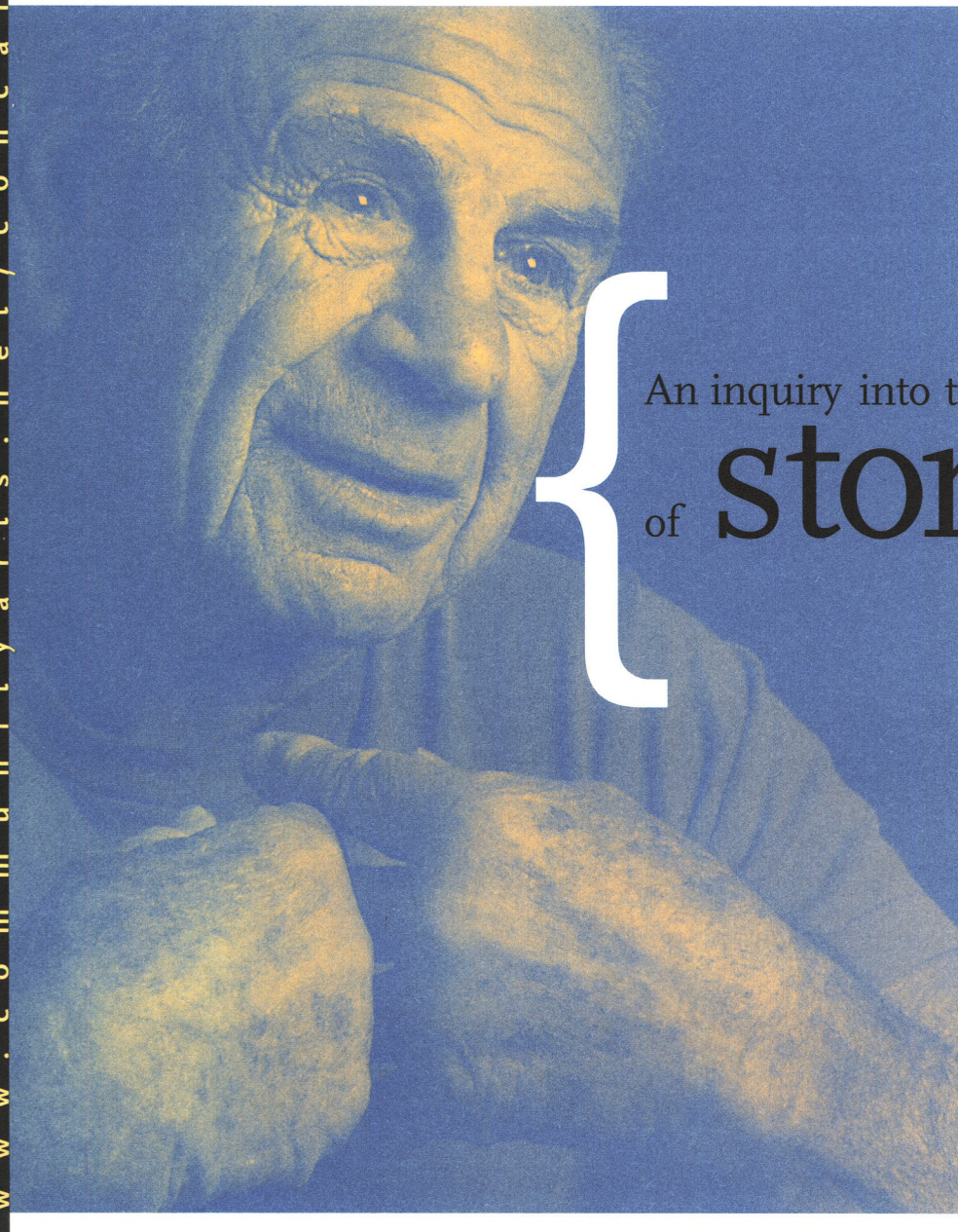
Connecting CALIFORNIANs

FINDING THE ART OF COMMUNITY CHANGE



An inquiry into the role of story in strengthening communities

www.communityarts.net/conncal

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The research question:
How can different ways of discovering and presenting local stories in public contribute to the strengthening of community?

Introduction

One California story began in a northern coastal town, with the death of a young child in a family of Hmong refugees from the mountains of Laos. In response to the tragedy, following a tradition thousands of years old, the family sacrificed a pig. Non-Hmong neighbors misunderstood. An ordinance against animal sacrifice was passed, and a painful inter-ethnic clash ensued. In the effort at reconciliation, a Hmong playwright, in partnership with a local community organization and a local theater, wrote a play about the incident that was performed for town residents. The play enhanced community dialogue, contributing eventually to the repeal of the ordinance.

The recurrence of stories such as this throughout California—communities using narrative art to strengthen themselves—led to the inquiry described in these pages. The hunch behind the inquiry was that art is a particularly powerful means of building community, and that the country's historical interest in grassroots narrative, as exemplified, for example, in the Federal Theater Project in the Thirties, might be bubbling up again from communities. The growing national debate about the decline of social capital and the need for civic

renewal provided a context for this hypothesis.

The research question: How can different ways of discovering and presenting local stories in public contribute to the strengthening of community?

The inquiry was itself designed as a public conversation, led by a partnership between funders and practitioners, who held the question mutually and functioned as equals. The research focused on the intersecting roles of artists and humanists, community organizers (including popular education and community development proponents), and diverse residents, all using story to address local issues.

The inquiry had six components:

- A California-wide scan by county during the period 1995-99 for evidence of public performances based on local stories.
- More than 100 interviews with artists, humanities professionals, community organizers, foundation staff, and educators in California and nationally.
- Case studies of public performances springing from the issues, aspirations, and histories of California communities and used to engage residents in community building.
- Two focus groups, one in Southern and one in Northern California, composed of artists, humanists, and community organizers, convened to discuss their experiences at the intersection of story, art, and organizing.
- Three monographs ("The Critical Discourse," "Factors for Success," and "The Sustainability of Storytelling"), commissioned to address prominent issues emerging from the research.
- A literature review.

The research data has been compiled in its entirety and is available on the Internet at:
www.communityarts.net/concal

The research team was particularly interested in the public performance of local story that combined a compelling vision of positive social change with high artistic standards. They postulated that the success of such efforts would depend upon how engaged community members were in all phases of the work, from creation through performance through follow-up reflection. The team had interest in projects that would provide opportunities for people from unlike backgrounds to make human connection and lay the foundation for community problem solving.

The Inquiry Team

Dudley Cocke, artist and Director of Roadside Theater, the 25 year-old Appalachian ensemble company, and Craig McGarvey, educator and Director of The James Irvine Foundation's Civic Culture Program, first met in the late spring of 1999 at a national theater conference in San Francisco. They quickly discovered a mutual interest in community story, learning theory, and the chasm between the arts and humanities and science. Their shared interests formed the background of the inquiry that they pursued over the next 10 months, from September 1999 to June 2000. Erica Kohl, community educator, who received her Masters Degree in Community Development from the University of California, Davis, in June 1999, joined the research team in November. Linda Frye Burnham, Co-Director of Art in the Public Interest and the Community Arts Network, and James Quay, Executive Director of the California Council for the Humanities, also participated in the inquiry.

Research Rationale

The research rationale emerged from the framework of The James Irvine Foundation's Civic Culture program.

Civic Culture at The James Irvine Foundation

Civic Culture at Irvine supports Californians working to build an effective pluralism from the State's exponentially increasing cultural diversity. One in four current Californians was born overseas; in Los Angeles and the Bay Area, the number is two in five. These newcomers have arrived from nearly every country on earth, with a great predominance from the Pacific Rim.

The program's first premise is that the democracy is built as people build their communities. Community building is collective problem solving—shared experience toward common purpose across lines that can divide. Often with the guidance of an organizer, people come together with those unlike themselves to identify issues important to the improvement of quality of life in their communities. They make and implement plans collectively, all the while trying to learn how to get better at their work together. Through this experiential education in democratic participation, they develop the skills, knowledge, attitudes and, importantly, the human relationships that build social capital and strengthen their communities.

Often the result is improved public policy. For example, a statewide project of a California faith-based community organizing network helped to shape and pass legislation in Sacramento that devoted $50 million to after-school educational programs. Policy formation is part of democratic participation. Yet the process was as important as the product. From a dozen separate California communities, from hundreds of congregations, tens of thousands of people acted inclusively toward this common purpose. They learned from one another and about one another. Working together, using the techniques of adult, community-based, experiential education, they turned their communities into places of learning.

The Arts and Humanities and Community

The arts and humanities are a particularly powerful means by which people may turn their communities into places of learning. Through art:

- We express our understandings of the world around us; we give voice.
- We interpret the views and experiences of others; we learn to perceive.
- We create new understandings; we synthesize, develop new approaches.

The expressive, interpretive and creative aspects of the arts and humanities carry special utility when dividing lines have been etched deeply in communities. Often with greater power than other modes of human discourse, collective engagement with art can heal wounds, break logjams, build bridges.

It is not only at the extremes of experience, however, that the arts and humanities are important to collective life. Art is community's growing edge. It is through expression, interpretation, and creation that the culture is continually reinvented.

Nor does art's importance lie only at the extremes of talent or achievement. To be certain, the search is for truth and beauty. But it is through the collective process of reaching toward excellence, amateurs and professionals solving problems together, that the community can grow.

Story and Community

Absent the stories of others, how will we know them? Absent our own stories, how will we know ourselves? Story is inherent to human experience; we are the story-telling animal. Story is the means by which we learn, by which we make meaningful experience from the events of our lives together. The stories we are able to tell ourselves and others, those we can understand and imagine, carry our identity, our culture. They define what we believe to be possible in our individual and collective lives.

Interaction with narrative strengthens community in several ways:

- Telling stories gives shape to personal identity, enabling us to link with others and with universal themes.
- Engaging with stories (listening, interpreting, responding) introduces us to others who could otherwise remain distant; it builds empathy and understanding.
- Sharing stories with one another creates human connection, builds relationships, and develops a sense of common narrative.

Because of its innate power, story lies at the center of the work of those attempting to strengthen communities. Organizers start with the stories of individuals, using narrative to illuminate the hopes, concerns, and interests of community members; the exploration and interpretation of shared stories creates common ground, and the collective action that follows is an attempt to build a community story. Artists and humanists with an interest in community use their narrative skills to express complex and sometimes contentious ideas, emotions, and issues, enabling communication and connection. Stories that are of, by and for the communities in which they are publicly performed can be the galvanizing occasion for civic engagement.

The researchers posited that artists, humanists, and organizers have developed an extensive practice using narrative to catalyze civic engagement. It was in search of the breadth and depth of this current practice that the inquiry started.

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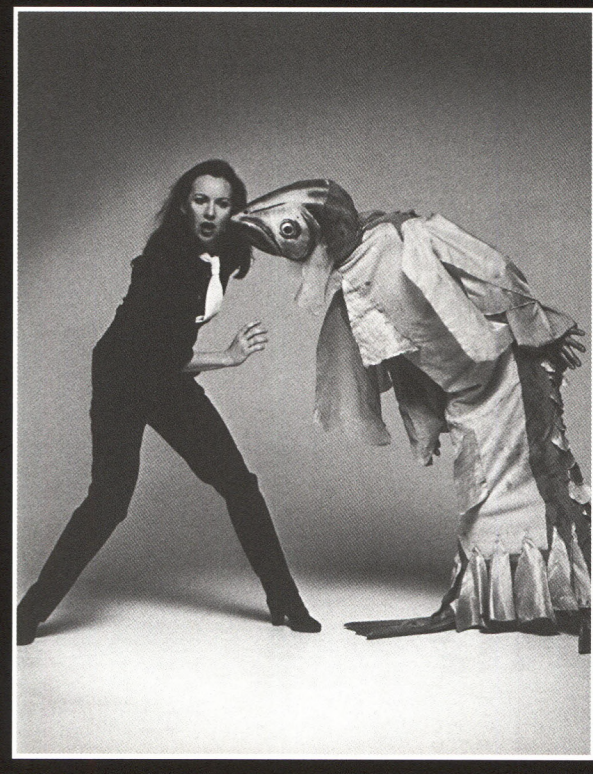


Based in Humboldt County, California, the Dell'Arte Company has pioneered "Theatre of Place", which is original theater created by, for, and about a particular community, but that is accessible to audiences anywhere via a unique physical performance style.

