



Illustration by Lincoln Cushing

CULTURAL DEMOCRACY

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Illustration by Joe Matunis

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.

This issue of CULTURAL DEMOCRACY is drawn from ACD's February '88 Imagination III national gathering in San Francisco at the Women's building in the Mission District.

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They Want You To Perfume The Sewers

I bring greetings from the Middle West and also from Time. On February 22, I'll be 88 years old. I've been a writer, an artist in the Middle West, trying to find out what the true image is of our time and our country.

I believe that now is the most wonderful period of my life because for the first time we can think of a global world; a global world of art, a global world of expression, a global audience, a global people. Global was not a word in my time that you even spoke about. It wasn't in your consciousness to be global. Today the consciousness, the rising of the global people, is so wonderful, so tremendous. Such an energy is released and we are released as artists from servitude to the establishment, to the death force of imperialism.

Engels said in 1877 there were only two subjects for the artist, for the creator. One was the moribund dying society, the corpse he called it. The other was the newborn, being born out of the corpse, the new people, the new consciousness, the young child, the image of humanism. Now we see this actually happening. It's no longer a theory to say "the rising of the working class" as we used to say in 1916 in the First World War. It seemed like a dream. Today you look at your television in the evening and you see the people rising. You see the children throwing rocks at the army, you see the brutal resistance of the dying class, the corpse as Engels said.

Imperialism is dying. I don't think they have any way of even saving themselves. They're committing suicide by cutting off the food, causing famines, exporting our products to other countries and selling them back to us. It would be like an Alice in Wonderland death if it wasn't so horrible.

I don't belittle the dangers of the bomb at all, but even these dangers very often bring us together in a unity, in a global unity and certainly in a consciousness of the dangers. We see now that we didn't even dream of the viciousness, of the deathliness, of the willingness to risk complete global and cosmic death; of the capitalist class. The middle class is also falling down into the working class and betraying its interests. They have too much to protect to move against death. Death is the only product of imperialism today. It's an obvious problem. They tell us they're going to kill us, and they do kill us.

So the artist has a great wonder and a tremendous influx of new life at the same time as a great responsibility, because he must bring his skills to the rising people who contain the creation of a new world. It no longer exists in the middle class. It no

longer is any good to get the grants. They just want you to perfume the sewers. They need artists to bring perfume to the terrible stench of their death. It isn't doing the artist any good. There is no place to go except to the struggle of the people today. There is no place for the artist. There is no artist arising except from the struggle of the people.

We see now that all culture comes from the people, comes from the struggle of the people. In America, middle class culture has obscured the great vigor of American peoples' culture. I came up in the farm culture, When I was young there was farm music, the farm songs, a great culture of the Midwest farm and the democratic forces in the Middle West, and radical organizations like the IWW.

The IWW is something for you to look at because, there, culture was part. It wasn't separate. It wasn't something you just brought out. Culture was part of the struggle. You could only be a poet or an artist if you were a worker, a revolutionary. The IWW taught me that culture is part of the struggle of the people. It's not separate. They never had a meeting they didn't open with poetry. They painted. They had cartoons. Their culture was immense, but more that that it was a culture of the people. I once saw a group of IWWs learning poetry, learning Walt Whitman, in preparation for going to prison because they didn't have books, so they learned poetry. When going to the same prison they each would learn a different poem so they could bring their culture into the prison.

Culture was part—it created a tremendous audience. In 1934, John Reed worked on a tremendous production in Madison Square Garden, put on by the children of the strikers of Patterson. We used to put on affairs here from the farm. We had music, poetry, books. There is a tremendous culture which is almost unknown and is now in danger of disappearing, like the black culture, like the ethnic cultures of the Norwegians and the Scandinavians.

This is coming up in our culture like a Vesuvian release of energy and it's just beginning. Recently in the Austin strike, there was a wonderful example of the artists emerging out of the struggle. They've had a mural which the reactionaries destroyed. They had wonderful music. They had theater that just came out of the struggle. This is where it comes from. Go where it is. Go there. That's the only place there's life. That's the only place where there are any kind of images.

The new images are coming from these struggles. The farm struggle recently here,

(continued on page 3)



Illustration by Clifford Harper



Illustration by Paul Borgerson

for example, was one of the great uprisings of culture in the Middle West. The grief, the tragedy, the images....People, farmers, committed suicide. They were looking for images of their struggle; seeing their struggle as a long history, for the first time, as inevitable.

In the thirties, the workers and farmers saw that the factories would open up again, saw that there would be again a prosperity even. Today, they know there is not going to be a "good" war. They know the factories are not going to open. The work has been exported to cheap labor in foreign countries. The steel workers know as they are struggling and struggling to open those mills. The worker knows that there is going to be no "good" war. That there is no prosperity. That there is not going to be an end to exploitation. This in itself is a great cultural vision, a vision that is true, a vision that is possible. It is not only possible, it is necessary. It is the only continuation of the struggle of man to exist.

So I feel wonderful for you young people. It's a wonderful thing to be here now, stripped of some of the illusions of bourgeois culture—the illusions of getting into those galleries, the illusion of becoming prostitute to bourgeois culture. It's not possible anymore, except maybe for a few. The grants are being cut off. They're not going to give out those grants anymore. They didn't work. You didn't come in and perfume the sewers. And thank God, we're not going to have those kinds of grants anymore.

What we need now is something like the WPA where a democratic culture can be supported, and a democratic audience. One of the great things about the WPA was its raising of the audiences' consciousness. There was audience for art, there was audience for murals. We started here a farm collective, a painters' group for the farmers to paint during the winter and have farm exhibits. This is where your

audience is. The middle class is not a rich audience anymore. They don't have the images anymore. They don't have the truth.

