territory I've defined in central Appalachia. I've been living and working in that region since 1955 when I moved there to teach in a small branch college of the University of Virginia in the middle of a coal field. That was a time of tremendous mechanization; people were moving out in droves, saying the coal industry was dead.

I looked at the statistics and I saw the coal industry wasn't dead; it was still producing coal. It was the mechanization that was dispersing the people to Chicago and Cincinnati. So I began teaching and working with community groups to try to understand some of the basic changes that were occurring in the area. Because I found that my work didn't suit the University too well, and the University didn't suit me too well, I quit regular teaching about ten years ago.

I came to the Highlander Center, what used to be called the Highlander Folk School in New Market, Tennessee. Highlander has a long and notorious history of working with social movements in the South, from Civil Rights days to various problems of today — working with Appalachian communities to deal with strip mining, etc. We work with grassroots groups in the deep south and throughout the mountain region. Our work is "community-based" education, working to understand what's happening to our communities, trying to put new life in them, save them, or just plain surviving. We work with a variety of issues. It may be toxic waste, labor struggles, or with a group of women trying to set up a sewing factory in their community they might own and make a living from.

The other group I work with is called Appalshop, a media center in Whitesburg, Kentucky. I went to work with them because I am an educator, a cultural worker, and in education you use cultural symbols, images, filmmaking, slides — whatever you can use to help people learn and tell their own stories. Particularly in rural communities, people's voices have not been heard and they haven't had the facilities to tell their stories, so it seemed extremely important to try to get hold of how to use these media effectively for education. Appalshop and Highlander cooperate on a number of projects.

Many people have an image of Appalachia as a beautiful, isolated place where people sit around and strum on dulcimers and hillbillies are back in the hills making moonshine. Actually it's also the place of Oak Ridge and Union Carbide. There are toxic waste dumps in these beautiful, little hollows. There is coal mining, industrialization, strip mining. We're not underdeveloped — we're peculiarly or wrongly developed. We're exploited. Both Appalachia and Nicaragua are Third World countries. Appalachia is an internal colony in the U.S. and we have been treated and used that way. This is one of the things I have busied myself with trying to help people there understand.

Here's a situation where even though we're supposedly isolated in the backwoods, we are involved in what's going on throughout the world. A.T. Massey was a small company that did not sign the union contract with the United Mine Workers last year. And so, although the UMW did not go out on a long contract strike against the mining companies, they went out against the small operators that did not sign — like A.T. Massey.

Well, when you begin to look, you see that A.T. Massey owns a whole series of small mines all over southern West Virginia and eastern Kentucky. In turn, Massey is owned by Royal Dutch Shell, who is itself associated with the Flora Company that owns mines in South Africa. Well, the miners have gotten a real education about working for this small town coal operator who happens to be part of a big multinational corporation. They come to see how they're being forced into competition with slave labor in South Africa. They begin to understand what anti-apartheid means and start talking in very sophisticated language about the whole multinational economic situation.

One of the striking miners took some equipment and started filming the strike and what was going on. At Appalshop we have helped edit his film and put together a piece with our professional equipment. Now we have a nice film about the strike with workers talking about how they are connected with and identify with what's going on in South Africa.

Let me tell another story. I live in a small town. The people fired up there are a group of women — I've been seeing how all over the rural south women are coming forth and beginning to take charge of things. Now, unemployment is massive in the mountains, and it

is everywhere. The mines are being reconsolidated, with a whole restructuring of the industry, a new mechanization — just like back in the 50s. Everybody's saying the coal industry is dead because everybody is unemployed.

The coal industry is not dead. The Virginia coal fields are producing more coal this year than they have ever produced — but there are thousands of people unemployed. Well, they can't go to Chicago or Cincinnati this time. A

(Continued on page 3)

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.

Editorial Crew

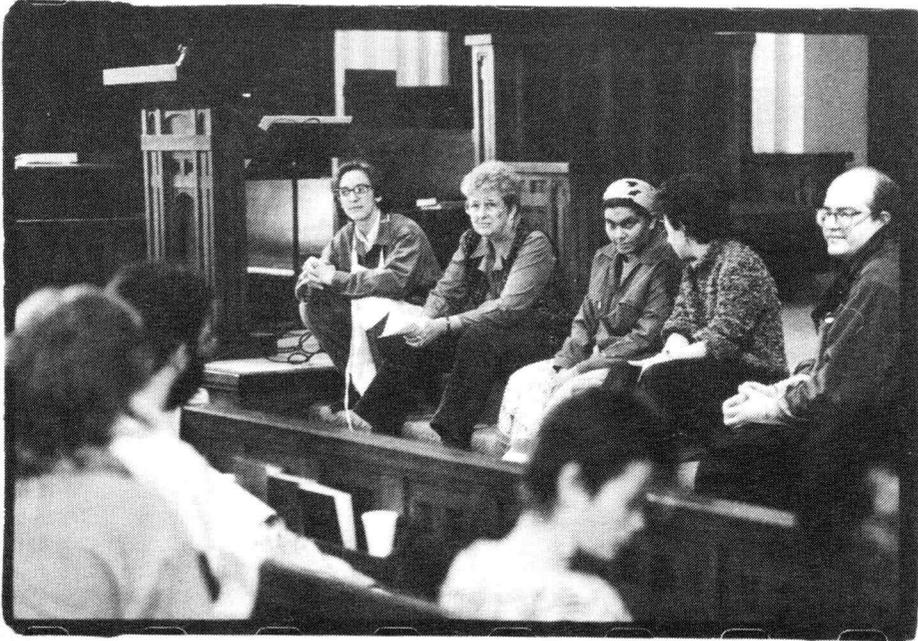
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Featured speakers Helen Lewis (second from left) and Nidia Bustos (third from left).

(Continued from page 2)

few go to Texas, a few to Atlanta. But on the whole, there's no place to go. And in times like this in our history, you'll see that the women are called forth to make a living and protect their families and homes.

In the little community where I live there are about 340 people. Up and down the Clinch River there are about 7,000. From these people, women who only finished the fourth and fifth grades are coming out to get some more education, so they might get jobs. So we started an education center at an old depot in the middle of town. In the last five years we've had over 400 women come through that depot and to basic literacy and GED training. And then some of them finish their two years of college because we've made arrangements with the Mountain Empire Community College to offer classes there.

Some of these women were working in a sewing factory that caught fire. Well, some of these women didn't like the way that sewing factory was run and they pulled out. They had had a class in economics that talked about co-ops. So what these women decided to do was to start a sewing factory on their own. So, 34 women have a sewing co-op.

