

Documentation from the Los Angeles Learning Exchange, November 15-17, 2002

LEARNING EXCHANGES

The Animating Democracy Lab encourages cultural organizations, artists and dialogue practitioners to experiment and test ideas and approaches to arts-based civic dialogue. Animating Democracy Learning Exchanges are opportunities for Lab participants to come together periodically, to share and build knowledge that can help the projects meet their full potential for success. Learning Exchanges (LEs) encourage critical thinking about the philosophical and practical dimensions of arts-based civic dialogue projects, through peer feedback and exchange. The intent of these convenings is to enable practitioners in various disciplines to inform each other about their work, explore common questions or problems, and draw on differing perspectives. Exchanges occur as the projects are evolving, providing a forum for ideas to develop, as well as in-process analysis of principles and practices of arts-based civic dialogue work. LEs range from 70-125 participants, including programmers and artistic directors, cultural organization leaders, community partners, artists, and dialogue specialists associated with Lab projects. Although Learning Exchanges are geared to serve the interests of Lab participants, a small number of guest artists, curators, arts and cultural institution leaders, critics, scholars, and civic dialogue leaders are invited to diversify perspectives and enrich discussion. It is hoped that Learning Exchanges promote a sense of community, cumulative learning, and collective growth. Animating Democracy encourages participants to maintain contact in-between Exchanges and to extend their learning to the broader field.

DOCUMENTATION

Animating Democracy reviews notes from all Learning Exchange sessions to identify key findings, and questions for further discussion or investigation, for reporting purposes. A by-product of that process is a summary document compiled, organized, and carefully edited by Animating Democracy Project Associate Andrea Assaf. For participants in the Exchange and other interested readers, this summary captures the key points raised in presentations and the substance of discussion around those key points. This is not a transcript. Material is arranged under clear headings that allow readers to browse or jump to the topics in which they're interested. Session formats vary. Some material has been omitted to respect confidentiality. The editor has tried to represent all voices with accuracy but was dependent on the quality of notes from each session.

THE L.A. PROGRAM

This Learning Exchange offered an opportunity to explore challenges and issues related to dialogue and diversity. We collectively investigated questions arising directly from the experiences of Lab projects, sharing and reflecting on productive, dialogic and creative approaches to addressing the challenges of diversity. We looked at diversity inclusively, discussing different kinds of diversity, as well as a range of impacts diversity can have, informing, enriching, disrupting or challenging our work in arts-based civic dialogue. This convening provided an opportunity to think through various inter-group dialogue models, collaborative conversations and approaches to art, inter-group partnerships, and diversity within groups. Some questions that emerged prior to the convening and informed

session development included: How do we address bias, power, assumptions, prejudice, or inequity in our projects? How do we sustain difficult dialogues around diversity? What are the variables or attributes of meaningful inter-group collaborations? What are the special contributions and challenges of art in supporting, celebrating, or revealing the significance of diversity?

Case study sessions included Cornerstone Theatre’s Faith-based Theatre project and SPARC (Social and Public Art Resource Center). All participants attended Cornerstone's production of ZONES, illustrating part of their Faith-based Theatre project. We also traveled to SPARC visit its Digital Mural Lab, and to hear about arts-based civic dialogue activity related to selecting and designing images for The Great Wall of Los Angeles mural through the last four decades.

Additional case presentations included Dell 'Arte Company (The Dentalium Project), MACLA(Ties That Bind), Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities (Imagining Robert), and the Arts Council of Greater Lima.

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MACLA/Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana, *Ties That Bind*

SPARC, The Great Wall of Los Angeles and Great Walls Unlimited

Dell ‘Arte International, *The Dentalium Project*

Massachusetts Foundation for Humanities, *Imagining Robert*

GETTING GROUNDED

“THE OTHER L.A. TOUR” OFFERED BY SPARC!

This was an optional tour led by SPARC and visited approximately 15 murals in several L.A. neighborhoods, including East L.A., Chinatown, Skid Row, and Downtown. The group stopped afterward for dinner at El Meracado.

OPENING SESSION

Pam Korza (PK), Barbara Schaffer Bacon (BSB), and Andrea Assaf (AA): Introductions to Learning Exchange participants, the program, and the diversity and dialogue thread.

Metaphor-Making Activity led by **Judy Baca (JB)**: Write two moments of epiphany on your post-it notes. May be metaphoric (that would be great!), but they don't have to be. These become metaphors even if they're not metaphors at the moment. Statements are anonymous. Write “I learned...” As soon as you have one, raise your hand. We'll pick them up and post them on a wall. Once on the wall, people will be invited to come up and look at notes and categorize them. People will be asked to work together in categorizing by identifying affinities between the pieces. Categories will each be assigned a title.

Categories were:

- Art as a revelation
- Realization of life's mission
- School
- Music as a transformative experience
- Out of adversity
- Social change
- Community building
- Power of one
- Recognition of self in other
- Making assumptions

People were asked to move into groups by category with which they most identified or had an interest. Each group was given time to move into its own space and use the category as a topic or starting point for introducing themselves to each other, integrating the comments on the notes into the conversation. The group then reconvened and shared creative presentations of their topics and discussions.

Grounding Principles

AA: We need to lay out some grounding principles that can guide us over the course of the weekend. Some things came forward from the Story Circles. I heard:

- Listen—just listen
- Have trust in overcoming your own fear
- Listen for commonality or connection
- Appreciate what it takes for someone to tell their story

David Campt (DC): What are some grounding principles (not rules) that we should add?

Group offered the following:

- Speak from your own experience
- Don't edit yourself—we're in a safe environment.
- Edit yourself: Be conscious of who is participating, and who's not
- Keep your sense of humor
- Risk showing yourself fully
- Feel free to ask honest questions

Q: How important is critiquing each other and disagreeing?

Michael Rohd: I'm more interested in word challenge than critique.

- Be open to respectful challenges
- Feel that there isn't necessarily one answer—often many truths
- Sometimes there's no answer
- Engage authentically
- Assume goodwill and good faith
- If arguing: give the best interpretation to everything people say
- Take the long view; be mindful of tomorrow
- Circles are better than ranks
- Equity in time is important
- Silence is ok
- Take fresh air and food breaks

DC: These are touchstones that we can use to check ourselves and make sure that we are bringing our best to the group.

Q: What are we going to do with these ground rules? Because right now they just sound like platitudes.

BSB: Introduction to the Difficult Moments Team. We have created a “Difficult Moments Team” to constantly watch the interaction and take responsibility for helping to get through any tough moments. No one has the power to intervene alone. If something needs to be addressed, two people on the team have to agree stop the discussion, and can make a proposal to the

group about what to do next. It isn't okay if people aren't cared for, or if we don't find outlets for discussing our difficulties. If anyone feels uncomfortable with something that has happened during the convening, or feels an issue needs to be addressed, please talk with one of the members of the team.

The Difficult Moments Team members for this convening are: David Campt, Lisa Chice, Abel Lopez.

DIVERSITY & DIALOGUE SESSIONS

DIALOGUE & DIVERSITY SESSION 1: SURVEYING THE LANDSCAPE

An opening to the Dialogue and Diversity thread of the convening, intended to surface stories, questions, challenges, and explore how to travel this terrain together. AA guided the group in transition into the dialogue and diversity session, with John O'Neal and Michael Rohd. Two main goals for the session—to bring out, in stories, the range of different diversity issues that different projects are asking about, challenged by, etc; and afterwards to set ground rules for the rest of the convening.

John O'Neal (JO): Introduction to Story Circles. I'm going to describe how we do it, and the shape of the session, and then after my introduction, Michael has got some pieces that highlight the kind of theme that we felt fit the purposes of this session. He's going to do a little piece, I'm going to help him do a piece, then we will close with a piece, then I will describe the process, and then we'll do it.

Michael Rohd (MR): We're going to hear three pieces from *Passing Glances*, part of my organization's ADI Lab project. These are text pieces, but they were also performed. *He describes the voices we're hearing, and the race and gender of the speakers we're asked to imagine. They are:*

1. An interview with a white, middle-aged man in the suburbs.
2. Two white women in the south end of Lima and a black politician.
3. African American man in 30's who is the CEO of a corporation.

John O'Neal and Michael Rohd perform these 3 pieces.