The hearings (Iran-Contra) were the greatest thing to show you what the middle class does to support the lie. Culture is used to support the lie, to cover the lie. Language is used to cover the lie. In those hearings, language became a tool to cover not only lying, but the death and destruction of our whole society. So this is what is happening. It's revealed. It's not a secret any longer. They can't keep it a secret. What those bastards do in the morning is on TV in the evening. It's impossible to be secretive. They tell upon each other, in fact. They can't even keep a secret from each other. You are living in a time when the front door is open, the road is open. You don't even hardly have to choose—it's between life or death. It's between what supports creative culture and what is death to it. It isn't even a choice. It's inevitable. It's just there. You have to live it. You have to be it. You have a chance to become part of this struggle. As the Communist Manifesto ends; the only people who will save the world are those who have nothing to lose but their chains.

This is what we see in the colonial countries. People driven to hunger, to death, who literally have nothing to lose, who really rise up on the horizon on all scenes. Those great meetings are not any longer the little meetings, but the meetings of millions of people demanding life, demanding the image, the true image. So this is what you have now for your life; to go into this great life, this great new force. We used to say, "Workers of the World, Unite." Well now they have no choice. It's inevitable. They have to unite or die. So it's not a dream any longer. It's not a hope any longer. It is a presence, a wonderful living presence.

I'd just like to read a piece of mine that I wrote years ago, for now probably, and

this I hope would be the keystone in the temple of your meeting together:

Let us all return.

It is the people who give birth to us, to all culture, who by their labors create all material and spiritual values.

No art can develop until it perpetuates and penetrates deeply into the life of the people.

The source of American culture lies in the historic movement of our people, and the artist must become voice, messenger, organizer, awakener, sparking the inflammable silence, reflection back to the courage and the beauty. He must return really to the people, partisan and alive, with warmth, abundance, excess, confidence; without reservations, being cold and merely reasonable; or craftiness, writing one thing and believing another; not being superior person, even superior in knowledge, in theoretic knowledge, an ideological giant, but bereft of heart and humanity.

Capitalism is a world of ruins, junk piles of machines, men, women, piles of dust, floods, erosions, masks to cover rapacity.

To these stinging sounds the people carry their young, in the shades of their grief, in the thin shadow of their hunger, hope and crops in their grief, in the dark of the machine, only they have the future in them.

Only they.

Meridel Le Sueur is a writer and activist whose works are rooted in the Midwest and flower throughout the nation. Her celebration of life and commitment to the struggles for liberation have inspired generations of peoples.

Editors note: Ms. Le Sueur read from "The Dark of Time" in her book Harvest & Song for My Time (West End Press, 1982). The text as printed in this magazine is based on a transcription of Ms. Le Sueur's ACD Conference speech is available for \$20.00 from Neil Seiling, 217 N. Cedar Lake Road, Minneapolis, MN 55405.

Struggling, Acting, Doing, Believing

Doug Paterson

Welcome to the ACD annual Conference. I've been asked to give a very brief and general overview of ACD's perspective on culture in the 80's. At present, I am doing research on the subject of actors and social activism, and have been here in San Francisco for two weeks talking to actors in political theatres. During the last decade, I've been able to keep a sort of track of activist theatre companies due to both my work with ACD and my own interest in activist theatre-making.

What I have seen and read about in progressive theatre specifically, and the struggle for cultural democracy generally, leads me to some unsurprising observations. The last seven years have been very hard for the Alliance for Cultural Democracy, for progressive culture, for activists. Ronald Reagan had made a difference. Several landmark theatre companies that I know of, and numerous other progressive cultural groups, have for one reason or another found it necessary to stop operations. Public funding has been sharply reduced. Private funding has responded to "defund the left" drives by the right. Both funding processes have made it difficult for small and especially politically-active groups just starting out to get support, because of the layers and layers of bureaucracy, longer lead times for grants, and a generalized required corporate model of management.

The activist cultural movement has also felt the strain of attrition through age and limited energy. Spawned in part by the 60's and 70's political surges, cultural activism now sees many of its early pioneers no longer in their twenties, but in their forties, even fifties, and some long-termers losing energy, even burned out, or entering more established fields. With no broad-based political waves bringing as many new cultural activists to the fore, we may sense a thinning out of the participant ranks. So, yes, recently we have gone through some hard times.

But on the other hand, I'm very hopeful and I don't think that my optimism is wistful or rose-colored. For starters, the activist movement generally is surviving and fighting. New people are coming along. In spite, depending on how you count them, seven years, ten years, fifteen years, of less than promising conditions at the national political level, we have found in fact that we didn't need promising conditions to act and organize and to attract new people. Rather we found that promising conditions would at best be both the exception and be very relative anyway, and that what was truly important was the ongoing action and organization.

And we learned how to fight the white, urban, male, rich, straight, anti-spiritual, capitalist power structure without a temporary liberal permission or a relaxation of the right-wing's grip on things. We don't act, fundamentally, in terms of them. We act. We strike for peace and justice and cultural democracy on our own terms, in terms of the need for struggle and fresh creativity, and then we see what happens.

I am also hopeful because as a result of this culture of resistance and advocacy, some things are different than they were at the time of the last great freeze of the late 40's and 50's. At that time, progressive forces were hunted down and, though not eliminated, severely weakened despite heroic efforts. Thinking back on the 60's, it seems at times that we were inventing radical, socially progressive action from square one. There were few left to teach us, and fewer connections, and regrettably, not always respect for the fighters and progressive artists of the past.

But now, after a freeze of seven to fifteen years, it seems that, although the tide has gone out for a time, there are hun-

dreds and hundreds of tide pools that have survived, and there we find preserved vitality and community and savvy and experience and wisdom. Look at those tide pools—look at the theatre companies and musicians and poets and muralists and dancers and painters and video people and other culture makers who have survived.

I don't think the tide inevitably has to come back in, though some kind of reverse flow is likely. And I certainly don't think progressive forces are ever owed an insurrection or a tidal wave. But I do think that we are learning how to struggle and survive in our expanding tidepools regardless of who wins the national presidency; and that, if some better conditions arrive, we will be in a much stronger position in 1990 than we were in 1960, or even in 1930, to take advantage of those conditions.