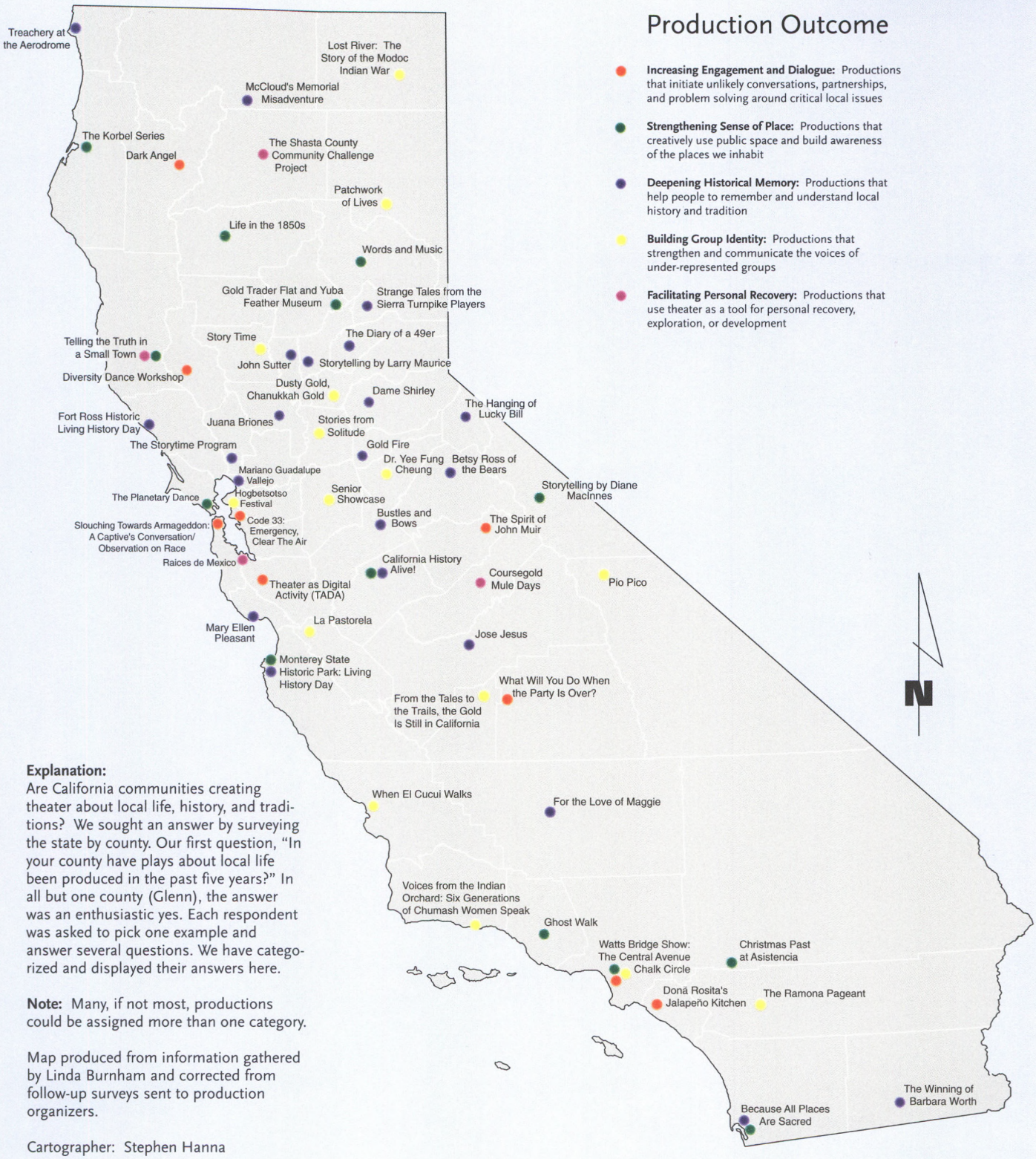
The inquiry uncovered Californians in every corner of the state who are using narrative art to strengthen their communities.

The California Landscape

The inquiry uncovered Californians in every corner of the state who are using narrative art to strengthen their communities. In an attempt to map the extent of state activity, the researchers conducted a county-by-county survey, asking for an example of a recent public performance that had drawn its narrative from local history or current community issues. In 57 of the state's 58 counties, examples were readily available. They ranged from oral histories to classical texts adapted to local circumstance, from "The Story of the Modoc Indian War" to "The Watts Bridge Show," and are displayed on the accompanying maps.

Descriptions of each of these performances appear on line at www.communityarts.net/concal. It is important to note that a survey of density of practice was beyond the scope of the inquiry; such a map of Los Angeles County alone would have produced hundreds of data points. Depth of practice, however, was a central concern of the research. The following three case studies, which appear in expanded form at the web site, illustrate the creativity, versatility, and commitment of Californians who are connecting their communities through the arts and humanities.

Connecting Californians: DIVERSE Outcomes



Production Outcome

- **Increasing Engagement and Dialogue:** Productions that initiate unlikely conversations, partnerships, and problem solving around critical local issues
- **Strengthening Sense of Place:** Productions that creatively use public space and build awareness of the places we inhabit
- **Deepening Historical Memory:** Productions that help people to remember and understand local history and tradition
- **Building Group Identity:** Productions that strengthen and communicate the voices of under-represented groups
- **Facilitating Personal Recovery:** Productions that use theater as a tool for personal recovery, exploration, or development

Explanation:
Are California communities creating theater about local life, history, and traditions? We sought an answer by surveying the state by county. Our first question, "In your county have plays about local life been produced in the past five years?" In all but one county (Glenn), the answer was an enthusiastic yes. Each respondent was asked to pick one example and answer several questions. We have categorized and displayed their answers here.

Note: Many, if not most, productions could be assigned more than one category.

Map produced from information gathered by Linda Burnham and corrected from follow-up surveys sent to production organizers.

Cartographer: Stephen Hanna

Connecting Californians: DIVERSE Styles

Production Style/Content

- **Storytelling performance:** based on the personal story of the teller or traditional tales of the region
- **History-based performance:** based on written and oral histories of the community
- **Poetry and fiction performance:** performance based on written poems and fiction
- **Community performance:** performance by and for community members, based on a well-known text, adapted to address immediate community concerns
- **Community festival:** festival by and for the local community, including theatrical elements
- **Chataqua performance:** scholar/actors in unscripted portrayal and discussion of historical characters
- **Performance Art:** performance principally derived from visual art and not theater
- **Musical Theater:** theater production of which music is a primary component
- **Issues-based theater:** original scripted play about issues faced by local community, performed by a theater company
- **Experiential Education:** education through a 'realistic' experience of the past, including theatrical elements
- **Residency:** combination of activities by a visiting theater company, including performances and workshops in local schools or other community setting

Note: Many, if not most, productions could be assigned more than one category.

Map produced from information gathered by Linda Burnham and corrected from follow-up surveys sent to production organizers.

Cartographer: Stephen Hanna

Story for an Inclusive Public Narrative:

Telling the Truth in a Small Town, Ukiah

UKIAH (population 14,600) is located in a mountain valley in Mendocino County, approximately one hundred miles north of San Francisco and fifty miles inland from the ocean. It is home to the Pomo band of Indians, Italian grape growers, timber industry and agricultural workers, and a mix of intellectuals and artists. Ukiah Players Theater (UPT) was founded in 1977 by a handful of young theater artists who had moved to the region in the early 1970s to 'live simply in a rural community.' UPT's annual production, *Telling the Truth in a Small Town,* helps residents share personal stories with their neighbors.

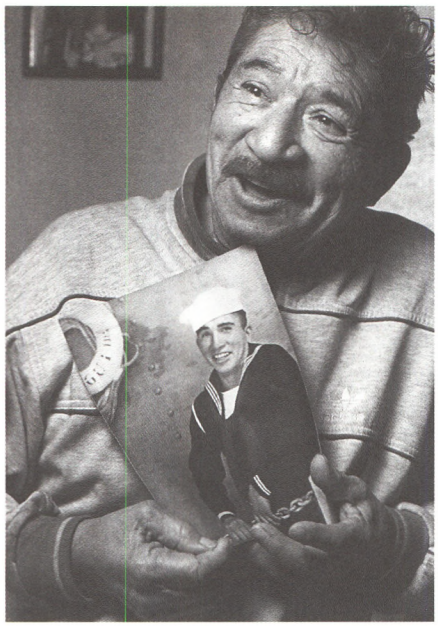
In the 130-seat UPT playhouse, community members take turns on the stage telling their own truths. Their performances, crafted and rehearsed with the assistance of professional UPT staff, are followed by audience discussions. This year, one storyteller told of "Bloody Island," a local massacre of Pomo people by American soldiers in 1850. The teller had learned the story from his great-grandmother, who had survived the killing by hiding under water, breathing through a reed. According to UPT co-founder Kate Magruder, "There was a combination of shock, grief, and defensiveness that rumbled through the audience each night. The audience discussions that followed were astonishing in their candor, emotion, and optimism."

The 2000 *Telling the Truth in a Small Town* series included a special program examining the impact of World War II on the lives of Ukiah residents. With funding from the California Council for the Humanities, UPT's partners in The Good War Project included the Mendocino College Community Exchange Program, Ukiah Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Native American History Project, Ukiah Daily Journal, Mendocino County Museum, Ukiah Senior Center, and the Mendocino County Library. A range of activities was designed to help bring the stories to the surface, including a book club, radio programming, a video and speaker series, writing classes, photo exhibits, a weekly newspaper column featuring a local veteran, and a multimedia theater production based on Studs Terkel's book of World War II oral histories.

According to Ralph Lewin, Assistant Director of the California Council for the Humanities, the evaluation of The Good War Project has demonstrated community building in several ways. Civic dialogue has increased, relationships among individuals and

"There was a combination of shock, grief, and defensiveness that rumbled through the audience each night. The audience discussions that followed were astonishing in their candor, emotion, and optimism."

— UPT co-founder Kate Magruder



Francis Lockhart, Pomo Indian Veteran, Ukiah Player's Theater, The Good War Project.

institutions have been strengthened, and a more inclusive public narrative about Ukiah has been developed.

Part of the public discussion in Ukiah has been about the process of *Telling the Truth*, itself. Not all residents feel safe enough to tell their stories publicly. For example, gay and lesbian youth at Ukiah High School recently declined to participate because they feared retaliation and abuse. And while those who are involved have come to believe in the power of public story, they also recognize the challenging work of addressing the community issues that are revealed. As one participant put it, "I'm a white woman married to a native man and know that the community needs to hear these stories because we need to understand why we don't get along. How can we deal with it if we refuse to know? First we need to listen, but the hard part is figuring out how to solve the problems."

Story for Systemic Change:

Faces of Fruitvale, Oakland

THE MULTI-ETHNIC FRUITVALE DISTRICT (population 55,000), located at the geographic center of the city of Oakland in the San Francisco Bay Area, is home to Latinos (36%), African Americans (32%), Asians (20%), European Americans (9%), and Native Americans (2%). *Faces of Fruitvale* is a community heritage project organized by the Friends of the Peralta Hacienda Historical Park in Oakland to illuminate the historical and contemporary ethnic differences and commonalties among Fruitvale residents.

Many Fruitvale residents agree with project coordinator Holly Alonso that in Fruitvale "identity is no longer supported by a web of connections between residents, and that, given such conditions, the possibility of a commons—a space held in common and a sense of joint responsibility for the common good—is ruled out. Violence, apathy, destruction of public places, inter-ethnic rivalry, and resentments form a ragged counterpoint to the efforts of the artistic, cultural, social, and service agencies in the neighborhood."

Peralta Hacienda Historical Park, once inhabited by Ohlone Indians and subsequently a Spanish-Mexican

rancho, has been used by the *Faces of Fruitvale* project as a touchstone for residents to explore their own histories and lives. Volunteers In Service To America and neighborhood volunteers, coached by participating scholars, initiated oral-history collecting throughout the district, inviting residents to share their stories and photographs. Project activities enhancing the collection process included an on-line digital repository for the stories, three twenty-minute radio programs featuring the collected stories, a photo exhibit of Fruitvale today, four public history events that celebrate cultural identity and unity, and two community-wide cultural festivals. Organizations helping to carry out program activities included the Spanish-Speaking Citizens Foundation, the Unity Council, the Oakland Museum of California, and Calvin Simmons Middle School. The project has been supported by grants from the California Council for the Humanities and the Oakland Arts Commission.

"The New Generation of Fruitvale" Mexican folkdancers on site where the old adobe wall of the Peralta rancho headquarters stood 150 years ago.

Alonso says the project has already prompted positive interactions among different ethnic groups and deepened residents' understanding of their local history. She believes this success to be the result of the project's commitment to including the full array of the district's cultures in a respectful way. For example, all public events are simultaneously translated in Spanish,

"A *frisson* went through all the Mien speakers when their language first came over the loudspeaker. A black resident said that Spanish sounded like music, that she had never heard Spanish before."

— Faces of Fruitvale coordinator Holly Alonso

English, and Mien. (The Iu Mien are an ethnic Chinese people, who, like the Hmong, are Vietnam War refugees from the mountains of Laos.) Alonso recalls "how a *frisson* went through all the Mien speakers when their language first came over a public event loudspeaker," and she remembers a black Fruitvale resident remarking "that Spanish sounded like music, that she had never heard Spanish before." Alonso noted that, in fact, the resident had probably heard Spanish most of her life, but not in a setting where people were exchanging ideas openly in a friendly manner.

The power of the project to move people and institutions toward action together is illustrated in the story of Peralta Creek. Elderly resident Alma en Paz told of what the creek had meant to her as a youth, wading and exploring from age five to fifteen in the decade of the forties. The creek in our time has become a concrete culvert, and the recent stories are of young people using the spot to abuse drugs, sex, and one another. As a result of the public airing of these dramatic ironies, teacher David Montes de Oca from Calvin Simmons Middle School started the Urban Arts

Academy, an after-school activity using the arts, history, myth, and archeology to engage students in a range of projects. Alex Zaragosa, a historian and project participant from the University of California, Berkeley, who had recently been named the Vice President for Outreach of the University of California system, decided to make the project a model program for the ways in which UC can work with middle schools to put underrepresented youth on the road to higher education.

Civic engagement and systemic change of this sort continue to be generated by the project. But perhaps the best measure so far of *Faces of Fruitvale's* success, Alonso concludes, is the growing commitment in the community to continue the work after outside funding is expended.

Story for Community Education and Action:

The Bus Riders Union Teatro, Los Angeles

TRANSPORTATION ISSUES have always defined public life in sprawling Los Angeles, with a population of 3.5 million people. When the city made plans to build a major railway line to wealthy suburban areas, proposing at the same time to cut bus lines in the poorest neighborhoods, the case became a major civil rights lawsuit.

Founded in 1992, the Los Angeles Bus Riders Union/Sindicato de Pasajeros (BRU) advocates and organizes for the mass transit and environmental

Dolores's Dilemma, Bus Riders Union Teatro

interests of its working-class, ethnically and racially diverse membership. In the past eight years, the BRU has grown to more than 3,000 dues-paying members, with an additional 50,000 self-identified members on the buses. In 1996, BRU won a consent decree against the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority on behalf of the city's 500,000 bus riders, and has since focused on enforcing the decree's provisions. In 1999, in collaboration with LA's Cornerstone Theater and with support from the Rockefeller Foundation, BRU organizers started the BRU Teatro as an instrument to organize bus riders.

"When you do a play in a big theater to a traditional audience, you measure success by the applause and the reviews that follow. When you do skits for bus riders, it's the little things you notice: the passengers who engage with the actors, the questions people ask, maybe even just one person who for the first time realizes his or her rights as a bus rider."

