

Art, Creative Practice, Action, and Leadership

A Next Generation Leadership Alumni Network Cooperative Inquiry

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About the Research Center for Leadership in Action

The Research Center for Leadership in Action (RCLA) approaches leadership as a collective achievement. It supports a shift in attention from leaders to leadership and works with practitioners to build knowledge from the ground up. We conduct practice grounded research on leadership; create customized leadership development programs that emphasize reflective practice and action learning; and create structured opportunities for leaders to come together to explore the complexities of their leadership challenges and collectively advance their work. We do this work across the public and nonprofit sectors in the US and globally. Our partners have included the Ford Foundation, Open Society Institute, Annie E. Casey Foundation, AVINA Foundation, Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, and Accenture. RCLA was launched in 2003 with core support from the Ford Foundation.

About the Next Generation Leadership Alumni Network

A community of 115 leaders who received a Next Generation Leadership award from the Rockefeller Foundation between 1997 and 2002 make up the Next Generation Leadership Alumni Network (NGL). Rockefeller created the original NGL program based on their commitment to building a stronger, more sustainable democracy for the United States in the 21st Century. NGL Fellows are elected officials, nonprofit leaders, business executives and individual activists from around the country working for democracy and social justice. When the active fellowship program concluded in 2002 after five cohorts of 20-24 fellows, the Rockefeller Foundation and the NGL Fellows themselves selected the Research Center for Leadership in Action to administer the NGL Alumni Network to continue building the relationships, knowledge and capacity developed through the NGL program.

The goals of the Alumni Network are:

- To encourage further leadership capacity through reflective practice and the articulation of new knowledge about leadership
- To provide opportunities for the Fellows to regenerate, acquire additional knowledge, resources, relationships, skills, partners and allies to strengthen their work
- To promote and encourage broad participation of the diverse voices within NGL
- To promote democracy and social justice through action and reflection

The NGL Alumni Network incorporates a variety of activities to support the work and professional development of its members, including annual retreats, ongoing network discussions, and 10 collaborative workgroups involving 6-8 NGL Fellows in intense conversations around issues related to their work and leadership practices. These activities seek to create new knowledge and skills for individual fellows and generate knowledge to be shared with the broader field on the dynamics of leadership and social change networks.

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Since 2002, NYU's Research Center for Leadership in Action (RCLA) has fostered collaboration among the NGL alumni "...to create a viable network of practitioners that will boost their professional effectiveness through a series of on-going activities..." (RCLA Web site, 2006). This report seeks to convey the experience of one collaborative group of NGL fellows who met five times from October 2005 to June 2006.

Approaching this Report

The report is divided into four main sections. First, the inquiry is introduced and contextualized. Second, we present the preliminary findings and outcomes from the inquiry. Third, we describe the journey itself by inviting the reader to follow the outline of the experience as it unfolded from October 2005 to June 2006. In the fourth and final segment, the group reflects upon the process and journey. The map of any journey, of course, is not a full representation of the territory. We would invite those interested to engage with the questions and insights raised herein as a way of better experiencing the actual territory.

Cooperative inquiry is a way of working with other people who have similar concerns and interests as yourself in order to understand your world, make sense of your life, develop new and creative ways of looking at things, learn how to act to change things you may want to change, and find out how to do things better.

Peter Reason and John Heron, 1999

There is something inherently difficult about conveying a group's lived experience on paper. When the group's experience represents a cooperative inquiry, where the primary outcome is the development of practical know-how, writing about such ineffable knowing is a tall order. John Heron, in *Co-operative Inquiry: Research into the Human Condition*, anticipated one of our dilemmas in preparing this report:

This thesis about the primacy of the practical in research outcomes does pose a special challenge for university-based researchers surrounded by an academic culture with an entrenched Aristotelian bias in favor of propositional outcomes. For a skill, knowing how to do something, can never be reduced to written descriptions of doing it. Being able to write such a description is no evidence of being able to perform the skill. The only evidence that you have the skill, and have it up to a certain standard of competence, is your demonstration of it. The only skill that can be demonstrated conclusively by writing a research report is the skill involved in writing such reports... Any published

paper descriptive of a skill or skills is going to be partial, an incomplete and ghostly cipher (1996, pp. 34-35).

Annie Lanzillotto conveyed similar thoughts this way, when reading an early draft of this section:

I will speak for myself... As an artist and particularly memoirist who does render life into two-dimensional mediums such as words on paper, I refer to the metaphor my fellow artist Neil Greenberg uses: that the "work of art" in relation to the process of making art is like the "cricket's carcass." He's a videographer, and as we all know, what ends up on the cutting room floor is often of most interest...in the process of making, or in this case writing about a group experience... We honor it as any two-dimensional artwork... (July 13, 2006).

Overview of Forming the Group and Getting Started

Prior to the launch of this inquiry, Cara Page and several collaborators met with other NGL fellows in San Francisco during the 2005 NGL reunion to explore the idea of putting together a cooperative inquiry group. The group wondered, "How are artists valued as political and cultural leaders?" Some felt that the larger NGL alumni group did not value the arts as an integral component of social justice work and activism and had felt somewhat marginalized as advocates for the arts, activists, healers, and practitioners through our art/cultural work and politics during their cohort experience. Gathering this group in San Francisco was exciting and difficult. Some saw it as the first time artists at NGL had come together as a collective. It was intriguing to observe that those who incorporated creative practice, arts, and organizing were not always seen as political leaders. Some members of the group felt that NGL was not a place where the creative process was honored or valued. It was uncomfortable not to have a recognized and more formal creative component of the program. The group desired more intentional mechanisms that allowed for art and creative practices as tools for organizing, conflict resolution, anti-oppression work, community building, and economic development. Though we saw continuous examples and modes of these models, creative process was not attributed as a value to movement building and social change.

Context on Art, Creative Practice, Action, and Leadership

The budding collaborative wrote an initiatory proposal for conducting the CI, providing ideal context for its experience and intentions when launching the group.

Artists inform the process and practice of organizing, leadership development, and social change through their methods of multi-sensory and experiential learning, reflection,

and creative action. We have informed liberation movements by using interdisciplinary ways to create and convey meaning, message, and ideologies. Yet, artists are often not valued as leaders, as decision-makers, in many sectors and are often not called upon to reflect on and influence policy and law. Our skills are often used resourcefully to document an experience; however, they are not necessarily seen as vital resources to the process of theoretical and ideological practice in our liberation movements. Even in the nonprofit sector, artists are marginalized and not often seen as having the capacity to build systems of peace, change, learning, and models of vision and leadership in creating sustainability for our communities.

*In a capitalist society where cultural consumption continues to further commodify art and the artist, our product continues to be more valued than our creative process and leadership role. Most recently, in the academy, 'creative intelligence' is becoming a valued tool for discerning social judgment [and] building leaders and social capital. Howard Gardner, author of *Multiple Intelligences*, identifies 'creative intelligence' as being vital to the ways we think, learn, lead, and participate in our society. The question then remains on how to model our creative voice and practice as integral tools of resistance for systemic change.*

This CI, using interdisciplinary modes of reflection and action, will look at the role of the artist as a practitioner and creative leader and assist the artist/activist in developing ways to engage our political communities to see art as a tool of reflective practice, leadership, and action, not just product—to see the artist as a visionary thinker and leader who informs, creates, and sustains our cultural and political memory and future movements.

Proposal Document, Arts CI Group, Spring 2005

The proposal also explained that “...the alumnae included in this CI reflect a cross section of cultural communities, social change work, and various forms of genre and media (including documentary film, music, photography, performance, and visual arts).” The original group that expressed interest in the idea of the CI group was more racially and culturally diverse than the group that was able to commit to the inquiry in October 2005.

In the end, the group of women represented a variety of artistic practices. There was a playwright, a filmmaker, two visual artists, a theater person, and a multi-disciplinary performer. While each member of the group had an artistic identity, only two of the six participants currently support themselves with their art/cultural work. This raised the question of how you maintain your identity as an artist when art is not your main work and led to framing the inquiry question. Two of the six are people of color, and four call themselves lesbian or bisexual.

Though it is important to herald the artistic process as a tool of documentation and reflection, it is also important to view the creative voice as a tool of leadership and action. This CI would give artists a chance to deepen their practice and in turn facilitate a wider impact on how to more intentionally integrate our modes of expression as tools of decision-making, leadership, and sustainability for our lives and our communities.

Cara, April 2005

SUMMARY THEMES

Imagine a world without painters, just people who paint..

Kathie, for Karl Marx, June 9, 2006

Somewhere amidst work and the war, these creative endeavors seem life saving. I am so thankful for this experience and realizing how influential it has been on wanting to stay true to what I believe in--art and healing breathes life.

Cara, July 30, 2006

As the group moved toward the end of its meeting time, themes were identified that stretch across the arc of the entire inquiry. Cara began a list in Philadelphia that covers a wide range of the experiences. The group has framed the findings and outcomes with these themes:

- **One of Ritual**—Examining the “practices of our lives” as a way to understand what helps to create space, heal us, and remind us of who we are;
- **One of Place**—The importance of place, home, and context;
- **One of Healing**—Connecting creativity, art, activism, and social justice;

- **One of Culture**—The unique and vibrant cultural communities of the South and North, which deeply informed the group’s experience, and the conversation of “legacy values” connected us to the water in which we swim;
- **One of Heart**—As a group grappling with issues of race, poverty, enlightenment, spirituality, conflict, pain, and violence, there was a presence of heart and love that provided a container for exploring these realms openly.

Cara’s words and reflection introduce and frame each theme, followed by more specific findings and outcomes from the entire group. As Kathie put it, in many cases our findings and outcomes included both discovery and insight, alongside “...uncovering the stuff we already know, remembering what we’ve already learned and perhaps forgotten, and uncovering stuff we didn’t know we knew.”

One of Ritual

The group utilized ritual as a way to honor the ancestors, be fully present, and set a context for the importance of the work together.

We visited the Village of Arts & Humanities in a tender part of Philadelphia, entrenched with poverty and still able to emanate life and light. The gift of the ‘village’ was a testimony to how ritual can become the community and become change. The open park and community garden is an unwinding path of community artists using mosaic tile and mural montages as a testimony of grief, life, passages, change, and growth. The unassuming mounds of earth they raised up inside a poor neighborhood to create a space for life and ceremony is moving. You walk into one of the open courtyards and in the center there stands a group of tall sculptural figures gathering, speaking to one another in incantations. For me it paid homage to the grace and royalty of our ancestors. The voice of present, past, and future was loud and swelling from this place, and I was reminded that art can be a place to center, converse with spirit, and call out visual testimony to our own means of survival.

Cara, August 1, 2006

Group Reflections on Ritual:

- Role of ritual in art, activism, and healing, anchoring conversations and experiences;
- The cost to humanity of losing daily practices of ritual and art-making;
- Knowledge that some indigenous cultures don’t have a word for artist because there is no such thing as “not artist.”

One of Place

The group's experience was grounded in seeing individuals and organizations sustaining themselves and transforming their communities when they've been rooted in a particular place and context over time.

A critical space for me to see and understand was Appalshop. Born out of a response to the media distortion of poverty and communities in the Appalachian mountains, this institution became a critical voice for the reflection and manifestation of culture from the people who lived there telling their own truth. It was like a beehive of creation; with technology and music chords vibrating off the window panes, promising a Southern and discordant revolution. You could taste the creative energy flowing and a sense of power in defining 'place' from their own eyes, ears, and throats and from the deep shadows of the coal mines. This cultural institution personifies for me how art can change a people and heal old wounds of shame and unmentionables by reflecting back our truths outside of how others need to claim and judge the Southern experience.



Calling Cambodia by Amy Sanford. See www.laconiagallery.org for further information.

Another way place was demonstrated for me was through the notion of "home." In our last stop, in the fair city of Boston, we met with Amy Sanford, a Southeast Asian woman artist who had unraveled her own legacy of not knowing her home country because she had been displaced by war and imperialism. She imprinted hundreds of tiny pieces of metal to symbolize letters to her family. It was awesome. It was not so much for me her graceful style and exquisite detail in the application of art and installation, but more the provocative way she healed her silence and displacement through voice, touch, and memory.

This reminded me of how art is an action-based way to heal, evolve, and bring voice to the nameless. For me, the quintessential reason why this CI came to be was the need to measure and value how artistic process critically shapes our movements in finding the nuances and identifying the complexities of what moves us to do the work for change. If we do not know ourselves in the work, how will we know when we have achieved transformation?

Cara, August 1, 2006

Group Reflections on Place

- The pivotal nature of the visits to Appalachia and Philadelphia, where there is a mixed and contentious political history of the land. Learning about the South, the world beyond the coasts. What is in the South is more vibrant. How to make the Northeast more vibrant?
- Who are we in the face of poverty? What is our relationship to poverty?
- The challenge, when our ancestors have moved around/conquered others, of having no place where we are not outsiders.
- Sustaining community and the importance of real estate.
- Having cross/regional, interdisciplinary, intergenerational, intercultural, poly-thought experiences that have rooted us in principle, place, and practice.
- Is beauty enough? Art and the economic life of a community. Grappling with the question of who belongs, as in the Philadelphia trip. What does it mean when great art does nothing to transform the community? One friend broke into tears after creating a play. In the end, it didn't save anyone's home. So what good am I as an artist? Sometimes all you can do is bear witness, trust the ripples. If you survive, you can tell the story. Art helps others to tell their stories.