JO: *Describes story circles process:* The idea that we already know what we need to know in order to do what we need to do. In arguments, we often end up, at the end of the argument, confirmed in our differences. But when we tell stories, we come to different places. In our groups, each person has about three minutes to tell stories. Identify a time-keeper, or at least divide time equitably. Rules:

1. The group must sit in a circle
2. You don't have to tell a story if you don't want to—you can pass
3. You don't have to like the story that someone else tells, but respect the right of every person to share a story and bring it back to the large group
4. Hearing is more important than what you share—hearing is what makes it a story.
5. Don't think about it too much before you talk, trust that there will be a story there to tell.
6. Tell as much as you feel comfortable sharing in the group you're in.

Topic: Use whatever came to you from the stories from Lima as an initiating impulse. Emphasis should be largely on race, but also diversity in general. There is one minute at the end to compress stories, whether you summarize all of the stories, or just talk about one particular

story—you have to figure out how to bring out what happened in your small circles back to the big circle in the most profitable way.

AA: Perhaps focus on what issues of diversity you are working with in your projects. This is a time for you to deal with who you are, who is in the room, how you deal with your projects, and what you are working with in your projects.

Group breakout. Over-arching themes appear:

- Group 1 The first time they really encountered or experienced racism in their lives, and what it means to be different; or being conscious of racism, and how they continue to become conscious of different racisms in their lives and the world; and how people deal with different aspects of racism and assumptions.
- Group 2 These stories seemed to be more about observing other people being or acting racist, and how it affected them as an "audience" member or witness; it seemed like less "direct" racism—not really directed towards them, but more "overheard."
- Group 3 They talked a lot about how different it is to grow up in one environment and to then learn about and live in other environments—inter-marriage, assimilation and multi-ethnic families; the messages we are fed in this country about celebrating cultures and diluting cultures.
- Group 4 Discussion of a personal sense of liberation that we all must go through in order to do social or community work—themes of discomfort and association.
- Group 5 Image, and separating one person from a group; boundaries, access, choice, multiplicity.

Reconvening in large group for small group presentations:

- Group 1 All the stories seemed to come back to how we identify ourselves in race, how others identify us, and how religion and language, gender and sexuality, issues of generations perceiving themselves and their place in the United States—when we talk about who we are as a Latino, African American, etc., what identifying factor is that, and how do you act like that? And who's to say that I am not black enough or Latino enough, etc. And this default "white" category—what is that?? The loss of identity in the US construct of whiteness.
- Group 2 Common thread was this idea that there is a discourse around race and class and how one might obscure the other at different times; how assumptions can be made, and how we became more conscience of ourselves and of others. How our perceptions are constructed throughout our lives. Insiders/outside: even within our racial groups, there is racism and contradictions that we take inside of ourselves—Racial identity and all of this reflection on it over the years has helped to build political commitments and racial projects that all of us, in some way, are involved in; we are trying to negotiate our own identities through the work that we do.
- Group 3 Political poem/rap using the words “don't reduce me.” Assumption is the lowest form of knowledge.

- Group 4 Performance piece: they lined up from darkest to lightest.
- Group 5 Performance about the age that they realized there was so much prejudice in the world, and their first encounters with racism
- Group 6 They talked about race, diversity and how people interpret the same event in many different ways. Everyone in the group participated in drawing their own section of a person to make up one whole human, but they did not look at the other parts of the body when drawing their part.
- Group 7 They formed a circle with one person breaking out of the middle and telling his story; they all simulated their own lives in this "water fountain" metaphor. "Out of the streams of culture and race, we run together in our lives; is there only one fountain?"
- Group 8 Spoken word piece: voices of people with mental illnesses. Whose voices count and who is affected by it? They were all speaking out little bits of their stories. "Love is all there is, you gotta walk a mile in another man's shoes."
- Group 9 Spoken word piece: "look at me/don't look at me." They told little bits of their stories while saying the beginning quote over and over under the stories.
- Group 10 They went outside and asked everyone to look through the windows at them--they popped out from below and looked in at us confused.

Reactions to experience:

Elizabeth Gonzales (EG): I was amazed by how hard it was to tell a story, even when my job requires me to ask other people for their stories.

SK: It's a lesson in trust and overcoming your own fear - how do you balance this with wanting to have a theme in a story circle? How do you balance having a theme in a story circle with just speaking in the moment?

JO: The theme tends to emerge naturally, I have found. If you start with something too heavily focused, you tend to have people start to think too narrowly (with adults), and they begin to edit themselves. If you leave it open, the connection starts to emerge naturally and you can cite the large theme that the group is concerned about.

AL: Found that dealing with issues of exclusion, we came to theme of diversity.

Sandy Agustin (SA): We need to stop thinking "we" and "they," and start thinking of "us."

DIALOGUE & DIVERSITY SESSION 2: WHAT'S PARTICULAR ABOUT RACE?

National Conference for Community and Justice dialogue specialist Diane Burbie and artist Marty Pottenger offered an opportunity to look at the particularities of race as an issue (or interconnected set of issues) present in our work in arts-based civic dialogue. Creating an environment of collective inquiry and peer exchange, they invited us on a journey with various stages of exploration, in which participants engaged questions, issues, and challenges arising directly from the experiences of the Lab projects. Together we reflected on the complexities of race and its intersections with various forms of diversity, exploring how to make connections and when it's important to be specific.

Marty Pottenger (MP) and Diane Burbie (DB): *Introduction to the process which is intended to spur discussion of and explore issues of race. Asks each group to choose a process monitor (NOT a facilitator). The process is intended to give people time to talk about issues from their projects and discuss issues in general. We'll split into 10 groups. In our groups, we will use metaphor. There will be 50 minutes of small group, 15 minutes for each question.*

Format:

- A journey. Participants will journey through various stages of exploring “race,” beginning with one aspect of the subject, then being prompted to take on additional dimensions of the subject as the dialogue progresses.
- Every 15 minutes, each group will symbolically move to the next stage of the journey by switching seats with someone in their group.

Fishbowl (15 minutes):

“What is particular about race? What is a fundamental concept, principle or model you’ve found to be particularly effective when intentionally inviting the consideration of race into the process? When the issue of race just shows up during the process?”

Small Group Dialogue – Questions:

- **TAKING STOCK:** What’s happening in our projects around race? Is the consideration of race invited or just showing up? How are issues getting on the table? Are there issues under the rug?
- **CHALLENGES:** When/Where/Why is it still so scary to take on the issue of race? What are some effective ways of moving groups into conversations about race? What invites engagement and what offends?
- **LEARNED:** How does race intersect with other issues, experiences and forms of diversity? Is there a “pecking order” among diversity issues? When is it important to be specific about race? When is it important to make connections to other diversity issues? When is it “not about race”?

Large Group Closure Process

- The process concludes in the large group, where participants are invited to pose “harvested questions” inspired by the exploration.
- We end with questions vs. statements (answers) in affirmation of the notion that “what matters most is not the destination, but the journey.”
- Question used as the catalyst for the large group dialogue: “What are the net results when race is part of the process (intentionally or unintentionally): rewards, surprises, regrets, etc.?”

DIALOGUE & DIVERSITY SESSION 3: SUSTAINING DIFFICULT DIALOGUES

David Campit facilitates, tackling the question: How can we work through difficult moments in dialogues? This session investigated how to bring people to the table, keep them at the table, and continue the dialogue.

Q: In doing inter-group dialogue, how culturally specific are our choices?

At a moment of conflict, or to prevent conflict, establishing the agenda is important. We must be very clear from the beginning, or at that moment of conflict, we must review agenda and consider changing it.

Comment: This is all too surface, not deep enough.

Depth comes in part by recognizing that all types of knowledge need to be equally privileged.

Q: What types of knowledge?

Examples: expert vs. average, systemic vs. anecdotal, etc.

Questioning terms, digging for what's underneath the terms, willingness to define the terms...

David: This can be a distraction, but it can also help the conversation go deeper. Don't to forget the role of art in facilitating greater depth. A metaphor or an image can take you somewhere else in a way that literal talk cannot.

A cultural organization should consider what exactly its role is. It is not a one-time assessment, but an every time assessment. In some situations it calls for creativity, other times it requires recruiting people, other times it presents questions. In a funny way, ADI almost implies that we play all of the roles.