— BRU lead organizer Martin Hernandez

The Teatro's performances have rotating casts drawn from the BRU's membership base. Skits are performed on buses or at bus stops on the Crenshaw bus line, which runs through the mixed African American and Latino neighborhood of South Central, on the East LA lines that travel through Latino neighborhoods, and on the ethnically diverse Pico line. Using improvisational techniques, the actors incorporate responses and ideas from their bus-riding audiences into their performances.

Shepard Petit, who gets around by public transport in a wheel chair, recently wrote and performed a play called *The Invisible Passenger*, dealing with the common contempt he has experienced from drivers and other passengers for handicapped bus riders. *Dolores's Dilemma* is straight melodramatic comedy. Dolores, dressed in a wedding gown, is waiting at the bus stop for her groom to join her on the way to their wedding. The groom's bus never arrives, and her frustration with MTA service brings her to tears. Fretting and vulnerable, she is approached by the character of a "conniving MTA rail contractor who tries to steal her heart." But she is not tempted and concludes, with vocal support from her audience, that her heart belongs to the Bus Riders Union.

Martin Hernandez, lead organizer for the BRU, distinguishes between formal theater and the BRU's performances. "When you do a play in a big theater to a traditional audience, you measure success by the applause and the reviews that follow. You feel like you need a huge response. When you do skits for bus riders, it's the little things you notice: the passengers who engage with the actors, the questions people ask, maybe even just one person who for the first time realizes his or her rights as a bus rider." Hernandez emphasizes that the conversations with passengers after performances are the most important part of the organizing. "This is where we really start to hear about people's issues and experiences, and it is also an opportunity to popularize the facts concerning transit policy and rights."

Cornerstone Theater Company creates plays
with various communities, building bridges between
the artists of the company and people in
neighborhoods and regions -seeding a network of
community-based theater companies
in Los Angeles and across the nation.

The arts and humanities are a particularly powerful means by which people may turn their communities into places of learning.

The Field Dialogue

Practitioners working in grassroots arts and humanities such as Kate Magruder, Holly Alonso, and Martin Hernandez were among the more than 100 people interviewed during the course of the research. Also included were representatives from larger arts institutions, humanities professionals, program staff from philanthropy, community organizers, and popular educators. A list of those interviewed is included as an Appendix to this report.

The discussions uncovered an overwhelming belief in the value of the arts and humanities to community-strengthening efforts. The themes identified here do not do justice to the nuance and complexity, the richness and intensity of response elicited by the interviews. They have been selected as examples of the concerns now being expressed in community dialogue, worthy, therefore, of further consideration as the work is pursued.

Some people in the world of the arts institutions believed that crossing old lines etched by habit and custom was the key to diversifying and deepening participation in their organizations, a process they regarded as a key to future institutional success. Others felt that community engagement in the creative process dilutes artistic excellence. For these people there seemed to be a clear dividing line between the *product* of art that has been established as first rate and a *process* of

creation that engages the community. They drew a related line between professional and amateur. At one extreme, this view was expressed as "art should not be put to social purpose," accompanied by a fear of "political correctness." There seemed to be a relationship between these sentiments and some of the political rhetoric that has accompanied recent debates about culture issues in the country.

The line between process and product was of less importance to members of the humanities field, perhaps because story is so central to their worldview, perhaps because education is a driving interest, perhaps because interpretation of established artistic product (a territory they claim for themselves) is more sympathetic to community participation.

Among professionals in philanthropy, there was genuine interest in the cross-disciplinary aspects of this kind of community work. The interest seemed associated with a general desire to explore approaches to grantmaking that cross program fields.

Leaders in community organizing acknowledged readily that, in the form of story, they regularly put the arts to use in their work, both by encouraging participants to develop personal narratives and through training with classical stories from the Bible and Ancient Greece. Several acknowledged that organizing and art had been more closely connected in the past than at present, during, for instance, the civil rights and farmworkers movements. Organizers were thus authentically interested in learning more about the arts and humanities, but, ever the pragmatic strategists, they also seemed ready to dismiss any approach that might take them off a straight line to definable success.

Those who saw themselves more in the tradition of popular education were clearly already resonant with and accomplished in the use of the arts to create the line, not necessarily perceived by them to be straight, to success in communities.

"I'm just thinking about how much of the experience in organizing that I've come out of really has to do with helping people understand how to get a place, a space, a stage, that they can then proclaim and make a statement and tell their story, and draw the attention, which hopefully does in some way transform those who see it, which I think is what theater is about. Organizing is an art. And it engages people in the process of acting and transforming at all kinds of levels, as does any good art."

"And I kind of feel, I'm the organizer, and you're the artist, and doing something collaboratively, there are all these decisions where there could be tension. And I feel, well, he's got his agenda, and I've got mine. Both could be towards social change, but we just kind of come out with different world views."

"Everybody pays lip service to community art but it's a code word for 'bad art.' And art is about hierarchy. That's just what it's about."

Current practitioners in grassroots arts and humanities seemed genuinely thrilled that anyone was interested in interviewing them. They said they feel isolated and marginalized from institutional worlds of art, humanities, and funding sources. No feelings of marginalization, though, accompanied their descriptions of their work in communities. They reported a groundswell of community interest, a "hunger to connect" through the use of the arts and humanities.

Conversations between Artists and Organizers

Seeking to deepen the dialogue of the interviews, the research project conducted two focus groups, one hosted by Dell'Arte Players in rural Northern California, one by Cornerstone Theater in Los Angeles. Artists, organizers, educators, and funders were invited to discuss their work in communities, reaching out from the techniques and training of their individual disciplines to find connections with one another. They told stories.

An artist turned organizer told of a seven-year old Bay Area boy with leukemia, who, because his doctors didn't know Spanish and his parents didn't know English, had served as translator between them during the years of his successive treatments. When the last treatment had finally failed, it was he, at age fourteen, who translated to his parents that he was going to die. The story had become the focal point of a community campaign that forced the hospital to provide medical interpreters.

An artist told of a collaboration on a cross-ethnic, black-white performance of *Romeo and Juliet* between an ensemble company and residents of a small town in the deep South of the United States. The work had been challenging for everyone involved, and when the project

"It's not really just about building an audience, it's about culture and civic society and about that horrible disconnection and isolation from life—me as participant versus me as passive observer—which is a lot of what we in the so-called arts world encourage and nourish. 'Come see the people who know how to do it, aren't they great? You can't do it yourself, but you can sit and watch really creative and talented people and be amazed and entertained by them instead.' That kind of thing always makes me want to throw up."

"What ended up on the stage was very didactic and it felt like a smash, a blast, an insensitive look at them. So my problem was being able to handle a contemporary, fairly volatile, charged issue with passion and with humor and with animation and life but without running amok. I'm intrigued with finding a way to just present the stories and letting them be heard; the image of the stories rising up with equal power and not making comment on them. That seems to be a key."

was finished and interracial theater was not continued in the town, the company worried that their collaboration had caused more damage than positive change. Yet three years later the community won a major award for a racially integrated economic development project. Many in the town felt that this success had only been possible because of the relationships they had developed by working together on *Romeo and Juliet*.

An organizer argued that sharing the stories of individuals without collective action is little more than "community masturbation," but he told of a campaign in California to raise the minimum wage and of the undocumented immigrant who decided to participate in the action, even though he risked exposure to the INS and deportation back to a country where he would likely lose his life. The campaign was won, raising the minimum wage from $3.45 to $4.25 an hour and creating enormous collective good. The immigrant was never seen again.

The interplay between artists and organizers in the two conversations was lively, provocative, and informative. The transcripts of both focus groups are available in their entirety at the report's website at www.communityarts.net/concal.

Current practitioners in grassroots arts and humanitites said they feel isolated and marginalized from institutional worlds and funding sources. No feelings of marginalization, though, accompanied their work in communities, where they reported a "hunger to connect" through art.

"One of my personal agendas is to elevate the word 'community' to have the same status as 'beauty' when I'm talking about art."

From the Appalachian coalfields of eastern Kentucky, Roadside Theater makes original plays drawn from the song, history, and stories of its people. The ensemble also collaborates nationally with other artists and communitites eager to tell their stories in their own voice.

To be certain, the search is for truth and beauty. But it is through the collective process of reaching toward excellence, amateurs and professionals solving problems together, that the community can grow.

Issues for Analysis

The inquiry also sought to capture the dialogue underway in the broader national community of practitioners and critics. Linda Frye Burnham of Art in the Public Interest and the Community Arts Network was commissioned to write essays answering three questions: How do we talk about this work? What are the ingredients of a successful project? Can a project's storytelling "energy" continue in a community after the project is completed?

All three of Linda Burnham's essays can be found at www.communityarts.net/concal. An excerpt appears here.

Telling and Listening in Public:

The Critical Discourse

by Linda Frye Burnham

THE LID BLEW OFF the critical community in 1995 when New Yorker dance critic Arlene Croce published a refusal to review — or even to attend — a performance of "Still/Here" by the black, gay, HIV-positive choreographer Bill T. Jones at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Croce objected to the introduction into the performance of audio- and video-tapes of "real" people who were neither dancers nor actors, but people terminally or gravely ill with cancer and AIDS, talking about their own lives. She called it "victim art" that placed itself "beyond criticism" and "unintelligible as theater." Croce went on to attack all forms of "issue-oriented" art. She claimed that "advanced culture" was being turned into "utilitarian art" by "community outreach," "multiculturalism" and "minority groups," rendering it nothing more than "socially useful."

In subsequent issues, *The New Yorker* published responses, for and against Croce, and the issue turned up everywhere from college classrooms to daily newspapers. Joyce Carol Oates in *The New York Times* saw Croce's stance as a sign of the outworn critical voice, concluding, "Throughout the centuries, through every innovation ...criticism has exerted a primarily conservative force, the gloomy wisdom of inertia, interpreting the new and startling in terms of the old and familiar; denouncing as 'not art' what upsets cultural, moral and political expectations." Criticism is itself an art form, she declared, "and like all art forms it must evolve, or atrophy and die. Ms. Croce's *cri du coeur* may be a landmark admission of the bankruptcy of the old critical vocabulary, confronted with ever-new and evolving forms of art."

Following suit, critic Maurice Berger, in his book *The Crisis of Criticism,* observed that critics are subject to a lethargy that "exemplifies one of criticism's gravest problems — a tendency that lowers the profile of art in society and affirms most Americans' belief that the arts have little or no relevance to their lives." Berger believes that the strongest criticism for today can serve as a dynamic critical force, "capable of engaging, guiding, directing and influencing culture, even stimulating new forms of practice and expression." But many artists agree with California artist Suzanne Lacy, who claims that "criticism has not caught up with practice," and unless it does, "its ability to transform our understanding of art and artists' roles will be safely neutralized."

The Croce controversy brought to light for the first time the position of criticism vis-à-vis community-building narrative performance work. As this new and popular work rises in public profile, mainstream critics either turn away in frustration or struggle with ways to write about it, finding the old tools fairly useless.

In some desperation, artists themselves have begun to suggest and even exercise new critical tools. Suzanne Lacy, in her essay, "Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art," argues that measures of the effectiveness of a work must move beyond its "beauty" and "transcendence" and attempt more complex and multilayered measures of art at work in both the aesthetic and social realms. Lacy asks critics to

jettison old notions about artists' intentions, their interaction with audiences, and the role of the audience itself, and she offers some new perspectives.

Artist Liz Lerman and educator Mat Schwarzman have found new methods for artists and organizers to use critical dialogue during the art-making process. Schwarzman has written about ways for artists and organizers to cross the barricades of prejudice between them when trying to meet a mutual goal of social change. He believes this effort requires both the organizer's materialist analyses of power and oppression *and* the artist's intuitive analysis of the human spirit. Lerman has devised a Critical Response Process for works-in-progress, a process that puts the artist in control of critical exchange.

Roadside Theater of central Appalachia takes a grassroots approach and puts the audience at the center of the critical dialogue. Sometimes its plays are developed from community "story circles." The technique is often used at the conclusion of a performance, also, as a means to invite audience members to talk about how the performance relates to their own lives. Says Roadside's director Dudley Cocke, "Audiences are interested in a play's story and how it connects to their story. By the stories they tell — and how they tell them — we can judge how well the performance went. One of our plays, a co-production with an African-American company, examines black and white history and issues from a working-class, southern perspective. So in the post-performance story circles you have black people and white people from the same community talking about race and class based on their local, personal experience. Their stories become a powerful subtext for the actors at the next performance."

This kind of critical dialogue does not ignore beauty and transcendence, the typical concerns of contemporary U.S. criticism: "Truth and beauty," says Cocke, "are inseparable, and to separate them or ignore one in favor of the other, as often happens in contemporary criticism — and art making — is a mistake. What happens when you separate the dancer from the dance?"

The intimacy of a fine performance, then, prompts deeply personal stories from its witnesses. "When the performance is successful," says Cocke, "the stories in the circle are subtle, sometimes sly, complicated and intimate — like life. The play has been the occasion for the audience members — individually and collectively — to plumb their own feelings and thoughts. This is what is meant when an actor or director strives to be good enough to get out of the play's — and the audience's — way."

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Lacy, Suzanne, "Debated Territory: Toward a Crucial Language for Public Art," in Lacy, Suzanne, ed., *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle, Wash.: Bay Press, 1995).

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"What's the scream?" the artists of Community Performance Inc. ask of their community partners. "What cries out to be dealt with?" The best projects have something relevant to say.

"Inclusion offers opportunities to embrace colliding truths," says dance artist Liz Lerman, "openness to the multiple meanings that art can reveal." The best projects incorporate as many perspectives as possible.

"Success is beguiled by vision but is in love with persistence," says artist Richard Owen Geer. The best projects require common effort over time.

"Management structures and business practices are value-laden," say the artists of Grassroots Matrix. "They affect the mission, goals and creative process." The best projects are equitably organized, engaging all participants.

"One measurement of a project's success," say organizers Don Adams and Arlene Goldfarb, "is that after the project ends participants demonstrate an openness to further learning." The best projects set learning as a goal.

