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ARTS-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: WHERE DID WE COME FROM?

Maryo Gard Ewell

"History does not refer merely, or even principally...to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do. It could scarcely be otherwise, since it is to history that we owe our frames of reference, our identities and our aspirations."

CONTEXT

My mother taught grammar, and my father and my husband are writers, so I've always paid attention to words, definitions and meanings. In 1992, I wrote an article in which I suggested eleven different meanings and usages for the term "community arts." ² Each is valid, but they are very different. For some people, "community arts" is synonymous with "amateur" arts; for other people, it refers to arts-based community development, as Bill Cleveland will describe the term in the next chapter.

And then there are prepositions. Take "for," "of," "by," and "with," for instance, often used carelessly and, in arts administration, too often interchangeably. Art of a people refers to shared cultural expressions—"that show truly captures the history, the spirit, of Colquitt, Georgia." Art by a group refers to performance or execution—"the mural was done by a group of fourth graders" or "that performance of *Taming of the Shrew* was done by a group from Monroe, Wisconsin." Art with people refers to cooperation or collaboration—"the performance was made possible with help from resident artist Susan Smith" or "the Gunnison Art Guild worked with the kids from 4-H to create this exhibit." Art "for" people refers to an offering, or to outreach—"the first performance was for seniors at the Meals on Wheels center" or "they did the show for the residents of Third Ward."

And then, most subtle of all, is the context which assigns meaning. People with very different world-views may both use a phrase like "The arts are for everyone," yet mean quite different things. Here is a fine example:

Meaning #1: John D. Rockefeller 3rd chaired a seminal panel³ on the performing arts in the 1960's. Michael Straight quotes the credo of the panel in Rockefeller's introduction to the report: "The arts are not for a privileged few but the many..." but then Straight says:

"On the other hand, he and the panel feared that government support would in time lead to the substitution of mediocrity for excellence in the performing arts. It was a latter-day expression of

¹ Baldwin, James, "White Man's Guilt," *Ebony*, volume 20, August 1965, page 47. Note: This quote is often-mistakenly-said to be from *The Fire Next Time*. Thanks to librarian Patrick Muckleroy, Western State College, for tracking down the correct source.

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² Ewell, Maryo G., "Community Arts and the Human Community: Why We Do What We Do," in Overton, Patrick, *Grassroots and Mountain Wings*, Columbia College, 1992.

³ Rockefeller Panel Report, *The Performing Arts: Problems and Prospects*, McGraw-Hill, 1965.

the Edwardian view, expressed in noble terms by Herbert Croly in *The Promise of American Life*. Croly held in essence that democracy was a fine idea; too fine to be left to the people as he found them.... In that same spirit the Rockefeller Panel held that the arts were 'for the many' but could not be entrusted to the many."⁴

Meaning #2: Robert E. Gard of Wisconsin was writing about arts development in the 1960's as well. His worldview was quite different, although he, too, believed that the "arts are for everyone." Contrast this with the perspective above:

"In terms of American democracy, the arts are for everyone.... As America emerges into a different understanding of her strength, it becomes clear that her strength is in the people and in the places where the people live. The people, if shown the way, can create art in and of themselves." 5

On the one hand, the people are given access to works of art, presumably in order to appreciate them, learn about them, perhaps to be influenced or changed by them. I think of this as art *for* the people. This is quite different from the second perspective—art *of*, *with* and *by* people—in which the people can be the creators of art as a part of the process of deepening democracy.

The perspective of the Rockefeller panel, of art *for* people, is an important one, but because it's in large part a perspective of organizations and of gifted professional artists, it tends to be reasonably well documented. The other perspective is equally important, but harder to research, for it often appears within stories about grassroots community development movements or about non-arts institutions (such as Settlement Houses or the federal Extension Service, described later in this chapter). Linda Burnham and Steve Durland said:

"There is a space opening in the public imagination where people can visualize reaching out to the arts to help them attain a goal—whether they simply want to participate locally in vigorous artmaking, or they articulate a more pointed social need: to research a community's past, to brand a community identity, to heal the local river, to find something productive for kids to do after school, to reduce crime in a neighborhood, to transform an empty lot, or to help an economically stressed community inventory its assets and come up with a product or service they can market for themselves."

Elsewhere, Durland observes that often this work is not addressed in art-critical terms, but rather, in social and political terms. And, sadly, Art in the Public Interest's Community Arts Network, which had invited and collected writings on arts of, with, and by people, ceased to exist as an active site when funding was lost. 8

Still, the history and the stories are there. My library and filing cabinets bulge with just a tiny bit of what exists. The stories go back decades—even centuries—depending on what thread you're unraveling.

it.org/2077/20100906194820/http://www.communityarts.net/apinews/index.php

⁴ Straight, Michael, *Nancy Hanks: An Intimate Portrait*, Duke University Press, 1988, p. 80-81.