And that brings me to ACD in 1988. This organization shows features of these same wider characteristics. We have had some very tough sledding these last seven years. Within two years of Reagan's inauguration, it was clear ACD could no longer sustain our under-paid staff and we became a volunteer board-run organization. The economic shortfalls have been continual and our ability to put out six to twelve **Cultural Democracy** issues a year has shrunk to two. Even finding enough willing and able people to serve on the board has been extremely difficult. Nor have we been entirely effective in some bottom-line goals such as making the Alliance truly multi-cultural in membership and leadership, or of getting membership sufficiently actively involved between conferences, or of somehow raising enough money to pay a full-time staff person. And there are other areas where our own limitations and the climate of the time thwarts our purposes.

But we keep trying. Year after year, we put ourselves back together with bat shit and bubble gum and through struggling, acting, doing, believing, we bring a conference together, publish some CD's and regional bulletins, do a few projects and continue. We are now in the near-final stages of adopting a Bill of Cultural Rights. After several years of continued effort a mere seed of an idea is bearing fruit. Our very being here this morning is part of and a result of this twelve year effort; this effort to fight the isolation of cultural activists by bringing us together for sharing work and ideas, for discussion and hard analysis, and for fun with old friends and meeting new like-minded people.

I look around, and though I know that we are in no way out of the woods as artists, as ACD people, as progressives and, in fact, we may have to get used to living in the woods; I still take heart. Not only are we going to make it, we are making it as political people, as cultural activists. At this very moment, Reaganites are packing their bags and leaving the so-called power center, dispirited and defeated. And though some version of unrepresentative government will take Reagan's place, we're learning that to some degree it doesn't matter.

As artists, as people who energize culture with an eye on our work and an eye on the people, we know that at the heart



The Women's Building, San Francisco

Photo by Tim Drescher

of it all we deeply care about, are fond of, respect, and yes, at the risk of sounding ridiculous, love, human beings. We can envision ways in which that living is more likely to be nourished and endure.

Arts work, work in a people's culture, is part of the reason we can entertain the words "not just endure but prevail." We loved, we imagined, and we acted. Three of the greatest of human capacities, combined in life-giving cultural creation. Love, imagination and action, combined into activist art, help create the images that sustain us and our neighbors. Imagination. It's why we are here. And in part it's why we're still here.

Doug Paterson is co-founder of the Dakota Theater Caravan. He is currently researching socially conscious theater groups in preparation for writing a book. He is also the Chairman of the Theater Arts Department at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.



The Women's Building, San Francisco

Photo by Tim Drescher

Building Multicultural Alliances

Workshop Presentors: Carolyn Brandy, Enrique Chagoya, Fundi, Betty Kano, and Lucy Lippard.

Over a period of two days, artists and other participants explored the challenging and difficult terrain of issues related to ethnicity and race in the cultural landscape.

Multicultural work at its best portends the joyous diversity that a truly pluralistic and visionary society might provide. In these workshops, it was pointed out that in the reality of today, it can also be the territory of cultural colonialism, ethnocentrism, and isolated individualism. The scope and variety of the many different artists' work shown was extraordinary. The savvy use of postmodern devices, the collaborative work of people on issues and causes, and the magical creative act of infusing common or found objects with meaning and spirit was seen to be strengthening to many artists and their communities.

More difficult to see and to discuss is the interweaving of peoples and traditions of different cultures into a web which neither appropriates nor subordinates in a colonialist or racist way. Many artists of color have expressed the problem that white liberal institutions will showcase their work without making room for a substantive critique of either the institution or the showcase format. We are not, as Lucy Lippard commented, in a position to speak for each other. The world is not a happy "Disneyland of Ethnicity," but is segmented with very real divisions of race, gender, class, and power. Enrique Chagoya argued that it is important to remember when you are discriminated against on the basis of race or sex, that this prejudice is not an "end" in itself, but a manifestation of the struggle of the larger, complete system of power and oppression.

So the problem faced by many people, including the organizers of *ImaginAction III*, is how to go beyond **respect** for other cultures (which still implies a hierarchical structure) to a true pleasure in our diversity. Betty Kano pointed out that just as the artifacts of different cultures are different, so too are the ways people relate different. White organizers impose a certain order or style on organizations. This structuring is itself often a source of division and misunderstanding. Cultural workers must be prepared to work to dismantle structures, even well-intentioned ones, which promote ingrained racism and exploitation. They must be prepared to communally build and work within new structures and new forms that may be uncomfortable or unfamiliar.

During the second day workshop, Caroline Brandy, who described herself as coming from a mixed racial and ethnic background, talked about her experiences as a member of *Sistah Boom*, a multi-racial percussion group with a predominant Afro-

Brazilian influence which was formed in 1980 to march in the Gay Pride Day Parade. *Sistah Boom* has evolved and struggled to maintain a true multicultural character.

Early in the group's history, the ratio of white women to women of color rose to nearly 6 to 1. This was a change of real concern to many of the members, and so *Sistah Boom* began to explore the reasons for the change. The women of color clearly identified the lack of a forum for airing issues of racism as a problem, and they rejected the responsibility of educating white women about racism or of listening to white women talk about their personal history of interactions with people of color.

Sistah Boom addressed the problem by setting up a series of workshops. The workshops for white women dealt with unlearning racism; the workshops for women of color on developing support systems for themselves. "Building Alliances" workshops for all the women then offered a forum for women to work together. Today *Sistah Boom* has almost reached an equal balance between women of color and white women.