You might think it's foolish today when the textile factories are moving out all over the world — and these women had learned that, too, when they took a course on textile economics. But they said sewing was what they could do. They could do it well, and they liked it. They didn't like working for the factory owners, but they thought it would be better working for themselves. They made themselves the owners. So it turns out that all the textiles haven't moved away. Now we have one in my town. So the buyers buy blouses from both us and Yugoslavia. The women have had to

see themselves in a world market.

Another factory that employed 90 women also burned. They came to our school. About 98% of these women are on financial aid, which gives them a little money to come to school. But if they get the money to come to school, they lose their food stamps. So the women developed a program to give food to people who lost their food stamps so they would stay in school. They started making speeches about how unfair this was. As a matter of fact, one of the women is going to Washington, D.C., next week to testify before Congress. She's never been out of her hometown, and she's going to testify before Congress about this problem. These women have begun to take charge of their community and their own lives.

Oftentimes we get really excited when we get in the middle of a strike with a group of people or in a situation where people are really concerned. They make such radical statements. We say, "Oh gosh, they really understand this completely." And they do, we all do to a certain extent, but then they'll vote for Reagan.

We say, "Why did they do that?" Well, maybe their granddaddy was Republican, or whatever. What we have to do is to join together to understand, link all our economic understanding. We have to really understand the nature of capitalism and the nature of the corporate structures, the changes that are happening in the total economic scene today. This is really the project I am working on in that little community. We have always said, "Act locally, think globally." Well, now I believe that working locally is working globally.

Helen Lewis is an educator from Appalachia, working with the Highlander Center and Appalshop.

Literacy Campaigns for Violence

Walter Bradford

I used to make my living legitimately as a poet, but now I'm the executive director of a half-way house that helps people out of jail, and this is what I am going to talk about.

To talk about prisons here in the United States of America is essentially to talk about the drive for extinction of the black male. Although black males are roughly eleven percent of the total population of the U.S., we make up about seventy-four percent of all the people locked up across the country.

But they're doing a pretty good job on black females too. More women are going to prison — about thirty percent more. And when they get out, the services available for them are fewer than they are for males. Women are going to prison now for more than the traditional reasons, like prostitution. More women are going to jail now for "hanging paper" — passing bad checks. What it usually means is that a woman has several social security numbers that she can use to milk enough money from state and federal government to feed her children.

Women are also going to jail now for murder and manslaughter — they're hitting back and killing more often. There are also more people — specifically women — who are going to jail on first offenses. That is to say, they are not criminal, they don't develop criminal careers. They're going out and taking a chance at doing something on a one time shot — usually to get some money, and usually because it's an emergency. They need food, or clothing. Our government's closed down the helping houses about five o'clock, so if you start to starve about eight o'clock, you might be in a little trouble.

In general, more and more people are going to jail — black, white, old, young — everybody's going to jail. The prisons are crowded, too many people there. I think that if there were sessions and conferences that talked about alternatives to prisons, perhaps we could get on living our lives so we don't have to put gates all across our doors, guard our children, and wonder if we're going to make it from our cars to our houses at night.

And what's going on now is our Governor has made this a determinant sentencing state. This means that if you're convicted of a Class X felony, you'll get flat time. That means you can't get any good time; if you get a ten-year sentence for stealing a purse or an automobile, you serve the flat ten years. And they've just completed a new prison where the screw —

Literacy

the administrators — never have to come in contact with the people they have locked up. They can push buttons and serve them food, give them mail, tell them about their phone calls, sometimes even let their mates up.

What this means, very simply, is that a person may go to prison for a determinant sentence of ten years or whatever, and he will never come in contact with anybody other than the people like himself, who are locked up. But when he finishes his sentence, he returns to places like Chicago.

Who's in prison? Let me give you a little profile of the kind of folks who end up at my half-way house. Remember now, that over eight thousand people a year go to prison in Illinois alone. Of those — since there are fewer half-way houses — seven thousand more are coming to the street with absolutely no preparation for what this life means out on the bricks. That's part of the reason there's such a recidivism rate. A person coming out of prison is — in general profile — a black male, between the

ages of twenty-four to twenty-seven. He reads at almost a sixth grade level, has about four years of prison experience, and has about an equal number of years work experience. He's been to jail as often as he's been working. And he often has an addiction — caffeine, nicotine, cocaine, uppers, downers, all of that. Over ninety percent of the people who come to our half-way house are addicted to something, although this is higher than the norm.

It is extremely difficult for people with limited reading and writing skills to begin to understand what it means to kick a habit. You have to have at least some sort of way to receive information that you're getting to make you better. Most of the folks think they're feeling

fine. As long as they can have it.

The thing about this young person — addicted to something and who goes to jail more routinely than he goes to work — is that this person is creating more violent crimes than ever before. So alternative sentences make sense. People who don't commit violent crimes don't necessarily have to go to jail. It only costs you more money. If we could convince the powers that be that repaying the victim, serving community time in agencies to clean up streets, rebuild factories, rebuild viaducts — all this is better and cheaper than to go to prison.

So what does all this mean? I think the prison problem in the U.S. has not risen to its zenith. What's in store for us is a tremendous era of violence, first of all in the so-called low-rent housing projects, and eruptions in prisons. If we don't make a powerful, concerted, political effort to change the direction and the internal workings of how prisons operate, we can look forward to paying for it in more ways than one.

Walter Bradford is a poet and works at a half-way house for men released from prisons in Chicago.

Free to Mandela



Clemente Padin, Uruguay

Perry Didn't Discover the North Pole: A Black Man Named Henson Did

Pat Rosezelle

This is the most overwhelmingly white room that I have been in in a very long time. And I need to say that — in terms of a great deal of the work I do and what it feels like being on the other side of this mike. We are in an overwhelmingly Third World city. There is Chicago out there, and within a few steps there is an enormous number of Black, Latin, Asian peoples. But in here, discussing culture, there's not a whole bunch of sense of that. And that's part of what it's like being "of color" in the United States. I reclaimed the term Third World with a passion and delight when I realized that colored peoples were eighty-nine percent of the world, and plus I am a woman, so I don't call myself or anybody like me a minority.

I'm a very lucky woman. I was thirty-eight on Thursday, and I came of age as a young black person in a world that changed and was drastically different from that of my parents or grandparents. I came of age in a world where people of color around the world were changing the shape of the world, and defining liberation — the cutting edge of what change and a new world would be. I'm a movement baby, and in lots of very fundamental, not just philosophical, ways the movement changed my life. For a young black girl, it validated, celebrated, and gave skills. And a bunch of this happened in the context of a reclaiming of culture.