⁵ Gard, Robert E., *The Arts in the Small Community*, University of Wisconsin Extension, 1969, p. 4.

⁶ Burnham, Linda Frye and Steven Durland, "Help Wanted! Communities Reach Out," Community Arts Network/API Online, February, 2007. http://wayback.archive-

<u>it.org/2077/20100906203654/http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2007/02/help_wanted_com.php_</u>downloaded January 17, 2012.

⁷ Durland, Steven, "Notes from the Editor" in *High Performance #65*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Spring 1994, p. 10.

⁸ Archived articles can be found at http://wayback.archive-

In the following chapter, Bill Cleveland includes definitions of many terms inherent in his concept of "community-based arts development." Integral to the definitions are core foundational values. For instance, he defines community development in general: "a set of values and practices which play a special role in overcoming poverty and disadvantage, knitting society together at the grass roots and deepening democracy." He defines arts-based community development: "community-based arts activities that equitably and sustainably advance human dignity, health and productivity; that educate and inform us about ourselves and the world; inspire and mobilize individuals or groups; nurture and heal people and/or communities; build and improve community capacity and/or infrastructure."

It's worth foreshadowing Cleveland's definitions here. Vital, in fact. For in addition to speaking an aesthetic *language* that synthesizes process/product, that synthesizes meaning/technique, practitioners of arts-based community development share core *values*: they believe in the worth, dignity, and voice of all people; and they believe in the importance of a decent and meaningful collective life.

Who are some of the people who have paved our way during the last century, whom we can claim as ancestors for this language and these values, and from whom we can draw inspiration? Let's meet a few of them, ask them to walk with us and give our work their blessing.

EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY: URBAN

The start of the 20th century was a time of great social ferment. W.E.B. DuBois was writing about race and the many facets of segregation and cultural liberation, beginning in 1903 with *The Souls of Black Folk*. He said that "the beauty of truth and freedom which shall some day be our heritage and the heritage of all civilized men is not in our hands yet and that we ourselves must not fail to realize."

But later in that same speech DuBois says,

"We must come to the place where the work of art when it appears is reviewed and acclaimed by our own free and unfettered judgment. And we are going to have a real and valuable and eternal judgment only as we make ourselves free of mind, proud of body and just of soul to all men.

And then do you know what will be said? It is already saying. Just as soon as true art emerges; just as soon as the black artist appears, someone touches the race on the shoulder and says, 'He did that because he was an American, not because he was a Negro.... He is just human; it is the kind of thing you ought to expect.'9"

Indeed, scholar Cornel West believes that DuBois found art essential for intercultural dialogue, creating "an atmosphere and context so conversation can flow back and forth and we can be influenced by each other." At the same time, the Settlement House movement was underway; at a place like Hull House in Chicago, new European immigrants could take night classes and could learn about their new culture, while staying attuned to their old. Jane Addams describes putting rooms with musical instruments at the disposal of families so that music from home could be remembered and passed on to the next generation. At the same time, there was an art gallery, a crafts school, a theater, a music program (indeed, the National Guild of Community Schools of the Arts claims Jane Addams as their progenitor), and there one might find both "high art" events as well as topical or culturally-specific exhibits and shows. Indeed, Addams felt that—in the spirit of W.E.B. DuBois—the arts could help transcend cultural barriers; she describes showcasing Negro music, drama, poetry, and art as a way

⁹ DuBois, W.E.B., "Criteria of Negro Art," in Lewis, David levering, W.E.B. DuBois: A Reader, Henry Holt, 1995, p. 512 and 514.

¹⁰ West is quoted in Applebome, Peter, "Can Harvard's Powerhouse Alter the Course of Black Studies?" *New York Times*, November 3, 1996.

of addressing racial animosity. ¹¹ [Editor's note: The preceding chapter on the Pillsbury House Theatre documents a legacy of the Settlement House movement.]