Many ideas and new areas of awareness and suggested directions for thought and exploration were presented by panelists and participants. Here is a sampling:

- Institutions which seek to erase people by denying legitimacy must be combatted. For example, We must oppose government decrees that Native American who are born off of reservations are not **officially** "Native Americans" or applications which force us to choose one of our ethnic backgrounds and ignore others.
- We need the sense that we're making progress, not starting the same battle over and over again. One gets to a point where one feels that one has to make tools and make headway or leave a group.
- White people can **learn** how to be an ally of oppressed groups.
- There is not a homogenized white culture. This concept was created to give privilege to Europeans.
- Many white people feel stripped of their own ethnic identity or ashamed of their ethnic group's history and so are cut off from a full cultural experience. These people have difficulty fully participating with people of color on a multicultural project.
- Progressive groups like ACD sometimes must stop and change focus if they want to be truly multi-cultural. It's important to remember that it's no good to aim to be multicultural just to give the group legitimacy.
- Americans have a tendency to love things which are far away rather than what's near to them. As a result, many well-intentioned people become wrapped up in and exhausted by issues of U.S. domination abroad and do not engage issues of domination in their own communities.

Loving The Differences

Avotcja Jiltonilro

When Joe called me and asked me to speak to you, I was shocked for several reasons. He said it was a conference about cultural workers and I've never called myself a cultural worker even though I'm from four generations of performers. I believe that culture is many things and my art is only one part of it. I don't separate myself from my culture which is Afro Boricua Black.

So I was shocked and Joe said, "Oh well, we want to hear that side of it too." And I said, "Oh, that's nice. It's about time." And it **is** about time.

People have been playing lots of games for lots of time. I would like to see a united cultural front of all the cultures. There are many different cultures by my definition of what culture is. I'm from Spanish Harlem in New York. My lover is Afro-American from Kentucky. We have had more than one cultural battle when I throw on the Salsa and the Calypso, and she wants to hear something else.

There are all kinds of different cultural battles people get into. They play games with each other about differences. Differences seem to be very hard for lots of people to accept. It's all right for us to have **a** culture, one American culture. Well, there are **many** American cultures and until we get used to the fact that there are **many** American cultures, we will never do anything with each other. And we'll all die together, rather than survive together.

So I think it's about time that we started talking to each other and allowing the differences, and not only allowing the differences, but loving those differences. I can just imagine 35,000,000 Avotcjias! Oh God! How **boring**.

I play music and I do poetry and I teach kids music and poetry. I was doing a thing for another conference which happened not too long ago and I mentioned something about the Cambodian kids I teach up in Hunters Point. One man ran up to me and he just wanted to get into one of my classrooms so he could study the "Cambodian project." I said, "I don't have a Cambodian project."

The reason that I am there is because I seem to have some kind of a thing that works well with these Southeast Asian and Black kids. The reason that these kids and I get along so well is that we have rapping groups and all kinds of other things together. We like each other and we're friends. I don't study Cambodians. I have never put a Cambodian under a microscope and I have no intention of doing so and I don't like to be studied.

I got into media when I came out here from New York because I'm a collector, a music junkie. I've been playing music since I was 4. I'm now 46. I've got Black music from all over the world, but I also have Japanese music, Chinese music, East Indian music, Native American music. If the music is good, I don't care what it is; I am **gone**. And it's not because I **study music**. And it's not because I **study the people** who play the music. I **love** music. People who knew that I am a music freak started coming to me and saying, "We do such a program. Would you please come with us so we can use your records?" So I started going with people so they could do their programs and telling them what to play.

When I came out here there was a radio station KALX at what we used to call the Berkeley Mausoleum. Two guys I was friends with from Chicano Media came and asked me would I sit in for their program because they were going away for a couple of days. I said, "Oh sure, you want me to do a Salsa Program," and so I did it. The couple of days wound up being two and a half months and it was, I'm proud to say, the first non-commercial radio program in California that got ratings. I started doing that program on a regular basis. Then 16 years ago, F:POO, a Black and Latin station which was just forming,

asked me to do a program for them. They said that I could do what I wanted rather than what they wanted me to do, and so that's what I did.

I had always been sick of people trying to put me in their



Illustration by Bill Crook

little boxes and their bags and getting me to say things the way they wanted it to be said. I'm from New York, I was born in Brooklyn and raised in Spanish Harlem. I grew up with Salsa, Blues, and Jazz. Anything that makes you jump up and scream and holler—Calypso, Merengue, Guaguanco. It's all part of what I grew up with. It's part of me and that's what I wanted on the program. So my brand of Pan-Africanismo, Pan-Africanism started to shine and I said, "Oh, let me at it!" And so I did it. It's popular and it's been popular and I have seen no part of it dying.

I've heard certain people say, "Oh well, a music program." It is not considered the radical thing to do. Do you **know** how much of your life gets controlled with music? They have Muzak to pacify people. Everybody makes fun of it, but Muzak is not just into elevator music. They've gotten very, very, complex with their stuff. If you don't believe it, come sometime to a dance I deejay and I can show you how to completely control an audience like puppets if you want. Don't underestimate the power of music.

The so-called revolutionaries use music and the arts all the time. And they pimp artists all the time. Which is why a lot of people who are serious about the arts that they perform say, "I'm getting out of this, cause I'm just getting pimped." You get pimped by the Left, you get pimped by the Right, you get

pimped by the Middle. How many people in here have been asked by every organization in town to open up such and such a rally for two million speakers? The people don't come to hear the speakers most of the time because most of the speakers are boring. They come to hear the artists that open it up. You get everybody roused up, but you're not really important because to them art's not really important. I say, "Bullshit."

How does that relate to media? In a lot of different ways. People are listening to the radio all the time, and if you are good at what you do, you can literally change the way they think about the universe. If I play music from Black Venezuela, if I play music from Black Kentucky, if I play music from Black Trinidad, if I play music from Black South Africa, if I play music from Black San Francisco; and it's all on one program and everybody starts bouncing and jumping and having a good time to that music, somebody might say, "Hey, it's okay to be Black. That's dangerous. Not only is it okay to be Black, but if you've really got them going, it's not only okay to be Black, it's okay to be Black and powerful. Communistic thinking, and I do it all the time, every week.