Identifying who was in the dialogue in our own groups was important, it helped us see how that shapes the conversation. This can be used to recognize where our own organizations are...it depends on the scope of the project...Lisa mentioned the role of power, collaboration with church; it implies equity throughout the process, that involving community sets high expectations...but all those needs can't be answered. If I am the staff person that will steer the process...The individuals on the front line, coordinating the dialogue, will end up in a different place than the institution. (in a nutshell, "watch out for problems around power, you may not see them.") The partners may have a different level of commitment and readiness, but the larger groups they are representing may be ready to finish or close up.

CORNERSTONE THEATRE CASE SESSION: *ZONES* & FAITH-BASED THEATRE PROJECT

ZONES (or Where Does Your Soul Live and Is There Sufficient Parking?)

Part of its faith-based theatre project, *ZONES* is part play, part community conversation—a participatory theatre experience that invites the audience members to share thoughts and experiences as the action unfolds around them.

"A little known religious group is on the agenda of a local Planning Commission hearing, the setting for *ZONES*. A proposed piece of sacred architecture divides a community and a family. As characters confront the challenges of living in a religiously pluralistic city, audience members are encouraged to do the same."

ZONES DEBRIEF

Following the performance of *ZONES*, the group re-convened to deconstruct this experience, look at the range of arts-based civic dialogue efforts within Cornerstone's multi-year project, and spin off to related broader issues of interest to the full group.

Introduction: Peter Howard (PH), playwright of *ZONES*, and people related to Cornerstone or Cornerstone's work introduced themselves before opening the floor for discussion.

Mitty Owens (MO): Please give background on *ZONES* – how do you use the piece, who do you target, how do you set it up with the space and audience, and when did the project start?

Bill Rauch (BR): It was a centerpiece in our proposal for ADI, created late last summer 2001. We took one week off in the middle of rehearsal process for Peter to do rewrites. Performed a few weeks later at our festival of faith venues, a Buddhist temple, synagogue, Ba Hai center, Islamic private school, a Christian church, and 7 other times at other places of worship or religious affiliated institutions.

Elizabeth Gonzalez (EG): Remounting allowed us to continue our partnerships or enter into new partnerships within the faith-based cycle.

David Camppt (DC): How far do you think *ZONES* can go (locations and audience)? What is your vision for the future and the project's evolution? What is your vision of how you plan to keep using it in terms of audience participation and development with this piece?

BR: We're not sure, but hope it can keep going and changing. Perhaps commissioned works? It's a small house, usually only performed for 60 people. Usually it's always linked to a community partner. We didn't know last year that we would be able to do it this year, but we would love to have the opportunity to keep developing it and changing it. We also did one commissioned performance of it this year at the University of Redlands.

Q: How is ZONES different for NCCJ from carrying out a normal dialogue?

Dani Badau (DB): It's scripted. Taking the characters' needs and scripting a dialogue process that will feel like it's coming directly out of the characters (that was what PH wanted). We tried to bring these two things together. Scripting a dialogue process that would feel spontaneous was difficult. It was fun to coach actors in how to facilitate, to know what to look for, how to deal when people freak out, etc. The part that wasn't scripted was how the audience would respond.

Geoff Korf (GK): Also, in theatre making, the most fundamental thing is risk-taking, and in dialogue it's about creating a safe place.

Larry Hott (LH): I am someone who participates in zoning hearings, like ZONES, very frequently. Initially, when facing the front of the room in presentation format, I felt comfortable in both the theatre and the dialogue. But when in small groups, I felt that it got away from the more interesting performance aspects, and I felt less interested and comfortable. It made me wish that we could get back to the scripted part with little bits of participation. What do you do when the audience is not as rarefied as this one? Does a normal audience get it? Do they object? How do they react when you take it out of the scripted realm?

PH: It's been about striking certain kinds of balance, and it changes so substantially depending on who is the room. At times, we may fail to achieve balance with certain audiences, but we tried to mix it up enough to keep people from turning off.

Sue Wood (SW): There were times when I was very involved with the characters and there were times when I felt they were too much "types," and there were times when I thought that they were commenting on their types. What did you go through as a playwright, or a director, with this—was it an issue for you?

BR: How theatrical is it? How artistic is it? We talked a lot about the beginning being as dry and dull as possible, but our theatrical sides took over as it became too dry. There has been a lot of resistance from recent audiences with some of the exercises.

PH: As far as characters go, one of the interesting processes was trying to have characters be moved and motivated by whatever went on in the room. And as much as it's about religious differences, it is really about power and control.

Abel Lopez (AL): Do you have several of these productions going on at once? Does your casting influence the way people respond to the piece?

Wayne Winborne (WW): Mother/daughter characters were both black, but this did not seem to be about race—was that intentional? The theme was squarely on religious difference, and race and ethnicity weren't a major factor in the play, were they? The racial differences in the characters throw another dynamic into the dialogue. Was ethnicity important? Is this just about religion, or is it also about race and class? It seemed more about the casting than the writing.

BR: The casting was intentional, but race and disability were sub-textual. As a director, I enjoyed Peter's instinct that race and disability were always sub-textual. Also, the pastor has been different races in different shows, and this has changed the show.

Q: I think the balance between textual and sub textual is interesting. I think there's something in Diana's case with the disability that is very interesting - I have been to so many meetings like this. The problem that I have with what you just said is that 95% of the time when people are at these meetings, the issues of race are VERY TEXTUAL when there are issues of public zoning.

Q: It was one of the things for me that elevated the play. It would have been so obvious if it was about race and class, and the religious issues became a metaphor for everything else—the casting was great, and for me that's art. If they had done the standard town hall meeting, it would have become bitter and cynical.

Q: What were the compromises in terms of the artistic creation?

DB: The size of the audience. Dialogue folks want small audience numbers, theatrical folks want larger numbers. Settled on approximately 60.

BR: Dialogue sequences, how much we were going to give over to the scripted play - what happens in the dialogue exercises affects the emotional temperature of the room, but the plot always stays the same. There was a lot of negotiation around how the dialogue was created.

PH: The closing movement, the circle of hanging questions—we envisioned cross talk at the end, a completely open forum, and I have to credit Michael Rohd for helping us to come up with the perfect compromise to hear everyone in the room, but to not need to talk about it all, and to have a ritual to close was a fortunate thing that came up late in the process.

Lucky Altman (LA): There is a possibility for that dialogue to continue. What does it mean to be biased? How far can I go? Where are the lines? And it enables us to continue those conversations later

BR: Back to the casting: last year, the meeting was run by an Asian American actress, and it does change the piece from race to race—one thing that always comes up is it's relation to Christianity and the pastor, what does it mean to do it in the audience where 95% of the people are born again, or when 95% is atheist? A Jesuit priest thought that the piece was too biased towards Christianity; he talked to us about Manichaesism and we wanted to let the pastor in our play have the perspective that that particular priest had.

Q: I am just curious about why you chose Wicca religion or how you came about it as a concept?

PH: What did you hear in the piece as being partial to Wicca religion? That's not a perception I was seeking. She mentions it once in the context of feeling allied with other persecuted religious belief systems, but her religion is fictional. Many of the details come from real religions, but the combination is made up.

Lori Robishaw (LR): What has the after-effect been? What do you hear from communities? Have any minds or hearts been changed?

BR: My first response is that it's part of a process. We've never done it cold, it has always been with communities we have or are partnering with, and it usually has to do with other things within the community rather than ZONES in particular.

Q: How do you deal with a need that might come up in the process that really needs to be discussed? How do you keep the play going? If someone all of a sudden needed a safe container, how do you allow for time for nurturing without stopping the whole show and throwing out the risk of Theatre?

Shishir Kurup (SK): There were people who were willing to thwart the process and there was a vehemence in not being told what to do—you have to find different ways to cajole, and you have to find the middle ground between respecting what this person needs and what the rest of the group needs.

BR: There have been lots of different ways of creating “safe space,” but there has not been a set place or set way of dealing with uncomfortable or strong feelings that may come up. Audience members and cast members have reacted to emotions in lots of different ways...I’ve seen audience members reach out to actors, and I’ve seen actors reach out to audience members who are upset. I feel like there’s been a lot of care-taking. I think in small ways, at the end, some people are shut down and some people are weeping—just where people do or don’t go at the end...

GK: We’ve had people leave the show because they weren’t comfortable with the audience participation, and we planned on that.

Armando Molina (AM): It functions as a personality test—some people get really into the proposal, and it functions as a workshop. Everybody’s reaction to it depends on who they are.