Pageantry grew with the Progressive movement of social reform, and–alongside the National Child Labor Committee, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or the Playground Association of America–the American Pageant Association was founded in 1913, with an aim of reforming the arts as well as improving American life. To many of us in the 21st century, the word "pageant" connotes superficial spectacle; not so, a hundred years ago. The choreographers, musicians, and playwrights of the movement felt that in capturing the meaning of a place through drama, in engaging masses of people to tell the stories of their pasts and aspirations for their futures, they were creating a new, powerful movement in contemporary art, creating an "expanded role for art in modern society, in contrast to the conservative genteel ideal of elite cultural leadership." ¹²

The members of the APA agreed "that pageant productions could be a powerful force for change in American life and they believed in pageants of quality," uniting art and democracy, "mobilizing citizens for various tasks and encouraging them to participate in a secular community ritual." A paper presented at a sociology conference in 1914 was entitled "Municipal Pageants as Destroyers of Race Prejudice." Although the focus of that paper was primarily on prejudice towards new European immigrant groups, ¹⁴ in 1925 W.E.B. DuBois urges the people of Los Angeles to attend "The Star of Ethiopia," a grand pageant about "the history, real and legendary of the Negro race" with an African-American cast.

In Boston in 1909 an introspective process was underway. Committees studied conditions of public health, religion, business, labor, immigration, parks, education, prisons, and more. Representatives of each committee sat on the "Boston 1915" super-committee whose goal was to find a way to institute significant improvements by 1915. The Boston 1915 committee decided that a pageant could be key to the process, and they contracted with a young playwright, Percy MacKaye, to coordinate the effort, synthesizing findings and issues of the many committees into a grand, engaging show. "Cave Life To City Life" involved, literally, hundreds of ordinary people, bound by the organizers' beliefs that working together on the show would lead to intergroup communication, a better understanding of collective issues, and a new commitment to working together to solve them. "Indeed, middle-class young people from the Curry School of Expression performed as Dust Clouds and Disease Germs alongside immigrants from Hale House, who depicted Flames.... The Boston Teachers' Club dramatized The City of the Future.... One reviewer wrote about the pageant, 'Commonwealth Avenue and Beacon Street met with the North and West End."" 16

MacKaye was also invited to do a pageant in St. Louis in 1914. The number of participants of "The Masque of St. Louis" was staggering, although they were primarily people of European-American descent despite the relatively large African-American population in the city. Participants included a 100-piece orchestra, a 500-voice chorus, a total cast of 7,000, and there was outdoor seating for 43,000. This pageant was coupled with a national Conference of Cities; the largest city in each state was invited to send an envoy who represented "the best things in the progress and development of [that] city;" moreover, "the representative should also be able to take part in the drama himself, to appear to advantage on horseback." The conference, whose theme was the

¹¹ Lasch, Christopher, *The Social Thought of Jane Addams*, Bobbs-Merrill, 1965. See, for example, p. 51, 193, and 207-8.

¹² Glassberg, David, American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century, University of North Carolina Press, 1990, p. 283.

¹³ Prevots, Naima, American Pageantry: A Movement for Art and Democracy," UMI Research Press, 1990, p. 9.

¹⁴ Prevots, Naima, p. 17

¹⁵ DuBois, W.E.B., "A Negro Art Renaissance," from the Los Angeles Times; reprinted in Lewis, David Levering, W.E.B. DuBois: A Reader, Henry Holt, 1995, p. 508.

¹⁶ Prevots, Naima, p. 30-31.

¹⁷ Prevots, Naima, p. 20-21.

democratization of art in city life, addressed topics from "Folk Dancing in America" to "People's Orchestra" to "Municipal Recreation: A School of Democracy" to "Humanizing City Government."

Perhaps the big idea of pageantry can most clearly be summarized by three successive chapter titles of Glassberg's *American Historical Pageantry*: "The Place Is the Hero." "Community Development Is the Plot." "To Explain the City to Itself."

Or, more poetically, it is summarized by playwright Percy MacKaye: pageantry reflects "the half-desire of the people not merely to remain receptive to a popular art created by specialists, but to take part themselves in creating it; the desire, that is, of democracy consistently to seek expression through a drama and the people, not merely *for* the people."

EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY: RURAL

And what was happening in rural areas? Pageantry was not strictly an urban phenomenon. In 1914, "The Social Center Pageant" was presented in the tiny town of Sauk City, Wisconsin, attracting a crowd of 4,000 people from miles around. Wisconsin was at the forefront of many progressive reforms including that of creating Social Centers—places where people from all walks of life could gather to discuss ideas, to work out democracy "down on the ground." "Sauk City's Pageant was a celebration of that city's decision to fully adopt the structure of the school as Social Center. Additionally, they were the first community in the nation to fully adopt the structure in which the Principal of the school became the official 'Civic Secretary' of the community." Ethel Rockwell of the University of Wisconsin-Extension's Community Theater department directed the pageant (assisted by Zona Gale, later the first woman to win a Pulitzer Prize for drama), which moved from venue to venue throughout the town, culminating in a scene at Town Hall where "the Town Board and School Board officials then lofted the symbolic ballot box to their shoulders and marched with it out of the Town Hall, followed by the crowd of citizens, to what was to be its new home—a seat of continual learning and open inquiry: the School House." ²⁰