I mentioned music as a pacifier, and I mentioned music as a con, I want to talk about music as a healer. Music is probably the most healing force in the universe. Music can not only heal you of what's physically wrong with you, it can heal you with what's emotionally wrong with you. Music can either make you crazy or it can make you strong enough to keep on keepin' on. Take somebody who's really down—I wonder how much would get done? I wonder how many of us would survive with this lovely thing Reagan, that cowboy who is up there destroying everything in sight, without that music?

I'm not talking about the garbage they want to feed you on the top 40, "Ooo baby, baby, wish I had a baby, jut lost my baby while I was messing with your baby, ooowww, baby." I ain't talking about that. I'm talking about all the music you don't often hear on the radio. How many of you have turned on a major station or even some of the "public stations" and heard Blues? You won't hear very much of it. Why? Cause Blues tells everybody's business. Blues will pull the covers on everybody. And Salsa, everybody's thinking, "Oh, isn't that nice happy music, "but **listen** to some of that stuff they're talking about in Salsa.

Listen To The Rain

(pa' la voz invencible
del Jibaro Andres Jimenez)

El Yunque * _____ Jardin de esperanza
Donde vive el alma Boricua
El alma de la perla del Caribe
El señor Gringo, he always listens
But never hears the music
Of El Yunque
Too busy!!!
Always rushing, running
Taking, breaking, always taking
But never taking time enough
To listen to the rain
To hear her sacred song
To feel the magic
The Magic
Aiiiiii _____ El Yunque
Gritando sangre de las flores
El llanto del coqui



"They" came

Suffering acute Grinto-itis
Of the bank account
"They" will never know
El Yunque is
More
Than just another rain-forest
More
Than a beautiful tourist trap
More
Than just one more "romantic locale"
With more great potential
For the "cultural expansion"
Of Mac Donalds bullet proof hamburgers
BORICUA
Have you ever listened to the rain
The magic
Listen Boricua
Listen to the rain
El Yunque
Is a fertility dance
It's Borinquen's poem of power
Don Pedro, Doña Lolita, Don Juan Antonio
Tried to make you hear
Tried to make you feel strong enough
To live for a tree
And maybe die to be free
Did you hear them
The magic



El Yunque sagrado
Oracion de la lluvia
Corazon de la tierra
Pesadilla de los Yanquis

Aiiiiii _____ El Yunque
Sombra de anhelos escondidos
El renacimiento del sueño Borincano

Listen Boricua
Listen to the rain
Let her whisper in your ears
Let her shower you with pride
Let her overwhelm you with her beauty
Let her lead you to the magic
El Yunque
Is nature's Declaration of Independence
Let the rhythm of the rain
Burn like fire in your blood
Have you ever listened to the rain???
Listen Boricua
Listen
Listen to the rain!!!!

por Avotcja



*El Yunque=the national rainforest in Puerto Rico

WORKSHOP

HIGHLIGHTS

Aids and Culture

Panelists — Cleve Jones, Michael Kearns and Adele Prandini

"The American people have to make some decisions and if the American people base their decisions on love and respect, we trust they will make the right decisions." — Cleve Jones on the motive behind the Names Project.

AIDS is changing the face of culture in this country. The AIDS and Culture workshop presented the works and insights of artists seeking to use art as a means to deal with grief in ways which are transforming and healing.

Michael Kearns has explored AIDS through theater. AIDS/US, produced in LA, presented 13 professional and non-professional actors in performances based on transcribed taped interviews. The actors were, variously, AIDS patients, children or spouses or significant others of people who have or have died of AIDS, or people providing services for AIDS patients.

By using their own words and the words of others, the performers discovered that they were all actors and writers in a very professional sense. The act of creating and performing was described as "cathartic and healing — a life affirming experience" for actors and audiences. Michael Kearns invites requests for advice on how to do this project in other cities. He can be contacted at 1616 Garden St., Glendale, CA 91201.

The Names Project, dedicated to the memory of those who have died of AIDS has been very successful in focusing media attention on the human tragedy of the epidemic. To date, 2400 3' by 6' cloth panels, each bearing the name of a person who has died of AIDS, have been constructed by friends, lovers, or family. Sewn together in sections which can be laid out as a large quilt, these "American folk art" samplers have been made and seen in many cities around the country. This spring and sum-

mer the project will tour 20 American cities.

Organizer Cleve Jones stated the three goals of the Names Project:

1) To illustrate the enormity of the problem by showing people a glimpse of the lives of those affected.

2) To show the courage, love and community of those affected.

3) To provide a fundraising mechanism to help agencies providing direct assistance to those affected.

Because, as Jones describes it, the project is "pretty," it breaks through barriers and is seen by the less at risk middle class. Such contact humanizes the disease and makes real the existence of lost lives. "We say we're not political, but, of course, we are," said Jones. He then described the conscious decision to appeal to nationalism and to recognize that the names project could be most effective in promoting sympathetic and thoughtful legislation and policy by not taking stands on the issues, but rather by making the emotional dimensions of the problem clear to many people.

Jones also told of his own realization that the making of a panel had had healing value to him. The meditation on the name and the person, and dealing with color and design while handling the cloth and thread, produced an unexpected healing. He now knew that artists understood and used this in doing their work. Asked about how he felt about the situation surrounding this issue today, he said, "In the short term, I'm very bitter and fearful. But I really believe and hope now as I never have before."

Cleve Jones invites individuals to write him at 2362 Market St., San Francisco, CA, a local chapter of the Names Project.

Film, Video and Photography

Recognizing the real experience and talents that a meeting of like-minded artists

could bring to bear at a conference such as ImaginAction III, the attendees chose to use this workshop time more as a caucus to explore issues rather than to showcase the work of individuals.

Here are some of the main parts raised.