SK: In terms of safety, there were people who wanted to thwart the process. One guy would not move at all. Twice this happened and after a while I let him stay there. After a while he realized that he was now in the way, in a way he wasn’t comfortable with, and he moved.

Q: I felt at different points that the process was being manipulated at certain points and didn’t know if it was testing the audience to see at what point we would participate. Are they trying to avoid getting to the issue? And I’m not sure how much you do want this tension, or how much you just want people to participate.

Q: It was about the democratic process as much as it was about religious diversity...how much do you have to have an agenda and how much can you depart from it?

BR: We wanted it to be as disorienting and reinventing as possible.

Jay Nuegeboren (JN): I have a critique: it feels that we come away with too much of a feel-good feeling than is appropriate to the issues.

Q: There seems to be two different dialogues going on: a dialogue between bigotry, hatred and intolerance...and the dialogue between people who are intolerant and people who are tolerant.

Wayne Winborne (WW): A critique of performance: I felt it was an excellent melding of the art and dialogue, even if it did require that the audience somewhat give itself over to the experience. Typically, artists think that post-performance conversation is dialogue, but that’s not dialogue. This moved beyond that.

Q: It concerns me that we assume it would be more successful if everyone moved in the circle—I would hope that there would be a lot of people who don’t conform.

CASE SESSION: CORNERSTONE THEATRE, *FAITH-BASED THEATRE PROJECT*

Introductions: Shishir Kurup (ensemble), Maria Sanchez (community participant), Armando Molina (Ensemble), Manuel Sanchez (community participant and NCCJ), Karen Rushfield (University of Judaism, community collaborator), Shay Wafer (Cornerstone), Bill Rauch (Cornerstone), Lucky Altman (NCCJ), Elizabeth Gonzalez (Cornerstone), Phil Wilson (African American Aids Policy And Training Institute, community collaborator)

BR: *Discussion of why they decided to focus on works of faith as their primary subject:* We found that in every group and community they worked in, there were divisions along faith line, so we found it important to work through these issues. We had worked in a lot of faith-based venues, and there was a lot of internal stuff along religious lines in the company. That was the birth of the faith-based cycle. We partnered with NCCJ, and that gave us the opportunity to think about dialogue more deeply—that was great for us. We began with a series of dialogues that involved members of Cornerstone, partner communities and public, facilitated by NCCJ facilitators. These “Weekly Wednesdays” were a way for people to get together and talk in circles about ritual and “believing in 2000,” and to get them asking and discussing the hard questions. We began this process before we had any plays. Last fall we kicked it all off with the Festival of Faith, which was a series of 21 short pieces of theatre around L.A., in different places of worship. This video is about that. (*Showing of video*).

Shay Wafer (SW): *Discussion of upcoming projects:* After the festival, we did *Crossings*, which was 48 cast members speaking 16 languages, with 5 writers at St. Vibiana’s. It focused on journeys of Catholic immigrants. The next project is the *Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender People Of Faith*, about to go into auditions. Also *Black Aids/Black Faith; The Muslim Project*, which has been changed due to community response; Jewish, Hindu, Pentecostal, Secular Humanist, Elemental, and then *The Bridge Show*. This takes us to the spring of 2005.

Q: Is a bridge show a collage?

Answer: No, it's a totally new piece.

BR: *Discussion of Muslim Story.* We commissioned a Muslim playwright to write a play for collaboration for the Muslim community that was called “10 Acrobats and an Amazing Leap of Faith.” I was disappointed and concerned when I read the draft, but I thought we were ready to move forward and produce it, and hope that it strengthened in the life of the process. The play was built through story circles and interviews, then we took it back to the members of the community. The dialogue that followed the reading and the response that we got taught us what we knew already, but didn't have the courage to face—we couldn't produce this play. This is the first play that we have commissioned that we aren't producing. The dialogue from the community made the decision for us.

Q: Can you be more specific?

BR: The playwright's anger for his family and religion became the driving force for the play and it blindsided all of us.

SK: He wasn't willing to work to see if he could change or learn something in the process.

BR: When do we cross the line from collaboration and listening to "well, the majority said we can't have that in there?" When the community comes up and wants the changes to represent them, it becomes clear what we have to do.

MR: This is twice in a year that working with a writer has been a challenge. In community collaboration work, determining things that you need to think about and talk about with artists from the beginning.

BR: We're working on a project, led by Ferdinand Lewis, about methodology and core values...What are the core values that just can't be messed with as we begin to build a new project?

SK: Maybe it is also about getting local playwrights, and looking at how people come to Cornerstone—if we are seeking them out, it's even harder for us because they might not know the culture of the company.

Lucky Altman (LA): Our relationship with Cornerstone was a wonderful opportunity for NCCJ's interfaith and dialogue work to intersect with the artwork. We decided early on that we need to be clear with each other with the language we use and the dialogue. What language do you use, what do we use? We had to develop a common language for the both of us, and we've been able to influence one another. Language is important. We were creating ways for people to reflect on the art. We realized that people needed a vehicle for reflection, and sometimes they weren't ready to talk. We had a town hall forum with the *Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender People Of Faith* people and had a great dialogue. Understanding how you can compliment one another is so important, as is language, with a partnership. For the *Festival of Faith*, there were not only artistic coordinators at the venues, but also facilitation coordinators.

Q: Can you say how you feel this work through theatre has been different in helping you with this dialogue?

LA: Weekly Wednesdays required us to write dialogue in a way so that everyone felt they could be engaged. We also included some of Michael Rohd's techniques to use different kinds of mediums for that conversation. It has really helped us at NCCJ to really understand how theatre helps us to reflect more deeply. The art speaks to us and we can talk about it later. Somehow it affects our emotions and our thoughts. I have realized how much we have been only focusing on those who were connected to organized religion, and we have been excluding those who were not connected in the past, which now we have a grant to do more work on. People have come to an interfaith conversation through art in ways that they never would have before.

Crossings Teams

Armando Molina (AM): The initial idea was to adapt the Old Testament stories to reflect the 5 communities that we chose; the second act was supposed to be the New Testament. Evangeline Ordaz and I adapted the story of Ester in South Central and met through Story Circles. That's how I met Maria Sanchez and her whole family. We were interested in finding out about the crossings story. People were very generous with sharing life-threatening experiences about crossing the border and what life is like here soon after, and even 20-30 years after arriving. We needed to change the story title to *Ester and the Exodus*.

Maria Sanchez (MS): I didn't know what to expect, my parents and other people were telling very emotional stories. It was basically the story of my parents and their journey from the U.S. to Mexico illegally, and back to the U.S. illegally. The play began present time with Ester and her current job. Then you'd see flashes of her memories and stories she was told, that would come together at times within one place.

AM: Her parents had to smuggle the baby into the U.S. and had to hand it over to someone else to carry in legally; her parents then died crossing the border. And she has to tell her boss that she is undocumented.

Shay Wafer (SW): Maria, has the dialogue in your family changed since then?

MS: Yes, we became a lot closer. I am involved in theatre, but they had never been involved in it before, so it brought us a lot closer together and to our community. I didn't know the stories of my parents. The Hispanic community in my area has more important things to do than go to the theatre, but the people that did come from the community said that they related so much to the story. It wasn't the people who came over as much as the sons and daughters that were there, and I've never seen that before in the theatre. An African American family came to see it and were so touched by the story.

Elizabeth Gonzalez (EG): We did have a Cambodian parish, and the Cambodian youth and Latino youth were getting together. We realized that the Hispanics were speaking Cambodian and the Cambodians were speaking Spanish, and they were going to be friends and go have dinner at each others' homes.

SK: The amount of food that was exchanged between cultures was incredible!

Black Aids/Black Faith

SW: Bill and Phil both received the Leadership for a Changing World award and that's how they came together. That's how it all started.

Phil: African American Aids Policy And Training Institute is the only black HIV/AIDS think tank in the U.S. African Americans represent 12% of the population and 53% of the population with AIDS. AIDS is disproportionately affecting blacks in any and every country where AIDS is a real epidemic. Part of our work is working with black clergy. Faith is certainly a big part of what we do, and the black church plays a big role in what happens in black communities. It is important for these dialogues to go on. We thought that since Cornerstone was doing a faith project, it would be an exciting opportunity to merge those two efforts; it brings together an interesting dyad with the art and community. We also add factual information to that pot that we feel very passionate about it, although right now it's in the early stages.