1914 was an important year in rural America, for it was then that Congress passed the Smith-Lever Act, creating the federal Extension Service. Of the ten objectives of the Extension Service—such as advancing the educational and spiritual needs of rural people; building appreciation of rural life; fostering cultural, social, recreational and community life—almost all invited a creative, artistic response. Today, Cooperative Extension describes its state offices as being "staffed by one or more experts who provide useful, practical, and research-based information to agricultural producers, small business owners, youth, consumers, and others in rural areas and communities of all sizes." So today we may think of 4-H or agronomy when we think of Extension, but this was not always the case. In 1937, *The Arts Workshop of Rural America* studied the surge of rural art-making throughout America, and described many Extension Service workers as, in effect, circuit-riding community arts developers.

"The story of the cultural contributions of the Rural Arts Program of the Agricultural Extension Service has never been fully told.... These activities are deeply rooted in the soil.... Over wide areas farmers are interested now in opera as well as in corn and hogs, in drama as well as in cheese and cream, and in folk dancing as well as in wheat and cattle.... We are accustomed to hearing the voices of the little-theater groups in cities and larger towns.... We are not so accustomed to the new voices now making themselves heard from the plains, the prairies, and

¹⁸ Prevots, Naima, p. 87.

¹⁹ Drury, Gwen, "The Wisconsin Idea: The Vision That Made Wisconsin Famous," online at http://www.ls.wisc.edu/documents/wi-idea-history-intro-summary-essay.pdf, downloaded 1/3/12, p. 57.

²⁰ Konnack, Sally, on a 2005 note accompanying the script of "The Social Center Pageant," Freethinkers Hall library, Sauk City, WI.

²¹ http://www.csrees.usda.gov/Extension/ downloaded January 16, 2012.

the mining communities, and from little, remote places in the mountains.... They are the voices of men and women who have struggled through drought, thaw, drifts, impassable roads, dust and hail storms; who have fought grasshoppers, chinch bugs, and rust."²²

As we explore the art-making encouraged by the Extension Service, we meet remarkable people. At North Dakota State University, Alfred Arvold was professor of drama from 1914-1953, with a partial appointment in Extension. His Little Country Theater was intended to be replicable by any of his students in barns, fields, or town halls when they returned home to their farm towns. He urged his students to create pieces of theater or dance from the life they knew, and to see creativity as part of a whole life that included sports, food-making, beautification (his drama students planted lilacs along the road from Fargo to Grand Forks every spring), theater, conversation, and democracy. In the attic above the Little Country Theater, Arvold created the Lincoln Log Cabin Room, a replica of the interior of the cabin where Abraham Lincoln was born, and after a show, the audience would be invited upstairs to join the cast in a meal and a discussion of issues important to them.

At Cornell University at about the same time, Alexander Drummond—who was considered to be one of the "greats" of the American theater at the time—was doing similar work. Like North Dakota State University, Cornell was a Land Grant college and Drummond took that seriously. His students left Cornell trained for the New York stage—but they could also be trained for work among rural people, helping them create their own theater. Drummond put an ad in the *American Agriculturalist* magazine, urging anyone from a small town or a farm in upstate New York to come to Cornell for help turning a story about his or her life or community into a script, and then for helping turning the script into a staged play.

And at the University of North Carolina, Frederick Koch–a contemporary of both Arvold and Drummond–was urging the people of North Carolina to write "folk plays." Epitomizing the saying, "Write what you know!" he stimulated the writing of hundreds, if not thousands, of plays by "ordinary Americans," addressing the meaning of their lives and their communities. He believed that the American dramatic renaissance, befitting a democracy, would be intensely local, "a drama as many-sided and as multi-colored as are the peoples of our American states–an American regional drama ... which will interpret the interestingness and the rich variety of our American life in a drama worthy of the struggles, the achievement and the common vision of all our people." The folk plays dealt with rural mountain life, with stories of labor struggle, with the historical stories and myths that made up North Carolina's collective identity. They included an anti-lynching play, "Country Sunday," commended by the Southern Interracial Commission, and another, "According to Law," about an innocent Black man caught in a white man's court. They included a play about Durham slum life. Some of his students returned to their native countries–Egypt, Mexico–intending to stimulate folk playwriting at home; others stayed to stimulate folk playwriting at home, as Loretto Carroll Bailey hoped to do with Negro playwriting from her post at Shaw University in Raleigh.