1) There is a need for networks of support that cross the borders of countries, regions, states, and the art world. Opportunities are needed to share our cultural products within a network, and to see the work of other artists and groups in that network as part of a common struggle. Specifically sought are:

- Networks to share subtitled Third World videos with audiences here in the U.S. and support for sub-titling work already available.

- Grassroots organization in the U.S. to create networks to distribute their productions with each other.

- Issue-based organizations to share their productions with public access outlets nationwide, e.g. Labor Link in San Diego seeks video tapes on labor culture, calls for a 24 hour labor-cable network, and productions which relate national labor issues to the local level as a means of building activism.

- There is a need for a network of networks to channel requests through a source which is connected to dispersed individuals and organizations. This might help dispel the sense of isolation many artists and organizations feel.

2) Some of the participants were particularly interested in expanding the use of technologies to include extra-artistic communities, issues, and people. Specifically called for here was:

- An effort to train unionists in the use of video technologies.

- Continued effort to teach the use of technology through public access.

- The use of Xerox publishing as cheap and accessible.

- The use of humor to humanize our work and demysticize the struggle.

- The creation of theatre which combines professional and non-professional artists with video and live performance.

- The exploration of less "safe" or established ways of exhibiting work.

3) The cost of financing and broadcasting or sponsoring program showings or exhibitions requires a willingness to cooperatively share the burden or the technology or the space.

Community Murals

Presentors — Tim Drescher, Wenti Tsen, Joe Stephenson, and Carol Kenna

Panelist Carol Kenna of Greenwich Murals in the United Kingdom gave a brief overview of the state of funding for mural projects in Britain and of the search by muralists to find forms in which to work under a government which believes that it should not support the arts. Muralists and community artists have been forced into the position of taking commercial work to support themselves and of trying to main-

tain the principles and structures of a community arts network without government funding. With community-based work being marginalized recently, artists have found it important to re-affirm the politics of what they believe under these uncertain conditions and to use less permanent forms such as the banner and poster to carry that message.

In terms of cultural policy issues for muralists in the States, Joe Stephenson and others discussed the problems of the inadequacy of "Percent for the Arts" programs to provide meaningful community-based art and of the lack of funds for maintaining murals. Many "Percent for the Arts" programs support "name" artists and marginalize community-based work as "ethnic", "quaint," or "expansion." Similarly, when such projects are done, there is no budget allocated for maintenance—as though the art is eternal and unlike the building is not subject to the elements of use and age. The muralists spoke for a concerted effort to lobby locally and nationally for increased financial support to make mural and other community public arts projects a part of the mainstream of arts funding.

The artists advocated increased and direct contact with specific communities to make their availability known in addressing social issues. The role of the artists is sometimes to be organizer, a difficult and necessary task, and one which can draw an artist away from his/her artistic expertise. Wen-ti Tsen, ACD board member and muralist from Boston, led a discussion about the separation and growth of one's life as artist and as muralist. The discussion included the idea that aesthetic growth occurs in and comes from the community and not only from the artist. New forms (other than social realism) can be made significant to and acceptable to a community. In such an exchange, both the artists and community grow.

The summary of this workshop points to the importance of clear communication and the production of high quality work as the means to address the audiences and issues we engage. By asking important and probing questions well, we learn to reveal ourselves and our communities to each other.

Rural Culture

Presentors — Phil Esparza, Ken Larsen, and Doug Paterson

Ken Larsen began by expressing the opinion that the title of this workshop was a misnomer — that it should have been called Rural Cultures. The range of issues, disciplines, geographic locations and formats described here emphasized that truth. Presentors and participants told of their experience in working with constituents as disparate as Northwest fishermen, Native Americans, Latino farm workers, Great Plains farmers and small town residents.

There was a strong acknowledgement that the artists and organizers working in rural cultures must understand the people and their specific culture. For some, this meant recognizing one's own rootedness

and history; for others, this meant dialogical questioning and animation projects — seeking the truth which the people know. That truth can best be expressed through a primacy of respect for the symbols and mythology of the people. Participants discussed the deep-rooted mythologies of agrarian consciousness — the weather, nature, the land, the family, the harvest, Christianity and Native American spiritual traditions.

The artistic processes described by this diverse set of artists included traveling circuses, musicians, story tellers, festivals, animation projects and theaters. The best work simultaneously carried forms, ideas, entertainment, and connections to the community, at the same time that the artwork emerged from the experiences and understandings of the culture. All the participants drew a sharp distinction between bringing in an outside culture which has no intrinsic connection to the community (e.g. a touring ballet company) and developing professional forms which have a connection to the traditional forms, mythos, and style of the cultural life of the area.

Participants expressed many concerns and needs. Some mentioned:

- The lack of resources, both physical and financial.
- The importance of being familiar with each others work so that a network of rural cultural workers can be maintained.
- The difficulty of relating social and political information to cultural forms.
- The Census Department does not recognize and does not record the diversity of rural life. Recognition of this diversity is necessarily the first step to preserving and celebrating it.
- The importance of appreciation for the different layers of rural cultures, including the layer of survival.
- The recognize that development of rural cultures is a long-term problem; that people must be persistent and creative, and can use the schools to create new patterns and avenues with young people.

As Doug Paterson stated, "The rural regions are and will remain under siege. The current catastrophe is the depopulation and neo-feudalism of the land base in the U.S." From a population demoralized and isolated, too often misunderstood and ignored, the rural artists at this workshop inspired each other with stories of imaginative action.

Cultural Policy

With the new draft of the ACD Bill of Cultural Rights in hand, panelists at *ImaginAction III's* Cultural Policy workshop began to address strategies for implementation. The Bill of Cultural Rights was formulated during the last 3 years by former ACD Board members Maryo Ewell and Mark Miller with the editing and comments of many others.

Don Adams described three reasons why a clear statement of policy was necessary for thinking and speaking about culture:

- 1) Cultural policy embodies values which inform decisions.

- 2) Cultural policy articulates goals, which inspire action.

- 3) Cultural policy can identify priorities.