One of Healing

David Arizmendi, an NGL fellow not in this CI group, explained in an April 2006 NGL reunion in Atlanta that the people in his community, the immigrants arriving in this country, could not take advantage of the opportunities before them until they had healed the wounds they had collected over a lifetime. Annie reminded us of this heartfelt expression while we were in Philadelphia, and it helped the group to connect the dots between art and social action.

Many of us lost a close friend or community leader who represented inspiration for our political and cultural work

during the time of the inquiry. Many of us experienced the stresses of work and lack of time, energy, and space to commit completely to our creative work without the daily duties that take us away from our creative selves. Many of us were displaced physically from our homes or struggling with some form of change or transition in our life's work or relationships.

It was a sense of bounded time and experience that brought us together at this intersection of all of our lives, from different regions, backgrounds, cultural experiences we descended on a journey that allowed us the mental, intellectual, spiritual, and physical space for real and proverbial hugs, reflection, and quiet time for healing inner guilt, shame, and challenges around our work and careers. For me, I was inspired by all of our actions to learn and grow in our capacities to really do what we say we will do to live a more holistic, creative, passionate, and political life. This manifested for me personally when I pursued a grant for my artistic work and applied to graduate school for an MFA. Though I did not receive either one, I was gently guided by our collective team to keep trying and still believe in myself as an artist, healer, and cultural worker.

Cara, August 1, 2006

Group Reflections on Healing

- Connection to art and activism.
- Staying engaged, energized, while dealing with illness, burnout, etc.
- Creativity is a practice that every indigenous culture uses for healing and transformation and ritual.
- Accountability and self-care—how do we demand the first and support people in the second?
- Allowing ourselves to be creative art beings, for self-expression AND social change.
- Healing from within—how do we accept healing for ourselves?
- Healing as a two-part process: self and community.
- Finding the “gem self” definition: Finding what shines within, a term introduced to us by the Carpetbag Theater.
- Meeting the “shadow self” with grace and compassion.
- Dealing with limitations of consciousness and commitment. It is quite finite. It pushes, and we push back. We become the leavening to the

bread, the process. In order to be an activist, you need to sustain yourself for the long haul. What are the forces that push back?

One of Culture

Many of the places we visited were in the South, whether by pure coincidence or necessity for our group of six (many of whom had roots in the South, whether the Southeast or Southern Italy). The culture of the South is one of beauty and ever-evolving ability to rise up from the ashes like a phoenix. I have lived here for the past eight years and still unfold the truths of legacies in this deep red soiled earth and its memory of pain, strife, struggle, and freedom. The places we visited held culture like a seed on the tongue, as if swallowing each face and place would grow a deeper love in my belly for the South's cry of evolution and change. One of the sites we visited, The Highlander Center, sits atop a hill in Tennessee, with spirits still speaking about the crisis of poverty and apartheid in the US. It is a monumental place of grassroots history and stories, as one of the few spaces where community activists of black and white ancestry could come together to integrate their strategies toward working against segregation and working toward a better humane life in the Southeast. Here, the hallowed halls promised secrets exchanged between the Rosa Parks and the Martin Luther Kings, and the Candie and Guy Carawans. It is a place of ancestors. We met with many creative voices there, and it was most harrowing to listen to the change the wind speaks on its hillside.

Cara, August 1, 2006

Group Reflections on Culture

- Transforming legacy values, with which we were born, into conscious intentions.
- Legacies we choose to leave.
- How to make our work obsolete.
- Charismatic leadership versus shared leadership, and the implications for legacy.
- Legacy as cultivating a place and sense of belonging.
- Ambivalence toward power was a real subtext throughout. The group had an uneasy relationship to power, starting with its relationship to RCLA. What constitutes leadership versus ego.

One of Heart

The heart seemed to provide the container for the work the group did together, covering the wide swath of terrain necessary to encompass love and death, beauty and justice, pain and healing.

The discourse between us was as much as a group of philosophers and political leaders as of artists. We were an unlikely cast of characters grappling with issues of race, poverty, enlightenment, spirituality, identifying the difference between healing and ritual, the exponential impact of never ending wars, and vast notions of transformation in our lives. We expounded on concepts of religion, political sacrifice, death, violence, abuse, geography, censorship, institutional control over artistic vision, and so on, with sometimes clear goals to achieve greater things (e.g., Liz starting an independent filmmakers advocacy and support group in her new home in Vermont; Annie challenging the divide between institutional ethics and humanity; Kathie's exploration of the critical voice of community through the mechanism of legislative theater; Pam's manifesting her quilts and plays as a cultural framing of her work at Highlander; Timothea's unabashedly transparent philosophies of life—that should all be on tape—and Doug's persistence in showing us that the process “...will always make meaning.” It already has.)

The symbol of a heart, introduced by Doug, resonated for me in how I will explain this time we put aside for critical reflection and standing still in this small community of fascinating “full of soul” folk to welcome the opportunity of listening to what brings us joy and light as artists, healers, philosophers, activists, and cultural workers and asks of myself not to succumb to my critics but live inside of my will to create and be the change I believe can happen.

Cara, August 1, 2006

Group Reflections on Heart

- Intersection of Beauty and Justice. Is beauty enough? We saw beauty in Philadelphia but didn't feel the justice so it was diminished in our

eyes. Beauty is laden with political and social judgments. Everyone has a right to beauty, a beauty rooted in justice, not leaving political and economic justice aside. Beauty is not devoid of values.

- Art as inseparable from leadership and social activism. How did we end up with anti-arts leadership? I'm talking about living the integrated practice, not the wound of separation. Artists as conduits who bring this all together. Artists as interweavers.
- Art as creative practice for justice and healing.

SUMMARY OUTCOMES

Tools to Share

- **Sunshine/Shadow Power.** This was a tool introduced by Kathie deNobriga to look at dynamics of power in our individual and communal lives.
- **Process of Checking-In.** The group appreciated the importance of communicating one another's unfolding experiences over months, that is, of witnessing each other's lives over time.
- **Creating a Container through CI.** The process of being in a CI group helped us to understand better what it takes to create an environment where arts for social change can flourish. Meeting regularly over the months and witnessing each other's lives provided us with a social change artists/cultural workers' support group of sorts. We were able to help each other to achieve goals, problem solve, share resources, and remind each other of the importance of our work. In order for the arts to flourish in a culture that does not provide much institutional support, these kinds of groups are necessary to maintain an artist's sense of wellbeing.
- **Generation Five Anti-Violence Training.** This refers to a new training, which Cara introduced to the CI group, by the Generation Five organization (www.generationfive.org). It works toward "...interrupting and mending the intergenerational impact of child sexual abuse on individuals, families, and communities." Cara found their transformative justice (TJ) framework tool to be incredibly holistic for body/mind and spirit.
- **White Supremacist Awareness.** An article was introduced by Kathie, written by activist and friend Tema Okun, which looks at white allies working against racist oppression in their communities and how white supremacist cultural habits can be present in organizations of color.
- **Sense of Place and Big Impact.** Arts organizations that have a strong sense of history and deep connection to the place where they are

located have longevity and impact. For example, Appalshop (KY) is a 35-year-old, nonprofit, multi-disciplinary arts and education center in the heart of Appalachia. They are dedicated to supporting and enriching their local culture through the creative acts of telling and listening to the stories of their own community. Their nurturing a deep sense of home and place has enabled them to reach an international audience with their work while having a meaningful effect on their own neighborhood. The best places have a strong sense of history.

- **Shared Leadership/facilitation.** Paper Tiger TV taught us about the importance of shared leadership in artistic groups. Paper Tiger Collaborative is a media collective that has been in existence for over 25 years. They attribute their longevity in part to their structure. Every month, a different member of the collective takes on the role of facilitator. They all have the opportunity to lead the group and thus feel a deeper sense of shared ownership.
- **Cultural Legacy.** This means visiting and learning from models that are steeped in cultural work and artistic practices that are shared throughout this report.
- **Tools for Communication.** Through some of the CI process, we looked at ways artists/activists and cultural workers needed more integral tools in conflict/resolution and communication that do not perpetuate the same oppressive paradigms of power.
- **Validity Procedures.** The CI process introduced validity procedures that could be helpful to any group function where authenticity is needed for doing the work.

Making Meaning of Action

Below are “gem phrases” from conversations and experiences:

- What does it mean to be an experienced artist?
- How do you stay in your practice?
- Taking ourselves seriously and being with other people who do.
- The importance of process and how in some ways it is more important than the product.
- See this CI as studio space, and much like a turtle, take it on our backs.
- Heard the urgency of time and made me think about being realistic about the kind of change we are talking about; maybe part of our practice should be the imperative to be more clear.
- Models of intergenerational organizing as it relates to claiming our power and creating respected space.

- Dynamic tension between nimble and flexible, allowing us to take advantage of the opportunity as well as the need for structure and discipline.
- Conflict between making the work and organizing the work.
- Emotional conflicts that get in the way of the work.
- Strengthening self-image through story and culture.
- Looking at relationships between art and social change; social action is balancing that which is lived within a context.
- Collaboration is not about working together but rather a spiritual parallel universe framed by common experience.
- Our own personal struggles about how we exercise power.
- Moving from viewing power as simply destructive but reclaiming its most positive sense.
- Artistic power is claiming excellence on the range of things I can do in the range of what I have and expect.
- Social change and culture. Highlander has a full-time cultural worker on staff, and culture is integrated into all of its social change programs. At Appalshop the whole organization is a cultural center.
- How to maintain tradition and expand to include more people?
- Who is waiting for us? Who wants to speak to us? Who wants to seek and find us? Who is longing to hear our voice of hope that another world is possible? By not doing our work, people can't find us.
- The search for perfection prevents the embracing of the good.
- It's not what you do but who you are.
- The only way we will win is to tell a better story.
- Mountain top removal, the natural world, and the genius of industrial design—sometimes design ends up far removed from the original practice.

Tangible Outcomes/Actions/Next Steps

- **Building Community with Art and Social Action:** A month after our last meeting, Timothea reported that she was organizing a collage-making weekend workshop that focused on legacy, values, and sorting out our best practices, a workshop whose creation, she felt, was directly related to her participation in the CI. "If I hadn't done the CI, I wouldn't be doing the collage weekend or establishing the artist's network. People see us out making our art. We need to be out, not closeted, about being artists. We are asking, 'What does our organization need to look like to make this happen?'" (July 13, 2006). Kathie noted how interesting it was that, "...so many of us are creating clusters of people in dialogue about getting together as artists." Timothea emphasized

the importance of external networks like NGL. “When I get really stuck, I don’t call people at work; I call my friends at NGL” (July 13, 2006).

- **Continuing the Journey:** Liz and Annie are working on a proposal to continue the journey of inquiring into: *How can I claim my own power as an artist/cultural worker, and in that, help create more vital and respected space for artists and cultural workers in society in general, and in the work for social change in specific?* Several members have mentioned how the inquiry has only just begun.
- **Humility:** As Timothea said, “Helping children find their voice doesn’t help keep people from getting evicted.” Holding the ambiguity of the work they do and its connection and disconnection to issues like poverty, gentrification, class struggles, and racism requires ongoing humility, reflection, and action.
- **Liz and the Community Center:** Liz, as a result of the visits to Highlander (TN), Appalshop (KY), Hopscotch House (KY), and other exemplary organizations, has provided leadership to a community arts organization that is now exploring the idea of buying a building as part of its planning for a community arts center. It was clear that part of what has led to the longevity of Highlander, Appalshop, and Hopscotch House was the ownership of their own buildings. This has allowed them to generate income through renting out space and stay afloat when most other nonprofit groups have been put into financial jeopardy or forced to close due to skyrocketing rents. These organizations also have a deep commitment to their communities, which has helped them to maintain their health. Drawing on lessons learned from these site visits, Liz has been advising a local arts group on how to expand, buy a building, and become more self sufficient down the road.

1. WEEKEND ONE—NEW YORK

The group’s first meeting took place in New York City, home base for RCLA. The six members of the group were joined by CI facilitator Dr. Elizabeth Kasl. After an opening dinner at the hotel, the group met to learn about the CI process. Each CI member was asked to bring two or three objects that best described what brings them to their work as an artist and activist. Convening Thursday night, Timothea was unable to be there. The group immediately explored what the CI process had to offer, discussed confidentiality, and committed to speaking about what was happening in the group to integrate horizontally and vertically, that is, to push toward integration—and not compartmentalization—as artists.

The initial check-in in New York was an important moment for the group, as members shared what was most important to them in their lives and why they had chosen to join such a group.



Notes from the Group Journal, New York, October 2005

After checking in, the group spoke about why they felt interested in the inquiry topic. The sharing of each person’s story was important, in that these stories and the talking about the objects people brought—personal photographs, materials from people’s work, quilting, a camera, pottery—led into the longer stories of their life and why they were there.