SW: We've been having Story Circles, and we had a writer who became too busy. Now we have a new writer who will be in town next week. Her name is Tracy Wilson and she's from New Jersey, and we are excited to work with her.

EG: Early on, when we were doing Story Circles in March, the overwhelming response was from Christian churches. We decided to look at a community of churches.

BR: We struggle a lot in how broad we go and how deep we go, as opposed to how centered we should be. The more we talked to community partners and amongst ourselves, we felt it would be better with this project to stay within the Christian church. ***The Gay Lesbian***

Bisexual Transgender People of Faith project and its dialogue with the community has also changed the work of the art. We originally thought of keeping it all interfaith, but at least 30% of people who have showed up through the Story Circles identify themselves with spirituality and not an organized religion.

Karen (of University of Judaism): We're starting this collaboration right now. I just want to tell you what fascinates me about the whole part of being involved. I've always been interested in the process of what Cornerstone does—more than the result. How they come to the work that they do is so interesting. Then, there is the opportunity to get my community involved, tell my stories, hear other people's stories from Jewish communities and get feedback from people who are not in the Jewish community's perspective. How we tell a story, and how they are going to find a way to tell the stories is incredible, and the process of deciding how you put it together intrigues me.

SK: Cornerstone constantly wrestles with the problem of language. So what we call “**The Muslim Project**” might have 10 different types of Muslims in the show. What each person is going through in this process is incredible; and everything about that person can become you.

Questions:

Q: Do you ever tour your work?

BR: Well, Phil has been very vocal about us not letting the play we do die after it's done here in Los Angeles, but the problem is that we often find our plays really speak mostly to the community they are written for.

MR: How does art of place resonate in other sites? I believe that it would live beyond the site; maybe in a different way, but it would survive as art.

Q: There is something about the methodology generated by the projects that can be very useful. A lot of what you do is a skeleton, and if you had the funding and the ability to train others to go out and do what you do, it would be incredible. What kind of intellectual property comes out of the methodology? There needs to be some way to codify this methodology. Can we create a working methodology that can be disseminated to the field?

David Camp (DC): In all of your projects, how have you wrestled with people who do not bring tolerance to their own faith?

BR: It is a constant struggle to get like-minded people of tolerance together in a room, but also those who are not tolerant. It's the job of the theatre company to get people out who are going to represent more extremist views ... But you can't drag people to the room. The people who want to come are the ones who do, so perhaps it's already tainted.

WW: I want to encourage you guys to really struggle with this issue. There are great benefits to making the extra effort to identify and use local writers.

BR: 95% of our writers are local, and I would love to have a deeper dialogue about that, because Cornerstone is made up of nomadic artists coming into other areas and creating art.

BR: ADI has profoundly affected this faith-based project and how Cornerstone looks at its work for the future. It feels very full circle. Thank you!

CASE SESSION: MACLA/Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americana, *Ties That Bind*

Maribel Alvarez (MA): *Introduction to MACLA. Introduction to San Jose and Silicon Valley, urban structure, political structure, cultural heritage.* Thinking of ways that ethnic and cultural organizations can deal with issues of identity in a world and city of changing identity. I had a desire to mobilize a different kind of work that combines arts and humanities. We tried to identify people in the community who would come forward and identify themselves with specific ethnic groups, to talk about family stories, intermarriage, generational issues, etc. Started with an online survey (25 questions), got 40 responses. We selected 15 of these 40 for in-depth study. We planned to have ethnographers gather data and pass along the data to artists, who would then create an exhibition. This became problematic because we were using oral history but then trying to create a visual piece. There would also be a dialogue component, to bring families together. But the dialogue component really expanded, and we found that many sub-dialogues existed.

Problems became: at what point can a story not capture everything? how are artists a part of the interview process? ...Eventually, it became that the artists interacted with the families and created relationships with the families themselves...Artists became ethnographers. Artists were on a commission basis, though. As the artist got into the process of collecting stories, there arose a tension of choosing icons of representation that would reduce stories and rich history and tradition into an object form. They knew that these issues were going to be there, but it was more of a tension than they expected. They ended up sometimes, too, making people more ethnic than they needed to be (some just thought of their families as American!) for the purposes of the project.

It was a project that was fraught with need for experimentation and tensions between social and ethnographic aspects and the art aspects. Finding visual metaphors to represent the ideas they were talking about was difficult. It required a lot of conversation. The show opening: was from 6-9pm, and families came exactly at 6:00, which surprised MACLA...but, the families were not gallery-going types; they showed up exactly at 6 and ate the food and left...that's a little anecdote illustrating the kind of things that popped up that were unexpected, and complicated what they thought they were doing. MACLA project provides a methodology for engaging art in a very civic orientated way. The methodology means that you really start off with some basic curiosity; you don't know the answers until you go to the participants, start to ask some questions, and engage them in these issues.

Questions

Q: How did you select the artists?

MA: We were looking for artists who were comfortable in intimate spaces and had experience working with families. We had a couple of artists who were not local and it didn't work out because they found that they needed to connect with the families often over a long period of time. We chose 3 artists—the artists worked collaboratively, resulted in installations. We

struggled working with a photojournalist; and the struggle he had because he only knew how to represent literally.

Q: How much did you know up front about what you wanted to see as an end result?

MA: I had certain things in mind that I wanted to see...I came to it mainly from an anthropological perspective, but also as a curator.

Slide show of the installations.

Lissa Jones (LJ), artist, *narrates during slide show. Describes events the images capture, discusses the metaphors used and represented, symbolism of the exhibition format and structure—the way the photos are hung and presented. The metaphor of food and eating runs throughout...pictures shown alongside different food products from the neighborhoods and laid out sometimes in a table-like format. Only b/w photography used, and this was a deliberate choice. None of the families ever asked me about what I did as an artist or asked to see the pictures or negatives or anything like that...There was just trust...In working with the families, it struck me that there's a protectiveness about them; there was this thing about needing to be protective, but each person within the family moves freely and independently...*

Q: Is this an ongoing activity in your community, and how are others from community engaged?

LJ: We had several different community events and others from the community participated. Found that the families often wanted to meet other families and talk to them. There became a lot of inter-dialogue between these families. But it was very intimate and never became a huge community campaign.

Q: Were there issues of privacy that came up...things that the families did not want to share?

LJ: Yes, and they weren't pressed to share. But it was a slow process, and trust grew.

Abel Lopez: I also found that the families became more open when talking about and reacting to the art. Opened up avenues for dialogues. The art prompted them to become much more public about some very private discourse. Up to that point, some of these families had never said some of these things outside their homes.

Debra Padilla: I liked the metaphors used, very powerful. But also liked the images aesthetically and the way ethnic concepts and objects were reappropriated. I felt that these intimate stories were honored in an aesthetic way that worked very well and was very considerate.

Larry Hott: Did you collect comments from those who just wandered into the space and had no connection with the project...and if so, what were those comments?

MA: We had a comment book and offered guided tours to the public.

LH: What did you find?

Lisa: I often work with graduate students, so they had a fairly savvy mindset...but they often asked, why there wasn't a sound component? Not having sound was deliberate...I wanted people to hear their own voices in what they were seeing. That was the springboard for intense conversation.

Abel: Observation of watching people confront the artwork...was very different than the conversations with people about the work...This resulted in several different reactions and

types of conversations. Their individual confrontation and interactions with the work was very important and very different.

Q: How was the decision made to work with families rather than individuals...and was there interaction with these families and others in other communities?

MA: Some people were worked with as individuals and often they ended up drawing their families in. But there wasn't interaction outside the community largely because of time and money and other practical constraints.

Q: Is the exhibition traveling?

MA: It will be going to Fresno, and it will have a local component there.

Q: Were there any same-sex couples that were interested in the project or was there any intentional thought about inclusion or exclusion of these?

MA: MACLA did say that they defined "inter-marriage" as including the possibility for same-sex couples. But none came forward.

Q: Who owns the work? How much ownership does the family have over the artwork?

MA: The artwork belongs to the artists. But there are funds for compilation of a few of the photographs to be given to each family.

Q: When you started, did you have thoughts of outcomes that would happen in terms of the community?