I teach — which I see as part and parcel of the steps toward liberation. I've taught most of my life. At thirteen and fourteen, I made, I think it was seventy dollars a week — an enormous amount of money. It allowed me to leave where it had not been healthy and comfortable for me, and I did that as an assistant director in a tutorial program. In rooms like this in the University of Chicago, you would never have known that the Woodlawn black community next door to this community existed (and they finally made sure it didn't). The students in the program were primarily black, some Latino, and the tutors were primarily white, from the University of Chicago. We began to find and develop ways that you could teach people to read, to write,

and get them excited about it. And I thought that's what learning was about.

I'm real lucky because I had grown up in a community. See, integration did a lot of fragmentation to self and culture. But I grew up in an all black community in East Woodlawn, so most of the teachers in my community *came* from my community, and they looked at me and students like us as the *hope*. I have such a sense of self, that there's never been any doubt in my mind that me and anybody else who wants to, collectively, can make the world different.

I remember in the third and fourth grades particularly, teachers telling us to close the textbooks because these were lies. Our great grands were not happy in slavery. They didn't act different because they came from tropical climates. And I remember the story of the North Pole, and how Perry didn't discover the Pole. Perry fell ill and a black man named Henson saved his life and planted the flag on the Pole. Perry made sure that Henson never worked again. He died an old and broken man, because this white man could not forgive that he was the one to plant that flag.

You take that kind of learning, and you couple it with people changing the world — and I was hooked on being an organizer, forever. My world has been, how do you make change? How do you facilitate that for yourself and others? And how do you not get too heavy, and too serious with it? How can I tell these white folks that it is very white in here, without them biting the dust before I start and then they can't hear nothing else?

Culture is key. I think culture is part of why this room's so white. Because culture is taken away, in terms of who we are and our roots, as part and parcel of living in this society. So, at thirty-eight, I can talk in terms that the movement saved my life, but culture helps me celebrate it. It's crucial that culture not be defined out of the distortions of our oppression, that we truly do the homework and be able to celebrate really with whoever our constituency is, and ourselves — all the different places.

Pat Rosezelle is an educator and organizer in Chicago.

Cattle Are Kind of Expensive Pets

James Ritchie

I think your theme for the conference, self-determination, is very appropriate for farmers in the crisis they face right now. In my memory, I don't remember a time when farmers had less power to make decisions that will affect their future and the livelihood of their families.

I'd like to give you just a little background for those of you who may not know how we got where we are. I was raised on a farm in south central Missouri. I grew up in the late thirties, forties, the late Depression and the war years. We raised virtually all our food, except for some staples like coffee and sugar. We farmed with draft animals. We produced the food for them. Mules don't require diesel fuel, oil, or spare parts. You don't have to take them in every four years and trade them for a new, more expensive model. Horses have little horses and they grow up to be big horses.

A lot of older farmers look back on that time as the period of independence for farmers, but what it really was, was the period of interdependence because the community was all important. If you needed extra help, your neighbors provided it, and you paid in kind. If you were sick, your neighborhood helped and did your chores. This kind of tradition was strong.

And then sometime, I suppose right after WW II, farmers began to trade that for purchased production resources. There was an explosion of technology then. Hybrid seed corn came into being — fertilizers, pesticides, bigger and more powerful machinery. Agribusiness did a good job. County extension agents and land grant universities did their work well and farmers got on this treadmill of buying more inputs from off the farm which took more dollars which meant they had to specialize in crops that could be sold for cash so they could buy a bigger tractor. They bought the bigger tractor. Then they had to buy more land to justify the bigger tractor. And on and on.

It got real crazy in the seventies when the farmland appreciated in value about 15% each year. So a guy who in 1970 had land worth \$500 an acre, in 1976 he had land worth — on paper — \$1,000 an acre, and in 1979, \$1,800. It wasn't any more productive. It didn't grow any more, but it was worth more dollars.

The kind of agriculture that evolved with this new technology was more efficient — at least from the terms of output per man and acres, but it was too efficient in a way. The government had to step in and become the major market for many commodities — corn, tobacco, cotton. Farmers got more and more in debt.

As this rapid inflation in land values in the seventies took place, we had people going around saying things like, "You can't go wrong



Illustration by Bill Cook

with the land. They're not making any more of it. Whatever you pay for the land, it's going to be worth more next year.' Well, that was true for ten or twelve years. People believed it. Bankers believed it — they would loan you money on the increased paper value — no more production, but a bigger paper value, so they would loan you money against the paper value and let you buy more land — or machinery with newer paint.

This was the way the stage was set when the Reagan recovery took place. In one year, from 1979 to 1980, land values dropped 15%, while the interest rate rose from 10 to 12% to 18 or 20%. The farmers were so leveraged against paper value that with this turn of events, it would take the money from an entire year's production just to pay the interest — with nothing left to live on, nothing left to buy the seed and supplies to put in next year's crop. Bankers panicked, started calling in loans. The Farmers Home Administration, the government farm-lending agency, began to close on the farms.

So, essentially, that's how farmers got to where they are. It's easy to stand here now and look back and say, "Man, that was dumb — that was dumb to borrow that money just because the lenders were willing to lend it." But, that was the conventional wisdom then.

You know, we talk about the trouble some Third World people have, the trauma of adapting to new technology, new money-based economy, cash crops instead of subsistence farming — and I think that's the same thing that happened here to a great extent. It maybe took a little longer, a couple of generations, rather than in one.

But as much as I am concerned about the farmers, I think I'm even more concerned about small towns, rural communities, because they're drying up. I live near a town that had

marginal land, good only for cattle and timber. There was a small shoe factory and a trousers plant. When people were displaced off the farm, some went to work in town. Well, as you know, the same thing has happened to the shoe industry and the textile industries, like it's happening in agriculture. The shoe factory closed down five or six years ago. The pants factory closed down last year.

So now what we've got is a town full of old people — returned retirees. The young people leave — there's nothing there.

When some historian stands in the middle of the next century and looks back, I think one of the big stories in this century — other than the ability we've managed to acquire to bump each other off — is the migration from rural to urban areas.

In my view, we're going to be left with three kinds of agricultural structures: the small, part-time farmer — people like me who pursue some other career and do a little farming as a kind of hobby. There'll be the big, corporate farm. This may be a farm that's run by a family, but by its structure, its capitalization, the way it's operated — it will be a corporate farm. And then there'll be absentee landlords whose land is farmed by tenants.

There won't be much room for small farmers. There's no organized open market. For example, you need a contract with some processor before you can sell. And no company's going to write you a contract unless you have at least 10,000 laying hens. If I'm going to piddle around and raise anything at all, but don't have any place to sell it, then I'm not farming. I just live in the country. We had some cattle and I sold them — they got to be kind of expensive pets.

James Ritchie is a free lance journalist from Versailles, Missouri.