1. Kathie spoke about the integration of the personal, civic, and artistic. Kathie joined the group when it was forming and when she saw who else would be there.
2. Liz described how her reason to come was about politics, the election, women’s wages, globalization, sustaining the work, and maintaining political will.
3. Pam talked about the intersection of arts, race, and politics and introduced the term “cultural worker,” which the group used in addition to the word artist. She described how white folks trade their souls for privilege.
4. Annie described a sense of impotence, not being able to get things done, and the need for spiritual renewal. “NYU gave us funding to let the ritual grow. I’m there for the other people in the circle.”

5. Cara spoke of creating art as a healing and spiritual practice and described the healing/survival of emotional and physical abuse as a child. Using ritual in social change work.

Site Visits

The group brainstormed inquiry questions before heading out for a site visit to the Paper Tiger Collaborative, where they learned how the collaborative has been sustained for more than 25 years <http://www.papertiger.org/>. They met with Denisse Andrade, who had been part-time on the staff for three years. Denisse explained, “People in the collective came there because they liked the way it was. We didn’t come wanting to change it—we liked the collectivity.”



Photo courtesy of Deep Dish Television.

Paper Tiger shares office space with another organization, Deep Dish TV Network. Elvira Englan, the office manager of Deep Dish, and Brian Drolet, board member of Deep Dish, also met with the CI group. As Kathie explained, “Deep Dish tries to speak to people’s brains and souls at the same time.”

Twenty Years of Deep Dish Television!

Deep Dish TV (as in parabolic and apple or pizza pie) is the first national satellite network, linking local access producers and programmers, independent video makers, activists, and other individuals who support the idea and reality of a progressive television network. While commercial networks present a homogenous and one-dimensional view of society, Deep Dish thrives on diversity. Instead of television that encourages passivity, Deep Dish distributes creative programming that educates and activates.

www.deepdishtv.org.

Our visit closed with questions to help identify issues. “We are an over-educated and under-skilled people. How does each generation learn over time? The progressive movement has less institutional memory.”

On Saturday, the group reserved time to create “artist’s space” and spent four hours working together. Several CI participants commented later that “creating that space for art in NY” was more successful than any other time in the CI process. Making space for art was a constant tension in which the group lived.

Bring elements and materials of your arts practice into the room. Large paper, markers, fabric, music, video, Web technology, song, chant, recitation, meditation... We will practice, improve, and play together. Then we will reflect on what happened.

Pam reflected:

As a former trophy-winning athlete in five different sports who went through some kind of weird performance anxiety in her last year of competitive softball, I was a bit hesitant in joining some of the free flow movement that was happening in our morning session. Elizabeth, as facilitator, somehow sensed this and with a smile pitched me a set of juggle balls. It was much easier for me to juggle than to dance up there in those windows visible from the street. I will always remember and appreciate that moment.

Kathie remembered that morning as “...what was most satisfying—singing, free writing, toning, etc. It helped connect the relationship between hearts and healing—artists work with people in trauma—and being honest about who you are helping. Wrestling with that relationship between arts and healing.”

Developing the Inquiry Question

After the site visit and stories, the group paused to reflect upon themes thus far, before formulating the inquiry question. Themes that arose in New York included:

1. Violence, rhythm and survival.
2. Reclaim the joy in the work. Moved by Denisse’s love for Paper Tiger, the group was reminded of the importance of remembering joy, which was a strand that moved through each of the weekend gatherings.
3. Everyone has a desire to make more art in their lives.
4. Role for artists is to help make change. We share the fear and horror of the country’s direction

5. Function and form. Be creative to hold institutions together and get our work out into the world. Be sustainable, as Deep Dish and Paper Tiger so aptly demonstrated.
6. How to compile our work and bring it back to the center.
7. “Holding back” like when Cara didn’t ask all the questions she wanted to ask at the site visits.

The question that emerged on the final day of the New York gathering seemed to encapsulate many of the issues, tensions, and ideas that had been named during the weekend:

How can I claim my own power as an artist/cultural worker, and in that, help create more vital and respected space for artists and cultural workers in society in general and in the work for social change in specific?

Highlights of New York

One strand of the experience that stretched across the entire year was the issue of sustainability. In asking, “How can I claim my own power... [and] help create more vital and respected space for artistic cultural workers?” the group was deeply impressed along the journey to find social change and social justice organizations that had been around a long time and had somehow figured out how to sustain their movements across generations and decades. The first kernel of this insight came in New York when the group met with Deep Dish and Paper Tiger. Because the organizations had had the foresight and resources to secure their real estate future by ownership, Deep Dish and Paper Tiger had a degree of self-sufficiency and control of their destiny that had helped sustain their work over the past 25 years. The importance of this theme carried forward throughout the inquiry. Liz, as a result of the visits to Deep Dish and Paper Tiger (NY), Appalshop (KY), Hopscotch House (KY), and other exemplary organizations, has provided leadership to a community arts organization that is now exploring the idea of buying a building as part of its planning for a community center. The seed was planted and began to unfold as the inquiry went forward. Self-sufficiency and control of destiny became more clear as the inquiry progressed, a direct result of the first visits in New York and the visits to come with Appalshop, Highlander, and Carpetbag Theater.

Reflecting back, Annie added:

The intimate [kick-off] dinner at La Luncheonette...was opulent and healing. Eating well and healthy and with class started us off on a great foot for conversation. Respect. Honor. Celebration. These are words that come to

mind. We had the resources to invite Sofia Quintero, a member who couldn't join our group because of her book tour priority, and this dinner with her was significant for me, since she was at a great success point in her career as a writer.

2. WEEKEND TWO—TENNESSEE AND KENTUCKY

The weekend in Kentucky and Tennessee was an important one for Pam, as the group visited both her workplace and her homeland:

The second CI weekend was held on somewhat home terrain for me as a lifelong Kentuckian, who had lived in the southeastern mountains and was now living and working at Highlander. I was struck by the immense legacy of both organizations around culture and both having started in economically impoverished communities. The inter-generational sharing with the Carawans, with an over 40-year history with Highlander and Civil Rights Movement songs, to the hip-hop sharings with Highlander's current cultural organizer Tufara Muhammad, was potent. The conversations with Donna Porterfield and Herb E. Smith are notes I continue to go back to. Cara's ancestors' piece that she shared at Appalshop was an inspirational moment that stays with me.

It turned out to be the only weekend when everyone was able to attend. The group welcomed Timothea into the circle and spent time providing context for what Tim had missed in the initial weekend.

Site Visits

The group first gathered at the Beck Cultural Exchange Center in Knoxville, for *Remembrance, Reflection and Action*, a commemoration event of the 50th anniversary of the day Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus, sparking the Montgomery Bus Boycott and helping ignite the modern Civil Rights Movement. Pam spoke at the event, and was also one of the organizers, representing Highlander, an organizational cosponsor. The event closed with a reading, songs, and a candlelight vigil around a '50s era school bus.

We had dinner in Knoxville following the event and traveled to Highlander to settle in at the newly renovated Horton House. The Highlander Center (www.highlandercenter.org) was founded in 1932 to serve as an adult education center for community workers involved in social and economic justice movements. The goal of Highlander is to provide education and support to poor and working people fighting against poverty and to achieve economic, racial, and environmental justice. Since the beginning, Highlander has

integrated cultural work into all aspects of its programming, including employing a staff person as a cultural organizer.

The next day, after reporting on our actions, we had a workshop with Linda Hill and Linda Parris-Bailey of Carpetbag Theatre, an African American theater ensemble in Knoxville, Tennessee. Carpetbag helped us meet and share our “gem selves” with others, to say out loud with others those things that make us special, unique, and peculiar. They taught us a song, “I Got It, I Got It, Let Me Tell You About the Time I Got It,” as a reminder, a way to reflect and evaluate on our collective work.

They introduced the idea of a “cultural toolbox” and asked us to share what we were learning from each other pertaining to our core question. They talked about collecting things for their cultural toolbox. You need vision (what you see), action/practice (what you do), and source (where it comes from). People talked about best practices that lead toward your vision.

“The only way we will win is if we tell a better story.”

Shared by Linda Parris Bailey quoting Bertholt Brecht

“Love analysis is knowing the pieces and why.”

Linda Hill

We prepared and enjoyed a dinner at the Horton House with Guy and Candie Carawan, Tufara Waller Muhammad, and other members of the Highlander staff. The Carawans are singers and cultural workers who have been active in the Civil Rights Movement since its beginning and have over a 40-year relationship with Highlander. Muhammad is Highlander’s current cultural organizer. Following dinner, we shared songs in a generational mix from the Civil Rights movement to today’s hip-hop.

On Saturday, we had an early departure to Appalshop (KY). The route took us through the Cumberland Gap and the coalfields of Eastern Kentucky, where we continued sharing about the work we did during our last actions.

Appalshop is a nonprofit, multi-disciplinary arts and education center in the heart of Appalachia, producing original films, video, theater, music and spoken-word recordings, radio, photography, multimedia, and books.

Appalshop's education and training programs support communities' efforts to solve their own problems in a just and equitable way. Each year, Appalshop productions and services reach several million people nationally and internationally.

Appalshop is dedicated to the proposition that the world is immeasurably enriched when local cultures garner the resources, including new technologies, to tell their own stories and to listen to the unique stories of others. The creative acts of listening and telling are Appalshop's core competency.

www.appalshop.org

We met at Appalshop with Donna Porterfield, managing director of Roadside Theater, which started in 1975. No one was trained in theatre but all felt a good story was a great tool, so people looked at their own traditions including storytelling, music, and dramatic indigenous church services with call and response. Roadside Theatre plays to working class and poor people in Whitesburg, and it tours nationally to varied audiences, including the Zuni tribe, with which it has a 26-year tribally sanctioned relationship.

“Tell your own story, because if you don’t tell it, someone else will, and they won’t get it right.”

Donna Porterfield

We then met with Herbie Smith, a filmmaker and co-founder of Appalshop. Smith shared his current film project, a meditation juxtaposing images of mountaintop removal with the words from a September 11th essay by Wendell Berry. In 2005, the largest annual coal yield ever was produced in the U.S. with the least amount of manual labor.

Some of the staff who started Appalshop are now in their 50s, and Appalshop is in the beginnings of an important and intentional, self-initiated three-year, generational transition project. When asked what core things about Appalshop he hoped would survive, Herbie Smith reflected:

I believe culture is really important. We often get mixed up in public policy issues of the day, and I care about all that—but I think those things are relatively temporal, and the way we see ourselves as people and our connection to the place and our culture is even more important than those things. If you start, and you and your people aren’t up to snuff, then it doesn’t matter about the dam or whatever because you are already coming from a place of weakness.

And that is a serious issue here. I don’t know if we can counter all the Hollywood bunk about us, but we can help how people

think about themselves. So I hope Appalshop remains a center that documents the history and culture of Appalachia and keeps closeness to everyday people.

On our last day together, we met at Appalshop to complete the sharings of our individual actions and then integrate the experience of individual actions with our cumulative experiences of being at Highlander and Appalshop. We created tentative statements that summarized growing insights about art, action, and leadership. We started the validity process. We discussed the theme of sustainability, with Appalshop at age 30 and Highlander at 75, each maintaining a big, sustained impact and grounded in its physical space.

We decided on actions that each group member would take during the months of December, January, and February. We reflected on the weekend's experience with the intention of providing guidance for the next planning team.

Highlights from Tennessee and Kentucky

- The Rosa Parks Event.
- Staying at the Horton House, where we lived, worked, and ate food we had prepared together in a retreat space with a view of the Great Smoky Mountains.
- Being at Highlander.
- Workshop with Carpetbag.
- The evening cultural sharing time with the Carawans and Tufara.
- The drive to Appalshop.
- The conversation with Donna Porterfield.
- The video by and conversation with Herb E. Smith.
- The barbecue on the way to the airport (Dog House).
-

3. WEEKEND THREE—LOUISVILLE AND HOPSCOTCH HOUSE

“My internalized self-image (Appalachian, poor, etc.) gets in the way of me “claiming my power.” Once we get burned by power, like a hot stove, we cut ourselves off from cooking. I just realized how much I had to put away to walk in the world. When I go to Louisville foundation meetings, I think people are still thinking about me as poor.”

*Judi Jennings, Executive Director
of the Kentucky Women's
Foundation*

One of the themes that had emerged from the first two gatherings was about legacy, as the organizations with which we met had sustained many decades of service over a changing social justice landscape. The seeds of legacy had been planted within the group, and the Hopscotch House provided a perfect venue to explore the concepts of legacy, legacy values, and having a vision for the legacy that these leaders hoped to offer in their work and lives.

Meeting in Louisville, Kentucky, in February of 2006, Doug joined the group for the first time and met the group at Pam’s house. There was a sense of, “How will this new person fit with the group?” Doug reflected back on the moment, “To stand shoulder to shoulder with these women artists and activists...seemed audacious. It was an honor to be there.”