MA: We had three guiding questions: 1) how were these tensions of intermarriage experienced in every day life? 2) how can artists respond with representative sensual reflections of every day life and create a rich and warm environment and keep this about love, not entirely cerebral? 3) for ADI purposes, test this as a methodology for our organization. Challenge our own organization to think of ways to expand our definitions of ethnicity and include a broader group/ audience/ demographic. I believe definitions of ethnicity are changing, however; we are an organization that exists as a Chicano organization. What does it mean to be an ethnic organization with the country's changing demographics?

Caron Atlas (CA): *Talked about conversation that the writers involved in this project had (Critical Perspectives writers).* They were interested in what became truth and fact. One writer who has been involved with this project is as interested in what *wasn't* said as what *was* said. Another writer mentioned the importance of a community organization doing this work versus a university doing this work. The organization has its heart and soul invested in this community and can have different conversations with the families than a university researcher might have.

AL: The dialogue about the impact of this work on the organization has been very interesting.

MA: I feel it became a pivotal moment for the organization, and it makes us think about how to capture some of the energy from this project and continue this in our other projects.

Lisa Chice (LC): I like that this talks about race issues without starting from a baseline, such as black/white, or the predominate race in this country (white), but looks at relationships between races independently.

AL: I was struck by comments by artists and interviewers that many of these families had been so focused on assimilation that they had stripped their families and homes of traces of ethnicity.

And before they could actually have these inter-race dialogues, they had to re-claim their own ethnicity and had to look more internally at their individual cultural and ethnic heritage.

MA: Projects like this allow organizations to tackle the issues of hybridity and critically engage questions surrounding it. I see hybridity as a double-edged sword.

Q: I'm curious about families that have stripped their homes of ethnicity...did these families "become more ethnic?"

LJ: In ways, yes! They became more interested in going back in their own history and reclaiming things.

AL: They also found that even though the appearance in a home was that of assimilation, sometimes they found that behind certain doors, you found references to their ethnicity. For instance, you open the cupboard doors and the food products tell a story about the families' ethnicity.

CASE SESSION: SPARC, GREAT WALLS UNLIMITED

PART 1: FIELD TRIP TO THE SITE OF THE CARACEN MURAL

Present are Poet Rosanna Perez, Caracen executive director, Angela Sanbrano, and community members to talk about how this project has evolved, its meaning to the community, and how it relates to The Great Wall effort.

PART 2: SPARC CASE SESSION: THE GREAT WALL OF LOS ANGELES AND GREAT WALLS UNLIMITED

A multimedia presentation focusing on SPARC's inter-group efforts in three of fifteen communities – Koreatown, Watts, and Caracen – as part of the Great Walls Unlimited: Neighborhood Pride program. SPARC talked about how its community education and design process in these communities, and use of internet technology, is creating the designs for the next four panels of The Great Wall of Los Angeles mural and generating public dialogue that furthers inter-group relations. Design for the final four sections, encompassing events from the last four decades of the century, has evolved through live and online dialogues. Using methodology developed by Judy Baca, scholars, designers, poets, activists, historians, students, and local residents have come together in dialogue forums to arrive at incidents and ideas they consider important to be represented in the mural. These will be articulated as imagery by Baca and a design team, and then taken back to the community and posted on SPARC's website for further feedback.

Judy Baca (JB): *Talks about their ADI Lab project, Great Walls Unlimited: Neighborhood Pride, and How dialogues at these three focus sites have informed production of the Great Wall. City Council has pledged \$100,000 for restoration of the Great Wall. With this restoration, we feel that it needs to be re-energized and re-dedicated, and the public needs to be educated ... SPARC and Great Wall were begun when I was asked to take a look at the concreted-over Los Angeles River site. I concluded that by painting over this eyesore, it could be said that "The Great Wall is a tattoo on the scar where the river once ran." People from different communities and different ethnic groups came together, to work together and spur dialogue in the creation of this mural. What was unique about this process? Ways of knowing: academic research, popular culture imagery, lived experience, collected metaphors, expert and not-so-expert opinions. These were broken down into a series of prisms...age, race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. There was a "visual talk through." The Great Wall production period was 12 years. Over 1000 people worked on the production of the mural.*

Judy shows segments of Great Wall and explains metaphors.

The relationships formed with the kids are unique to this project: SPARC is looking to engage every segment from peer group and family up to federal government, in the relationships with these kids through this mural process. The dialogues from these 80 different sites will result in metaphors and eventually images for the new view of The Great Wall. How do the dialogues at these sites inform The Great Wall? First, they have to add the "prism of place." SPARC has worked in 15 different communities and conducted more than 80 community meetings. SPARC's work does not end with the mural. For instance, with "Sites of Public Memory: The

Prism of Place,” they conducted three case studies: San Fernando Valley, Watts, Caracén. Conducted dialogues in these places...discussion of some on the dialogues and what happened there and issues that were raised. In each of these dialogues, there were issues that were contentious. These images and metaphors, stories about the movements and future of L.A., are the future of The Great Wall.

Case Session: Dell ‘Arte International, *The Dentalium Project*

The Dentalium Project explored the economic impact and cultural and political conflict surrounding the construction of a Native American casino in the small rural community of Blue Lake, California. Dell ‘Arte worked with leaders of the Blue Lake Rancheria nation and the Cascadia Forum, a community building organization, to design and facilitate dialogue forums that explored the community’s responses to living with a casino in its midst. These dialogues informed the creation of a new play, Wild Card, which has reverberated and fed into the broader media and public discourse on the issues related to the casino. In a video documentary produced in collaboration with KEET public television, the project tracked five community members with different points of view about the casino over the course of a year. Video showings planned for fall provide additional focus for dialogue. The session explored implications of recent outcomes of the play, namely that two people are running for city council because of the play, and how the issue is currently shaping community dialogue around upcoming city council elections and recent community planning meetings.

Presenters: Julie Fulkerson (JK), mayor of Arcada, Ferdinand Luis (FL), writer, Kathy DeNobriga (KD), ADI liaison, Arla Ramsey (AR), tribal chairwoman (on tape).

Contextual background: Humboldt is a city of 180,000 people, rural, undeveloped, timberland; 85% white, largest minority is Native American. At least 5 major Native American tribes, within which is the Rancheria. Forced by government, the Rancheria has relied on fishing and timber, which are diminishing. The five tribes are not in agreement, there are issues over money, environmental war, tree sitters, the relationships often get nasty and mean. There is a huge liberal community, where “the 60’s meet the sea,” a “completely green city council,” which has moved further to the left in the last election. The Rancheria is a designation the federal government, which gave it to them, took it away, and then gave it back again. The land is located in-between a sewer and the garbage dump. Now a casino is there.

Dell ‘Arte is 30-year theatre company—physical theatre, ensemble-based, training program, extensive outreach and performances in region and all over; the work is diverse, company members range in age from 25-55.

The Dentalium Project had 3 components: 1) dialogue; 2) documentary; 3) new theatre work (most of the time was spent on this)

Theatrical form is important. The theatre work is outside, as part of a festival—the time of year most visible in the community. It’s a musical, staged as a radio show, broadcasted live...We hired most popular local band.

In satire, you have to make fun of everyone. One failure in the play, it hit everyone including ourselves, ADI, dialogue (pull out blue talking ball scene based on an actual event)...but not the Rancheria. The play was intended as a provocation. We believe it was a success, and will repeat without ADI.

Q: Why are there no Indians in this play? (Asking the question in response to one song in the production, titled “Why There Are No Indians in this Play”)

Arla did not feel comfortable having any of her group on stage. Now that she has seen it, she is re-considering.

The casino opened two days before play, which was an interesting convergence.

Challenges and issues that came up: the Pandora's box of history: genocide goes back hundreds of years, you can't imagine that one project could impact that...Paradigm shift and shift of power: people who have not been in power for hundreds of years are now in power, and people are uncomfortable.

David Rooks, Ogalla Sioux and Critical Perspectives writer, was involved in [the Critical Perspectives meeting] where we had a discussion about the whole issue of including a Native American actor in the Dell 'Arte play. One issue was the level of sheer skill on stage, not a lack of desire to include community on the stage...They are now planning a one year scholarship for a Native American to attend training. So far they have not succeeded, but it's a step in the right direction.

A rancheria is made up of more than one tribe—one has to be Indian and has to be voted into the tribe.

Arla: The group up in Blue Lake...the difference was that they were stakeholders. The actors and company lived there and had their own feelings about the casino. They did a dialogue with their own company, including John Shirley who lives right across from the casino.