Great Leap in Los Angeles is a community-based performing arts organization whose mission is to create, produce and present works that give expression to the Asian American and multicultural experience.

There exists a thriving "market force" for the making of art that is of, by and for community.

Findings and Further Questions

The inquiry confirmed that Californians throughout the state are telling local stories in public, actively using the arts and humanities to strengthen their communities. The power of narrative art to promote communication and human connection, to create associational networks, and to address local issues is being demonstrated daily. There exists a thriving "market force" for the making of art that is of, by and for the community.

A great deal can be learned from this experimental practice. Many further questions are worthy of pursuit.

How best do we measure and describe how communities are strengthened through their interaction with art? How do we articulate clearly the "theory of change," and how will we know when success has been achieved?

What are the best tactics for negotiating the interchange between story gathering and artistic creation, between artistic performance and community response? If art is a powerful tool for community problem solving, can it be *over*powering? What tools are necessary for the work of discovery, collaborative creation, and collective engagement with the resulting artistic product?

How best can a community's civic and cultural life be integrated for mutual benefit without compromising the integrity of the artists, the humanists, the

organizers, or the residents? What is the science of collaboration among these interests? For artists and humanists and their audiences, the quality of content and performance is paramount. For organizers, the bottom line is leadership development and a change in power dynamics. For residents, the goal is to solve problems and improve quality of life. What are the pitfalls to be avoided in these collaborations, and what are the practical characteristics that can lead to success?

What are the appropriate purposes of the arts and humanities in communities? Is a sharp distinction between amateur audience and professional artist necessary? Are there mediating approaches available to mitigate the political divisiveness that has sometimes accompanied grassroots art? Is it possible that the loss of authentic connection between diverse residents and art is both a cause and an effect of community decline? If there is some of the artist, organizer, and humanist in each of us, how do we create more opportunities for individual and collective expression, action, and inquiry?

Guided by these questions, the research team sketched the design of a program that would explore and promote the use of narrative art to strengthen California communities.

A Potential Program Design

Three core values—engagement, inclusion, and inquiry—informed program design. Projects would bring together local collaborations of artists, humanists, organizers, and residents and their civic and religious organizations. The program would explore the role that a *cultural organizer* plays in promoting and sustaining these collaborations: facilitating relationships, coaching collaborators, and encouraging local leaders to emerge. A group of California universities would be partners to the program, helping to turn practice into knowledge. All involved would participate fully in the program's evolving design.

The Participating Cohorts

The three cohorts of participants would interact fully throughout the life of the program.

- *Local Community Partnerships* from communities across California would form the heart of the program. The artists in each partnership might include theater, folk art, and/or performance-based groups, as well as musicians and visual artists; there would be oral historians or other humanists; community activists might include organizing, community development, or popular education groups. Local community-based organizations of other kinds would anchor the partnerships. Focusing on the development, public presentation, and interaction with locally meaningful story, Local Community Partnerships would actively engage diverse groups of residents in issues and aspirations important to their communities. The Partnerships would be organized in regional clusters to enhance learning.
- *Cultural Organizers.* Central to the inquiry of the program would be the role that a cultural organizer plays in promoting and sustaining the interaction among local collaborators. The program's cultural organizers would work regionally to assist a cluster of Local Community Partnerships to develop their projects' themes and goals. Cultural organizers would be trained in negotiation, facilitation, and coaching skills and would study learning theory and the history of aesthetics. Working collectively within their cohort, they would help identify local and statewide leadership, would encourage learning among the community partners and the program as a whole, and would provide analysis to all program participants.
- *University Partners.* Teams consisting of faculty members and students from a number of California universities would help develop and codify the practice and methodologies of the cultural organizer. The university cohort would participate actively in the statewide learning and teaching network.

Asking organizers, artists, humanists, community residents, and university students and faculty to reach toward one another in community partnership, the program would encourage participants to stretch beyond their customary ways of working. A yearlong project planning period, a two-year implementation period, and a fourth year devoted to reflection and assessment would form the arc of the program design. An opportunity fund separate from the project budget would be available for grantees to propose collective activities that addressed unforeseen issues and new opportunities.

Hypothetical Projects

Real work in community is always more complex, interesting, and rewarding than anything that can be imagined by program designers. But the following hypothetical efforts can illustrate the kind of Local Community Project envisioned by the program.

- Community-based organizations encouraging civic participation among farmworkers seek to build relationships between workers and growers. The organizations partner with artists from both communities: musicians, writers, photographers, muralists, performers. Reaching out through informal and formal associations, they bring together workers and growers to share family histories. With guidance from the artists, these histories are turned into a dramatic performance and accompanying photographic and painting exhibit that tours libraries, museums, and schools in the

region, providing the catalyst for scores of community meetings. As a result, an institutional network is created in the region, governed by an advisory body of workers and growers, producing annual plays and other community events that engage residents.

- A city neighborhood is concerned about youth gang violence. A community-based arts organization goes to the local high school, drawing together a group of Asian and Latino youth. In workshops, they develop a play about two immigrant families, Asian and Latino, who build a relationship through the common experiences of disruption, loss, and renewal through the naturalization process. The play is performed in the community as a centerpiece of a civic participation campaign led by the youth to encourage adults to naturalize, register to vote, and be counted in the 2000 Census.
- A region is being rocked by conflicts between environmentalists and managers of the timber industry. In an attempt to bring people into dialogue, the local Chamber of Commerce partners with a theater company, conducting extensive interviews and group meetings with people on all sides of the issue. Hundreds of stories are collected about the relationship of people to the land, from which a dramatic piece is developed. The play focuses on a third, mediating perspective: that of the timber industry worker and his family. The play tours the community, performed by residents in local parks, with audience discussion and story circles following each performance. Encouraged by the outcome, the Chamber selects another issue, repeating the process in the following year.

Core Values and Key Objectives

Three key objectives would follow from the program's core values, guiding program design and evaluation.

- ***Engagement.*** Successful projects would focus on local community expression and problem solving and engage a broad range of residents in every aspect of the project. *Civic participation would be a key objective.*
- ***Inclusion.*** Successful projects would reach across dividing lines in the community. The strongest projects would reach the farthest and operate in an equitable way. *Boundary bridging would be a key objective.*
- ***Inquiry.*** Successful projects would have authentic interest in learning purposefully: trying new ideas and approaches, asking questions, and seeking answers. Evaluation, documentation, and communication would be pursued in the spirit of learning. *Building knowledge from practice would be a key objective.*

Program Learning

All three cohorts would be connected through face-to-face and electronic learning communities throughout the four-year program. The intent would be to develop a statewide field of practice that connected local efforts with one another and with intellectual and physical resources. Gatherings, publications, ongoing conversations, and regional and national networks would support and enhance the program's work and findings. Knowledge born from the program would be linked to regional, state, and national conditions that encouraged it to spread.

Goals and Anticipated Outcomes

Each Local Community Partnership would develop specific goals and outcomes, contributing to the following broad outcomes sought by the initiative:

- More participation among community members in complex public discourse, problem solving, and cultural production, and the development of an institutional infrastructure to sustain and deepen this participation.
- The development of new relationships, characterized by trust and mutual understanding, among people and organizations representing diverse elements of communities; the development of new leaders who maintain these relationships.
- A vibrant critical dialogue about and practice at the intersection of community, the arts, the humanities, and community organizing.
- Greater public understanding of local issues and knowledge of local life, both its natural and human history.
- A sense of community-owned public space sufficient to promote the development of civic culture.

APPENDIX

Interviews

GENERAL

Don Adams
Adams and Goldbard
Seattle, WA

Holly Alonso
Peralta Hacienda Historical Park
Oakland, CA

Raul Anorve
Instituto de Education Popular del Sur de California
Los Angeles, CA

Caron Atlas
Consultant
Brooklyn, NY

Debra Ballinger
Industrial Areas Foundation
San Francisco, CA

Karen Bass
Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment
Los Angeles, CA

Rev. John Baumann
Pacific Institute for Community Organizing
Oakland, CA

Loren Bommelyn
Smith River Rancheria
Crescent City, CA

Danielle Brazell
Highways Performance Space
Santa Monica, CA

Linda Burnham
Art in the Public Interest
Saxapahaw, NC

Ben Cameron
Theatre Communications Group
New York, NY

Jo Carson
Freelance Writer
Johnson City, TN

Diane Cary
Winters Tale
Winters, CA

Leilani Chan
TeAda Productions
Los Angeles, CA

Bill Cleveland
Center for the Study of Art and Community
Minneapolis, MN

Sandy Close
Pacific News Service
San Francisco, CA

Rodrigo Duarte Clark
Teatro Esperanza
San Francisco, CA

Kevin Cordi
Youth Storytelling Network
Hanford, CA

Ernie Cortes
Industrial Areas Foundation
Pasadena, CA

Judith Dunning
Oral Historian
El Cerrito, CA

Chris Dwyer
RMC Research
Portsmouth, NH

Tim Ereneta
Storytelling Association of Alta California
Oakland, CA

Larry Ferlazzo
Industrial Areas Foundation
Sacramento, CA

Michael Fields
Dell'Arte Players Company
Blue Lake, CA

Richard Owen Geer
Community Performance Inc.
Chicago, IL

Arlene Goldbard
Adams and Goldbard
Seattle, WA

Larry Gordon
Industrial Areas Foundation
San Francisco, CA

Pat Graney
The Pat Graney Company
Seattle, WA

Martin Hernandez
Bus Riders Union
Los Angeles, CA

Tu N. Herr
Hmong Youth Foundation
Fresno, CA

Theresa Holden
The Artist and Community Connection
Austin, TX

Ralph Hurtado
Juvenile Crime Prevention Program
Long Beach, CA

Jean Jackman
Down Home Tales of Davis
Davis, CA

Henry Jaurequi
Aztlan Community Cultural Center
Modesto, CA

Paul Johnston
Central Coast Citizenship Project
Salinas, CA

Simona Keet
Humboldt County School District
Eureka, CA

Amy Kitchener
Folk Arts Program, Fresno Arts Council
Fresno, CA

Erica Kohl
Community Education Consultant
Oakland, CA

Mary Beth Larkin
Industrial Areas Foundation
Pasadena, CA

Liz Lerman
Liz Lerman Dance Exchange
Takoma Park, MD

Ferdinand Lewis
Writer
Valencia, CA

David Lighthall
California Institute for Rural Studies
Davis, CA

Agustin Lira
Teatro de la Tierra
Fresno, CA

Jonathan K. London
Youth in Focus
Davis, CA

Joyce Lowery
Humboldt Community Network
Eureka, CA

Kate Magruder
Ukiah Players Theater
Ukiah, CA

John Malpede
Los Angeles Poverty Department
Los Angeles, CA

Aida Mancillas
Stone, Paper, Scissors
San Diego, CA

Deanna J. Marquart
Marquart Policy Analysis Associates
Sacramento, CA

Graciela Martinez
Proyecto Campesino-AFSC
Visalia, CA

Myrna Martinez-Nateras
Pan Valley Institute – AFSC
Fresno, CA

Libby Maynard
Ink People Center for the Arts
Eureka, CA

Martha McCoy
Study Circles Resource Center
Pomfret, CT

Larry McNeil
Industrial Areas Foundation
San Francisco, CA

Don Miller
Center for Religion & Civic Culture
Los Angeles, CA

Mark Miller
American Friends Service Committee
Sacramento, CA

Nobuko Miyamoto
Great Leap, Inc.
Santa Monica, CA

Naomi Newman
A Traveling Jewish Theater
San Francisco, CA

Juanita Ontiveros
California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation
Sacramento, CA

Albert Padilla
Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation
Visalia, CA

Bill Rauch
Cornerstone Theater
Los Angeles, CA

Erick Recinos-Rosas
Compumentor
San Francisco, CA

Solomon Rivera
Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment
Los Angeles, CA

Sue Ann Robinson
Long Beach Museum of Art
Long Beach, CA

Deborah Salzer
Playwrights Project
San Diego, CA

Dave Schaechtele
Monterey State Historic Park
Monterey, CA

Mat Schwarzman
East Bay Institute for Urban Arts
Oakland, CA

Maria Singleton
Singelton, Tacket and Associates
San Luis Obispo, CA

Marcia Sharp
Millennium Communications
Andover, MA

Anna Deavere Smith
Playwright and Actor
San Francisco, CA

Ken Smith
Industrial Areas Foundation
Watsonville, CA

John Suter
New York Heritage Documentation Project
Ithaca, NY

Lauren Texiera
California Indian Storytelling Association
San Jose, CA

Edward Wemytewa
Zuni Rainbow Project
Zuni, NM

Carol Whiteside
The Great Valley Center
Modesto, CA

Rev. Eugene Williams
Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches
Los Angeles, CA

Sam Woodhouse
San Diego Repertory Theater
San Diego, CA

Jerry Yoshitomi
Consultant
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UNIVERSITY

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University of California, Berkeley
Berkeley, CA

Anne Killkelly
Virginia Tech
Blacksburg, VA

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Oakland, CA

Julian Lang
Humboldt State University
Arcata, CA

Steven Lavine
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Valencia, CA

Robert Leonard
Virginia Tech
Blacksburg, VA

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Bronx, NY

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Fresno, CA

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Davis, CA

Amalia Mesa-Bains
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Seaside, CA

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Santa Cruz, CA

David Robertson
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Thenmozhi Soundararajan
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Berkeley, CA

Marc Spencer
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FOUNDATION

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David and Lucile Packard Foundation
Los Altos, CA

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Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation
San Francisco, CA

Ruby Lerner
Creative Capital
New York, NY

Ralph Lewin
California Council for the Humanities
San Francisco, CA

Peter Pennekamp
Humboldt Area Foundation
Bayside, CA

Jim Quay
California Council for the Humanities
San Francisco, CA

Josephine Ramirez
J. Paul Getty Trust
Los Angeles, CA

Robert Sherman
Surdna Foundation
New York, NY

Holly Sidford
Wallace - Reader's Digest Funds
New York, NY

Bruce Sievers
Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund
San Francisco, CA