PROGRESSIVE POLITICS AND ARTS

Let's return to Wisconsin, state of the Sauk City pageant. The Wisconsin Idea, grew out of the state's Progressive politics in the early 20th century. It reflected a deep commitment to public education and a pledge by the State and the University of Wisconsin to provide the newest, most useful ideas to the people of Wisconsin, access to higher education for all, and the fulfillment of everyone's talents—be they engineering, banking, or art. The University especially assisted music and drama in those early days of the Wisconsin Idea. In 1928, University President Glenn Frank was asked to write a preface to a play, "Goose Money," published by the College of Agriculture. He captured a facet of the Wisconsin Idea when he wrote, "Agriculture is a life as well as a livelihood. There is poetry as well as production on a farm. Art can help us to preserve the poetry

²² Patten, Marjorie, *The Arts Workshop of Rural America*, Columbia University Press, 1937, p. 3-4.

Frederick Koch, quoted in Patten, Marjorie, *The Arts Workshop of Rural America*, Columbia University Press, 1937, p. 6.

while we are battling with the economics of farming."²⁴ Later, Frank said, "There's a gap somewhere in the soul of the people that troops into the theater but never produces a folk drama...The next great dramatic renaissance in America will come when the theatre is recaptured from the producers by the people, when we become active enough in mind and rich enough in spirit to begin the creation of a folk drama and a folk theatre in America."²⁵

Dean Chris Christensen, of the College of Agriculture, agreed. He believed that an agricultural education must include poetry as well as production, and to this end he envisioned an artist-in-residence who could help farm people express this poetry. Said to be the nation's first artist-in-residence—and not in an art department, but in an agricultural college!—John Steuart Curry's job was to assist anyone who wanted to paint, to capture and communicate their personal vision. Curry began his job in 1936 and the idea caught on fast. Soon there were scores of rural artists "painting what they knew," everywhere in the state, joining Curry's Wisconsin Rural Art Project (which still exists today as the Wisconsin Regional Art Program).

Robert E. Gard was a student of Alexander Drummond's at Cornell, and he was captivated by the notion of rural people creating their own plays, about their own issues. He had heard about the Wisconsin Idea and Wisconsin's Extension programs, ²⁶ and in 1945 he was offered the opportunity to do in writing and playwriting what Curry was doing in the visual arts. He created the Wisconsin Idea Theater—a theater that was not a place, but an idea as big as the state: the idea that all people are creative, with important stories to tell through poetry, prose, drama. In *Grassroots Theater*, a seminal book that linked creative arts to a "sense of place," he recalls a creative writing workshop that he offered in 1948. The three days sped by in conversation, spontaneous acting, dialogue. At the end of the whirlwind he marveled at the profound sense of theater they had shared. One of the participants responded:

"There must be a great, free expression. If the people of Wisconsin knew that someone would encourage them to express themselves in any way they chose...there would be such a rising of creative expression as is yet unheard of in Wisconsin and it would really all be a part of the kind of theater we had had these past three days, for the whole expression would be of and about ourselves."²⁷

The Wisconsin Regional Writers Association–still going strong today as the Wisconsin Writers Association—was born in this moment, attracting scores, then hundreds and then thousands of people statewide who wanted to write, and who supported one another in their writing. The Creed of WRWA was a beautiful statement of belief, penned in 1950, saying in part, "Let us believe in each other, remembering each has tasted bitter with sweet, sorrow with gladness, toil with rest. Let us believe in ourselves and our talents. Let us believe in the worth of the individual and seek to understand him, for from sympathy and understanding will our writings grow." Though the name has changed and the purpose statement is slightly modified from the original Creed, some of the original words, and all of the original intent still exist: "...the democratic process of government is safest in the hands of an educated, enlightened people who participate actively in the democratic process through the well-written word."

Gard's work in Wisconsin grew, and by the 1960's he was envisioning rural arts councils throughout Wisconsin. He secured the first National Endowment for the Arts "access" award for rural America in 1966,

²⁴ Frank, Glenn, in Mrs. Carl Felton, "Goose Money," University of Wisconsin College of Agriculture, 1928, Foreword.

²⁵ Frank, Glenn, quoted in Gard, Robert E., *Grassroots Theater: A Search for Regional Arts in America*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1955, p. 95.

²⁶ In fact, there were two "Extensions" in Wisconsin-the federal Cooperative Extension network as well as the University's own Extension Division.

²⁷ Gard, Robert E., *Grassroots Theater*, p. 217.