The play is set 10 years in future. There is a New York size skyline in background...There is a log truck driver who gets a hernia, leaves for NYC, and becomes a DJ. He goes back to Blue Lake for first time in 10 years to host the anniversary, and can see Blue Lake with new eyes

Viewing of Wild Card video .

We were interested in...experimenting with different approaches and different results. It was a dream opportunity to work with Michael and Dell 'Arte. I have a background in politics and have seen democracy in the best and worst ways. We do leadership training. I think of Dell 'Arte as an equal opportunity insultant—everyone gets blasted, which makes it okay and fun. I feel like there is a lot of power in listening, but the dialogue approach was a challenge because Blue Lake consists of 50 people who are normally left out. There is no incentive for the rancheria people to participate. We had to artfully design the dialogue and know that a theatre piece would arise.

How do you bring people together to discuss, knowing that they could be made fun of on stage? We did some dialogue without theatre people present, did some without the troupe...This was challenging because the troupe did not hear things first hand...Then we did it with the theatre group.

Q: How did you contextualize for participants that the dialogues would be used in the play without the theatre troupe?

Answer: We just drew them in to talk about what change was like in their community.

The struggle became: How do we invite members of the rancheria? How do we make it comfortable for rancheria residents? How do we strike a balance? How do we get a mix of people who have already put things out in public?

It started off with lots of direct interviews based on a tree of names (who knows who). We got a good mix of representation from the community...We were ultimately looking for the opportunity for people to feel comfortable...About democracy: will this make change? One actor ran for City Council and won (another, Alex Rica, also ran but lost). These people were "catalyzed by" the Dell 'Arte project to run for office. This was one really stunning example of

the impact. Another person decided, instead of running, to be on committee. Arla wanted to attend all of the dialogues; two of her sons both went away to college and now work for Blue Lake.

Before, if you graduated from high school on the Rancheria, you were paid 500 dollars. The Rancheria has an approach that is more comprehensive than the City Council.

JF: The Rancheria did try to cooperate with the city regarding the sewer system, but the city tried to use the sewer connection as leverage...There were ongoing tensions...Early on in a community meeting, Arla laid out what was going on...was asked, are you going to hire locals? Only if you pass the drug test?

As an ensemble company, we talk about commitment over time with attention to place; need to commit to long haul. This is part of a thirty year piece of work, and will go on...This project was really close to home for the ensemble, brought up different things for the ensemble; it's literally next door.

FL: I was brought on board to write. I've known Michael for years, since 1991. I've written about Dell 'Arte in a number of different fashions—as an art journalist and critical writer. This project invites writers to challenge themselves to see how the process might of writing about arts based civic dialogue might be different.

We had an extraordinary [Critical Perspectives] meeting in San Francisco. The jumping off point was dealing with "Why there are no Indians in the show." Dell 'Arte went to considerable difficulties to find the right writer, and they were determined to have a Native American writer. They found David Brooks up in the Dakotas, and since, they have become great friends. David now has a relationship with Dell 'Arte. David is the first to say the project was successful, and we wish he was here to say that for himself. He was also the first to say he was angry that the Native voice was not on stage—thematically, the Native voice was not present.

Q: Do you mean that there were no Native themes that represented Native concerns, or that there was not a Native point of view?

Q: I assumed that the perspective of Native Americans was in the show, even in absence of Native American actors...is this correct?

Answer: I actually think there are Native themes in the show, but they were the one group we did not make fun of...That was my fault as a playwright...David said "you know, we are very funny people"...as a writer, I was fearful of making fun of another culture.

The play acts as a microcosm...at the core is the shift of power. White conservatives have not participated, but they are made fun of.

Another part was the pain David felt. ...He loved the play, the evocation of community; but at the same time, felt "my voice is not heard." He asked, how do his people become part of the "we?" He was thinking, how do I start a theatre company?

In other cases, elder Native Americans do not want their voice to be represented by other people...An interesting case is that of the "wind talkers." Not because of patriotism but because Native Americans did not want their land taken over for a second time by the Japanese. This is very recent history recent for California...grandfathers were involved...The rip off of Indians continues to this day.

Going back to Ferdinand...The Indian voice was that they were hurt and didn't want to come back! All sorts of subtle questions that are teased and explored, but not that one...When

Michael said there's distrust on all sides—their region bottomed out economically and suddenly the Native population has all of the money; the towns people were only one half of the argument, now the Indians have the economic side of the argument. It's very provocative. A lot of you work in advocacy, making sure all parties have power to argue their case. That's not the case in Blue Lake, and where that equality lies and where it's going, no one knows. The arc of development is subtle, but it is an arc. It brings up the issue of sustainability—how culture can slow down the arc and speed up the power and the voice. Dell 'Arte has always maintained a connection with Native Americans, but how do they get to the point where they can use humor in addressing the situation?

Bill: “We make the art that we make with communities because we need to work with communities to make the art that we love.” In the divisions we make, I have become a little suspicious and angry when I see hyphens everywhere. We should all be suspicious and proactive in erasing them, but there are times when they are necessary.

The real interaction between arts and community comes out in the long term and not the short term. The utility question is in the short term. I think this project asked the right questions; it risked failure.

Mike: Describes different genres: Theatre of place—place is about the long term, where art begins to inform and infuse culture. It is too much of a burden to accept that one piece can solve these problems, and it is not a fair burden to place on art...The purpose is culture building. That is long term process....

Kathy DeNobriga moderates the last half hour. She asks people to reflect on questions for clarity and other general questions. Questions from the group:

Q: What level of participation did community members have in devising the piece? Is it only the Rancheria policy to only have the chairwoman attend?

Answer: No.

Q: Was the fact that the Indians were not there a self exclusionary choice? Who wrote the play?

If there were Native people participating would there have been more liberty to make fun?

Q: What did you mean by levels of power?

Answer: Referring to advocacy model, encouraging equal power to lead to working out of issues,; used it to describe how unequal the power structure was.

Q: The Rancheria only has 50 people?

In the region, there is a much larger population, but the people of the Rancheria are the ones that built the casino.

Q: I got the sense of disappointment from David Rooks. What was the reaction of the whole community?

Q: I'd like to hear more about the process of thinking about form, hear more about the other ideas....

There wouldn't be room for Native American actors if it was all Dell 'Arte people. That's not an issue here, but an issue for other work we are developing...Because of the style we work in, how do we come with a common ground of style?

Michael describes that to do what they want to do as artists they need to change...It is a slow trusting process.

A point of discomfort, about the native voice: as if it were singular. The great point about the play is the range of opinion shown within the white community. I'm sure there is the same range in Native American voices. How well do you have to know a person to do satire?

This is a fascinating project. It is dealing with such an unusual situation—a minority group that is empowered...it's different. They are doing fine. What is the compelling issue here? What compels you in your work? What can help the white folks become more comfortable with power change and better understand their community? Perhaps that the Native Americans don't need the white folks this time.

A comment on casting: I don't know that the Native cultures are doing just fine. Life is long, and even though the project has a time frame, there is relationship that has opened the door to a continuum of time.

Make sure that the art-making part of it does not get left out of conversation. Laughter as a form of recognition, a physical response to recognizing something in yourself. Arla loved the play, she has an idea for the play...It was what they wanted 18 months ago, but it takes time, and that is the next step...The dialogue process is natural...We were using radio in a rural community where radio is still very powerful...lots of people heard but did not see it.

There is a visioning process; the Rancheria is driving it. Arla is truly interested in there being a full community that she remembers as a child, that is better in every regard...It's an inclusive vision. What can we gain from this? She wants to be part of the community, not separate. But in the long run, using the casino to gain money is a catalyst for saving money. We have the last salmon run—they spawn several times in a lifetime. This is a metaphor for the company—you hope they hatch, maybe not this year, but if you tend the river right eventually you leave something. That's our intent with this work, ultimately, that's the effort...Where do I choose to put my effort? As an artist, the effort came from the art, not from the dialogue...It's different for everyone here. It's a way to take art to another level in terms of how it engages the audience. It comes out of the roots of where they work as theatre artists living in a community.

FL: Everyone sees instability; people are looking for sustainability.

In terms of work changing, is that a typical process? The piece must change because the town has changed—the casino is now open, there are new people in the town.