It had already been a wild day. Annie arrived first and helped to coordinate the unfolding events. She learned that Timothea was not going to be able to join us due to issues with her mother’s health, and Pam, our host in Louisville, had just been in a serious car accident and was still at the emergency room. Luckily, everyone was fine, and the weekend progressed as planned.



Hopscotch House, a project of the Kentucky Women’s Foundation and our group’s home for the weekend.

Highlights from Hopscotch House

Instead of doing a typical site visit, the visit to Hopscotch House worked more as a retreat center, where the group’s inquiry could go deeper.

Creating Space for Art

Annie presented almost a case study for the challenge of making space for art. She was involved in a professional and life situation that combined so much of what the group's inquiry was about. In telling her story, Annie felt she was utilizing all of the skills she had learned from NGL over the past five years. She asked, how do we create space for radical art in progressive but predominantly white institutions? In coping with a volatile situation where jobs were on the line, Annie said to the group, "I need your skills out there. I need you with me."

Annie: "The program is a real success, but it is now under attack. There's no interim discussion, just crisis. The country needs this program, which is a combination of divinity and arts." The group engaged Annie's dilemma on a practical, emotional, and spiritual level, while also playing devil's advocate. Kathie asked, "Check the Sunshine laws about having meetings in the open [if the administration is operating in secret]—and have the women under attack by the administration that contributed to the situation?"

Along different lines, members of the group agreed with Kathie when she commented, "My work as an artist is in a sidecar." Pam responded, "My work as an artist is in a sidecar too—it's the story of my life." Cara saw her application to art school as a way to make space and time for her next artistic work.

Exploring Legacy and Legacy Values

The idea of legacy was central to the women's work and self-discovery from their first meeting in New York. The time at Hopscotch house only deepened this aspect of the inquiry. Cara, quoting Alice Walker, talked about artists as those who witness the genius in everyone. "If I want to be true about my work, I need to ask, what's my legacy?"

Judi Jennings, filmmaker and Executive Director of the Kentucky Women's Foundation, joined us for dinner on Friday night at the Hopscotch House. Judi spoke of legacy values as the ones you are born with. Her example was that in growing up poor, she doesn't have an easy feeling of generosity with money, even though she now runs a foundation that gives money to others. "Legacy values I want to keep include my fierce dedication to Kentucky," she said. She also told us about her experience at the Shannon Leadership Institute (www.wilder.org/382.o.html), where she learned a great deal about her legacy values in a short time.

Kathie added another perspective on legacy with her description of an ongoing conversation a foundation sponsored with its grantees. "Our Babcock grantee meetings focused on succession, legacy, and passing the torch. What is it we think we're passing on? This is the eighth or ninth year of this meeting, and every year I see how the arts are essential to learning and social change."

Exhaustion, Busy-ness, and Renewal

Cara: Many artists don't see their work as a spiritual practice and a healing practice. I want to do healing work around violence. Where do artists/activists go when they get really tired, as in the folks working in and around Katrina?

Kathie: Post-traumatic stress in the Gulf Coast, 100,000+ people impacted, years of collective trauma. Need to be trained in Post Traumatic Shock treatment.

Pam: Was not sure I was going to be able to do this weekend, even yesterday. I spent the last two years working away from home, straddling two states. I need spiritual grounding and miss friends who have known me a long time, that ease of not needing to talk. Friendship with staff is complicated. There is a feeling isolation in my new role. The accident was a crash waiting to happen, around my needing to get grounded. In hearing Pam check in, Cara and Annie inquired into just how vulnerable Pam was feeling, and what kind of support she needed. Pam responded, "I'm not critical, but I need tending to."

Early on, Cara was making the explicit connection between healing, art, and social change that would be such a central theme of our trip to Boston in June.

Cara: I am feeling settled. This is one way I believe that healing happens. I need to start with my own testimony and life experience.

Reflecting on the CI Process Midstream in the Inquiry: Reporting on Prior Actions

As an example of how the participants engaged and reflected upon their actions, the following samples are included from the third weekend at Hopscotch House.

Kathie described her actions as more concrete and outcome-based (doing a series of workshops on legislative theater, finding and reading a book, rewriting a piece, and scheduling a performance) instead of cultivating intentional daily practice. She found something unsatisfactory about her concrete actions. Without a daily practice, a lot of her work and "big hairy audacious goals" haven't developed discipline and sustainability.

Kathie: "[In thinking about the question] I've come to understand at first that it was something external to me—an exercise of power—but I now think it's not about that at all. It's about exercising that power internally, creating space, like the Gandhi quote, 'Be the change you wish to see in the world.' It's an internal shift that is supported by external structures." The example she gave was of working out, once she got started by paying a trainer and setting a schedule, she had the energy for it. Internal change from the inside out and outside in.

Pam commented that “Civil rights law got started like that, where the law provided the external structure even when we weren’t ready for it as a nation.”

Liz asked Kathie what she wanted from change, and Kathie replied, “A clarity of intention around how I want to live as an artist. What is my artistic life? Is it collaborative? My best creative work, the Babcock conferences, is not my work at all. I love the feeling and power of solo-performance; even though I haven’t done much of it, I have been encouraged to.” Kathie spoke of reclaiming the power that comes from solo performance. Cara asked, “What does it mean to be the center of attention?” Kathie replied, “terrifying...and to be flooded with a sense of power...” We then spoke of sunshine and shadow power, which Kathie handed out to people in Boston. Kathie finished by wondering about what new actions to set to support that kind of shift toward creating space. “I get caught up in the form. The answer is to start writing. Maybe like Pam I should do daily writing.” Cara pointed out that Kathie has the challenge of moving from a director’s mindset to that of a performer. Cara and Liz then brainstormed practices that promote writing on a regular basis.

Liz reported that she was “being more creative more of the time” in that she was working hard to finish work while also involved in organizations like the Upper Valley Producer’s Group and helping another important independent film nonprofit raise money to be sustainable. Along these lines, Liz asked for some practical advice on how to manage the situation, and the group readily and creatively brainstormed different ideas and approaches.

Cara felt a tremendous release having applied to art school and was proud of her artist’s statement. She also made progress on connecting her artistic vision of organizing with healing; she will be attending an anti-sexual violence and transformative justice workshop in Atlanta with Generation Five. Another of her actions was to move forward with Men Stopping Violence in Atlanta on a project called Because We Have Daughters. She was invited to be guest artist-in-residence in the first session to build something creative for fathers talking with daughters about violence. She entered this process with her own questions about the role of leadership and as an artist/activist that works for healing and challenging systems of family and communal violence and trauma.

From Cara’s work as ED of an international network against population control, she is thinking more about art projects that show the relationship between scientific racism (eugenics) and immigration policy, criminalization of communities of color, etc. It brings together the use-of-science, spirituality (who controls life), queer bodies, etc. She sees her struggle against eugenics as part of her anti-violence and healing work. One inspiration is the way the Indigenous Nations Against Bio-Colonialism uses art to display the correlation of genocide and scientific technology.

In joining Generation Five (www.generationfive.org and http://nycagainstrape.org/survivors_factsheet_series_13.html) for the workshop in May, Cara was invited as both an artist and activist.

Pam's original two actions after the first gathering in New York relate to her intention for being a part of the group. "I've always had this artist's side and have helped to make much art happen, but not my own. Organizing was always on the front burner." Her actions were: "...to have six heartfelt conversations with people who know me well about the above conundrum and write for 30 minutes three times a week."

I got hired at Highlander and didn't do [the actions]. Shifted the writing action to 10 minutes, writing more frequently. I did schedule time with Judi, and it was quite painful. She felt I had missed some opportunities (being on the farm, working only part-time). I was grateful she shared this disappointment. It was hard but helpful. I was surprised by Judi's disappointment and understood how it came from a place of her knowing how hard it is for activists to make time for their art. It took our relationship to a deeper level.

I want to finish my "Bette" play, but I'm not in a place to write a lot. SONG took me on the road, so I was glad to be more local in 2002 and 2003. Whenever I've been writing and productive, I've done it on retreat. In my play, I started writing stories, then used Post-It notes to organize them. When I left SONG and moved to the farm, I thought I didn't need to go on retreat because I lived in retreat. Now, I live in two places, but I don't have a space with my stuff. I need to create a space at Highlander.

My politics are radical, but I'm square. I don't fit in with artistic clothes, trendy, hip, etc. Watching my play drive all of this action was satisfying. Writing a true story was painful. In rehearsals, I had to disappear awhile. It was power and vulnerability. I put my family out there. The next play I write, I wanted to make it up. Then Bette asked me to write her story, and since she died, it's become another death/dying story.

The group then brainstormed with Pam about ideas for creating space for herself--creating an altar, going on retreat, taking a playwriting class, envisioning an audience, coping with further isolation and even playing devil's advocate with the idea that she had to write a play. "You don't miss your water until the well runs dry" was an adage Kathie shared to remind everyone of the importance of renewal. It is interesting to note that, due to the unusually cold temperatures and snow that weekend, the Hopscotch House actually ran out of water Sunday morning! (Perhaps the universe was adding an exclamation point to Kathie's adage about water and the well?)

Writing is pretty isolating; that is the solo act. I want to try the daily writing—Judi suggested a three minute egg-timer. I'm not trying to work on a finished piece, but to write what is churning.

Pam, February 18, 2006

Actions after Hopscotch House

The actions chosen each weekend for the next stage of the inquiry emerged from dialogue and learning from prior actions. The group chose to pursue both a single, shared action and individually tailored actions for each person after the visit to Hopscotch House. In some cases people chose to continue actions that had not been fulfilled from the prior weekends.

The actions included those associated with healing, support and fun, like:

- Daily exercise.
- One minute of laughing each day.
- Ten minutes of silent reflection each day, with no restrictions on how she conducts or approaches that time.
- Write in a journal three to five times a week.
- Five minutes of dancing each day.
- Ten minutes of writing each day.
- Thinking about things to let go of.

They also included more serious commitments to action:

- Begin looking for a genealogy map for one participant's Black Seminole family in Florida.
- Continue artistic practice within an anti-violence framework.
- Help a fundraising committee for an important organization in distress to recruit more members. If she can't get others to join, she'll back out, otherwise, full steam ahead.

- Help keep progressive community group going.
- Help family by doing some design work.
- On behalf of a deceased friend, take steps to make sure a memorial trip to Montana happens this summer and use that trip as a catalyst for finishing a story.
- Set up a writing room/space, by taking concrete steps.
- Have intentional conversations with close friends and give a positive frame to the intention.
- Come back in May, bringing something to “my people” in a metaphorical or presentational way.

Our Group Action

After our meeting with Judi Jennings on Saturday night, who discussed "legacy" values and how they fit or don't fit with our chosen values, we decided to think about our own legacy values—those values we were born with—as part of our action between meetings three and four.

In her reflections, Pam added, “Hopscotch House was particularly poignant for me. It opened with dinner in my home and was then held at a place very familiar to me. The poignancy was a combination of switching facilitators—seeing Doug’s grace in easing into the group of women was moving—and having a quiet agenda in terms of pace, more reflection time. And I had just had a bad accident on my way there, which shifts the way you think about things. I felt the group deepening in tangible ways.”

We concluded the weekend with a ritual of pouring of libations for our ancestors outside, under a clear and cold Kentucky sky, after the snowfall from the night before, continuing the attention to ritual that had begun in New York.

4. WEEKEND FOUR—PHILADELPHIA

The group met in Philadelphia May 11–14, 2006. We were sad to be missing Timothea, Liz, and Pam, who could not be with us for various life, health, and schedule-challenging reasons. We opened the weekend with a ritual that included this poem, which we would see on the wall at our retreat center in Boston the following month.

Wild Geese

You do not have to be good.
 You do not have to walk on your knees
 for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
 You only have to let the soft animal of your body
 love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
 Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
 are moving across the landscapes,
 over the prairies and the deep trees,
 the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
 are heading home again.
 Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
 the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—
 over and over announcing your place
 in the family of things.

Mary Oliver

Highlights from Philadelphia

Making Art. We again experienced the challenge of "making space" for doing art. One of the goals for the final weekend is to set aside dedicated time, as was done in New York, for making art together.

Community Economic Development. In an effort to better connect the dots among art, social action, and community economic development, we hope to expand our sense of context and place. How does art connect with economic wellbeing? How do we hold the paradox of anti-capitalism and healing enterprise?



This mural and the local resident pictured in it were viewed through the open-air windows of our tour bus. The experience was complex and painful and led us to question how art, social action, participation, and community economic development could be better integrated.

Coping with Poverty. Touring Philadelphia and the difficulty of sitting with the feelings that came up as we toured neighborhoods where people were living in poverty, on our own or on a tour bus. This is a conversation and reflection we only began and left unfinished. Cara asked, “Who is running the artistic institutions? How does the art change the economic structure? If healing doesn’t happen, the pain and violence gets passed down to the next generation.”

Serendipity and Being in the Moment: Meeting Ramona Africa. While we waited at the Independence Visitor’s Center to board our bus for the mural tour, we literally ran into a protest that had been organized on behalf of the MOVE family.