Marcia Smith
Ford Foundation
New York, NY

Sterling Speirn
Peninsula Community Foundation
San Mateo, CA

Ray Tatar
California Arts Council
Sacramento, CA

RESEARCH DATA AVAILABLE

www.communityarts.net/concal

The following research findings are available on the Community Arts Network website at: www.communityarts.net/concal

1. **RESEARCH REPORT**

2. **CASE STUDIES: THREE LOCAL PROJECTS**
   Brief studies of public performances springing from the history, aesthetics, and issues in three California communities.
   a. *Telling the Truth in a Small Town: Ukiah Players Theater*
   b. *The Faces of Fruitvale: Peralta Hacienda Historical Park*
   c. *Organizing and Theater: Bus Riders Union*

3. **SCAN OF THE FIELD: EVIDENCE OF PUBLIC PERFORMANCE BASED ON LOCAL LIFE**
   A search was conducted to find a recent project in each of California's 58 counties that engaged residents in a public performance of story about local history and life. Maps were created to represent the various projects.
   a. Style, Diversity, and Outcome Maps of Selected Projects in California
   b. Prominent Themes: Findings from Map Participant Survey
   c. Contact List and Brief Descriptions of Projects Represented on Maps

4. **CONVENINGS: TWO FOCUS GROUPS**
   Artists, organizers, educators, and funders came together to discuss the role of story in building community and their experiences working at the intersection of the arts, the humanities, and organizing.
   a. Transcript from Los Angeles Focus Group (154 pp.) with Contact List
   b. Transcript from Humboldt Focus Group (185 pp.) with Contact List

5. **NATIONAL AND CALIFORNIA INTERVIEWS: GENERAL, UNIVERSITY, AND FOUNDATION**
   Over the course of ten months, the research team interviewed more than one hundred practitioners, educators, and policy makers with experience in the arts, humanities, and civic culture.
   a. Introduction to Interview Conversations
   b. Interview Contact List

6. **MONOGRAPHS: THREE RESEARCH ESSAYS**
   Writer and critic Linda Burnham interviewed practitioners and thinkers in the field grappling with issues at the intersection of community organizing, art, and the humanities, producing three monographs.
   a. "Telling and Listening in Public: The Critical Discourse"
   b. "Telling and Listening in Public: Factors for Success"
   c. "Telling and Listening in Public: The Sustainability of Storytelling"
   d. Essay Interview Contact List

7. **LITERATURE REVIEW: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES**
   a. Arts & Humanities Bibliography
   b. Popular Education Bibliography

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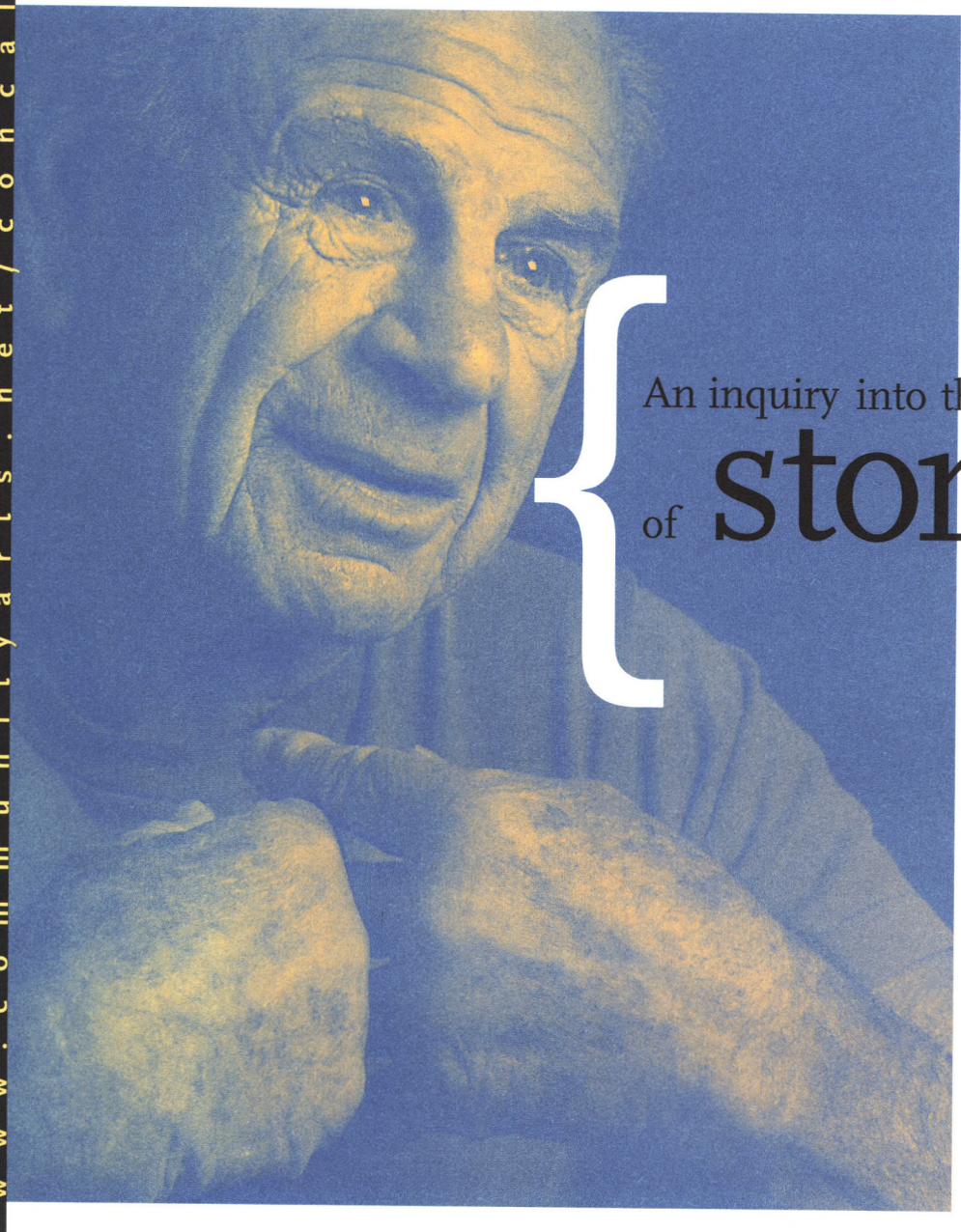
"Story is the true measure of wealth, and everyone is rich."

—Artist Richard Owen Geer

Connecting CALIFORNIANs

FINDING THE ART OF COMMUNITY CHANGE



An inquiry into the role of **story** in strengthening communities

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Contents

The research question:
How can different ways of discovering and presenting local stories in public contribute to the strengthening of community?

Introduction

One California story began in a northern coastal town, with the death of a young child in a family of Hmong refugees from the mountains of Laos. In response to the tragedy, following a tradition thousands of years old, the family sacrificed a pig. Non-Hmong neighbors misunderstood. An ordinance against animal sacrifice was passed, and a painful inter-ethnic clash ensued. In the effort at reconciliation, a Hmong playwright, in partnership with a local community organization and a local theater, wrote a play about the incident that was performed for town residents. The play enhanced community dialogue, contributing eventually to the repeal of the ordinance.

The recurrence of stories such as this throughout California—communities using narrative art to strengthen themselves—led to the inquiry described in these pages. The hunch behind the inquiry was that art is a particularly powerful means of building community, and that the country's historical interest in grassroots narrative, as exemplified, for example, in the Federal Theater Project in the Thirties, might be bubbling up again from communities. The growing national debate about the decline of social capital and the need for civic

renewal provided a context for this hypothesis.

The research question: How can different ways of discovering and presenting local stories in public contribute to the strengthening of community?

The inquiry was itself designed as a public conversation, led by a partnership between funders and practitioners, who held the question mutually and functioned as equals. The research focused on the intersecting roles of artists and humanists, community organizers (including popular education and community development proponents), and diverse residents, all using story to address local issues.

The inquiry had six components:

- A California-wide scan by county during the period 1995-99 for evidence of public performances based on local stories.
- More than 100 interviews with artists, humanities professionals, community organizers, foundation staff, and educators in California and nationally.
- Case studies of public performances springing from the issues, aspirations, and histories of California communities and used to engage residents in community building.
- Two focus groups, one in Southern and one in Northern California, composed of artists, humanists, and community organizers, convened to discuss their experiences at the intersection of story, art, and organizing.
- Three monographs ("The Critical Discourse," "Factors for Success," and "The Sustainability of Storytelling"), commissioned to address prominent issues emerging from the research.
- A literature review.

The research data has been compiled in its entirety and is available on the Internet at:
www.communityarts.net/concal

The research team was particularly interested in the public performance of local story that combined a compelling vision of positive social change with high artistic standards. They postulated that the success of such efforts would depend upon how engaged community members were in all phases of the work, from creation through performance through follow-up reflection. The team had interest in projects that would provide opportunities for people from unlike backgrounds to make human connection and lay the foundation for community problem solving.

The Inquiry Team

Dudley Cocke, artist and Director of Roadside Theater, the 25 year-old Appalachian ensemble company, and Craig McGarvey, educator and Director of The James Irvine Foundation's Civic Culture Program, first met in the late spring of 1999 at a national theater conference in San Francisco. They quickly discovered a mutual interest in community story, learning theory, and the chasm between the arts and humanities and science. Their shared interests formed the background of the inquiry that they pursued over the next 10 months, from September 1999 to June 2000. Erica Kohl, community educator, who received her Masters Degree in Community Development from the University of California, Davis, in June 1999, joined the research team in November. Linda Frye Burnham, Co-Director of Art in the Public Interest and the Community Arts Network, and James Quay, Executive Director of the California Council for the Humanities, also participated in the inquiry.

Research Rationale

The research rationale emerged from the framework of The James Irvine Foundation's Civic Culture program.

Civic Culture at The James Irvine Foundation

Civic Culture at Irvine supports Californians working to build an effective pluralism from the State's exponentially increasing cultural diversity. One in four current Californians was born overseas; in Los Angeles and the Bay Area, the number is two in five. These newcomers have arrived from nearly every country on earth, with a great predominance from the Pacific Rim.

The program's first premise is that the democracy is built as people build their communities. Community building is collective problem solving—shared experience toward common purpose across lines that can divide. Often with the guidance of an organizer, people come together with those unlike themselves to identify issues important to the improvement of quality of life in their communities. They make and implement plans collectively, all the while trying to learn how to get better at their work together. Through this experiential education in democratic participation, they develop the skills, knowledge, attitudes and, importantly, the human relationships that build social capital and strengthen their communities.

Often the result is improved public policy. For example, a statewide project of a California faith-based community organizing network helped to shape and pass legislation in Sacramento that devoted $50 million to after-school educational programs. Policy formation is part of democratic participation. Yet the process was as important as the product. From a dozen separate California communities, from hundreds of congregations, tens of thousands of people acted inclusively toward this common purpose. They learned from one another and about one another. Working together, using the techniques of adult, community-based, experiential education, they turned their communities into places of learning.

The Arts and Humanities and Community

The arts and humanities are a particularly powerful means by which people may turn their communities into places of learning. Through art:

- We express our understandings of the world around us; we give voice.
- We interpret the views and experiences of others; we learn to perceive.
- We create new understandings; we synthesize, develop new approaches.

The expressive, interpretive and creative aspects of the arts and humanities carry special utility when dividing lines have been etched deeply in communities. Often with greater power than other modes of human discourse, collective engagement with art can heal wounds, break logjams, build bridges.

It is not only at the extremes of experience, however, that the arts and humanities are important to collective life. Art is community's growing edge. It is through expression, interpretation, and creation that the culture is continually reinvented.

Nor does art's importance lie only at the extremes of talent or achievement. To be certain, the search is for truth and beauty. But it is through the collective process of reaching toward excellence, amateurs and professionals solving problems together, that the community can grow.

Story and Community

Absent the stories of others, how will we know them? Absent our own stories, how will we know ourselves? Story is inherent to human experience; we are the story-telling animal. Story is the means by which we learn, by which we make meaningful experience from the events of our lives together. The stories we are able to tell ourselves and others, those we can understand and imagine, carry our identity, our culture. They define what we believe to be possible in our individual and collective lives.

Interaction with narrative strengthens community in several ways:

- Telling stories gives shape to personal identity, enabling us to link with others and with universal themes.
- Engaging with stories (listening, interpreting, responding) introduces us to others who could otherwise remain distant; it builds empathy and understanding.
- Sharing stories with one another creates human connection, builds relationships, and develops a sense of common narrative.

Because of its innate power, story lies at the center of the work of those attempting to strengthen communities. Organizers start with the stories of individuals, using narrative to illuminate the hopes, concerns, and interests of community members; the exploration and interpretation of shared stories creates common ground, and the collective action that follows is an attempt to build a community story. Artists and humanists with an interest in community use their narrative skills to express complex and sometimes contentious ideas, emotions, and issues, enabling communication and connection. Stories that are of, by and for the communities in which they are publicly performed can be the galvanizing occasion for civic engagement.

The researchers posited that artists, humanists, and organizers have developed an extensive practice using narrative to catalyze civic engagement. It was in search of the breadth and depth of this current practice that the inquiry started.

Story is the means by which we learn, by which we make meaningful experience from the events of our lives together. The stories we are able to tell ourselves and others, those we can understand and imagine, carry our identity, our culture.

Based in Humboldt County, California, the Dell'Arte Company has pioneered "Theatre of Place", which is original theater created by, for, and about a particular community, but that is accessible to audiences anywhere via a unique physical performance style.