About artists being separated from dialogue: My interest is having people exchange their stories. This would not have been authentic dialogue if there had been someone taking notes. It is important for people to have a chance to exchange stories. We did not want to do it just for theatre. When we opened, it didn't make that much of a difference. We use satire. In the dialogue, it was clear that the theatre group was not neutral. Even the location of dialogue was important.

Q: What happened to Arla co-facilitating?

Answer: She was great with the project. She didn't have to do anything, but she was truly interested and became more so. At the first dialogue, those people had never had a conversation together. Arla's voice was heard, and she brought people from the Rancheria. Problem solving ended up occurring within the dialogue.

Q: What happened in the dialogue session, how did you get people talking?

It started with simple stories—we asked people to tell the story of their name. This revealed a lot without putting pressure on people.

Q: What opportunities and challenges does the casino bring to all levels? What would allow or create the relationships you would like to have with community?

Basic proposed guidelines: listen to each other, to yourself, the whole, look for patterns, stay curious, slow down...keep thinking... Concept of reconciliation: the project can be about long history; what does it look like to be involved in long term process of reconciliation?

Quotes:

"Learning local issues and getting to know council members fostered an emerging interest in the office which was catalyzed by the mutant vision of a future Blue Lake expressed in Wild Card."

"There were some points in the play that showed the potential for growth that could happen in our town. This is the time to get involved if this town and this way of life mean something to you." –Marlene Smith, City Council candidate

"There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about." -- Meg Wheatley

"Every question possesses a power that does not lie in its answer." –Elie Wiesel

CASE SESSION: Massachusetts Foundation for Humanities, *Imagining Robert*

*The video documentary, *Imagining Robert: My Brother, Madness, and Survival*, is the story of two brothers, Robert Neugeboren, mentally ill for 38 years, and Jay Neugeboren, a prize-winning novelist who has been his brother's caretaker. The documentary is providing local, statewide, and national forums to draw people involved with mental health together—family members, medical personnel, patients, police—and the broader public to explore the impact of chronic illness on families, and how to challenge assumptions and perceptions, stigma, treatment, and delivery of services. As mental illness gains ground as a national health issue, *Imagining Robert* seeks to increase dialogue about issues of mental health outside of a crisis situation and to provide insight into the most intimate personal and public dimensions of the issue. The session showed the film and described different experiments in dialogue approach. Organizers shared inroads made as well as the struggles of engaging people whose perspectives challenge the prevailing ideas in the film, and struggles of working with various bureaucracies and cultures to organize their film-based dialogues.*

Presenters: Larry Hott, Jay Neugeboren, Hayley Wood

Viewing of the film.

Haley Wood (HW): *Discussion of process. Talked about the groups they have been able to reach and those they haven't. For example, one early challenge was trying to plan a screening at a police academy. It seemed as though it would be valuable for recruits because police are often at the front lines of dealing with the mentally ill. It would allow them to understand the depths of the individuals they are dealing with, instead of just seeing "a problem." We were not able to get the police academy to show the film. Other challenges have included learning different ways of talking to and engaging different groups. One screening was at a state house (with legislators, representatives, chair of the mental health caucus, etc.). A question Larry Hott posed after the film to that group was: How much of this is just money—the cost required to support departments of mental health? If we had all the money in the world, what problems would we still have? One response he received: You'd still lack the people and caring. BUT, with money we could adequately pay staff. Another question posed addressed the issue of stigma. People responded: people have fear of those with mental illness, they're afraid to have them around their children. There's a lack of understanding of those who are different. Another response addressed the issue of isolation and a mentally ill individual's relationship to the community. It became clear that this is also class issue. The organization's most successful program was at a small gallery studio that is for people with mental illnesses; it is a place for them to make and show their work. They created an exhibit that included *Imagining Robert* imagery and objects, and also self portraits of mentally ill artists from the community. The themes of isolation and aloneness, of the need for a support system, came out strongly from one dialogue. This dialogue also raised the question of the relationship between the mentally ill and their care providers, and mental health professionals. How much voice is given to the mentally ill and how often are they spoken for?*

Larry Hott (LH): Our real dialogue was with people they brought to the table. All the prep work, getting people to the table, was the hard part. Once the people were there, the dialogue flowed. People came to the table who had never spoken to each other before. They were finally able to confront each other. It resulted in some amazing dialogue.

JN: When I wrote the book, I had no thought about its potential effect on the world. When I started working with Larry, I discovered that when working on a documentary, you don't write a script. The most important thing for me was broadening the reach and affecting change. Affecting policy. I didn't intend to do that...I have found that film can reach an audience that books don't always reach. The film also gives voice to Robert in a way that the book doesn't...to see him is to begin to know him, which cannot happen as well by reading the book. One of the really interesting by-products is that many people are calling and writing and e-mailing to say that they have a sibling, mother, spouse, etc. with a similar story, and these people are asking, "can you help me?" They are beginning to network and find ways for real people to get real help. In large part due to the film, Robert will publish a book. It will contain his diary, poems, and letters. The film has created a certain level of understanding and tolerance that I hadn't foreseen when writing the book.

Questions & Reactions:

Sandy Agustin: I think it is very graceful and gracious that Larry has done this. I feel, however, that Robert should be here in this room. (We are told that often he is present when the film is shown.) I'm wondering how you can comment on the form and subject matter of mental health without getting so drawn into the humanness of the story?

Q: I'm wondering about the sub-story of the relationship with the mother. How often does this get talked about and focused on? *(LH tells him that they'll get back to that.)*

Q: Jay's absence seems very present in the film. We don't get to know Jay as well as we'd like. This leads to a discussion of the issue of caregiver: what do we expect of him, and what are the limits of what should be expected?

MA: I like that the film is about Robert, and not the mental health system. As art and story, it has to leave a lot of questions unanswered and the room to tease them out. I like that it's about life; it's very rich and dignified.

JN: One of the things that has surprised me is Robert's total lack of embarrassment about things in his life and his behavior that most people would be ashamed of. I was nervous about writing certain things, but Robert's attitude was "why not?" The story, with beginning, middle and end, has given validity to Robert's life and has been very therapeutic for Robert. He loves being a movie star! Being made into an object that is readily accepted by the public (a movie) perhaps removes shame from the situation.

Regie Cabico (RC): There's a sense of hope in the film. Jay, what is the catharsis like? Now, where are you and how have things changed since the movie?

JN: It just draws us closer, creates another thing for us to share and to have something to talk about and struggle with together. It allows us to talk together more freely. Since Larry's involvement, Robert has been in an upward arc in his own life...not sure if there's a connection.

Katrina Brown: I appreciated Robert being given the camera. I feel that the portrayal and treatment were very dignified. I noticed my own bias about treating Robert fragilely and

assumed that maybe he wouldn't be able to handle the really heavy stuff...I appreciated that you allowed him to go there. I also appreciated the emphasis on time and the stress of the number of years that have gone by.

Mark Plesent: I was surprised by the hope present in the film. In my own experience with mental illness (my brother), I've never felt hope, and this made an impression. I'm wondering if this film has been used for other families dealing with mental illness.

LH: Yes. It has gone out to the world on its own and other organizations have used it with their own dialogue sessions. It has been very gratifying.

Jeffrey Herrmann: (*Asks Larry*) What didn't make it into the film, what was left on the floor? Because documentary is not reality, but shaped reality.

LH: There were originally some sequences of Jay working with graduate students. We tried to show Jay's normal life, but we decided that this should be only about the two brothers. Also, our budget was so small that I, for the first time ever, shot my own film...I had never picked up a camera before. But we couldn't afford a camera man. As for manipulation: example, the photo studio scene: we planned these shots originally for publicity stills, but then worked the scenes into the film itself and something magical happened. Also, a lot of the narration was written to the picture after the scenes had been shot. We were looking for what was lacking. This was in response to a question, posed by Pat Romney: what can you add to the film that can elicit more dialogue?

Steve Day (SD): Could you contrast the more successful dialogues with those that were less successful?

LH: I wouldn't say that any of the dialogues were unsuccessful, but the best ones brought different people working in mental health together. The least interesting was with the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill. I think it was because everyone was coming from the same perspective and it wasn't anything they didn't already know. They had a great conversation, though, but it was more cathartic than anything else.

BSB: It seems that the national partner for any issue often becomes too much of an advocate and creates a situation that is actually difficult for dialogue.