From the Heartland

Ron Sakolsky

Our editorial this issue is about *Cultural Democracy* itself. In updating the list of cultural workers/activists now involved in putting out CD, the significance of this expansion to ACD should be noted. While New York has done admirably in the past couple of years, as the board put it last October, "The flavor of the publication was too N.Y.C. or, at least, this shouldn't be maintained: It's time to select a new editorial staff." These new staff people and volunteers are more scattered across the country geographically and are less metropolitan in residence than previously. Presently, design and production is happening in the "Cornbelt" (Springfield and Champaign, Illinois), and the nearest town (Pawnee, Illinois) to the farmhouse from which I write this editorial is largely inhabited by coal miners (Peabody #10), beleaguered farmers and their families. While to some ACD members this might still give the magazine an "eastern" flavor (i.e., east of the Rockies), it is a new mix that more reflects our regional diversity.

After much deliberation, the board has decided to hold next November's ACD National Conference in Boston on Nov. 7-10. (Contact Debra Wise, Underground Railway Theater, 21 Notre Dame, Cambridge, MA 02104, 617/497-6136.) While the Bay area seemed tantalizing at last October's conference, the numerical strength of the Boston chapter was ultimately persuasive. This is not due to any lack of commitment on the part of the West Coast ACD membership, but to ACD's need to build the next conference on a strong membership base due to the continuing fragility of the organization. In this respect, while we realize we must build the West Coast presence in the organization in the future, for now, Boston seems the logical choice, and its membership's commitment and diversity should provide us with an exciting conference. There will also be a new emphasis on regional decentralization in the planning of the plenaries for the Boston conference.

If all goes according to plan, the next issue of CD will be to you by winter and will be a special tenth anniversary double issue. That issue will be centered around five generative themes: (1) the history of the Alliance, (2) cultural policy, (3) community access and the human uses of technology, (4) the aesthetics of community and activist culture, and (5) art and political practice. The designated coordinators below will jointly write articles on these themes based on the response that they get from the rest of us. They are (tentatively): (1) Lina Newhouser, Jim Murray, Katherine Pearson, Susan McCarn, (2) Mark Miller, (3) Neil Sieling and Abigail Norman, (4) Charles Frederick and John O'Neal, and (5) Lucy Lippard and Olivia Gude. This arrangement does not preclude the possibility of original articles coming from the membership without the mediation of the designated coordinators. In each case, at least one coordinator is a board member.

The anniversary issue will also reprise some

of our most significant articles from previous issues, particularly those that relate to this year's ACD theme of "Cultural Bill of Rights." Any original articles or thoughts on these generative themes or ideas on which "greatest hits" articles from CD and/or NAPNOC *Notes* to include should be sent to Charles Frederick, 803 Ninth Avenue, #4-N, New York City, NY 10019. Any editorial ideas or assistance and/or graphics and visuals that could be used for the upcoming issue or future ones would be greatly appreciated and should be sent to me at Fools' Paradise, Pawnee, IL 62558. "Letters to the Editor" are always welcome. By the way, there has been some talk among ACD board members and some of the editorial crew at *Cultural Democracy* about becoming a "journal" after the anniversary issue — this means longer articles that offer more depth. What do you think? Should we stay with the present format or become a journal, and if we chose to become a journal, what should it be like?

The issue in your hands now is our annual attempt to share with our entire readership the highlights of the last ACD National Conference in a way that captures both the group intensity and the personal involvement of those who attended. Coordinating the work of all the new participants in the editorial process has taken time, and so this issue comes to you a little later than originally anticipated but with a revitalized spirit in between the lines.

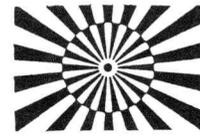
A Cultural Bill of Rights

a report by Mark Miller, Kentucky

During the Chicago Conference, ACD launched a major new effort in the struggle for cultural policies which are framed by principles of cultural democracy and which will sustain the cultural rights of all peoples.

During and after the conference, many ACD members have spoken and written about what these principles and rights are. The membership has also begun the task of describing the opposition to this effort as well as how we might move forward. Maryo Ewell from Colorado and I have been working to synthesize these ideas and to frame some possible courses of future action. We will mail what we have come up with to the membership before the ACD conference, scheduled for November in Boston.

At the conference we will be ready to carry out another round of discussion, among ourselves and with others important to this work. Ultimately, this effort will enable ACD to ally with progressive political and cultural forces of many communities so we might rally together with a manifesto for cultural democracy, perhaps even a formal Bill of Cultural Rights.



NETWORK

Women! Take Liberty in '86

To counter the upcoming July 4th Statue of Liberty pageant, a national network of feminist activists — Women Take Liberty in '86 — is planning a day of feminist/progressive performance, protest, and celebration on Sunday, August 3, 1986. We invite you to participate as a planner, performer, artist, etc. so that you will not miss this moment to reclaim the image of Liberty from a handful of Fortune 500 corporations.

With performance, poster, puppet, and dance work, we can shine Liberty's lamp on some of the realities of the United States: racism, sexism, apartheid, Central American intervention, homophobia, poverty, environmental destruction, etc. We are especially looking for work by women although we also would welcome the background support of men. If you are interested in planning the cultural works for this event or if you are interested in showing your work, please contact:

WOMEN RISING IN RESISTANCE

P.O. Box 257
Northport, NY 11768
(718) 768-4602

P.O. Box 2096, Sta. A
Champaign, IL 61820
(217) 352-6110

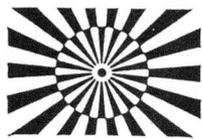
1221 N. Lincoln
Stockton, CA 95206
(209) 466-6346

4440 Lindell #403
St. Louis, MO 63108
(314) 531-9442

Womyn Make Waves for Peace
1327 Potomac Ave. SE
Washington, D.C. 20003
(202) 546-4279

We will meet all of
we will meet in the
We will we
to entangle





Publications Available to Membership

Write to Bob Feldman, 607 S. Mattis, Champaign, IL, if you would like a list of publications available to the ACD membership and/or copies of the newly updated ACD brochure to use for recruiting new members.

DEEP



DISH T.V.

A ten week series exploring crucial issues from a community perspective.

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US women of every land
the center, make a circle
we a World Web
the power
that bury our children



Illustration by Bonnie Acker, Northland Poster Collective

Appalshop has recently established WMMT-FM, the first non-commercial radio station to serve eastern Kentucky and southwestern Virginia. Programming covers a wide range of music, regional news, and public affairs. Also, four Appalshop filmmakers are presently touring India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Zambia, and Kenya with several award-winning films. Appalshop wishes to encourage ACD members to add their names to the Appalshop mailing list for both the newsletter and the latest attempt to reach a broader audience — *Appalshopper*, which is a series of topical media "catalogues" created by the arts and education center. Write Appalshop, 306 Madison St., Box 743, Whitesburg, Kentucky 41858, (606) 633-0108.