Demonstrate against US TERROR! May 13, 2006 On Saturday, May 13th there will be a demonstration at the Liberty Bell in Center City Philly from 12-4. This year marks 21 years since the city, state and federal gov’t conspired and dropped a bomb on MOVE’s home murdering 11 men, women, and children, countless animals and burned 62 homes to the ground. Not one single official ever served a day in prison for that genocidal act yet the MOVE 9 sit in prison 28 years later for a crime evidence proves they didn’t commit!
NEVER FORGET 1985! NOW IS THE TIME TO FREE THE MOVE 9!
www.onamove.com

Annie then met and introduced us to Ramona Africa, the only adult survivor of the May 13th, 1985, bombing of the MOVE family by Philadelphia police and city officials. It was the 21st anniversary of the bombing. We felt in some ways as though

perhaps the whole reason we came to Philadelphia was to have the blessed opportunity to meet this kind, compassionate, and resilient resistance leader in person. As Annie put it, “I am so grateful for those unexpected moments, like meeting Ramona Africa, that change me in my bone marrow, the way I look at my life.” Kathie later observed, “We haven’t talked about the risk-taking explicitly, how Annie acted in a moment of opportunity and curiosity to meet Ramona. *It wasn’t just serendipity*. It says a lot about what we are trying to do with our Art. She caused that to happen by being totally in the moment.” (Kathie, July 13, 2006).

Importance of Healing. Annie reminded us of David Arizmendi's words in Atlanta, about how the immigrants he works with can't take advantage of opportunity until they have healed. It is about the role of arts in the healing process, of making what is dualistic and separate (artist/not artist) into an experience of healing and love.

Microcosm Inside the Group Reflects the World Outside. Challenges we saw outside of ourselves also showed up inside the group. For example, we talked about the challenge of bringing art (making space) into our contributions to the world of work. How to make the case for bringing art forward as an integral part of the process, not as an add-on in our work, in our time together. We talked about the impact of race and white supremacy in the world, of how art is brought forward (the challenge of white organizations bringing art to neighborhoods of color, e.g., the mural project in Philadelphia) and how that challenge exists within our group as well. Talking about white supremacy was challenging as not everyone in the group is at the same place in terms of learning about that topic.

From Legacy Values to Legacies. We did an exercise where we explored the legacy values we inherited (as Judi Jennings had discussed with us in Louisville), and how they influence, shape, and give birth to the legacies we seek to leave/live in the world.

Themes from the Trajectory of the Inquiry Since It Began Last October. Cara developed an emergent list of themes that have arisen during the first four weekends together. They include sustaining individual and community transformation; legacy values leading to legacies; bringing ritual to our space/lives; the development of tools we can bring to our work/lives (validity procedures, sunshine/shadow, white supremacy framework, anti-violence, healing, role of pilgrimages, connection to ancestors, etc.)

Challenge of Making Meaning/Reflection. In talking with Cara, Kathie, and Annie, we discerned a pattern of taking actions (on our own, with validity procedures in Louisville on the tour of the murals in Philadelphia), where we did not have time or

make sufficient space to digest and more fully communicate our shared experiences of complex moments.

Living in Transition. Kathie noted that everyone was dealing with transitions and change. Pam was dealing with the loss of two major figures in her life; Timothea's Mom's health had been challenging all spring; Annie was planning on spending time with doctors when she was in New York; Liz had just moved, etc.

Last Actions Set in Philadelphia

In terms of actions, the group invited everyone to renew or rededicate themselves to actions between our last meeting and now. Here are some of the actions that the four of us came up with during our weekend together:

- Finish the four pieces of writing for several anthologies, with a view to putting some of those pieces together for a book.
- Figure out how to continue healing, how to stay in the West.
- Plan some outdoor time for the summer.
- Write the goals and objectives of Deeper Waters, as a way to be whole and find a better balance between Deeper Waters and other work/projects. This is the step prior to creating a full-fledged business plan for Deeper Waters.
- Move on some of the collaborations/projects that are coming. "People are knocking on the door and I think I'm going to answer..."
- Ten minutes of writing
- Regular exercise.
- Begin development of workshops for white people that integrate art as a healing modality.

5. Weekend Five—Boston

"Theater is the rehearsal for revolution."

Kathie, from Augusto Boal

The group met in rainy Boston for the last weekend together. Everyone was able to make it except for Pam. We met at the Walker Center (www.walkerctr.org) in Auburndale, MA. Liz jumped in to help find accommodations as we changed our intended location within ten days of our weekend in order to attend the Healing Arts Conference in Boston on June 10. In finding a location, we were grateful and lucky to find and stay at the Walker Center because the connection to the work of the place resonated with the values of the group.

Beginning in the late 1980s, Walker Center's resident population became more diverse. World issues, always central to the Walker community, became

personified through the resident presence of Chinese and Tibetan student activists, and Walker-sponsored programs reflected new manifestations of historic concerns for peace and justice, including the impact of globalization upon the poor.

Throughout the years, most institutions discover that their missions evolve in response to need and the times. That has also been Walker Center's experience as we look to refresh our vision to meet the changing needs of today's social activists. Our expectation is that we will look ahead to those new occasions that teach new duties to meet the new challenges.

For our opening ritual, Cara brought red string, symbolic of the ancestral bloodlines we carry with us; Annie noted that she learned a historical reference to red string symbolizing the blood of immigrants who left the Old World—someone on shore held one end and someone on the ship held the other until the boat pulled away and the string fell into the water.

Timothea later observed, “By the time we got to Boston, there was a maturation process, a sense that we had been on a journey together. Philadelphia and Appalshop felt like pivotal moments. The mixed and contentious political history and context of those places are powerful. The thing I felt the strongest was that this is a journey that has just begun. I got a glimpse of things I want to go back to.”

Highlights from Boston

We changed our plans to come to Boston once we found out about the Social Healing Arts Conference from Jason Franklin at RCLA. It was “a participatory, day-long event exploring arts for social healing through performances, displays, presentations, hands-on workshops, and discussions. By social healing arts they mean community-based art that directly supports civic dialogue, social action, community development, peace and reconciliation, and other social goals. While social healing arts are sometimes produced by professional artists, they usually include a community or constituency in the art-making, often involving dozens or even hundreds or thousands of people.” (www.socialhealingarts.org)



Annie Lanzillotto speaking at a conference during our trip to Boston, June 2006

The group also briefly attended a conference on food where Annie was a featured speaker. In Boston the group reflected upon the key learnings and findings from the nine-month experience, now reflected in the summary/findings at the beginning of this paper. There was also a conversation about the CI process itself and whether the group had fully benefited from the CI tool.

When the group left the Social Healing Arts Conference on Saturday, June 10, Boston's Gay Pride parade was taking place, and in order to leave the parking area, we had to briefly join the parade. It was a fun moment, and the costumes, dancing, music, and expression of the parade seemed a fitting ritual on our last full day together.

REFLECTIONS ON THE EXPERIENCE AND THE CI PROCESS

In response to questions the participants asked of themselves, they each reflected upon the experience and the process. They asked one another, "How has the experience in the CI group made an impact on your life, and how did the CI process work for you?"

Liz Canner

The question we developed in our CI group became my mission statement for the past year. I used it to envision new projects and to help guide current ones. The CI group process made my art, activism, and community building more focused and directed.

As a result of the CI group process, I have initiated a variety of new projects. Most of these were inspired by knowledge gained during our site visits and from the other members of the CI group. I'm on the board of White River Indie Films. At a recent board meeting, we were trying to figure out space issues. After visiting Appalshop and our meetings with Paper Tiger and Deep Dish, I was inspired by the idea of a

cultural/media arts center that was based in a specific community and depended on place for artistic inspiration and exploration. I created a PowerPoint presentation about Appalshop, Deep Dish, and other media arts/cultural centers and presented it to the board. We are now engaged in discussions about a cultural/media arts center for White River Junction. Some of the members of the board have already begun looking into purchasing a building for the center. Jason Franklin kindly sent me contracts for a nonprofit/developer arrangement.

I have also used some of the knowledge shared by members of the CI group and Paper Tiger to help shape the Upper Valley Producers Group, a support group for independent filmmakers in my area. I founded the group a few weeks after our first CI meeting. I have formed these groups in other cities before, but they have never been so successful. Our last UVPG meeting was with the Vermont Film Commission. This meeting focused on ways they could help to support the independent filmmaking community. Because of this, they are making some important changes, including adding one of our members to their board.

For the most part, cooperative inquiry worked for me. Having a common question/mission statement to guide our inquiry was especially helpful. It provided a structure that we used to focus our site visits, activities, and discussions. It's a question that I will keep thinking about and using for the rest of my life.

All in all, this was a wonderful, life changing, and expanding experience.

Kathie deNobriga

Here is what I did in my CI Year:

I decided to run for a second term of City Council during the CI year (“that year with those women”). I considered not running because of the time commitment to another project, but two other artists were likely to be elected, and I was curious about what would happen if half the elected city government were artists. I hope to increase artistic responses to community issues. Stay tuned.

I attended the annual international conference on Pedagogy and the Theater of the Oppressed, taking workshops with Julian Boal and Michael Rohd. I went with the intention of learning Legislative Theatre techniques to apply to governance challenges in Pine Lake, but realized that I need to do more ground work. In the meantime, with a colleague who also attended the PTO conference, I have initiated a workshop with Michael in Atlanta in early 2007. I hope to use the fall to build a group of performers in Pine Lake.

Here is what I did not do:

Write, perform, or create for myself. However, I did begin to relearn *Who's on First* with my partner and did one public performance.

What else happened:

I feel a new level of accountability after this process. Although most of my intentions have not been met, I have not dropped them. I feel accountable to a small, trusted, and honest group. With any other group of people, I might say, "The thing is over, we had our last meeting, and I'm done." But I'm not feeling that way. Our group will meet again in December, and I plan to report that I have performed at least twice (once in August at the ROOTS meeting and again in the fall for a fundraising benefit that I will organize).

I think I am more honest with myself. I realized that I am in the habit of announcing my good intentions without being prepared to achieve them. Am I calling on people to join me? Dreaming out loud? Or just indulging in wishful thinking? I say things I'd like to do, don't do them, then feel bad about it. So I either need to put up or shut up, as the saying goes.

Is it possible to call yourself an artist without any regular artistic practice? Basically, I think not, and this process has challenged me to be honest about who I am and what I (say I) do.

I became even more keenly aware of the unrealistic and oppressive expectations I place on myself. This is often manifested in the amount of work I think I can accomplish in a given time. I am also learning how to hear, but not heed, the brutal internal voice of judgment.

Reflections on the process:

NGL Fellows were offered an opportunity to learn the CI process following the 2004 NGL Reunion in Chicago. I often jump at the chance to learn a new technique that I might be able to apply in my own practice. I like learning new things.

I spent a couple of days with a dozen or so other people, becoming acquainted with a process that sounded intriguing, but one that I also felt had been forced on us. I have yet to understand the mysterious seductive power that CI holds over RCLA: why *this* process, to the exclusion of something else? Whoever controls the process

holds the power. Why couldn't people come together to design their own process? In a certain way, I think that's what we tried to do all along.

Anyway, although I held some skepticism about the process, I remained deeply interested in learning it. When Cara Page initiated a CI group, I didn't even read the prospectus all that closely: the topic appealed to me; interesting people were signing on (although not all of them were able to commit, unfortunately); it would be my chance to *really learn* the process by doing it; *and* our expenses would be paid.

The critique:

Whatever we did seemed organic and fruitful, but I'm not sure anyone would recognize it as CI. I still don't feel like I understand CI. I didn't feel that it was rigorous enough for me, although I think the validity procedures were interesting. We didn't talk so much about how our question was evolving; we talked more about how *we* were evolving—and isn't that the point of CI? I think we struggled with seeking balance between process and flow, trying to create a process that allows flow. Is that CI? Basically I want to know when we're in a process or outside of it.

I know our facilitators signed on to do CI for/with/on us, but I'm not sure how intentional the teaching was. For example, I have CI literature in my file that we could have talked about more—I know I would have read it more carefully then. I think I expected to learn more *about* the process itself, in addition to being *in* the process.

What I learned from the others:

Make the artist-self so much a part of what you do/are that it can't truly be separated. Cara is my mentor here: the way she dresses, moves, thinks—every action is an artistic one.

Annie's fight to stay alive reminds you how casually you treat your own life. Every time I hug her, I'm surprised how small she is—because she's so big in life.

Liz's razor mind makes me want to hone my intellect more, read wider, think more critically.

Tim and Pam both brought astute political analysis, and coming from Southerners, I really appreciated the challenge to look deeper, make connections to larger issues.

I loved how we supported each other in our most vulnerable moments and how we challenged each other, how we encouraged each other. That kind of space is just not that available to me, and I cherish it.

I've made lifelong friends and built a loyal cadre of searchers and seekers (and sometimes see-ers). In one year, I doubled the number of people of whom I would feel comfortable asking anything. I consider that a damn fine outcome for a year's work.