Three strategies for the use of the ACD cultural policy statement were presented for consideration.

Susan Hoffman described a personalized approach that began by circulating the policy to sympathetic politicians connected with arts agencies and councils. They were asked to place the policy on the agenda in their respective political party platform plank discussions. Then, candidates were asked in public forums for specific statements of support for that policy. In this way, policy issues receive heightened visibility and legitimization.

Mark Miller described an intensive lobbying campaign in Kentucky in which Appalshop and its constituents attended a Kentucky Arts Council hearing on cultural policy. Appalshop artists and organizers as well as individuals from the communities it serves, presented an articulate and comprehensive argument for the principle of cultural democracy. Careful planning, extensive preparation and a large turnout, made Appalshop's argument persuasive to Kentucky Arts Council members, and caused them to consider aspects of culture and policy often overlooked. Appalshop's previous work in relation to promoting indigenous culture gave added credence to the presentation.

Arlene Goldbard described her work for the Institute for Policy Studies in formulating a thinkpiece on culture as a part of a soon to be published alternative political platform. In general, she said that we must:

- Be propositional, and not marginalized by self-definition or opposition.
- Develop greater competence at dealing with and in the public arena.
- Be visionary.

Goldbard also suggested several practical proposals for implementation, some of which were:

- 1) Remedial funding for "outsiders" to create parity
- 2) An end to competition between commercially viable work and work which is not. Independent artist producers should be viewed cultural "research and development" agents, and should receive compensation for that work.
- 3) A tax on the income of broadcasters to provide revenue for independents.
- 4) The current conditions of chronic unemployment requires a new W.P.A.
- 5) The U.S. should re-enter UNESCO.
- 6) Artists from other countries should be freely allowed to visit and perform in the U.S. Artists seeking haven should be welcomed.
- 7) A Cultural Impact Report should be made and considered as part of all policy moves.

In conclusion, ACD members were encouraged to use the new Bill of Cultural Rights when addressing panels or individuals at arts agencies and foundations and within legislative bodies. By spreading the work, we can hopefully engender new thinking and new action.

Brits To Do Community Arts Tour In States

Sylvia King, Brendon Jackson, Karen Merkel, and Graham Downes, the English community arts workers who energized our 1986 conference in Boston, want to come to the States in late fall of this year. They would like to do workshops and/or speaking engagements anywhere that people are interested in having them — and the “tour” could be “sponsored” by ACD. If you are interested in having them speak or lead a workshop in your area please contact:

Karen Merkel
Cultural Partnerships Ltd.
132 Caister Park Rd.
London E15 3PR England
or phone 472-8150 or 254-8217

Art for Peace

Art for Peace is now forming its annual group art exhibit and stage performance entitled “A Night of the AvantGarde,” to commemorate the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the beginning of August.

Artwork will be exhibited from all art fields. Art for Peace shows at a space provided by the local theatre centre.

Performance artists from all disciplines, (dancers, singers, comedians, musicians, poets, etc.) will be participating in the stage show “A Night of the AvantGarde.” The stage show will consist of several acts performed only once on Aug. 9.

Proceeds from the sale of the art work and tickets for the show will be used to benefit the World Friendship Center in Hiroshima and the National Association of Radiation Survivors in Berkeley, CA. Both organizations provide medical, legal and mutual support to radiation survivors in Japan and the United States.

For more information about “Art for Peace” and “A Night of the AvantGarde” contact Paul Borgerson at (217) 522-8009, or write: Art for Peace, 1223 N. 6th St., Springfield, IL 62702.

How to Create A Memorial Panel

You need not be an artist to create a moving, personal tribute. Whether you choose to simply use paint or sew elaborate embroidery, is up to you — any remembrance is appropriate. Please — only one name per panel.

1. Select a durable and medium-weight non-stretch fabric of any color for the background. After you have painted or sewn the design on your panel, then cut and hem the fabric to 3 feet by 6 feet. (We will hem it for you if you leave 3 inches of extra fabric on each side.) Please be sure that your design does not exceed these measurements.

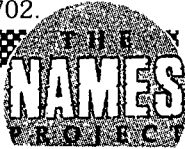


Photo by Marcel Miranda III

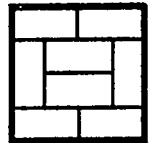
2. Design the panel. Some suggestions:
Applique: Sew letters to background fabric. Avoid using glue alone — it has not held up well.
Painting: Brush letters on with paint, color-fast dye, or indelible ink marking pens.
Stencil: Brush textile paint on after tracing letters.
Collage: Sew down material to re-create objects in fabric. Photographs can be photocopied onto iron-on transfers and then ironed onto the panel — it is best to use a natural fabric (such as cotton) for the background fabric.

3. In designing your panel, remember that the Quilt will be folded and unfolded many times, so that *durability of the design and durability of materials used* are crucial to the longevity of your panel.
4. When the panel is complete, take time to write a one- or two-page description of the person you have memorialized. Tell us what this person meant to you and how you think he or she should be remembered. Enclose a photograph of the person if you have one and are willing to part with it — we cannot be responsible for returning photographs or other mementos.
5. Please include as generous a contribution as possible to help us meet our transportation and material costs. All contributions are tax-deductible as provided by law.
6. Include the following information with the panel: Name on panel; Person on panel's full name; Name(s) of maker(s), relationship, address(es), and day/evening phone numbers; relevant cities.

Note: Materials submitted to the NAMES Project become the sole property of the

NAMES Project and cannot be returned or reclaimed by the sender. The NAMES Project retains all copyrights on all materials submitted.

Wrap the panel securely and mail or ship to to:
The NAMES Project
2362 Market Street
San Francisco, CA 94114
415/863-5511



Cassette Mythos

Cassette Mythos, the book by Robin James about the “audio underground,” is scheduled to be published sometime in the fall. Contact:

Cassette Mythos
P.O. Box 2391
Olympia, WA 98507

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Our Own Best Historians



Photo by Gudepounds

Oral History as a discipline has come a long way from its roots in storytelling and passing on cultural heritage through the spoken word. The five presenters at the Oral History Workshop, each representing different cultures and methods, spoke on some central issues in oral history for themselves and for the field.