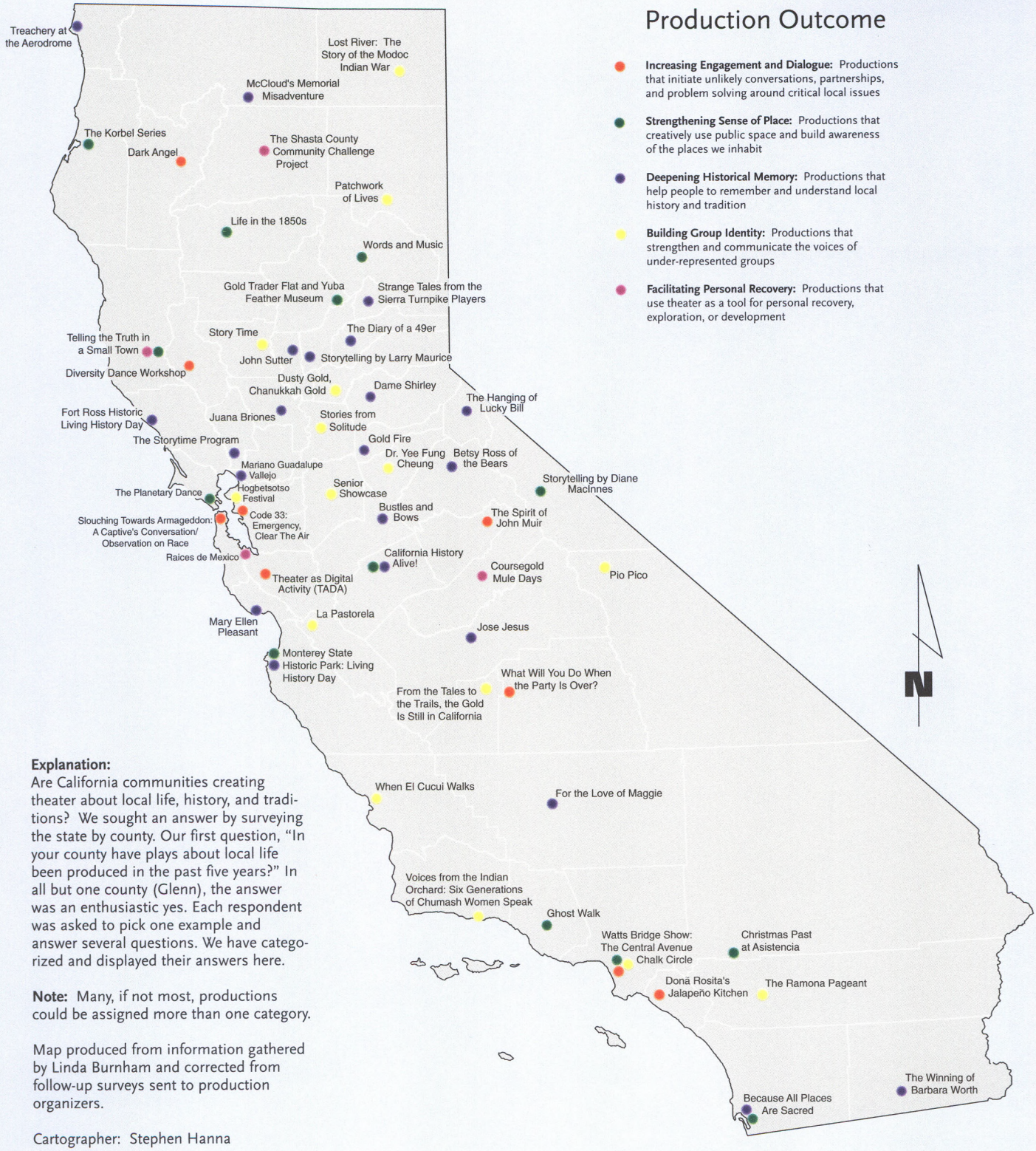
The inquiry uncovered Californians in every corner of the state who are using narrative art to strengthen their communities.

The California Landscape

The inquiry uncovered Californians in every corner of the state who are using narrative art to strengthen their communities. In an attempt to map the extent of state activity, the researchers conducted a county-by-county survey, asking for an example of a recent public performance that had drawn its narrative from local history or current community issues. In 57 of the state's 58 counties, examples were readily available. They ranged from oral histories to classical texts adapted to local circumstance, from "The Story of the Modoc Indian War" to "The Watts Bridge Show," and are displayed on the accompanying maps.

Descriptions of each of these performances appear on line at www.communityarts.net/concal. It is important to note that a survey of density of practice was beyond the scope of the inquiry; such a map of Los Angeles County alone would have produced hundreds of data points. Depth of practice, however, was a central concern of the research. The following three case studies, which appear in expanded form at the web site, illustrate the creativity, versatility, and commitment of Californians who are connecting their communities through the arts and humanities.

Connecting Californians: DIVERSE Outcomes



Explanation:
Are California communities creating theater about local life, history, and traditions? We sought an answer by surveying the state by county. Our first question, "In your county have plays about local life been produced in the past five years?" In all but one county (Glenn), the answer was an enthusiastic yes. Each respondent was asked to pick one example and answer several questions. We have categorized and displayed their answers here.

Note: Many, if not most, productions could be assigned more than one category.

Map produced from information gathered by Linda Burnham and corrected from follow-up surveys sent to production organizers.

Cartographer: Stephen Hanna

Connecting Californians: DIVERSE Styles

Note: Many, if not most, productions could be assigned more than one category.

Map produced from information gathered by Linda Burnham and corrected from follow-up surveys sent to production organizers.

Cartographer: Stephen Hanna

Story for an Inclusive Public Narrative:

Telling the Truth in a Small Town, Ukiah

UKIAH (population 14,600) is located in a mountain valley in Mendocino County, approximately one hundred miles north of San Francisco and fifty miles inland from the ocean. It is home to the Pomo band of Indians, Italian grape growers, timber industry and agricultural workers, and a mix of intellectuals and artists. Ukiah Players Theater (UPT) was founded in 1977 by a handful of young theater artists who had moved to the region in the early 1970s to 'live simply in a rural community.' UPT's annual production, *Telling the Truth in a Small Town,* helps residents share personal stories with their neighbors.

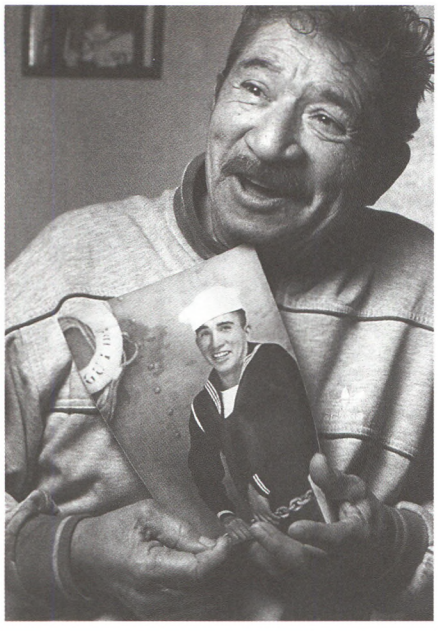
In the 130-seat UPT playhouse, community members take turns on the stage telling their own truths. Their performances, crafted and rehearsed with the assistance of professional UPT staff, are followed by audience discussions. This year, one storyteller told of "Bloody Island," a local massacre of Pomo people by American soldiers in 1850. The teller had learned the story from his great-grandmother, who had survived the killing by hiding under water, breathing through a reed. According to UPT co-founder Kate Magruder, "There was a combination of shock, grief, and defensiveness that rumbled through the audience each night. The audience discussions that followed were astonishing in their candor, emotion, and optimism."

The 2000 *Telling the Truth in a Small Town* series included a special program examining the impact of World War II on the lives of Ukiah residents. With funding from the California Council for the Humanities, UPT's partners in The Good War Project included the Mendocino College Community Exchange Program, Ukiah Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Native American History Project, Ukiah Daily Journal, Mendocino County Museum, Ukiah Senior Center, and the Mendocino County Library. A range of activities was designed to help bring the stories to the surface, including a book club, radio programming, a video and speaker series, writing classes, photo exhibits, a weekly newspaper column featuring a local veteran, and a multimedia theater production based on Studs Terkel's book of World War II oral histories.

According to Ralph Lewin, Assistant Director of the California Council for the Humanities, the evaluation of The Good War Project has demonstrated community building in several ways. Civic dialogue has increased, relationships among individuals and

"There was a combination of shock, grief, and defensiveness that rumbled through the audience each night. The audience discussions that followed were astonishing in their candor, emotion, and optimism."

— UPT co-founder Kate Magruder



Francis Lockhart, Pomo Indian Veteran, Ukiah Player's Theater, The Good War Project.

institutions have been strengthened, and a more inclusive public narrative about Ukiah has been developed.

Part of the public discussion in Ukiah has been about the process of *Telling the Truth*, itself. Not all residents feel safe enough to tell their stories publicly. For example, gay and lesbian youth at Ukiah High School recently declined to participate because they feared retaliation and abuse. And while those who are involved have come to believe in the power of public story, they also recognize the challenging work of addressing the community issues that are revealed. As one participant put it, "I'm a white woman married to a native man and know that the community needs to hear these stories because we need to understand why we don't get along. How can we deal with it if we refuse to know? First we need to listen, but the hard part is figuring out how to solve the problems."

Story for Systemic Change:

Faces of Fruitvale, Oakland

THE MULTI-ETHNIC FRUITVALE DISTRICT (population 55,000), located at the geographic center of the city of Oakland in the San Francisco Bay Area, is home to Latinos (36%), African Americans (32%), Asians (20%), European Americans (9%), and Native Americans (2%). *Faces of Fruitvale* is a community heritage project organized by the Friends of the Peralta Hacienda Historical Park in Oakland to illuminate the historical and contemporary ethnic differences and commonalties among Fruitvale residents.

Many Fruitvale residents agree with project coordinator Holly Alonso that in Fruitvale "identity is no longer supported by a web of connections between residents, and that, given such conditions, the possibility of a commons—a space held in common and a sense of joint responsibility for the common good—is ruled out. Violence, apathy, destruction of public places, interethnic rivalry, and resentments form a ragged counterpoint to the efforts of the artistic, cultural, social, and service agencies in the neighborhood."

Peralta Hacienda Historical Park, once inhabited by Ohlone Indians and subsequently a Spanish-Mexican

rancho, has been used by the *Faces of Fruitvale* project as a touchstone for residents to explore their own histories and lives. Volunteers In Service To America and neighborhood volunteers, coached by participating scholars, initiated oral-history collecting throughout the district, inviting residents to share their stories and photographs. Project activities enhancing the collection process included an on-line digital repository for the stories, three twenty-minute radio programs featuring the collected stories, a photo exhibit of Fruitvale today, four public history events that celebrate cultural identity and unity, and two community-wide cultural festivals. Organizations helping to carry out program activities included the Spanish-Speaking Citizens Foundation, the Unity Council, the Oakland Museum of California, and Calvin Simmons Middle School. The project has been supported by grants from the California Council for the Humanities and the Oakland Arts Commission.

"The New Generation of Fruitvale" Mexican folkdancers on site where the old adobe wall of the Peralta rancho headquarters stood 150 years ago.

Alonso says the project has already prompted positive interactions among different ethnic groups and deepened residents' understanding of their local history. She believes this success to be the result of the project's commitment to including the full array of the district's cultures in a respectful way. For example, all public events are simultaneously translated in Spanish,

"A *frisson* went through all the Mien speakers when their language first came over the loudspeaker. A black resident said that Spanish sounded like music, that she had never heard Spanish before."

— Faces of Fruitvale coordinator Holly Alonso

English, and Mien. (The Iu Mien are an ethnic Chinese people, who, like the Hmong, are Vietnam War refugees from the mountains of Laos.) Alonso recalls "how a *frisson* went through all the Mien speakers when their language first came over a public event loudspeaker," and she remembers a black Fruitvale resident remarking "that Spanish sounded like music, that she had never heard Spanish before." Alonso noted that, in fact, the resident had probably heard Spanish most of her life, but not in a setting where people were exchanging ideas openly in a friendly manner.

The power of the project to move people and institutions toward action together is illustrated in the story of Peralta Creek. Elderly resident Alma en Paz told of what the creek had meant to her as a youth, wading and exploring from age five to fifteen in the decade of the forties. The creek in our time has become a concrete culvert, and the recent stories are of young people using the spot to abuse drugs, sex, and one another. As a result of the public airing of these dramatic ironies, teacher David Montes de Oca from Calvin Simmons Middle School started the Urban Arts

Academy, an after-school activity using the arts, history, myth, and archeology to engage students in a range of projects. Alex Zaragosa, a historian and project participant from the University of California, Berkeley, who had recently been named the Vice President for Outreach of the University of California system, decided to make the project a model program for the ways in which UC can work with middle schools to put underrepresented youth on the road to higher education.

Civic engagement and systemic change of this sort continue to be generated by the project. But perhaps the best measure so far of *Faces of Fruitvale's* success, Alonso concludes, is the growing commitment in the community to continue the work after outside funding is expended.

Story for Community Education and Action:

The Bus Riders Union Teatro, Los Angeles

TRANSPORTATION ISSUES have always defined public life in sprawling Los Angeles, with a population of 3.5 million people. When the city made plans to build a major railway line to wealthy suburban areas, proposing at the same time to cut bus lines in the poorest neighborhoods, the case became a major civil rights lawsuit.

Founded in 1992, the Los Angeles Bus Riders Union/Sindicato de Pasajeros (BRU) advocates and organizes for the mass transit and environmental

Dolores's Dilemma, Bus Riders Union Teatro

interests of its working-class, ethnically and racially diverse membership. In the past eight years, the BRU has grown to more than 3,000 dues-paying members, with an additional 50,000 self-identified members on the buses. In 1996, BRU won a consent decree against the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority on behalf of the city's 500,000 bus riders, and has since focused on enforcing the decree's provisions. In 1999, in collaboration with LA's Cornerstone Theater and with support from the Rockefeller Foundation, BRU organizers started the BRU Teatro as an instrument to organize bus riders.

"When you do a play in a big theater to a traditional audience, you measure success by the applause and the reviews that follow. When you do skits for bus riders, it's the little things you notice: the passengers who engage with the actors, the questions people ask, maybe even just one person who for the first time realizes his or her rights as a bus rider."