Timothea Howard

Here are the lessons I learned from the cooperative inquiry (CI) process:

Before joining the CI, I had not painted in more than ten years. During that time, I occasionally took photographs, visited galleries or events, and thought about my art as having meaning beyond the personal. The CI process really forced everything to the surface and made me make explicit commitments to practice my art and inspire other artists in my presence to do the same. There were two streams of thought that never left me as I went through the CI process: one, that I was living in the United States at a crucial point in the world's history, and that meant people were being killed on the other side of the world. The second was my continuing struggle to maintain quality of life for my aging and increasingly fragile mother. Wrenched between these two realities, creativity was the only possible out.

I was physically able to attend only two sessions of the CI group. The logistics of getting mother situated and getting out the door proved too overwhelming and debilitating at times. I wondered right to the end if I should have bowed out of the process for the sake of continuity and group cohesion. But I didn't and stayed. Though my contributions were limited, I struggled to answer the critical questions of the inquiry as they related to the group and to me as an individual artist.

During the period of the CI, I met and then lost an amazing friend, Afro-Cuban photographer Nestor Hernandez, who considered himself a street photographer and a storyteller, sort of an urban Griot. He created numerous photography shows that consisted of photographs children and youth had taken of their communities and families. Nestor was a Cuban immigrant and an opponent of Castro and the Communists. I am a Marxist and have been since the age of 15. On this point Nestor and I agreed to disagree. We found common ground in our love of art, photography, community, and creative expression. Nestor taught photography at the Center where I work. He took the children out into the community and then sent them home with cameras to capture their experiences and vision. One evening in my office, Nestor told me that *there are hundreds of photographers in the world ready to take pictures of human misery and degradation, but only a handful that consistently showed the*

humanity, dignity, and resilience of the people. Nestor taught children the importance of showing their world as a place of refuge and renewal.

When Nestor was diagnosed with a fatal form of cancer, I changed the way I approached my work with children and families. It became necessary for those who were still able-bodied to carry on the work he began before his illness. Even on the weekend of his death, a photo exhibit on the lives of Cuban American families opened. I am still learning lessons from Nestor's life, our brief, intense friendship, and his death. I had written in an earlier version of this statement that I learned not to put things off. But I don't think that is really the essence of what I learned. Nestor taught me that no matter at what point you enter the creative process, enter it fully and be present fully. For Nestor, being fully present in the creative process meant reaching out to the most difficult children and giving them photography as a tool to reach teachers who had written them off; it meant helping youth see their parents and friends as strong, actualized people and not just statistics.

The same weekend that Nestor died, two other friends died as well. All were buried within three days of each other. The process of grieving for each person raised the questions, *"What do you leave behind as an artist when you die? How are others prepared to take up the work you leave undone? Have you practiced your art in a way that is accessible to others, or are you just one of a kind?"*

The trip to Kentucky and Tennessee to the Highlander Center and Appalshop again brought the critical question of the artist's role in social change sharply to the surface. Over the weekend and as I traveled across the states, I thought a lot about the limited chances my grandparents had of fulfilling their creative dreams. Either one of my grandmothers [could have been] a creative woman. They worked to support their families. Most of their creative expression found its way into religious fervor and hard, domestic work. My father started out as musician, but his family saw no use for his talent, and he was sent to train thoroughbred horses as a stable hand until he was 21 years old.

Traveling through the South and into coal country forced me to think about my family, its roots, and how we deliberately severed our ties to the land to move north and find some level of opportunity. Thinking about that still raises questions about personal and communal agency that arise from living and working on contested ground, being a member of a marginalized, alienated community.

A few days ago I came upon a quote from the Paris uprising of 1968:

"My job is to agitate and disturb people. I am not selling bread; I am selling yeast."

I place the quote over my bed and on all the emails I send out. It captures something about my past as a Marxist and about my future as an artist. I struggle in a land that never wanted my ancestors or me; and part of my legacy as an artist is to *create sellers of yeast*, not bakers.

The battlefield for the hearts and minds of people is the same battle for my own heart and mind. And while I stated in an early reflection that winning hearts and minds cannot solely flow from ideology, I've changed my mind. I embrace both my Marxist identity and my desire to create art. And neither is negotiable.

Annie Lanzillotto

“In general, I don’t like being a spectator in life.”

This has pertained to my work as a performing artist, teaching artist, cultural activist, and Caucasian ally to many diverse groups. The intimate circle has opened me as an artist into new forms, made me aware of southern political activism history and art initiatives, and has brought me into contact with many role models in the field. The group members have pushed me in my life, and I feel a close group eye on my personal progress. They have availed themselves to me as advisors in difficult work situations, and I have drawn on their knowledge often. The CI process has given me tools to implement in my group leadership actions. A memorable experience was going to the Highlander Center in Tennessee where Pam McMichael, a member of the group, became director. We met with elder artists, specifically musicians from the civil rights movement, and learned the history of how songs like “We Shall Overcome” came into being, and the fact that the royalties of this song are funneled to help Southern African-American youth. This was very inspiring to me.

Pam McMichael

When I think about the CI process and who I am now as a result of it, I am reminded of planting something in the fall and seeing the results months later, or perhaps even something like asparagus, which, at first crop, takes two years to grow. I know that this experience enriched me as a person and as an artist/cultural worker, and I also know that all the ripple effects are yet to be felt as I continue to work to manage my time better to create these reflective spaces for thinking, being, and writing. I also know that I now have a tangible plan of action to complete my *Bette StrangeCloud* play, a plan which came directly from the CI experience and conversations with the group, a plan that feels doable, right, and for which I feel energy and excitement.

As a new director of a “large” organization in terms of space, history, legacy, and expectation, I did not manage my time effectively to accomplish my writing actions. My writing attempts were sporadic and few.

One of the actions I did complete was an intentional set of conversations. As a result of this process, I engaged in honest, sometimes painful, and fruitful conversations about the intersection and challenges of being an out-there activist and inwardly-turned writer and what I had and had not done with some opportunities afforded me. I do not see writing and activism/organizing as separate or antagonistic, but I do appreciate the realness of time and focus of energy. The lessons I am processing still from these conversations are both deep and just under the surface.

On the process:

What worked for me was the experience itself, taking the time for an intentional process with an incredible group of women. Initially, I was drawn to the theme and the women in the group and saw cooperative inquiry as the necessary container that I was willing to experience to have this continued NGL experience. I’m not sure I could fully explain all the steps of cooperative inquiry now, but I do appreciate and understand a process of forming and exploring a shared core question that over time got deeper through active interaction with that question, ourselves, and each other.

What didn’t work was the time frame. We began our CI process in October. During the first weekend in November, I was named the director of Highlander, and my time/schedule became impossible. Though I had served as interim for several months, it was a new step to become the permanent director, during a foundation funding shortfall, and in the midst of a strategic plan.

Getting in six weekends for NGL (five for the CI and a reunion) in basically nine months (Oct–Jun) was hard for me. I very regretfully had to miss two of the CI gatherings. I wish we could have had longer to complete the process, or I wish I had been able to manage my time differently. I really missed the experience of the last two gatherings.

What I have learned about claiming my own power as an artist/cultural worker:

- 1) Some kind of tricky lesson about discipline. It’s not self-discipline to work hard. I work incredibly hard and have for years in both paid and unpaid ways. But it’s something about saying I want something and not creating the space to have it when deep down I know I do have the skills and talent to have it. So I am still pondering this piece about structure and discipline and habit and what choices I make to open or close my own doors.

- 2) Some kind of tricky lesson about balance—exercise, eating right, time for reflection, time to stop and put words to paper, things I know already but keep having to learn and re-learn to do.

At its core, Highlander helps create more artistic and cultural space in the work for social change, and I feel that at Highlander, and also in my work before going there, I do a lot of helping to create this kind of space. This is the kind of art I am interested in opening space for in the general society as well. I feel that I have been, and I will continue to be helping to create more vital and respected space for artists and cultural workers.

Cara Page

It seems rather poignant that it took me several weeks to put my thoughts, words, and rhythms down on the page about a remarkable year with a remarkable group of women activists/artists, cultural healers/workers, practitioners, philosophers, and change makers. Perhaps it was the gift of knowing that I was carrying them in my heart that made me not want to explicate the experience on the page, and that I am sad to see this process end. I am also hopeful that it will transform and renew itself. Or perhaps—and quite realistically—this is the first time in a long time that I've had a crack of time to actually swallow and regurgitate all of the senses I felt after a year of artistic venture, diving deeper into myself as a creative artist, activist, and healer and see how my intersections with a team of women artists transformed and informed my travels through a deeper journey of how to live my creative life.

They were midwives for me, pushing me to escape false attempts at how to be an artist and to remember that I already am one, whether eschewing political analysis or practicing my craft, I am and will always be an artist at my core. I learned more about my creative voice from the lives of the many artists we met at the center of their universes, in small towns, large cities, using their landscapes as a means of mapping change, revolution, evolution, and voice in their communities' lives. We met community filmmakers and videographers, storytellers, multimedia makers, performance artists, radio announcers, sculptors, installation artists, and more. They all dreamed and believed in the telling of stories as tools for reflective change and digging deeper into their own work and finding their own legacies. Some were more inclined and inspired by their own personal journeys, others by the inspiration of their communities' journeys. In the end, both proved inseparable from one another. Once you shape your own voice, you are inherently reflecting the voices of many that shape the lives around you.

Deepest gratitude and thanks for giving me the time to afford myself the space to reflect on creating and trust that as an artistic process, whether we were making an

actual product or not. I understood the experience of the CI to be about the process of guiding a question. Yet the most important piece for me was the process of allotting ourselves the time to even ask the questions, take care of ourselves in beautiful cultural spaces, and trust the process that we can be held by others. To move past guilt and judgment and move into a self sustaining space of understanding the artistic process as reflection, as organizing, as movement building. That it takes a creative voice to balance all the balls we hold in the air. In our first meeting, Kathie taught us how to juggle. How poignant this was!

Facilitator's Reflections and Disclaimer

Stepping into a group of powerful, brilliant women as a facilitator for a process they had already been using was a real leap of faith for me. The group welcomed me, and at the same time I always felt I needed to step up further to join with them. Learning about the issues and movements to which each of these women had dedicated their lives was humbling. Though I am 6'4" tall, I felt as though I were walking among giants. As the only man present, I was conscious of some ways that I took up space just by being alive, and I am sure, I was also unconscious of all the ways that my presence shifted the group. For the most part, I trusted that the group would stay on its own track. I had the feeling of not wanting to get in the way.

These feelings of deep respect and being an outsider sometimes meant that I wasn't sure I contributed all that I could have contributed. I was aware that listening and holding the stories was also a contribution, and as a white man, that is a lesson that I need to reinforce constantly and bring back to my fellow white guys. I wonder how best to have lived in and shown up for the position of facilitator in that group? It came out more clearly on the last weekend together that they would have liked more from me.

There is a responsibility to represent all voices in a shared report, particularly when the knowledge is created and explored in a participatory manner like CI. Ownership and control of these words has been raised as an appropriately thorny issue throughout this group's experience. How do we create a report that is useful and relevant to these participants' busy lives, a report that maintains the integrity of what they have experienced together? How do we appropriately meet the needs of RCLA and the Rockefeller Foundation, which have provided invaluable support and made this inquiry possible? As a paid consultant, it is part of my awkward role to provide this report on behalf of our group. I have forged ahead, at least partially aware of the many paradoxes, power-dynamics (e.g., a white man reporting on the experience of a group of diverse women, to name one), and unavoidable incongruities of this effort.

I have quoted liberally from my field notes, which can only provide a gross approximation of the actual words and experiences of the participants. In the end, only I can take responsibility for the shortcomings of this report, the frequent misquoting and misunderstood phrases I repeat here, and it is the full group of participants who should receive credit for any insight and wisdom that stems from these pages. This paper will be shared with all participants prior to releasing it, and I recognize that given the important work they do in the world, few of them may have the time to review and correct my limited impressions. Please hold these limitations carefully as you proceed, and I will hope that, at the very least, this report can point in the same direction as the path these women took together this past year.

Validity Procedures

A pivotal element of the CI process is the inclusion of validity procedures, which help ensure that the inquiry is authentic, congruent, and deep. Validity procedures provide an invaluable part of the CI process that makes CI distinct from other methods of learning from experience. Peter Reason and John Heron describe validity as consisting of the following procedures, which help the quality of knowing:

- 1) **Research cycling.** Cooperative Inquiry involves going through the four phases of inquiry several times, cycling between action and reflection, looking at experience from different angles, developing different ideas, and trying different ways of behaving. Research cycling can be convergent, in which case the co-researchers look several times at the same issue, maybe looking each time in more detail; or cycling can be divergent, as co-researchers decide to look at different issues on successive cycles. Many variations of convergence and divergence are possible in the course of an inquiry. It is up to the group to decide which one is appropriate for each piece of research.
- 2) **Balance of action and reflection.** Too much time in reflection is just armchair theorizing; too much time in action is mere activism. But it may be important, particularly in the early stages, to spend considerable time reflecting in order to gather together experience; and it may be important later to concentrate on trying out different actions to see how they work. Each inquiry group needs to find its own balance between action and reflection, depending upon which topic it is exploring.
- 3) **Developing critical attention.** Co-researchers need to develop the ability to look at their experience with affectionate curiosity with the intention of understanding it better. They need not to be so attached to what they have been doing that they cannot look at it critically. The process of research cycling is a discipline that helps people develop this ability. As the group

matures, it may be helpful to use constructive challenge in order to hone people's critical attention. For example, in the Devil's Advocate procedure, each person takes a turn at saying what he/she believes he/she has discovered. Other group members challenge his/her statements, trying to find other explanations for the claims, or evidence which shows the claims are not based in experience.