²⁸ Wisconsin Rural Writers Association, "Creed," Wisconsin Rural Writers Association Newsletter, summer 1951, p. 7.

²⁹ Wisconsin Writers Association, "Purpose," http://www.wiwrite.org/aboutus/index.htm downloaded January 3, 2012.

from which his seminal The Arts in the Small Community: A National Plan emerged.³⁰ These arts councils would encourage new work, would link the arts to other important local issues such as economic development, health, religion.

Gard drew on the thinking of Baker Brownell of Northwestern University in shaping the Wisconsin Idea Theater and in articulating its importance in community development. Brownell may have been the first person to use the term "community development;" and he believed that the arts-especially theater-have an important role to play in the community planning and community organizing process. He was brought to Montana after World War II by the Chancellor of the University of Montana to help small towns rethink their future. Just as Gard had called on Brownell as he articulated the role of the arts in Wisconsin communities, so did Brownell draw on Gard as he planned the Montana project.³¹ Brownell worked with a Montana playwright to help synthesize the thinking of local community "self-study" committees, just as Percy MacKaye had done in Boston 40 years before. Perhaps the best-known of the dramas that resulted was "Darby Looks At Itself," presented in 1945, when Darby was in economic crisis resulting from the clear-cutting practices that had taken most of the timber. As part of the drama the town aldermen conducted a hearing on stage, voicing support for the self-study group. Among the play's protagonists was the Devil, representing "outmoded thinking." At the end of the play, an old lumberjack shouted:

"'Our logging jobs are shot...because fifty years ago, twenty-five years ago, ten years ago, we listened to men like this devil here instead of men of vision who saw then a simple truth that is so pathetically clear now-that you can't cut all the timber from our Bitter Root forests and still have forests.' A wave of restlessness went through the mob of woodsmen. They moved forward against the devil and hurled him from the stage."³²

THE WPA

No doubt people like Gard and Brownell were influenced by the Works Progress Administration's arts programs during the Great Depression of the 1930's. These were bold experiments in writing, art, theater, music, and dance that both put professional artists back to work and provided thousands of opportunities for the public to see professional caliber shows, often for the first time-over 1,200 plays were produced; there were over 1,000 performances per month.³³ There were plays and puppet shows that toured to rural areas and to Civilian Conservation Corps camps; shows in English, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Yiddish; culturally-specific shows; new versions of classics (Orson Welles' "MacBeth" set in the Caribbean with an all-African-American cast was popularly known as the "Voodoo Macbeth"); traditional versions of classics as well as new scripts; the issue-based skits of the "Living Newspaper;" a radio theater; and a theater for the blind in Oklahoma to mention but a few. "Special emphasis was placed on preserving and promoting minority cultural forms. So, for example, black theater companies were established in Birmingham, Boston, Chicago, Hartford, Los Angeles, New York, Newark, Philadelphia, Raleigh, San Francisco, and Seattle-all places where economic and social conditions had made it impossible for black theater to exist outside of the fast-disappearing vaudeville stage."34

Most of the WPA art projects fall into the "arts for people" category, but people were expressing a need to make art for themselves. Painter Elba Lightfoot reflected:

³⁰ Gard, Robert E., Michael Warlum, Ralph Kohlhoff, Ken Friou and Pauline Temkin, The Arts in the Small Community: A National Plan. University of Wisconsin Extension, 1969; also at http://www.gardfoundation.org/windmill/ArtsintheSmallCommunity.pdf

³¹ Poston, Richard, personal correspondence to Maryo Gard Ewell, September 9, 1986.

³² Poston, Richard, Small Town Renaissance, Greenwood Press, 1971 (reprinted from Harper Brothers, 1950), p. 56.

³³ Adams, Don, and Arlene Goldbard, "New Deal Cultural Programs: Experiments in Cultural Democracy," 1986, 1995, http://www.wwcd.org/policy/US/newdeal.html p. 9. Adams, Don and Arlene Goldbard.,p. 11.

"We just felt that the Black minority so endowed with talent and creative energy needed an arena for itself. It was imperative that we had an outlet of our own. If we hadn't the means to make ourselves heard, we would never have been able to assume any responsibility of our own toward weaving the fabric of Black history." ³⁵

Particularly important to mention in the context of arts *of* the people, then, may be the network of community arts centers created by the Federal Art Project–100 of them in 22 states, serving an estimated eight million people. Holger Cahill, the director of the Federal Art Project, is quoted as saying, "The core of the community art center idea is active participation, doing and sharing, and not merely seeing..." Perhaps the best-known of these centers was the Harlem Community Arts Center, operating 1937-42, associated with the Harlem Renaissance.