The Peace Museum announces the availability of exhibitions curated by the Museum for loan to schools, churches, museums, galleries, libraries, organizations, and art centers. The Peace Museum is a unique institution dedicated to exploring issues of war and peace through visual, literary, and performing arts. The Peace Museum provides peace education through exhibitions and other programs. As part of its outreach program, the Museum provides the following traveling exhibitions, sharing them with cities across the United States and abroad.

1. The Ribbon: A Celebration of Life
2. The Unforgettable Fire
3. Give Peace a Chance
4. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Peacemaker
5. Arpilleras
6. Posters
7. John Heartfield: Photomontages of the Nazi Period

Contact: Peace Museum
430 W. Erie Street
Chicago, IL 60610
312/440-1860

Minnesota Hosts NASAA in 1986: The Twin Cities has been chosen as the site of the 12th annual meeting of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. Scheduled October 7-12, 1986.

The National Association of Artists Organization (NAAO) has just published *The Directory of Artists Organizations*, the only nationwide directory of alternative, contemporary, nonprofit arts organizations dedicated to supporting artists and their work. *The Directory* lists over 700 organizations, including state and local arts agencies. Single copies of *The Directory* are \$15 for individuals and \$20 for organizations (shipping and handling inclusive). To receive an order form, contact: NAAO, 930 F St., NW, Suite #607, Washington, DC 20004 or call (202) 737-8493.

The 6th Annual Conference of Artists Organizations sponsored by the National Association of Artists Organizations (NAAO), will be held September 18-21, 1986, at Hallwalls, a contemporary art center in downtown Buffalo, NY. For more info: NAAO, 930 F St., NW, Suite #607, Washington, DC 20004. (202) 737-8493.

Freirean educator Ira Schor writes to tell us that his new book, *Culture Wars: School and Society in the Conservative Restoration, 1969-1984*, is now available from Rutledge and Kegan Paul, c/o Methuen, Inc., 29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001. The book offers a left critique of the conservative shift in education over the past 15 years. This realignment has sought to rid education of its liberating potential and recast it as a tool for the silencing of dissent and the promotion of authority. Also, after 18 months, Ira has just finished a book for teachers with Paulo Freire on liberating education and he was just recently on two panels with Freire at the First Working Conference on Critical Pedagogy at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Ira can be contacted at 100 Bank Street/4E, New York, NY 10014.

Halife Networker Des McLean is thinking about putting together a "politically progressive" copier art magazine. His idea for the magazine is about two hundred pages mailed in by the contributors. He wants to know if the project is worth the effort (are there others of you out there who would contribute and/or like to see it happen?), and has it ever been done before?

Contact: Des McLean, Art Department
Glassboro State College
Glassboro, NJ 08028

The Women's Art Registry of Minnesota (WARM) is 10 years old, and to honor the contributions of women to the visual arts, they are planning a national conference on October 16-19, 1986. This conference will bring together women in the visual arts to raise questions about the future, meet each other, and strategize means to help women artists for the rest of the century. June Wayne, artist and founder of Tamarind Print Studio, and sociologist Janet Wolff, author of *The Social Production of Art* will speak at the conference. There will be a Critics' Morning with a discussion of feminist criticism, and an afternoon of Artists' Presentations. Staff from the National Museum of Women's Art and WARM Art Gallery members will present ideas for the future of organizations that help women artists. Discussion groups and sit down meals will facilitate personal participation and contact with other artists.

Place: Minneapolis Plaza Hotel, 315 Nicollet Mall, Minneapolis, MN

Cost: \$75 before September 20, 1986. Price includes 4 meals, all conference activities, 2 opening receptions and performances.

Scholarships: Scholarships and travel stipends will be available.

Contact: Catherine Jordan
WARM Gallery National Exhibition
414 First Avenue North
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55401
Phone 612/332-5672

The Infusion of Democracy Made News in Pittsburgh

Larry Evans

I've spent the most recent decade of my life nurturing fragile and sometimes unused and often abused democratic forms in the workplace. In 1976, I came to the then still raging furnaces of Pittsburgh's mills, on the tails of the Sadlowski's steelworkers' fightback campaign, originated here in Chicago's District 31 and opposed fiercely in Pittsburgh's international union headquarters.

Things went okay for a while. It was almost magic for a while. We got better contracts; many of us became model grievance people, and then came Reagan, imports, and a thing called concessions — the working class Big Chill. Well, who'd have ever thought that proud steelworkers would now be holding a desperate, year-round vigil outside a doomed, rustbelt blast furnace named Dorothy. Let's face it. My union — the United Steelworkers of America — failed to heed old John L. Lewis' warning: "If you don't reach down and pull them up (meaning the unorganized, undocumented workers), eventually they will reach up and pull you down." So I and the others jumped out of the forced smile of union and party optimism and started the dissident, irreverent rag called *The Mill Hunk Herald*. (In the phone book we're Mill Hunk, Harold; it was the only way we could get listed for free.)

The Mill Hunk Herald is a forum for poetry, uncensored reports, opinions, and stories of average folks. With the help of a very busy and popular events calendar, we tried to pull together what was left of the left in western Pennsylvania. We realized we were losing so bad on the political and economic fronts, that we'd better imagine some new actions in the cultural arena. Besides, the economic pressure was on full-tilt, and we had only a handful of frustrated unionists — the Network to Save the Mon Valley — the fellows who were perking things up with some class war pranks like the dead fish in the Mellon Bank safe deposits, and skunks in rich churches, to name a few. It was the norm for Pittsburgh. Unfortunately, only the cruel experience of collapse was going to be the teacher of this totally unprepared, suddenly declassed mass of hard-nosed Middle Americans. They'd been sucker-punched by the invisible hand, and many believed it was God's.

To expose this mill town's traditional blind obedience and classic workplace alienation, to go public with some uncomfortable knowledge and not just do it intellectually — that was the goal. We established only one rule: Vote on everything. It's a pain in the ass. Vote on everything — the rationale that you don't get any better at something, much less an ideal, unless you practice it. So, all the writing



Photo by Carla Katz

"THEY ALWAYS LOOK AT YOU AS JUST PART OF THE FURNITURE,"

submitted to the *Mill Hunk Herald* was passed around, read, rated, critiqued at Mill Hunk editorial meetings — meetings which should be called parties, actually, attended by upwards of thirty or forty people. The high marks got published, and it took all the heat off us editors who never were editors in the first place. The infusion of democracy into this local, new, artistic rough diamond made news in Pittsburgh. So, our mail occasionally got intercepted by the Federal government. And folks like Vonnegut, LeSueuer, Terkel, and even Lech Walesa said we were hot. The international union inspired a group called Steelworkers Members Against Radical Take-Over (SMART), and aimed it at us. They hassled us a good bit, but they dared not come to our events, because we had too many people and too many beers under the belt.