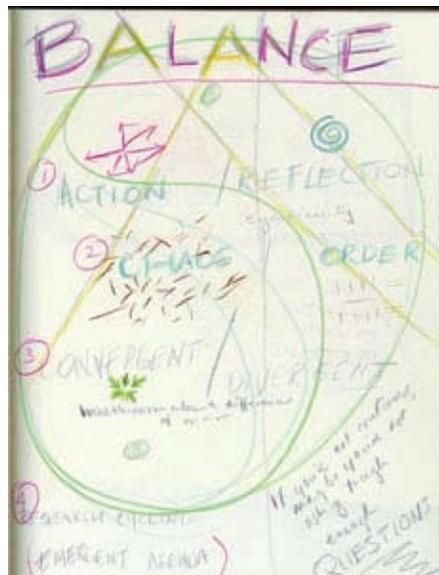
4) **Authentic collaboration.** It is really important that members of a Cooperative Inquiry group develop ways of working that are collaborative. You can't really call it cooperative inquiry if one or two people dominate the group, or if some voices are left out altogether. This doesn't mean that everyone has to have exactly the same role: it may be that one person in the group has more knowledge of the subject, while another knows more about the inquiry method. But it does mean that specialist knowledge is used in the service of the group. In order to develop equal contribution within a group, it may be useful to rotate formal leadership around the group, to have "rounds" in which everyone can have a say about the topic being discussed while the rest listen, and regular review periods wherein all group members can say how they feel about the way the group is working. (It is also important to note that there may be people outside the inquiry group who are affected by what it does; while they cannot be full co-researchers, they too should be approached in the spirit of cooperation and dialogue.)

5) **Dealing with distress.** Cooperative inquiry can be an upsetting business. If the co-researchers are really willing to examine their lives and their experience in depth and in detail, it is likely that they will uncover things they have been avoiding looking at and aspects of their life with which they are uncomfortable. Indeed, many inquiry groups are set up to explore these kinds of issues. So the group must be willing to address emotional distress openly when it arrives to allow the upset persons the healing of self-expression, which may involve expressions of grief, anger, or fear. Further, it may well be right for a group to spend time identifying the emotional disturbances within the group that have not yet been expressed and providing space for this to happen. If the group does not pay attention to distress management, it is likely that its findings will be distorted by members' buried emotions.

6) **Chaos and order.** Clearly cooperative inquiry can be seen as an orderly process of moving through cycles of action and reflection, taking account of experience in one cycle and applying it to the next. And so it is. But cooperative inquiry is also about intuitive discovery, happenstance, and synchronicity. It is sometimes about throwing all caution to the wind in a wild experiment. The best inquiry groups find a balance between chaos and order.

If the group is really going to be open, adventurous, and innovative, to put all at risk and reach out for the truth beyond fear and collusion, then once the inquiry is well underway, divergence of thought and expression is likely to descend into confusion, uncertainty, ambiguity, disorder, and perhaps chaos, with most if not all co-researchers feeling lost to a greater or lesser degree. There can be no guarantee that chaos will occur; certainly one cannot plan it. The key validity issue is to be prepared for it, to be able to tolerate it, to go with the confusion; not to let anxiety press for premature order, but to wait until there's a real sense of creative resolution. (Reason & Heron, 1999)

When Doug joined the group in Kentucky, they were eager to engage more fully with one another. Cara has consistently pushed us to have the conversations that groups usually avoid. "It's easy to schmooze with great people, and not get into stuff. If we don't have these conversations now, on this beautiful Kentucky farm, then when?" Kathie asked. "What needs to be said, for the group to go further and deeper?"



Notes from the group's journal on validity procedures, February 2006.

The group was clear that it was important to bring up difficult issues without necessarily trying to "fix" them. There was initially some resistance to the idea of CI's validity procedures, if they operated as a way to fix things. To the contrary, Heron and Reason's validity procedures were designed to push the group to go deeper by raising and acknowledging issues, not fixing or suppressing them.

In preparing to engage the validity procedures, the group devised a presentational process. Cara rang a bell, and we went into one hour of silence. We were to consider

which validity procedures were relevant for us to bring up with the group and think about what we wanted to bring to the creation of a bundle on Sunday morning.

On Sunday, we began with Cara bringing Annie, Timothea, and Elizabeth into the room, members who were not physically present in Kentucky. The group did a presentational sharing of “expressions of going deeper.” It was decided that Doug not take notes during this expression, and he was sorry not to recall more specifically the powerful ways that each person brought us into their experience. We later discussed what we had learned from one another during this exercise:

- Hierarchies of influence need to be equal.
- The need to take space, step back, and step up.
- Be intentional about sharing leadership.
- Value the Southern voice (Appalshop and Highlander).
- Remember to claim joy.
- Use quiet time as a key ingredient for creating space.

APPENDICES

Participant Biographies

Liz Canner is an award-winning media artist who has created many digital public art projects, video art installations, and documentaries. She employs new technologies to explore often-neglected social issues and to generate interventions in the public sphere. Her work is process based and tries to engage all sides of an issue in problem solving. Her latest digital public art project, *Bridges*, was created in response to the killing of Native people by Saskatoon police officers in Saskatchewan, Canada, during what were called starlight tours. A leader in the Native community and a leader in the police department each donned wearcams (small head-mounted video cameras) and lived/filmed each others' lives for a day. The resulting video was then presented as a large-scale video projection on the façade of the Police Department building. Recently, Canner was honored with a prestigious Rockefeller Foundation Next Generation Leadership Fellowship and a Radcliffe Institute (Bunting) Fellowship from Harvard University.



Liz Canner filming in Kentucky, February 2006

Since earning her BA with Honors from Brown University, Canner has received more than 30 awards, honors, and grants for her work. Recent projects have been supported by foundations including The National Endowment for the Arts and The Paul Robeson Fund for Independent Media. Her work has been broadcast on television both domestically (on PBS and various cable stations) and internationally in ten countries and screened at festivals like The New York Film Festival at Lincoln Center and the Human Rights Watch Film Festival. She has shown her work at numerous museums and galleries including Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art; The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and the California Museum of Photography. She has served on the Board of Directors of The Association for Independent Video and Filmmakers, the White River Indie Film Series, and the Boston Cyberarts Festival.

Kathie deNobriga was born in Georgia, raised in Tennessee, schooled in North Carolina, and educated by Alternate ROOTS and other community arts practitioners in the US. Now living again in Georgia, she was recently re-elected for a second term as City Council member in Pine Lake, a tiny city in the greater Atlanta area, and was once again elected by other members of the council as Mayor Pro Tem. Conflict within the city motivated her to train as a mediator, and in 2002, she received her state certification. As a member of city government, she uses the artist's skills of creativity and imagination and the mediator's skills of listening and curiosity.

A Fellowship in the Rockefeller Foundation's Next Generation Leadership program in 1999 was a catalyst for her running for public office. Equally important catalysts were the values and principles formed through deNobriga's 30-year association with Alternate ROOTS, as a founder, member, and executive director. ROOTS is a service organization for community-based and politically-motivated artists in the Southeast. During her ten years as executive director, she co-edited an anthology of new plays from the Southern theatre and initiated a consortium to create the Community Arts Training Directory, now available through www.communityarts.net. She serves on the board of Art in the Public Interest, which maintains this critical information service for the field.



Kathie deNobriga in Kentucky, February 2006

When not volunteering on the city council or leading a capital campaign to renovate the historic Little Five Points Community Center, deNobriga makes her living as a consultant with various nonprofits. She specializes in meeting design and facilitation, staff and board retreats, strategic planning, research and assessment, and basic organizational development for grassroots organizations in the South.

DeNobriga directed and acted professionally for many years and now aspires to find more time to develop her own artistic work. She lives in Pine Lake with her partner

Alice and their two cats, Veronica and Archie the Six-Toed Wonder. She is also an aunt with eleven nieces and nephews and one great-nephew.

Timothea Howard is the Program Integration and Expansion Manager for CentroNia, a community based, bilingual, multicultural learning center in Washington, DC. She is a community, labor, and cultural organizer who served as a labor organizer with the American Federation of Teachers; American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees-Council 31; International Brotherhood of Teamsters; and as a campus recruiter for the AFL-CIO Organizing Institute. From 1998 to 2001, she served as the Senior Organizer for the National Organizers Alliance.

Ms. Howard is the National Outreach Coordinator for *RACE: The Power of an Illusion*, a three-part documentary series produce by California Newsreel for public television.

Timothea served as the Lead Organizer for the Columbia Heights/Shaw Family Support Collaborative and the community-organizing consultant for DC VOICE. She has conducted organizing trainings for the National Organizers Alliance; Black Radical Congress; the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition; DC VOICE; Mothers on the Move; LISTEN, Inc.; the Michigan Coalition against Domestic Violence—Women of Color Caucus; and the DC Rape Crisis Center. Timothea serves on the board of directors of the Nuclear Information and Research Service, the Praxis Project, and the DC WritersCorps.

As a working artist, Timothea graduated from the Corcoran School of Art with Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. Upon graduation, she worked as a painter before entering the theater full time. Beginning with the Source Theater Company under the mentorship of Bart Whiteman and at DC Stage with Dorothy Neumann, Timothea worked as a stage manager, stage hand, properties manager, producer, and director for eleven seasons with Gala Hispanic Theater, The New Arts Theater, Sanctuary Theater, the Kennedy Center Opera House and Programs for Children and Youth, the National Theater, New Playwrights Theater, Horizon Feminist Theater, Dance Place, the Pola Nirenska Dance Company, the Primary Movers Performance Company, and Anacostia Repertory Company.

From 1983 to the present Ms. Howard has directed and collaborated with solo artists including Rebecca Rice (deceased), Karin Abromaitis, Jack Guidone (deceased), Janet Stanford, Kwelismith, Isabel Lee Malone, Anu Yadav, Judith Ann Smith, Sara Pleydell, and Centrifugal Force.

Ms. Howard is a member of Sophie's Parlor Feminist Radio Collective, one of the oldest women's radio collectives in the US. She is currently developing a girls' radio project that will come on the air during 2007 International Women's Day. Timothea

also was the host of Another Perspective a radio program produce by the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, DC.

In 1999, Timothea received the Rockefeller Foundation Next Generation Leadership Fellowship award.



Timothea Howard at the group's final meeting in Boston, June 2006.

Annie Lanzillotto is a Bronx-born poet, director, and performance-artist. Her award-winning poem "Triple Bypass" was published in the 2002 anthology, *The Milk of Almonds: Italian-American Women Writers on Food and Culture*. Her installation of text and sculpture, *A Stickball Memoir*, was featured in City-Lore's "New York City Neighborhood Tent" on the Washington D.C. Mall for the 2001 Smithsonian Folklife Festival, a celebration of contemporary New York culture. Her play *Sul Occh du 'Schapp* (by the Eyes of the Shoes) premiered at CUNY's conference on "Biancheria," Italian-American Women's Domestic Needlework. Her 1998 one-woman show, *How To Wake Up a Marine in a Foxhole*, opened at The Kitchen. Her site-specific community-based works at The Arthur Avenue Retail Market in the Bronx were commissioned by Dancing in the Streets and funded by grants from The Rockefeller Foundation MAP fund, and the Puffin Foundation. These works collectively titled, *a'Schapett!* (wiping what's left on the plate with the heel of the bread), 1996 to 1998, turned the oral histories of pushcart peddlers into street opera and the daydreams of butchers into countertop trapeze; *How to Cook a Heart* ran on Valentine's Days at Mario's Meat Market. Her 1993 play, *Pocketing Garlic*, received a Franklin Furnace In Exile performance commission. Her 1993 debut solo show, *Confessions of a Bronx Tomboy Part 1: My Throwing Arm (This Useless Expertise)*, premiered at Under One

Roof theatre, and Manhattan Class Company's Performance Marathon. Curatorial initiatives include: Opera Vindaloo! at Dixon Place 1994 to 1996, and Poets & Preachers at The Kitchen 1998 to 2001, culminating with One Score: Sermons in the Age of AIDS, an event which asked poets and preachers to reflect on what they've said over the first two decades of AIDS.