— BRU lead organizer Martin Hernandez

The Teatro's performances have rotating casts drawn from the BRU's membership base. Skits are performed on buses or at bus stops on the Crenshaw bus line, which runs through the mixed African American and Latino neighborhood of South Central, on the East LA lines that travel through Latino neighborhoods, and on the ethnically diverse Pico line. Using improvisational techniques, the actors incorporate responses and ideas from their bus-riding audiences into their performances.

Shepard Petit, who gets around by public transport in a wheel chair, recently wrote and performed a play called *The Invisible Passenger,* dealing with the common contempt he has experienced from drivers and other passengers for handicapped bus riders. *Dolores's Dilemma* is straight melodramatic comedy. Dolores, dressed in a wedding gown, is waiting at the bus stop for her groom to join her on the way to their wedding. The groom's bus never arrives, and her frustration with MTA service brings her to tears. Fretting and vulnerable, she is approached by the character of a "conniving MTA rail contractor who tries to steal her heart." But she is not tempted and concludes, with vocal support from her audience, that her heart belongs to the Bus Riders Union.

Martin Hernandez, lead organizer for the BRU, distinguishes between formal theater and the BRU's performances. "When you do a play in a big theater to a traditional audience, you measure success by the applause and the reviews that follow. You feel like you need a huge response. When you do skits for bus riders, it's the little things you notice: the passengers who engage with the actors, the questions people ask, maybe even just one person who for the first time realizes his or her rights as a bus rider." Hernandez emphasizes that the conversations with passengers after performances are the most important part of the organizing. "This is where we really start to hear about people's issues and experiences, and it is also an opportunity to popularize the facts concerning transit policy and rights."

Cornerstone Theater Company creates plays
with various communities, building bridges between
the artists of the company and people in
neighborhoods and regions -seeding a network of
community-based theater companies
in Los Angeles and across the nation.

The arts and humanities are a particularly powerful means by which people may turn their communities into places of learning.

The Field Dialogue

Practitioners working in grassroots arts and humanities such as Kate Magruder, Holly Alonso, and Martin Hernandez were among the more than 100 people interviewed during the course of the research. Also included were representatives from larger arts institutions, humanities professionals, program staff from philanthropy, community organizers, and popular educators. A list of those interviewed is included as an Appendix to this report.

The discussions uncovered an overwhelming belief in the value of the arts and humanities to community-strengthening efforts. The themes identified here do not do justice to the nuance and complexity, the richness and intensity of response elicited by the interviews. They have been selected as examples of the concerns now being expressed in community dialogue, worthy, therefore, of further consideration as the work is pursued.

Some people in the world of the arts institutions believed that crossing old lines etched by habit and custom was the key to diversifying and deepening participation in their organizations, a process they regarded as a key to future institutional success. Others felt that community engagement in the creative process dilutes artistic excellence. For these people there seemed to be a clear dividing line between the *product* of art that has been established as first rate and a *process* of

creation that engages the community. They drew a related line between professional and amateur. At one extreme, this view was expressed as "art should not be put to social purpose," accompanied by a fear of "political correctness." There seemed to be a relationship between these sentiments and some of the political rhetoric that has accompanied recent debates about culture issues in the country.

The line between process and product was of less importance to members of the humanities field, perhaps because story is so central to their worldview, perhaps because education is a driving interest, perhaps because interpretation of established artistic product (a territory they claim for themselves) is more sympathetic to community participation.

Among professionals in philanthropy, there was genuine interest in the cross-disciplinary aspects of this kind of community work. The interest seemed associated with a general desire to explore approaches to grantmaking that cross program fields.

Leaders in community organizing acknowledged readily that, in the form of story, they regularly put the arts to use in their work, both by encouraging participants to develop personal narratives and through training with classical stories from the Bible and Ancient Greece. Several acknowledged that organizing and art had been more closely connected in the past than at present, during, for instance, the civil rights and farmworkers movements. Organizers were thus authentically interested in learning more about the arts and humanities, but, ever the pragmatic strategists, they also seemed ready to dismiss any approach that might take them off a straight line to definable success.

Those who saw themselves more in the tradition of popular education were clearly already resonant with and accomplished in the use of the arts to create the line, not necessarily perceived by them to be straight, to success in communities.

"I'm just thinking about how much of the experience in organizing that I've come out of really has to do with helping people understand how to get a place, a space, a stage, that they can then proclaim and make a statement and tell their story, and draw the attention, which hopefully does in some way transform those who see it, which I think is what theater is about. Organizing is an art. And it engages people in the process of acting and transforming at all kinds of levels, as does any good art."

"And I kind of feel, I'm the organizer, and you're the artist, and doing something collaboratively, there are all these decisions where there could be tension. And I feel, well, he's got his agenda, and I've got mine. Both could be towards social change, but we just kind of come out with different world views."

"Everybody pays lip service to community art but it's a code word for 'bad art.' And art is about hierarchy. That's just what it's about."

Current practitioners in grassroots arts and humanities seemed genuinely thrilled that anyone was interested in interviewing them. They said they feel isolated and marginalized from institutional worlds of art, humanities, and funding sources. No feelings of marginalization, though, accompanied their descriptions of their work in communities. They reported a groundswell of community interest, a "hunger to connect" through the use of the arts and humanities.

Conversations between Artists and Organizers

Seeking to deepen the dialogue of the interviews, the research project conducted two focus groups, one hosted by Dell'Arte Players in rural Northern California, one by Cornerstone Theater in Los Angeles. Artists, organizers, educators, and funders were invited to discuss their work in communities, reaching out from the techniques and training of their individual disciplines to find connections with one another. They told stories.

An artist turned organizer told of a seven-year old Bay Area boy with leukemia, who, because his doctors didn't know Spanish and his parents didn't know English, had served as translator between them during the years of his successive treatments. When the last treatment had finally failed, it was he, at age fourteen, who translated to his parents that he was going to die. The story had become the focal point of a community campaign that forced the hospital to provide medical interpreters.

An artist told of a collaboration on a cross-ethnic, black-white performance of *Romeo and Juliet* between an ensemble company and residents of a small town in the deep South of the United States. The work had been challenging for everyone involved, and when the project

"It's not really just about building an audience, it's about culture and civic society and about that horrible disconnection and isolation from life—me as participant versus me as passive observer—which is a lot of what we in the so-called arts world encourage and nourish. 'Come see the people who know how to do it, aren't they great? You can't do it yourself, but you can sit and watch really creative and talented people and be amazed and entertained by them instead.' That kind of thing always makes me want to throw up."

"What ended up on the stage was very didactic and it felt like a smash, a blast, an insensitive look at them. So my problem was being able to handle a contemporary, fairly volatile, charged issue with passion and with humor and with animation and life but without running amok. I'm intrigued with finding a way to just present the stories and letting them be heard; the image of the stories rising up with equal power and not making comment on them. That seems to be a key."

was finished and interracial theater was not continued in the town, the company worried that their collaboration had caused more damage than positive change. Yet three years later the community won a major award for a racially integrated economic development project. Many in the town felt that this success had only been possible because of the relationships they had developed by working together on *Romeo and Juliet.*

An organizer argued that sharing the stories of individuals without collective action is little more than "community masturbation," but he told of a campaign in California to raise the minimum wage and of the undocumented immigrant who decided to participate in the action, even though he risked exposure to the INS and deportation back to a country where he would likely lose his life. The campaign was won, raising the minimum wage from $3.45 to $4.25 an hour and creating enormous collective good. The immigrant was never seen again.

The interplay between artists and organizers in the two conversations was lively, provocative, and informative. The transcripts of both focus groups are available in their entirety at the report's website at www.communityarts.net/concal.

Current practitioners in grassroots arts and humanitites said they feel isolated and marginalized from institutional worlds and funding sources. No feelings of marginalization, though, accompanied their work in communities, where they reported a "hunger to connect" through art.

"One of my personal agendas is to elevate the word 'community' to have the same status as 'beauty' when I'm talking about art."

From the Appalachian coalfields of eastern Kentucky, Roadside Theater makes original plays drawn from the song, history, and stories of its people. The ensemble also collaborates nationally with other artists and communitites eager to tell their stories in their own voice.

To be certain, the search is for truth and beauty. But it is through the collective process of reaching toward excellence, amateurs and professionals solving problems together, that the community can grow.

Issues for Analysis

The inquiry also sought to capture the dialogue underway in the broader national community of practitioners and critics. Linda Frye Burnham of Art in the Public Interest and the Community Arts Network was commissioned to write essays answering three questions: How do we talk about this work? What are the ingredients of a successful project? Can a project's storytelling "energy" continue in a community after the project is completed?

All three of Linda Burnham's essays can be found at www.communityarts.net/concal. An excerpt appears here.

Telling and Listening in Public:

The Critical Discourse

by Linda Frye Burnham

THE LID BLEW OFF the critical community in 1995 when New Yorker dance critic Arlene Croce published a refusal to review — or even to attend — a performance of "Still/Here" by the black, gay, HIV-positive choreographer Bill T. Jones at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Croce objected to the introduction into the performance of audio- and video-tapes of "real" people who were neither dancers nor actors, but people terminally or gravely ill with cancer and AIDS, talking about their own lives. She called it "victim art" that placed itself "beyond criticism" and "unintelligible as theater." Croce went on to attack all forms of "issue-oriented" art. She claimed that "advanced culture" was being turned into "utilitarian art" by "community outreach," "multiculturalism" and "minority groups," rendering it nothing more than "socially useful."

In subsequent issues, *The New Yorker* published responses, for and against Croce, and the issue turned up everywhere from college classrooms to daily newspapers. Joyce Carol Oates in *The New York Times* saw Croce's stance as a sign of the outworn critical voice, concluding, "Throughout the centuries, through every innovation ...criticism has exerted a primarily conservative force, the gloomy wisdom of inertia, interpreting the new and startling in terms of the old and familiar; denouncing as 'not art' what upsets cultural, moral and political expectations." Criticism is itself an art form, she declared, "and like all art forms it must evolve, or atrophy and die. Ms. Croce's *cri du coeur* may be a landmark admission of the bankruptcy of the old critical vocabulary, confronted with ever-new and evolving forms of art."

Following suit, critic Maurice Berger, in his book *The Crisis of Criticism*, observed that critics are subject to a lethargy that "exemplifies one of criticism's gravest problems — a tendency that lowers the profile of art in society and affirms most Americans' belief that the arts have little or no relevance to their lives." Berger believes that the strongest criticism for today can serve as a dynamic critical force, "capable of engaging, guiding, directing and influencing culture, even stimulating new forms of practice and expression." But many artists agree with California artist Suzanne Lacy, who claims that "criticism has not caught up with practice," and unless it does, "its ability to transform our understanding of art and artists' roles will be safely neutralized."

The Croce controversy brought to light for the first time the position of criticism vis-à-vis community-building narrative performance work. As this new and popular work rises in public profile, mainstream critics either turn away in frustration or struggle with ways to write about it, finding the old tools fairly useless.

In some desperation, artists themselves have begun to suggest and even exercise new critical tools. Suzanne Lacy, in her essay, "Debated Territory: Toward a Critical Language for Public Art," argues that measures of the effectiveness of a work must move beyond its "beauty" and "transcendence" and attempt more complex and multilayered measures of art at work in both the aesthetic and social realms. Lacy asks critics to

jettison old notions about artists' intentions, their interaction with audiences, and the role of the audience itself, and she offers some new perspectives.

Artist Liz Lerman and educator Mat Schwarzman have found new methods for artists and organizers to use critical dialogue during the art-making process. Schwarzman has written about ways for artists and organizers to cross the barricades of prejudice between them when trying to meet a mutual goal of social change. He believes this effort requires both the organizer's materialist analyses of power and oppression *and* the artist's intuitive analysis of the human spirit. Lerman has devised a Critical Response Process for works-in-progress, a process that puts the artist in control of critical exchange.

Roadside Theater of central Appalachia takes a grassroots approach and puts the audience at the center of the critical dialogue. Sometimes its plays are developed from community "story circles." The technique is often used at the conclusion of a performance, also, as a means to invite audience members to talk about how the performance relates to their own lives. Says Roadside's director Dudley Cocke, "Audiences are interested in a play's story and how it connects to their story. By the stories they tell — and how they tell them — we can judge how well the performance went. One of our plays, a co-production with an African-American company, examines black and white history and issues from a working-class, southern perspective. So in the post-performance story circles you have black people and white people from the same community talking about race and class based on their local, personal experience. Their stories become a powerful subtext for the actors at the next performance."

This kind of critical dialogue does not ignore beauty and transcendence, the typical concerns of contemporary U.S. criticism: "Truth and beauty," says Cocke, "are inseparable, and to separate them or ignore one in favor of the other, as often happens in contemporary criticism — and art making — is a mistake. What happens when you separate the dancer from the dance?"

The intimacy of a fine performance, then, prompts deeply personal stories from its witnesses. "When the performance is successful," says Cocke, "the stories in the circle are subtle, sometimes sly, complicated and intimate — like life. The play has been the occasion for the audience members — individually and collectively — to plumb their own feelings and thoughts. This is what is meant when an actor or director strives to be good enough to get out of the play's — and the audience's — way."

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"What's the scream?" the artists of Community Performance Inc. ask of their community partners. "What cries out to be dealt with?" The best projects have something relevant to say.

"Inclusion offers opportunities to embrace colliding truths," says dance artist Liz Lerman, "openness to the multiple meanings that art can reveal." The best projects incorporate as many perspectives as possible.

"Success is beguiled by vision but is in love with persistence," says artist Richard Owen Geer. The best projects require common effort over time.

"Management structures and business practices are value-laden," say the artists of Grassroots Matrix. "They affect the mission, goals and creative process." The best projects are equitably organized, engaging all participants.

"One measurement of a project's success," say organizers Don Adams and Arlene Goldfarb, "is that after the project ends participants demonstrate an openness to further learning." The best projects set learning as a goal.

Great Leap in Los Angeles is a community-based performing arts organization whose mission is to create, produce and present works that give expression to the Asian American and multicultural experience.