While the arts programs of the New Deal were often at the center of bureaucratic, political and artistic controversy, they were important in many, many ways. For instance, they helped preserve non-Anglo cultural forms, offering cultural experiences in many languages, recognizing regional differences in the arts, enabling culturally-specific theater:

"[The Negro Unit of the Federal Theater Project] employed some 500 blacks in New York in mid-1936 and brought dramas that dealt with Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman, Pierre Toussaint, and African folktales into many Negro communities for the first time. The Federal Music Project gave performances in all sections of the country of works by contemporary black composers; featured all-Negro casts in several of its operas; made a special effort to preserve, record and publish Negro folk music; conducted music instruction classes for blacks in at least a dozen states; and sponsored Negro concert bands in a score of cities.... And many thousands of Afro-Americans attended art classes funded by the Project in the South Side Community Art Center in Chicago and the Harlem Art Center." 38

Adams and Goldbard note that the New Deal arts projects took "responsibility for our cultural commonwealth. They took on the task of recording history–including many parts otherwise deemed too painful or embarrassing to mention." In large part, however, "minority" cultures meant African-American culture. Anthony Garcia, playwright and adjunct professor of Chicano Studies at Metropolitan State College in Denver, notes: "You are right in your recollection that there is very little that remains for us [in the Mexican-American community] in written form.... 'Las Pastorelas' that El Teatro Campesino produces is definitely in that category. I have an old pasturela script as well. Not much else, but some oral histories, and a few recorded and musical scores. Apparently the WPA and Alan Lomax missed the Mexicans." Elsewhere he suggests that this absence of cultural documentation may be a result of a strong attempt by Mexican-Americans to assimilate into American society.

"This generation...lived through lynchings, the KKK, the Great Depression, World War II and the Korean War. The 1950's were marred by McCarthyism, and the concept of stepping out and articulating a separate identity through the arts was pretty much repressed. For Chicanos this was a period of pre-civil rights, where the Mexican-Americans wanted to prove that they were white

³⁵ Finkelstein, Hope, "Augusta Savage: Sculpting the African-American Identity," M.A. Thesis, The City University of New York, 1990, p. 33.

³⁶ Adams, Don and Arlene Goldbard, p. 8.

³⁷ Finkelstein, Hope, p. 33.

³⁸ Bowles, Elinor, *Cultural Centers of Color*, National Endowment for the Arts, 1992, p. 18.

³⁹ Adams, Don and Arlene Goldbard, p. 11

⁴⁰ Garcia, Anthony, e mail to Maryo Ewell, January 3, 2012.

and as such should benefit from segregation rather than suffer from it.... This is why what Luis [Valdez, founder of El Teatro Campesino in 1965] did was so incredible. The conditions [in the 1960's] called for theater as a force for an independent identity. This did not exist in the twenty years from 1945-65. The Chicano Movement caused all of this to explode in a very different way, much as it did for the U.S. theater in the 1950's and early '60's when post World War writers like Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams sought to create a new American identity. The theater became their forum. For us though the theater was in the streets because that generation before us still struggled with the idea of an independent identity from the American mainstream...because of the fear or marginalizing themselves."41

CULTURAL DEMOCRACY

A teacher in New York City was thinking of such ideas in the early 1940's as she observed the students in her classroom struggling with their cultural identities-and those of their classmates. Rachel Davis-DuBois (no relation to W.E.B. DuBois, though they were friends), wrote these words:

"...the melting pot idea, or "come-let-us-do-something-for-you" attitude on the part of the oldstock American, was wrong. For half the melting pot to rejoice in being *made* better while the other half rejoiced in being better allowed for neither element to be its true self.... The welfare of the group...means finding ways to share unique qualities and differences..... Democracy is the only atmosphere in which this can happen, whether between individuals, within families, among groups in a country, or among countries. This kind of sharing we have culled cultural democracy. Political democracy—the right of all to vote—we have inherited though we do not as yet practice it perfectly. Economic democracy-the right of all to be free from want-we are beginning to envisage and to plan for more courageously. But cultural democracy—a sharing of values among numbers of our various cultural groups—we have scarcely dreamed of. Much less have we devised social techniques for creating it."42

By the 1960's, the term "cultural democracy" was on the lips of many. The Civil Rights movement came into its own, and with it, a surge of public expression by many cultural groups, and the creation of such diverse groups as El Teatro Campesino (Luis Valdez' company that grew from the experience of migrant farmworkers), the Free Southern Theater (John O'Neal's company that grew from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), Roadside Theater (part of Appalshop, a cultural and job-training organization that grew from the War on Poverty in Appalachia). Scores of new organizations, new forms of expression, new audience awareness, new national support organizations, such as The Association of American Cultures, came on the cultural scene in literature, music, drama, dance, and performance art. Starting in the 1960's, work of people has been visible and well-documented. Indeed, it is sometimes assumed that community arts was a product of the '60's.43

FULL CIRCLE

The 1960's was also the time when community arts councils became a movement, one which started in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and Quincy, Illinois, in 1948-9. Today the community, or local, arts agency movement includes literally thousands of groups in rural towns, suburbs, cities, and urban neighborhoods.