"I realize that the reason I am an artist is that I was alone as a child, I never had structured time during summers, and as a very ill child, I had a great deal of unstructured time through bedridden illness that kept me out of classrooms and divided the day and assigned tasks. I was left to my own devices. Time provided me an endless realm, where night and day melded, and these distinctions and divisions of the day by meals and schedules lost their meaning. I made things. I dreamed. I tinkered. I got involved with my imagination. In the summers I never had anything "to do." I wandered the neighborhood. I played in the mud, building worlds. In my young students in "theater" class, I see a different dynamic. I see students being prepared to succeed, in time slots. I see students being given "creative busywork" and "encouragement." The absence of these forces forged me into an artist. And so I question methodology, as a teacher and leader of youth. How to foster the taking charge of boredom? What to do about the excesses of "art supplies" such as paper, glue, and paint—things privileged students use to make their "art projects," which they throw away as fast as they make them. Going to Africa, where youth in an orphanage build worlds with bottle caps in mud, puts my mind in the prism of: poverty, imagination, privilege, waste, how youth discover how to "be" in hours, the role of creation. It is essential for us as a group of American living artists to travel to Africa and Sicily to get a cold shower, literally and figuratively. Revive our perspective. Get out of the "nonprofit industrial complex" as my NGL peer Mark Winston Griffith reminds me. There is so much to learn about collectivity, about being in time.

Pam McMichael is the Director of the Highlander Research and Education Center, a popular education center in east Tennessee, which works in support of and catalyst for grassroots organizing. Founded in 1932, Highlander has been part of major social change movements in the South and Appalachia from labor education to the Civil Rights Movement, to rural environmental issues, and today's work on immigration. Culture and cultural organizing are core aspects of Highlander programs and methodology.

McMichael grew up in rural Kentucky, then moved to Louisville to go to graduate school and was a long time social justice organizer there. For well over two decades, McMichael's work has been about connecting people and issues across difficult divides with focus on helping build an anti-racist framework, understanding, and action.



Pam McMichael outside Hopscotch House, February 2006

She is a founding co-director of the regional intermediary SONG, Southerners on New Ground, launched in 1993, is the vision of Black and White Southern lesbian organizers experienced in a broad range of justice and equality issues. The purpose of SONG is to build movement across the South for progressive social change by developing models of organizing that connect race, class, culture, gender, and sexuality.

Identifying herself more as a cultural worker than an artist, McMichael has been involved in a variety of projects and events that use art and culture to celebrate, educate, and build community. In Louisville, she was a lead organizer for eight years of a multicultural group of women that organized International Women's Day Events as celebration, education, and fundraisers for women and children's programs locally, nationally, and internationally. She was also executive producer of a positively reviewed documentary that broke down myths and stereotypes about welfare by telling the stories of five urban and rural Kentucky welfare recipients.

In addition to poetry, published writings include essays on class and multi-issue organizing. *Who Are You Calling Redneck*, first published in a journal of SONG, was reprinted in various print and online magazines and was used in Southern Empowerment Project's organizer's training.

The experience of her mother's death prompted McMichael to write a full-length play, *Tender*, which was produced in Louisville at the MeX Theater in a collaboration of the African American Women's Literary Series, University of Louisville Women's Center, and Artswatch. *Tender* also opened Peace with Justice Week at the Fine Arts Center in Henderson, KY. Directed by Steve Kent, for whom Laverne University, CA, named its school of socially conscious acting, the play brought together a cross-race, inter-generational group of people.

McMichael is currently in planning conversations with Carpetbag Theater and Junebug Productions for an interracial ensemble production of three plays that explore, among other themes, damage to the body from the environment and decisions based on working class survival. Her next writing goal is to complete her second play about a mixed-race, Louisville, Kentucky, civil rights activist and Head Start teacher.

Cara Page is a multimedia performance artist, writer, educator, and fiber sculptor. She is founder and Artistic Director of Deeper Waters Productions, promoting creativity, transformation, healing, and action through the arts. Cara has performed and produced many original works on healing, oppression, and transformation in collaboration with other artists, activists, and intergenerational communities across the country. Her work with youth and adults has spanned the range of working with schools to rehabilitation programs teaching life skills through the arts. She continues to work with community activists in creating trainings and interdisciplinary curriculums on the use of the arts as tools for liberation and healing.

Currently, she is the National Director of the Committee on Women, Population, and the Environment (CWPE). She is a queer rights, reproductive rights, human rights and women's health activist and artist based in the U.S. Southeast. She strives to bring visibility to the issues affecting women of color's bodies and to build the sustainability and wellbeing of poor people and people of color communities through health advocacy, political education, and creating healing and response networks. Through her work at CWPE, she continues to highlight the intersections between eugenic practices and population control, privatization of women's bodies and healthcare, and the misuse of dangerous chemicals and contraceptives on impoverished communities.



Cara Page at the Hopscotch House, February 2006

She is the former Artistic Coordinator of the West End Durham Art Institute in Durham, NC, which built tools of leadership, liberation, and economic empowerment

through the practice of the arts. She holds a BA in Liberal Arts from Hampshire College and is an alumna of GIFT (Grassroots Institute for Fundraising Training, sponsored by the Center for Third World Organizing and Southern Empowerment Project).

“I am a Black female artist, based in Atlanta, who has sought to create critical dialogue through documentary photography, performance art, and fiber installation that tells stories of different communities that I have worked with around issues of healing, racial justice, youth, queer rights, anti-violence, and the commodification of women’s bodies. Deeper Waters permits me the space to design testimonials and create opportunities to build coalitions with other mindful activists and healers.”

Group Conference Calls

We don't have a post 9/11 theory about maintaining a revolutionary stance in a world that calls that terrorism.

Timothea, March 19, 2006

The group frequently used conference calls both as a way to plan and organize the trips and touch base with one another on actions and other things that were happening. Throughout the spring we had a standing conference call on the fourth Monday of each month. One call in particular (March 19, 2006) was important because one member had an extremely relevant situation develop in her life, and the group provided her a welcome sounding board. She invited the group to consider meeting in the town where she was working, to see if there might be some kind of witnessing or advisory role we could play.

The discussion that follows is the group’s consideration of that suggestion. Ultimately, the group decided not to try and intervene in the complex situation directly, but helped her think through many of her options for engagement. Notes from this call have been included as an example of the kind of engagement the women had with one another. They demonstrate the enormous capacity of these women, as activists, artists, clear-thinkers, and supporters of one another.

Here is an outline of the situation: A predominantly white, well-intentioned institution was struggling to integrate an innovative program led by two strong women of color. Non-fiscal factors were driving the institution’s decision to close down the program. One member of the CI group was brought in as support for the two leaders. She developed good communication and rapport with all sides, particularly the population that was served by the institution. This put her right in the middle of things, and as she said to the group, “You all have been a piece of my brain.”

Some of the questions that arose during this conference call included:

- Does the institution need to go through the experience of failure with this program and its leaders?
- How might the space and respect for a spiritual, activist, art-oriented program be increased?
- The group asked, “Does witnessing mean seeing all the shades of gray, or do we specifically need to witness the experience of the program leaders? Bearing witness to the fuller view of what we see offers reconciliatory power. How do we get artists out of the war zone and into safer space? What are the lessons to be learned? How do we move forward in such a way that helps all parties move forward in a healthy fashion? Battling an institution is long, hard work, and witnessing can be fleeting. How do you do battle with institutions? What form does that take? What are the costs?”
- The group was hesitant and respectful about not wanting to run in on someone else’s community when transformative action is a long-term investment. There wasn’t a lot of energy for taking on a new fight, in addition to all the other fights with which everyone was dealing.

For our group member, her work at the institution was her way of engaging the group’s question. She was grateful for the group’s attention and input, which helped her to see different sides of the dilemma.

The group acknowledged that the institution in question is progressive and trying to do all the right things, *and* they are a product of the system of race, class, and oppression that exists in this country. Many nonprofits have a difficult path. How do you maintain the insurgency of the struggle and run an institution? The leadership has to deal with light bills and toilets! “I have to balance being revolutionary and being cooperative at the same time. We are still dealing with the insider/outsider piece. We fall on our swords every time with burn out. How do you stay in the fight and for how long?” Our group member, listening to the group, said, “I just want them to hear what you all are saying.” The idea of a conference call was suggested, if the program leaders were interested. The group felt that “...this is a good role for us to play, to help them frame their inquiry. We will raise our own questions, which are in common cause. We could bring our experiences from around the country and help place their struggle in a larger context.”

“To be inside the house you are about to take down” (Audre Lorde). Another member commented, “We live in a very different world at this point. Theory doesn’t match our lived experience. I’m doing great work, *and* I may be aiding gentrification. If my presence in the neighborhood makes things safer, gentrification can be one result.

What am I supposed to be creating? We don't have a post 9/11 theory about maintaining a revolutionary stance in a world that calls that terrorism. Where am I in this process? Today, if we are questioning capitalism, does that make us terrorists? Is now the time for institutions to strike out because the climate has been created? What is art in a time of jihad? How do you do art that makes a difference that isn't a threat for annihilation? This is a different ballgame now. It is masked because the program leaders are from the US, otherwise this dynamic might be more obvious."

Finally, another member suggested that our group members work with the two program leaders to develop a piece on what they were experiencing, to return to art as voice, healer, activist. "The things we teach are what we need to do for ourselves. Maybe it becomes a three-woman show..."

Further Questions Raised in Launching the CI Group

The group's proposal to launch provided further context on the importance of the group's work:

An...example [where art and activism meet] within the context of the NGL modular experience was when Cohort III met with artistic leaders in South Africa who were a vital part of the anti-apartheid movement. We learned that the theaters were not only being used as sites of expressive political rhetoric against apartheid, but also [as] spaces for incubating ideas and strategies and as meeting places for political dialogue between allies. Today some of these artistic leaders are still being called upon to sit on newly forming development councils in the redistribution of land and resources in the post-apartheid revitalization and democratization process of South Africa. Another model of creative leadership is the increased ingenuity of artisan cooperatives sprouting up around the world in response to globalization and free trade. Some of these arts and craft cooperatives (predominantly women of color in developing countries) are making sustainable impact by changing the economic infrastructure of their communities through uses of combined revenue that they put back into redevelopment. These models of shared leadership between artists, government, policymakers, and community organizations are now being evaluated, documented, and honored for the impact they are having on global communities as valuable resources of creative partnership, practice, and thought.

This [proposed] inquiry would allot space and time for artists to generate deeper reflection on our own creative practices and the greater potential to make an impact on the communities in which we work and live. Over a course of five meetings some possible themes to emerge might include:

- *Reflection on artistic practices as tools of resistance, liberation, and community development;*
- *Engaging in dialogue about the impact of art as a tool of individual and communal transformation and ways to measure its impact;*
- *Determining art's role in global resistance and liberation models;*
- *Ways in which artists can integrate their practices in collaboration with government, nonprofit, and for-profit sectors mindfully and effectively;*
- *Critiquing progressive, liberal, and conservative models of how creative partnerships (i.e., informed by artistic practices) can make effective change in communities;*
- *Discussing how censorship influences our impact as artistic leaders and change agents in public and private sectors;*
- *Exploring how our artistic practices better serve our local and global communities;*
- *Discovering models of reflection and renewal through practices in the art;*
- *Seeing how our artistic practices sustain us; and*
- *Determining impact and value.*

Through the difficult conversations we've had in the experience of NGL, we have critiqued the travesties that have been committed in the name of democracy and struggled through the possibilities of cross-sector politics to transform, heal, and manifest change. The global cultural need to commemorate through artistic process has been recognized as a valuable practice of community honor, storytelling, translation, and collective memory to address loss, grief, and celebration. Yet, we want to reflect past only the cultural interpretation of our work and deepen further our artistic commitments and practices to make greater impact on policy, legislation, and other venues that can critique, analyze, and inform public and private spheres and political movements. This process has the potential to allow for self-acceptance as an "artist and leader" combined—and to hone in on this unique experience as something that can be refined as a mission and practice of informing systemic change. For our communities, we hope to manifest the vision of moving past the product and commodity of art and

facilitate more value in the creative process as a tool for action, reflection, leadership, and sustainability in the rebuilding and transformation of ourselves and our communities in response to global systems of classism, racism, violence, and other forms of oppression.

Proposal Document, Arts CI Group, Spring 2005

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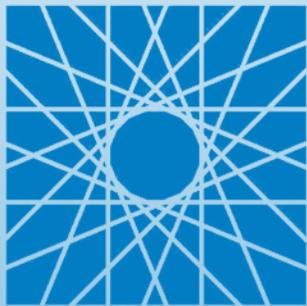
Social Healing Arts. www.socialhealingarts.org/ . [Arts that strengthen the social fabric.]

Spector, H. Opt In, the brainchild of longtime Chicago artist Hugh Spector, is an artist created and run project that provides a venue for other artists to have a voice in creating a positive change in the political landscape. www.spectorstorybox.com.

The Highlander Center was founded in 1932 to serve as an adult education center for community workers involved in social and economic justice movements. The goal of Highlander was and is to provide education and support to poor and working people fighting economic injustice, poverty, prejudice, and environmental destruction. We help grassroots leaders create the tools necessary for building broad-based movements for change. www.highlandercenter.org/

Tom Tresser is the Lead Organizer and Founder of the Creative America Project. www.creativeamerica.us

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