A Working Guide to the Landscape of Arts for Change

A collection of writings depicting the wide range of ways the arts make community, civic, and social change.

"Transition From Homelessness" program by the Peter & Paul Community Services in collaboration with Community Arts Training (CAT) Institute alum, Con Christeson, in which participants launch their boat of dreams on the Mississippi River in St. Louis.

Arts-based Community Development: Mapping the Terrain

By William Cleveland

The modern-day arts-based community development movement is founded on the belief that the arts can be a powerful agent of personal, institutional, and community change. Since its beginnings in the 1970s, the movement has grown from a very small and contained universe of intent and definition to become a widespread approach to both art making and community building. Many of the ideas considered radical in 1977 can now be found in the guidelines and policies of agencies and funders that serve communities. To effectively assess the current impact of these ideas, it is useful to look at the movement's components, its shared assumptions, and the vocabulary used to describe the work.

This essay is a refreshed version of "Mapping the Field: Arts-based Community Development," originally published in 2002 by the Community Arts Network. Included in Animating Democracy's series of papers that provide a current look at the landscape of arts for change, the essay holds up well in today's context. It can be read in relation to another essay in the Animating Democracy series titled, "Community Arts at Work across the U.S., 2010," by Linda Frye Burnham, which offers current examples of exciting community arts projects, programs, and organizations.

Thirty-five years ago, members of the nascent community arts movement used expressions like *beautification*, *quality of life,* and *community animation* to describe their efforts. Today, we hear terms like *social justice*, *sustainable economic development,* and *neighborhood revitalization* to describe the outcomes of these arts-based initiatives. Such goals dramatically raise the stakes and broaden the playing field for the creators, investors, and communities involved. And as more and more public and private resources are invested in this work, many feel a need for increased clarity of definition and intention from all involved.

An obvious sign of the changing nature of this field is the diverse vocabulary employed to name it. Terms include: *community art, community cultural development, art and social justice,* and *art and community building.* Some years back, when I first shared this article, I described the community arts movement as an expanding work in progress. Needless to say, it still is—and, given the dynamic nature of both art and community building, I believe it will continue to be. Nevertheless, this essay provides one way of looking at and defining the diverse constituency that we at the Center for the Study of Art and Community refer to as *arts-based community development*.

MY BIASES AND ASSUMPTIONS

I left the University of Maryland in the early '70s as a nascent writer and musician, knowing enough about psychology to be dangerous. In 1977, I fell into the arts and community nexus through an improbable gig supported through the U.S. Department of Labor's Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA).[1] Put simply, CETA placed unemployed people in full time public service positions with government and community-based agencies. Keep in mind this was a federal "jobs" program, not an arts program. But many, many artists and arts organizations qualified for participation and found themselves with full-time jobs making art in hospitals, prisons, public housing, senior centers, and the like—so many, in fact, that by the end of 1979 CETA had become the largest federal arts program in history.[2] In the process it introduced a generation of artists to the notion that good art, public service, and community development were not mutually exclusive. For me, and for thousands of other artists and arts administrators, CETA also expanded the dictionary of American culture beyond the realms of decoration, entertainment, and investment. It taught us that artists and communities could partner to serve the public good and, most importantly, that the arts could be a powerful agent of personal, institutional, and community change.

A few years after the demise of CETA, I was invited to join in another unlikely cultural partnership at the California Department of Corrections. During the next decade, we built

the largest arts residency program in the country with a faculty of more than 1,000 artists and more than 20,000 participants. Conceived during one of the most conservative eras in California political history, the notion of establishing a corrections-supported cultural community in every state prison was considered to be an impossibility. Nonetheless, California's Arts-In-Corrections Program did just that and ultimately lasted for more than three decades.

These kinds of experiences made a big impression on thousands of creative activists in and out of the arts. We learned, surprisingly, that some people were as afraid of art as they were of poor people and criminals. But, like our predecessors in the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the civil rights movement,[3] we came to know that the arts could translate to the needs of communities and public institutions without losing power or integrity. We learned not only that the creative process has an extraordinary capacity to heal, but that it was necessary for human and community development. Most importantly, we learned that the creative impulse cannot be destroyed and will in most the desperate circumstances emerge as a resource for survival. Needless to say, these experiences have had a lasting influence.

DEFINING THE FIELD

When the Center for the Study of Art and Community was established in 1992, these experiences informed both the philosophy and focus of our work.[4] Our intention was to help the field learn from itself. As our work has evolved, we have developed a dictionary of sorts to help communicate with colleagues in and out of the arts. Building a common vocabulary has also been a critical aspect of our training efforts. The increasingly cross-sector nature of arts-based community development has demanded greater clarity of focus and intent. In the mix, principles and definitions from other fields have been adopted and much common ground has been discovered—particularly with the areas of asset-based and sustainable community development. Here are some of the basic definitions and core concepts that have found a place in our dictionary.