But let me give you a list of our gigs in order to give you an idea of the flavor. We attracted all the radical fringe people, and we appealed to the large working class onslaughted union rank-and-file. So we had an interesting mixture of people at our events. We had a Mill Hunk ball, neatly combining the big band skills of the Pitt Alumni Band and the new wave reggae message of the Carsickness Band. We had a Mill Hunk Fund Oldies Deejay Dance, a Mill Hunk Dunk All-Night Swim Party, a Mill Hunk Junk Flea Market, and a Mill Hunk Vegetarian Dinner. (We beat it to death!)

At community fairs, we engineered a Reaganomics obstacle course where streams of people bobbed for Depression Apples, threw darts at Utility Balloons, and raced through Emergency Eviction Exercises. So we got the press, 'cause we were sort of an absurd reaction to everything. We took it to sports with men's and women's softball teams — the Mill Hunk Funks and the Herald Angels — the only

teams in the universe that voted on their own starting line-ups. We had Roberto Clemente Balls for Nicaragua Sports Festival, which became the first material aid sent to the Sandinistas from the U.S.

Then we went to TV. Warner Communications fitted Renaissance Pittsburgh, soon to be the corporate capital of the rustbelt, with a national showcase system, and a promise for community communications. Thirteen Mill Hunks evaded their initial training classes for community producers, and for five years now, we dominated the community channels with a workers' variety hour called "Our Own Show," a feminist hour called "Her Show," and every march/conference/hearing/festival we could drag the cameras to, we cablecast. We held writing workshops for two hundred new faces and community video workshops for forty. Currently we are in the throes of a new oral history project, "Steel Valley Stories." When Reagan took Grenada, we televised our own invasion of a busy downtown traffic island. (We gave it back only begrudgingly.) Using two army vets in camouflage gear, one being somewhat of a peacenik and the other an incredible hawk, we asked them to exchange roles. Then we took them to a deserted island in the Allegheny River, along with a couple of Salvadoran political activists and filmed a staged scenario of two GI's closing in on a Sandinista border sentry. We subtitled in both Spanish and English. Some viewers thought it was actual footage from Nicaragua.

All our stuff is low tech. That's why we don't pass it around as much as we should, I guess. We let people talk, and, frankly, they have told us some pretty far-out stories.

Larry Evans is a cultural worker and an organizer working with *The Mill Hunk Herald*.

Idealized Leftwing Marginality is the Safe Place



Jerry Kearns

... Last year or so has been more about myself than preceding years ... probably 40 year mid-life funk ... seems pretty self-serving and petty in the face of the world's problems ... there's a conflict between expressing me and expressing them in my work ... what's the relationship between that great mass of suffering and this privileged, concerned individual trying to make a career out of pictures of their suffering? ... art is a tool of empowerment for the poor, women, people of color — all the right folks — I'm none of them ... was once poor and beaten ... still feel the pain, but am now a middle class college teacher seeking and fighting success, fighting for and against myself ... trying to be great, an idea your egalitarian mind hates to hear. ...

Art-making is self-making, affirmation, yet we disbelieve and are trying to make art to destroy wrong culture we live in that has formed ... deformed us ... we are destroying ourselves at the same time ... more true for white males ... I don't want to be part of those in control but by biology I am ... idealized leftwing marginality is the safe place but is ultimately frustrating ... I don't want a marginal existence.

I want to make big strong images ... permanent recording of what's going down from the point of view of those who bear it ... a historical image that reminds how it really feels for most people ... something permanent lasting here after we are gone ... resent when the world pulls me away from working. ...

The truth of my experience is conflict ... not a positive hopeful or idealized future image but a conflicted worried-about-the-future image ... anything else would seem false ... am making images of couple's troubled present or future co-mingled with a militant oppressive environment ... couple sitting in a lifeboat eating raw fish at the foot of the Statue of Liberty which is being repaired ... or doctored. ...

Who do we image? Good guys and bad guys ... too bad it's not that simple ... usually we image the *other*, the victim and the oppressor, reacting to left and right political developments ... we show the truth being covered up by the bad guys (them) and what the consequences are for the good guys (them) ... but where are we

... where is our image? ... this is a very sophisticated but ignorant society ... people know a great deal about the falseness of communication but they are trained to like the same old answer ... Reagan knows this ... people are taught to mistrust clarity if it's unfamiliar, if it confuses them ... they love simplicity if it reinforces what they are always told. I want to show the wholeness of lived reality and in my wholeness I'm both we and them at the same time ... this is indeed a contradiction and is the real location of an artist trying to do a social work. ...

Culture is to empower ... in using it too simply to push the revolution we reduce the possibilities of culture ... we risk reducing the human potential we are fighting for ... I guess that is the reality the Sandinistas are up against as they pushed to a survival struggle by U.S. involvement ... they have shut down the potential of their revolution to make themselves strong enough to survive ... where do I get off defending art when millions are starving and bodies pile up in Salvadoran ditches stacked there by my tax dollars while I worry if I'm going to get my big break ... I go to my nice, clean loft to make political paintings, I step over bodies of the homeless and even call to some of them by name ... hello, dominick ... what's happening, angel? ... how you guys doing today ... cold, ain't it, man? ... I smoke some dope to relax my anxiety and paint some South African kids behind a comic book barbed wire fence ... lots of good that does anybody except maybe I can sell them and quit my teaching job and paint all the time and go on nice vacations with Judy who I love and hate because she wants me to be somebody fairly whole who can one day maybe enjoy a walk in the country or seeing Morocco without feeling like an imperialist rich white bastard ... worried about losing time from my paintings. ...

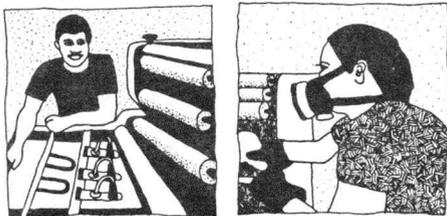
Making pictures is of course a place where some flash of illusory control can be found, some sense of order ... an escape where I can feel proud in some very personal way ... I can make scary, anxious, frightened pictures and expect people to like them ... hope they will ... to show the terror most of us feel ... but always feel hurt when someone says how strange the paintings are ... because the paintings are me ... I am you, you are me, we are them ... both bad and good guys. ...

Jerry Kearns is an artist from New York City.