American history has predominantly been understood from the perspective of the white male leadership. "Our history has traditionally been written by a small elite group for a small elite group," said panelist Shirley Moore. Yet we know our history to be a multi-cultural experience formed by the many peoples who have immigrated to, and worked in, this country. We live in a post-industrial society where the written report serves as the valued account of history. For those who do not write or publish, the significant events in their life experience are unseen and simply not heard in public records. The presenters all were not satisfied with merely making tapes for archives, but concerned with making public history public; with finding a form for making visible and known the often invisible lives of the "ordinary" people who they interviewed.

For Judy Yung, a Chinese-American writer, the need to discover her own roots led her to document the immigrant experience of the Chinese entering the country at Angel Island in San Francisco from 1910-1940. She wrote a book, **Angel Island**, and subsequently a play and video were made on the immigrant experience. She and the other presenters, felt it important to document history from the perspective of the people involved, to recover his-

tory for the community and to break stereotypes by presenting an alternative view. Yung explained, "My audience is dual, I would like to see the history that we write based on the oral history and the other research, read and shared by people from within the community, particularly second generation Chinese-Americans who have a hard time communicating with their parents and grandparents about the past. Secondly, there is a lack of this kind of material and it is important that somehow it get into the mainstream bookstores and media."

Shirley Moore, an oral historian from the East Bay, documented Afro-American community life in Richmond, California in a project called "Visions Toward Tomorrow." she has also documented through tape recorded and transcribed interviews the great immigration of Blacks in the early part of the century. Moore pointed out that the importance of oral history is not only in recording the stories the historian has decided are important. "Historians, employing oral history to get at the lives of working class Blacks and others, have begun to realize the importance of allowing these people to evaluate and interpret issues which they themselves have defined as significant to their lives and to their experiences."

Moore emphasized the time and the care it takes to build trust. She advised that the interviewer have someone respected by the community introduce the project. Often interviews took place in the kitchen in between cooking, caring for children, watching television and phone calls. The panelist agreed that once trust is given,

then these is the possibility of getting beyond the COVER story — the story people think the interviewer wants to hear. The INSIDE story is often complex and brings up defeats as well as triumphs.

After finding the stories, the problem of how to present the public history also represented an important consideration and raised questions for both the interviewer and the interviewee. What are the ethical concerns that the confidence calls for? "Very often when you finally get down to the real story, the cultural conflicts, you find that there is a sense of guilt, shame, bitterness. You are dealing with very deep issues. What is our responsibility as oral historians going into a community? how do we avoid being cultural imperialists? What is our responsibility to the community and to the individual we are working with?" asked Susan Perlstein.

Sal Salerno, an oral historian from Minneapolis, Minnesota is currently working on a project with the Minnesota Historical Society to document 20th century radicalism in Minnesota. He is interviewing trade unionists, political radicals, and cultural activists from the 30's, 40's, and 50's. Many have responded enthusiastically to the project. Some, however, expressed concern as to how the information might be used. Those who had been active in the Communist Party recalled the FBI's red-baiting investigations, times spend in jail and lost jobs. A few were still reluctant to talk openly about their experience out of concern that there might be reprisals against family or friends. Judy Yung expressed similar concerns in her work with Chinese immigrants noting that many still feared deportation. In Yung's work the real names of the interviewers are not given. How information may be used by others poses a difficult question for oral historians; one with no easy answers.

The forms for passing on the histories varied greatly and included archives, books, video, and theater. Larry Evans, a former Pittsburgh steel worker, interviews and videos the people he knows best, the steel workers. In order to get candid stories and overcome shyness, he often videotapes in bars union halls, and homes. "We ended up interviewing a lot of couples, steel workers with their wives to get the other half." One of their proposed uses of the tapes is a Mill Hunk "videobar" in which tapes of old-timers talking about their work and lives could be seen. Susan Perlstein, director of Elders Share the Arts in New York City, spoke about empowering people through the creation of "living history theater." In the process, older adults share their life stories in group interviews. They then transform their experiences into original plays which are performed for their senior community, schools, and public festivals.

(Continued on page 12)

Historians

(Continued from page 11)

History is then retrieved and transmitted in the present, so that future generations can learn from the past. Perlstein provided the following example.

"We are now doing a project in Spanish Harlem, a history of streetlife. The play that they're producing is touring Spanish Harlem where we collect more stories. We are very interested in not only empowering the community, but in making public history, in getting a public forum so we can really shape the way people think about the history of New York. We'll be performing the play at the Museum of the City of New York. I feel this is a real step forward for peoples theatre."

People felt inspired, enriched, and excited by comparing the methods and intentions of the different styles of doing oral history presented by the participants. As Sal Salerno summed it up, "There are different forms of oral history. Some attempt to recover tradition. Others attempt to document and add to an already existing record. Others attempt to capture a worldview, while still others are done because the story itself is so inspiring." People learned from each other and began what they felt was an important dialogue in uncovering and passing on the stories that must be told.

Within the variety of styles, subjects, audiences, and presentation formats; common commitments to retrieving the past to leave as a legacy for the community and to reshape history could be heard. Shirley Moore explained the source of that commitment, "The individuals who share memories with us are invaluable historical resources and vital links to our past. It's a link that is only partially discoverable in written documents and records. In order to complete the historical record we as academics and as cultural workers, must be willing to help the historically voiceless regain their voices. Accurately reconstructing the past can be achieved only by accepting the importance of oral history. The words of the people can stand for themselves. They are their own best historians."

This article based on the Oral History Workshop at the 1988 ImaginAction Conference was written by Susan Perlstein, Olivia Gude, and Sal Salerno.

Illustration by Clifford Harper



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