There exists a thriving "market force" for the making of art that is of, by and for community.

Findings and Further Questions

The inquiry confirmed that Californians throughout the state are telling local stories in public, actively using the arts and humanities to strengthen their communities. The power of narrative art to promote communication and human connection, to create associational networks, and to address local issues is being demonstrated daily. There exists a thriving "market force" for the making of art that is of, by and for the community.

A great deal can be learned from this experimental practice. Many further questions are worthy of pursuit.

How best do we measure and describe how communities are strengthened through their interaction with art? How do we articulate clearly the "theory of change," and how will we know when success has been achieved?

What are the best tactics for negotiating the interchange between story gathering and artistic creation, between artistic performance and community response? If art is a powerful tool for community problem solving, can it be *over*powering? What tools are necessary for the work of discovery, collaborative creation, and collective engagement with the resulting artistic product?

How best can a community's civic and cultural life be integrated for mutual benefit without compromising the integrity of the artists, the humanists, the

organizers, or the residents? What is the science of collaboration among these interests? For artists and humanists and their audiences, the quality of content and performance is paramount. For organizers, the bottom line is leadership development and a change in power dynamics. For residents, the goal is to solve problems and improve quality of life. What are the pitfalls to be avoided in these collaborations, and what are the practical characteristics that can lead to success?

What are the appropriate purposes of the arts and humanities in communities? Is a sharp distinction between amateur audience and professional artist necessary? Are there mediating approaches available to mitigate the political divisiveness that has sometimes accompanied grassroots art? Is it possible that the loss of authentic connection between diverse residents and art is both a cause and an effect of community decline? If there is some of the artist, organizer, and humanist in each of us, how do we create more opportunities for individual and collective expression, action, and inquiry?

Guided by these questions, the research team sketched the design of a program that would explore and promote the use of narrative art to strengthen California communities.

A Potential Program Design

Three core values—engagement, inclusion, and inquiry—informed program design. Projects would bring together local collaborations of artists, humanists, organizers, and residents and their civic and religious organizations. The program would explore the role that a *cultural organizer* plays in promoting and sustaining these collaborations: facilitating relationships, coaching collaborators, and encouraging local leaders to emerge. A group of California universities would be partners to the program, helping to turn practice into knowledge. All involved would participate fully in the program's evolving design.

The Participating Cohorts

The three cohorts of participants would interact fully throughout the life of the program.

- *Local Community Partnerships* from communities across California would form the heart of the program. The artists in each partnership might include theater, folk art, and/or performance-based groups, as well as musicians and visual artists; there would be oral historians or other humanists; community activists might include organizing, community development, or popular education groups. Local community-based organizations of other kinds would anchor the partnerships. Focusing on the development, public presentation, and interaction with locally meaningful story, Local Community Partnerships would actively engage diverse groups of residents in issues and aspirations important to their communities. The Partnerships would be organized in regional clusters to enhance learning.
- *Cultural Organizers.* Central to the inquiry of the program would be the role that a cultural organizer plays in promoting and sustaining the interaction among local collaborators. The program's cultural organizers would work regionally to assist a cluster of Local Community Partnerships to develop their projects' themes and goals. Cultural organizers would be trained in negotiation, facilitation, and coaching skills and would study learning theory and the history of aesthetics. Working collectively within their cohort, they would help identify local and statewide leadership, would encourage learning among the community partners and the program as a whole, and would provide analysis to all program participants.
- *University Partners.* Teams consisting of faculty members and students from a number of California universities would help develop and codify the practice and methodologies of the cultural organizer. The university cohort would participate actively in the statewide learning and teaching network.

Asking organizers, artists, humanists, community residents, and university students and faculty to reach toward one another in community partnership, the program would encourage participants to stretch beyond their customary ways of working. A yearlong project planning period, a two-year implementation period, and a fourth year devoted to reflection and assessment would form the arc of the program design. An opportunity fund separate from the project budget would be available for grantees to propose collective activities that addressed unforeseen issues and new opportunities.

Hypothetical Projects

Real work in community is always more complex, interesting, and rewarding than anything that can be imagined by program designers. But the following hypothetical efforts can illustrate the kind of Local Community Project envisioned by the program.

- Community-based organizations encouraging civic participation among farmworkers seek to build relationships between workers and growers. The organizations partner with artists from both communities: musicians, writers, photographers, muralists, performers. Reaching out through informal and formal associations, they bring together workers and growers to share family histories. With guidance from the artists, these histories are turned into a dramatic performance and accompanying photographic and painting exhibit that tours libraries, museums, and schools in the

region, providing the catalyst for scores of community meetings. As a result, an institutional network is created in the region, governed by an advisory body of workers and growers, producing annual plays and other community events that engage residents.

- A city neighborhood is concerned about youth gang violence. A community-based arts organization goes to the local high school, drawing together a group of Asian and Latino youth. In workshops, they develop a play about two immigrant families, Asian and Latino, who build a relationship through the common experiences of disruption, loss, and renewal through the naturalization process. The play is performed in the community as a centerpiece of a civic participation campaign led by the youth to encourage adults to naturalize, register to vote, and be counted in the 2000 Census.
- A region is being rocked by conflicts between environmentalists and managers of the timber industry. In an attempt to bring people into dialogue, the local Chamber of Commerce partners with a theater company, conducting extensive interviews and group meetings with people on all sides of the issue. Hundreds of stories are collected about the relationship of people to the land, from which a dramatic piece is developed. The play focuses on a third, mediating perspective: that of the timber industry worker and his family. The play tours the community, performed by residents in local parks, with audience discussion and story circles following each performance. Encouraged by the outcome, the Chamber selects another issue, repeating the process in the following year.

Core Values and Key Objectives

Three key objectives would follow from the program's core values, guiding program design and evaluation.

- ***Engagement.*** Successful projects would focus on local community expression and problem solving and engage a broad range of residents in every aspect of the project. *Civic participation would be a key objective.*
- ***Inclusion.*** Successful projects would reach across dividing lines in the community. The strongest projects would reach the farthest and operate in an equitable way. *Boundary bridging would be a key objective.*
- ***Inquiry.*** Successful projects would have authentic interest in learning purposefully: trying new ideas and approaches, asking questions, and seeking answers. Evaluation, documentation, and communication would be pursued in the spirit of learning. *Building knowledge from practice would be a key objective.*

Program Learning

All three cohorts would be connected through face-to-face and electronic learning communities throughout the four-year program. The intent would be to develop a statewide field of practice that connected local efforts with one another and with intellectual and physical resources. Gatherings, publications, ongoing conversations, and regional and national networks would support and enhance the program's work and findings. Knowledge born from the program would be linked to regional, state, and national conditions that encouraged it to spread.

Goals and Anticipated Outcomes

Each Local Community Partnership would develop specific goals and outcomes, contributing to the following broad outcomes sought by the initiative:

- More participation among community members in complex public discourse, problem solving, and cultural production, and the development of an institutional infrastructure to sustain and deepen this participation.
- The development of new relationships, characterized by trust and mutual understanding, among people and organizations representing diverse elements of communities; the development of new leaders who maintain these relationships.
- A vibrant critical dialogue about and practice at the intersection of community, the arts, the humanities, and community organizing.
- Greater public understanding of local issues and knowledge of local life, both its natural and human history.
- A sense of community-owned public space sufficient to promote the development of civic culture.

APPENDIX

Interviews

GENERAL

Don Adams
Adams and Goldbard
Seattle, WA

Holly Alonso
Peralta Hacienda Historical Park
Oakland, CA

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Industrial Areas Foundation
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Karen Bass
Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment
Los Angeles, CA

Rev. John Baumann
Pacific Institute for Community Organizing
Oakland, CA

Loren Bommelyn
Smith River Rancheria
Crescent City, CA

Danielle Brazell
Highways Performance Space
Santa Monica, CA

Linda Burnham
Art in the Public Interest
Saxapahaw, NC

Ben Cameron
Theatre Communications Group
New York, NY

Jo Carson
Freelance Writer
Johnson City, TN

Diane Cary
Winters Tale
Winters, CA

Leilani Chan
TeAda Productions
Los Angeles, CA

Bill Cleveland
Center for the Study of Art and Community
Minneapolis, MN

Sandy Close
Pacific News Service
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Rodrigo Duarte Clark
Teatro Esperanza
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Youth Storytelling Network
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Oral Historian
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Chris Dwyer
RMC Research
Portsmouth, NH

Tim Ereneta
Storytelling Association of Alta California
Oakland, CA

Larry Ferlazzo
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Sacramento, CA

Michael Fields
Dell'Arte Players Company
Blue Lake, CA

Richard Owen Geer
Community Performance Inc.
Chicago, IL

Arlene Goldbard
Adams and Goldbard
Seattle, WA

Larry Gordon
Industrial Areas Foundation
San Francisco, CA

Pat Graney
The Pat Graney Company
Seattle, WA

Martin Hernandez
Bus Riders Union
Los Angeles, CA

Tu N. Herr
Hmong Youth Foundation
Fresno, CA

Theresa Holden
The Artist and Community Connection
Austin, TX

Ralph Hurtado
Juvenile Crime Prevention Program
Long Beach, CA

Jean Jackman
Down Home Tales of Davis
Davis, CA

Henry Jaurequi
Aztlan Community Cultural Center
Modesto, CA

Paul Johnston
Central Coast Citizenship Project
Salinas, CA

Simona Keet
Humboldt County School District
Eureka, CA

Amy Kitchener
Folk Arts Program, Fresno Arts Council
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Erica Kohl
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Mary Beth Larkin
Industrial Areas Foundation
Pasadena, CA

Liz Lerman
Liz Lerman Dance Exchange
Takoma Park, MD

Ferdinand Lewis
Writer
Valencia, CA

David Lighthall
California Institute for Rural Studies
Davis, CA

Agustin Lira
Teatro de la Tierra
Fresno, CA

Jonathan K. London
Youth in Focus
Davis, CA

Joyce Lowery
Humboldt Community Network
Eureka, CA

Kate Magruder
Ukiah Players Theater
Ukiah, CA

John Malpede
Los Angeles Poverty Department
Los Angeles, CA

Aida Mancillas
Stone, Paper, Scissors
San Diego, CA

Deanna J. Marquart
Marquart Policy Analysis Associates
Sacramento, CA

Graciela Martinez
Proyecto Campesino-AFSC
Visalia, CA

Myrna Martinez-Nateras
Pan Valley Institute – AFSC
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Libby Maynard
Ink People Center for the Arts
Eureka, CA

Martha McCoy
Study Circles Resource Center
Pomfret, CT

Larry McNeil
Industrial Areas Foundation
San Francisco, CA

Don Miller
Center for Religion & Civic Culture
Los Angeles, CA

Mark Miller
American Friends Service Committee
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Nobuko Miyamoto
Great Leap, Inc.
Santa Monica, CA

Naomi Newman
A Traveling Jewish Theater
San Francisco, CA

Juanita Ontiveros
California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation
Sacramento, CA

Albert Padilla
Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation
Visalia, CA

Bill Rauch
Cornerstone Theater
Los Angeles, CA

Erick Recinos-Rosas
Compumentor
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Solomon Rivera
Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment
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Sue Ann Robinson
Long Beach Museum of Art
Long Beach, CA

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East Bay Institute for Urban Arts
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Millennium Communications
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Anna Deavere Smith
Playwright and Actor
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New York Heritage Documentation Project
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California Indian Storytelling Association
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Carol Whiteside
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Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches
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UNIVERSITY

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Humboldt Area Foundation
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Wallace - Reader's Digest Funds
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Marcia Smith
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Sterling Speirn
Peninsula Community Foundation
San Mateo, CA

Ray Tatar
California Arts Council
Sacramento, CA

RESEARCH DATA AVAILABLE

www.communityarts.net/concal

The following research findings are available on the Community Arts Network website at: www.communityarts.net/concal

1. **RESEARCH REPORT**

2. **CASE STUDIES: THREE LOCAL PROJECTS**
   Brief studies of public performances springing from the history, aesthetics, and issues in three California communities.
   a. *Telling the Truth in a Small Town: Ukiah Players Theater*
   b. *The Faces of Fruitvale: Peralta Hacienda Historical Park*
   c. *Organizing and Theater: Bus Riders Union*

3. **SCAN OF THE FIELD: EVIDENCE OF PUBLIC PERFORMANCE BASED ON LOCAL LIFE**
   A search was conducted to find a recent project in each of California's 58 counties that engaged residents in a public performance of story about local history and life. Maps were created to represent the various projects.
   a. Style, Diversity, and Outcome Maps of Selected Projects in California
   b. Prominent Themes: Findings from Map Participant Survey
   c. Contact List and Brief Descriptions of Projects Represented on Maps

4. **CONVENINGS: TWO FOCUS GROUPS**
   Artists, organizers, educators, and funders came together to discuss the role of story in building community and their experiences working at the intersection of the arts, the humanities, and organizing.
   a. Transcript from Los Angeles Focus Group (154 pp.) with Contact List
   b. Transcript from Humboldt Focus Group (185 pp.) with Contact List

5. **NATIONAL AND CALIFORNIA INTERVIEWS: GENERAL, UNIVERSITY, AND FOUNDATION**
   Over the course of ten months, the research team interviewed more than one hundred practitioners, educators, and policy makers with experience in the arts, humanities, and civic culture.
   a. Introduction to Interview Conversations
   b. Interview Contact List

6. **MONOGRAPHS: THREE RESEARCH ESSAYS**
   Writer and critic Linda Burnham interviewed practitioners and thinkers in the field grappling with issues at the intersection of community organizing, art, and the humanities, producing three monographs.
   a. "Telling and Listening in Public: The Critical Discourse"
   b. "Telling and Listening in Public: Factors for Success"
   c. "Telling and Listening in Public: The Sustainability of Storytelling"
   d. Essay Interview Contact List

7. **LITERATURE REVIEW: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES**
   a. Arts & Humanities Bibliography
   b. Popular Education Bibliography

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"Story is the true measure of wealth, and everyone is rich."

—*Artist Richard Owen Geer*