Try Community as an Aesthetic Principle

Olivia Gude and Jon Pounds

Illustrations by Lincoln Cushing



OG About four years ago Jon Pounds and I decided to work as a collaborative and to focus our work on public art. In 1981 we worked on a project we called the *Pullman Project*. I was in graduate school at the time and learning about stuff like "dematerialization of the art object" and "site specific work," and I was pretty excited about those things. I was also excited about the fact we had made a per-

manent move and this project was a way for us to deal with the history of our neighborhood, Pullman, which was originally the town George Pullman built for his workers a hundred years ago.

JP The *Pullman Project* commemorated the Pullman Strike of 1894. We used a retaining wall to do some very neat graffiti at the edge of the town, describing some of the strike events. The history we sought to recover was not George Pullman's, the philanthropist visionary capitalist, but the history of the people involved in the strike.

Each night we went out and wrote descriptions on the wall and then we would also go to locations in this small four block area and trace figures on the ground. The descriptions would tell the events of the following day (in the strike narrative) and the figures would visually present that action at the site where it occurred.

Throughout the summer we were particularly struck by similarities between events we were describing of 100 years ago, and the things that were coming out of the newspaper. This was the summer of the PATCO strike, the summer of the first baseball strike. On nights when we would put up a statement of George Pullman's declaring it would be irresponsible for him to mediate or try to negotiate with his workers about their wages, we had the baseball owners saying the exact same thing.

There was a considerable amount of dissension generated within the neighborhood. There was a body of people in the neighborhood who did not like our revisionist history. But, without preparing others to defend us, people rose in meetings to speak in our defense. We were also there ourselves to answer questions. This makes for a very complete experience for the community because there was a discus-

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Community

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sion of what we were doing as artists as well as of the community's own history.

OG One of the things we like about doing this kind of temporary work is that it is more in the nature of a dialogue than an indisputable statement because after all, it will wash away. It allows the possibility of the artist saying something and it then going away which I think sometimes makes the community more open to listen to the content. It's not something that they've been forced to own forever.

JP Something exciting about going to community meetings about the street work was that it was one of the times when you have your work taken seriously. How often is the work of visual artists really taken seriously?

OG In some ways we see our work in Pullman as being a life-time conceptual project: how to integrate yourself as an artist into a neighborhood?

We decided to do another major project in Pullman, involving the whole community. The plan was to transform a neighborhood playground, which was filled with broken glass, gang signs, and was best described as part of the deteriorating infrastructure of the city.

JP We started with a series of neighborhood meetings. The initial planning steps involved discussion with teenagers, oldsters, and anyone who would come to meetings about what possible things were needed for the playground. Mostly, people said that kids needed a place to play that would involve upper body strength, a place that would allow them to fantasize, and a place that would also help the kids recognize the historic importance of the community they live in. Then Olivia and I started sketching.

OG One of our primary objectives when we started the project, was working with the kids on changing their behavior in the playground. We wanted them to have a sense of collective ownership of the playground. The kids started helping immediately by sifting broken glass from the sandbox and sweeping up the trash.

JP We had a broad base of community support, not only on the labor, but on the design and theme development. The community also raised over \$7,000 to buy materials.

We specifically sought to engage and to cross some barriers. There were barriers between some of the very old and some of the very young people, between Hispanics and whites, and between Italians and virtually everybody else. We saw the project as being an important way both to focus on the improvement of a pitiful looking place and as an opportunity to create for the kids a sense that the future could be better and that the community cared about them, regardless of race.

Olivia Gude and Jon Pounds make up the collaborative GUDEPOUNDS in Chicago. They are artists and teachers.

El Verdadero People's Express

Renny Golden

I work with the Sanctuary Movement, specifically the Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America. The Sanctuary Movement coordinates the underground railroad that takes refugees from the border areas from coast to coast. There are approximately two hundred forty-five synagogues, churches, or Quaker meeting houses that have publicly declared themselves sanctuaries. There's probably seventy thousand people who are part of the underground railroad, helping in some way to transport, house, or harbor people.

Since last January this three-year-old movement has begun to pay some dues with these actions. Currently twelve Sanctuary workers — priests, nuns, ministers, and layworkers —



Illustration by Chuck Segard

"National Security is my Paranoid responsibility."

are going on trial for this work, facing up to thirty years if convicted on all counts. Their claim is that they have simply fulfilled their First Amendment rights and stood with the refugees to protect them against our Immigration and Naturalization Service, that violates the U.S. Refugee Act, deporting up to five hundred people a month back to El Salvador.

So, we're placing our hopes in the people to make a stand against this, in this grassroots movement and in a new resurgence within the religious community — including also other groups like Witness for Peace and U.S. Women Against Intervention. I don't think there has been such a mass response from the religious faith community since Civil Rights.

When thinking about artists involved in our work, I remember the Witness for Peace peo-

ple that were on the barge captured by the Contras. They wrote a song, *Somos El Barco*, and sang it constantly when they were taken by the Contras. The words are, "We are the boat/We are the sea/You sail in me/I sail in you."

I think that the Central Americans have taught us who are trying to do cultural work within this movement that as we move closer to their lives, the sea we enter and immerse ourselves within deepens our life commitment. Their criteria for art is quite simply whatever draws the people closer to a commitment to El Pueblo and their struggle for liberation.

North American artists at times feel tension about how much you organize and how much art you do. I notice, for example, how in the reviews of Grace Paley's work, there is often mention about how wonderful she is, but how she's not prolific. I think this is a false understanding of what "prolific" is. Grace Paley said she writes to save lives, but she also acts and

lives to save lives, and her prolific commitment seems to me equally creative, whether expressed in the actual books she writes or in her actual work of building a movement of resistance. The Central Americans teach us to let go of this tension and simply to plunge into this sea of commitment.

Another thing I've learned from refugees, most of whom are poets in a non-intentional way, is that the poet, the artist in Central America must give hope back to the people — who are in a situation of utter, unbelievable suffering. To give back to them a sense of hope to continue the struggle. I think of Meridel LeSueur who says that for the artist, not to hope, not to believe in the dialectical possibilities of change, is immoral.

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El Verdadero

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Another reflection from our work in the Sanctuary Movement. The religious people are coming to understand who they are themselves when, as a faith community, they are accompanying the refugees, standing up to the government. The arrests of the Sanctuary workers were an attempt to intimidate us, to break the movement, to say you're going to jail. But instead of intimidating people, it's creating potential felons in the religious community. Because of the arrests, fifteen more churches declared Sanctuary. It is typical of those in authority to fail to understand that with repression you just deepen people's commitment.