⁴¹ Garcia, Anthony, e mail to Maryo Ewell, August 15, 2009.

⁴² Davis-Dubois, Rachel, Get Together Americans: Friendly Approaches to Racial and Cultural Conflicts Through the Neighborhood-Home Festival, Harper & Bros., 1943, p. 5-6. The term "Cultural Democracy" is said by James Bau Grant http://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature_wdesc.php?rec=5051, to have first been used in Julius Draschler's Democracy and Assimilation, 1920

Indeed, that popular resource Wikipedia says of community arts, "The term was defined in the late-1960s and spawned a movement..." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community arts downloaded January 4, 2012.

These institutions, different in so many ways, all provide access to the arts *for* people, and many facilitate arts *of*, *with* and *by* people. While this is not the place to describe the growth of these institutions, their beginnings embody the very tension described at the beginning of this chapter—the tension of meaning inherent when we say that "the arts are for everyone."

The local arts agency movement is linked to the Settlement House movement with its many "of the people" elements. The Junior League started in New York City in 1901 in support of the new Settlement House on the Lower East Side. As the League grew, becoming nationwide in scope, it retained an interest in the arts. Often that interest was reflected in its support of children's theater; but perhaps emulating the example of Jane Addams, local Leagues sponsored more challenging work, as well–for instance, in 1934 the Junior Service League in High Point, North Carolina, presented "Itchin' Heel," "said to be the first full-length play of Negro people played by an all-Negro cast." Indeed, in 1939, the national League created the post of Senior Consultant for Community Arts–so Virginia Lee Comer was brought to Winston-Salem by the local League to help assess the breadth of arts in the community (a breadth which included the a labor union hall, as well as the more traditional arts groups and venues), and to help start the nation's first community arts council.

And, the local arts agency movement is also connected to the Rockefeller Panel Report, with its *for* the people orientation, that we encountered at the start of this chapter. Nancy Hanks was Executive Secretary of the Special Studies Project of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, coordinating the study, which recommended the development of state and community art councils throughout the country, and Nancy Hanks' time as Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts is characterized by her passion for access.

Which brings us full circle back to the fundamental tension—arts of the people? Arts for the people?

CONCLUSION

This tension is vital to acknowledge. Both are important; indeed, both are vital. But they are not the same, and too often they are confused.

Arts for people is a concept that is more tangible, more manageable, more measurable, perhaps more easily describable. Many are the lives that have been changed by moments of "access." Many are the arts organizations which, rightly, extend their offerings for people.

Arts of people is harder to describe. The artist may be a facilitator or co-creator as much as a gifted maker or interpreter. The resulting work is often difficult to discuss and evaluate in traditional arts/aesthetic terms. Lines between process/product or artist/audience are often blurred. There is a dual mission: the complicated, exhilarating, often frustrating, often liberating process of creating community-based art is both pushing aesthetic boundaries and building democracy, in new and powerful ways.

The story of community-based arts development is a thrilling one, and at every phase it demands that we ask questions like:

- What does it mean to be a human being?
- What does it mean to be of my culture?
- What does it mean to live in the place that I do?
- What does it mean to have a voice?
- What does it mean to be an American?

⁴⁴ Spearman, Walter, *The Carolina Playmakers: The First Fifty Years*, University of North Carolina Press, 1970, p. 55.

• What does it mean to fuse all of this into an aesthetic that is thrilling, fresh, relevant, and deeply rooted here, in my place?

The arts and cultural expression can help us explore these questions as nothing else can. May we call on those who have come before us, who may help guide us as we create an America of, by, and for her people, with liberty and justice for all. There is no more important work.

Let us close with the words of Robert E. Gard of Wisconsin; these are the final words in *The Arts in the Small Community*:

.... a sense
That here,
In our place
We are contributing to the maturity
Of a great nation.
If you try, you can indeed
Alter the face and the heart
Of America. 45

⁴⁵ Gard, Robert E. et al, p. 98.