So, the people in the Sanctuary Movement, really very ordinary people — the people in the pew, as it were — who originally said they had to be in solidarity with the refugees, who wanted to save a family, began to examine U.S. foreign policy from that commitment. They began to examine our immigration laws. What was happening was that these communities were quickly becoming conscientized. They were able to enter into struggles with the government, facing arrest. We have tried to look at how people deepen. The Sanctuary Movement could be ten thousand miles long, but only a few inches deep.

When we looked at the original underground railroad, we found that black abolitionists understood themselves differently than the whites. This is similar to the Sanctuary Movement. The question is, how can North Americans deepen their commitment beyond a charitable response?

Black abolitionists taught us that whites were preoccupied with the limited goal of ending slavery. They were not able to look at the structural roots of racism, or to imagine how by the 1960s a black nation would be confronting a white nation because as slaves came up North they entered the same conditions of enslavement, although in a broadened social context. Also, white abolitionists were preoccupied with the moral blight on the nation, while blacks were interested in being alive, changing the structures that kept them locked in — they were less interested in redeeming a white nation.

It's the same in the Sanctuary Movement. A lot of people say that the Anglo religious community has been morally asleep, so we have to convert them to the side of the refugees. We have to be careful that this conversion doesn't supercede active solidarity which demands not simply charity, but that people enter into a liberation struggle. They have to stop U.S. intervention. And that means religious people coming into conflict with their government. That's really who we're struggling with.

Renny Golden is a poet from Chicago who is active in the Sanctuary Movement.



Illustration by Lincoln Cushing

Culture is the Rope to Tie Things Up in a Secure Bundle

Nidia Bustos

When I listen to the people in the Alliance for Cultural Democracy, I feel like I'm in Nicaragua. You're making a revolution, too. A revolution that gives the human being a place, creating the possibility to fully express ourselves as human beings.

Not all that we need to do is yet done in Nicaragua. It is a hard and difficult struggle. But we have had a taste of victory, the taste of triumph. It is still small, but we are growing with it. Every time a woman from one of the tribes, for example, finds the words to express herself, or reclaims this ability — this is a triumph. Or every time a child can get milk to drink. Another triumph. All of these triumphs add up.

The struggle in the countryside in Nicaragua to gain consciousness, to change ourselves is a permanent struggle. I work with the campesino cultural movement called Mecate. Mecate translates as the Movement for Campesino Expression in Theatre and the Arts. Mecate is also a word in Spanish for a rope or cord that can tie things up in a bundle, securely holding things together. This rope, mecate, is a tool used daily by the peasants and when we use the same word for our cultural organization, the objective of our work has a very concrete meaning.

In our work with Mecate, we are struggling to recognize our own culture, to find our identity as Nicaraguans and to learn to feel more dignified, more human. I understand how people can both know and not know at the same time, like the striker voting for Reagan in Helen Lewis' example. That is what our work is about: increasing consciousness. To create a whole knowledge, an effort to better ourselves and create a collective consciousness, one of cooperation. And we hope that other people in Latin America can see for themselves what they might do from the example of Nicaragua. The advantage we have in Nicaragua over what you have here is that our government supports us and we are part of a daily national struggle.

Mecate was founded in 1980, although many of the members had already worked in cultural animation before the triumph of the revolution in 1979. After 1980 there was an incredible opportunity to organize the work as part of the reconstruction. The movement for campesino cultural expression began with 12 groups

around the country and now has over 80 participating organizations created throughout the country in communities, peasant cooperatives, and unions.

Our conception of culture in which we do our work is very wide. Culture is all that advances and inspires a people, and it is all that they identify with. Art is only one part of culture. This is the way we keep advancing and moving forward.

Our work is very diverse, depending on where a given group organizes itself, depending on what the region is like and the traditions and way of life of the people where the group is located. In each location with the assistance of "promoters" (what might be called animateurs), the farmers and/or peasants who live in the community create an organization to develop the cultural expression of the community.

Mecate works from some principles that characterize our work. To begin with, groups form and work in communities where they are from, or at least in the same zone, in a nearby community. So they don't have to worry about breaking the ice. These people are working in the same land cooperatives where the majority of the people are working — so they are all already working together. The communities are very close, so when people arrive from nearby, it's as if people from the same community are arriving. They are all wearing the same shoes. They all have the same callused hands. The people who are seeing the theater are actively a part of it. The people who are the audience and the people who are the players have the same problems and achievements in their lives.

The theater deals with everyday life in our campesino communities. We try to reflect ourselves in our theater like in a mirror, a critical mirror. What is happening to us? Where are we hurting? Where does it itch?

What is in the lives of people in the community that impells them forward or holds them back? The theater gives a description of the daily life in a creative way. To recreate their daily lives and enrich them, perhaps with information from other regions — although without ever losing the authenticity of their own region, their own regional sense. So the people in a place have to put on work themselves about themselves. They know what's impor-

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Culture

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tant to represent and how to interpret it.

The interpretation is not to give an answer to problems, but to perform the work — their lives — in such a way that the people learn the attitude of looking for an answer, to search for solutions. Of how to better themselves, how to advance themselves.

The groups always work accompanied by the community. So the community is always part of the composition and rehearsal process, discussing the work, making suggestions, giving criticism. The work is always inside the life of the community, it is not a privileged work. In the majority of countries, artistic work is an elitist work — this is the reproduction of what the society is. In Mecate we always get the community to participate. This method of creation is a way of avoiding the way elitism gets reproduced on a micro level the way it happens in other places.

We are always working on two levels. One is the common concern of cultural work, the external, our dynamic outside — how do we relate to, communicate to other groups? Does the work successfully communicate the meaning we want?

The other is more specific to our work in Mecate. This is the internal, concerned with the groups we are developing in each community — how do we improve ourselves from the experience of being in the group, our internal dynamics? If either of these is a failure, you can't do the work.

For example, to explain what I mean about the internal dynamic. In a theater group created in a peasant community, if we do a work about machismo or alcoholism, and if the minute we finish performing, people in the group go out and start drinking, then we're not really contributing to any change of consciousness. In other words, if you can't yourself transcend a false sense of things, you can't move forward, nor can you project the dynamic of the change in consciousness outside of yourself. Our work is not elitist, we are not showing the work from the outside. It is inside the community, the performers are members of the community.

Our cultural revolution has another task. We've become people who go to cemeteries and raise up the dead. We have to go and rediscover in our communities what so many years of oppression has buried. We have to give new life to what once had been our own, and to displace what is not ours, that we don't want, to get to what belongs to the community or is growing in the community. This is not an irrational refusal of everything from U.S. culture, however. There are also things to rescue from that universal culture. For example, popular music from the U.S. has a strong impact on me. I don't understand the words, but the music has a very strong effect.

Nidia Bustos is a cultural animateur from Nicaragua.

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