The Arts*: Pertaining to the performing, visual, literary, or media arts.*

Artist: A person who, by virtue of imagination and skill, is able over time to create a body of work of aesthetic and/or cultural value, in one or more arts disciplines.

Community: Our definition of community is derived from the one used by Alternate ROOTS:[5] groups of people with common interests defined by place, tradition, intention, or spirit.

Community-Based: Activities created and produced by and with community members that combine significant elements of community access, ownership, authorship, participation, and accountability.[6]

Arts-Based Community Development (ABCD): Arts-centered activity that contributes to the sustained advancement of human dignity, health, and/or productivity within a community. These include arts-based activities 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[7]

Sustainable Development: We define sustainable development as locally generated economic, social, and cultural development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.[8]

Asset-Based Community Development: The word sustainable has roots in the Latin *subtenir*, meaning "to hold up" or "to support from below." We concur with many in the community development field who feel that a thriving community must be supported primarily from within by its members, resources, and capacities, for the present and future.[9]

Cross-Sector: Many people feel that sustained community development requires collaborative effort that emphasizes a holistic systems approach. This is because many community issues are diffuse, multidisciplinary, multi-agency, multi-stakeholder, and multi-sector in nature. In this context, cross-sector refers to community development activities among and between often separately defined areas of influence and expertise such as education, public safety, human services, and the arts.

MAPPING THE FIELD

Over the last three decades much has changed in the field. What started out as a very small and contained universe of intent and definition has become much larger and amorphous. The 2000s are, of course, a different time. Many of the ideas that were considered radical fruitcake in 1977 can be found in the guidelines and policies of more and more agencies and funders that serve communities. As the work has proliferated, the need for clarity of purpose and intent has become more critical. A few years ago we thought it might be useful to try to graphically map the diverse and interrelated world of arts-based community development. Our aim was to not to impose a prescriptive definition of the field but rather create something that would provoke conversation about the multifaceted and multi-valiant quality of the work. Here is what we came up with.

The Art-based Community Development Ecosystem

A Map of Arts-Based Community Development

As you can see, the four "neighborhoods" represented on the map reiterate the components of arts-based community development described in the *definitions* section. The sub-categories scattered about—such as prison art, arts-based organizing, and arts education—are provided to illustrate the general orientation of each of the neighborhoods. The nice thing about using a graphic is that it allows one to show the interdependent and integrated nature of the field. Many of the examples share aspects of two or three of the neighborhoods. Another way to experience this is to try to position on the map community arts projects with which you are familiar. We have done this with the programs described in Linda Frye Burnham's paper, "Community Arts at Work across the U.S."

Another advantage of using the map is that it allows us to portray the diversity of our field. Participants in our community arts training programs have been quick to recognize the importance of discerning the different skill sets needed to work effectively in each of the neighborhoods. They have also suggested changes, many of which have been incorporated. Just like the natural environment, the map's ecology is not a static thing. It has grown with the field, changing and diversifying, in ways that were unpredictable when we started.

The State of the Field

Much of our work at the Center for the Study of Art and Community (CSA&C) is about documenting, describing, and learning from the field.[10] We have also challenged the field to consider some hard questions about the efficacy of their work in and with communities. The information, ideas, and opinions we have gathered show a field that is relatively new and growing rapidly. They reflect a field that is hungry to learn from itself and eager to make collegial connections. They also portray a field largely unaware of its history, driven by a

diverse pastiche of philosophies, practices, motivations, and intents. The mix is complex and intriguing and some through-lines and patterns have emerged. Here are a few.

This is actually an old field: As Linda Frye Burnham states in her accompanying paper, "Artists have been working with and for communities for thousands of years." We would argue that the community arts concept is a modern iteration of perhaps the oldest "field," with a lineage that stretches back to humankind's most essential pre-historic community-making/community-defining practices.

This is a new field: Projects like the ones described in Burnham's paper deal with issues like prison reform, refugee and immigrant rights, community reconciliation, and environmental justice. Descriptors like these do more than expand the community arts dictionary. The intentions they represent greatly alter the nature of the work. Arts-centered efforts to improve economic or social health indicate the emergence of a new field (or fields) entirely. This is a realm of cultural practice that regards public participation and artistic creation as mutually interdependent. It also asserts that there are significant and tangible community benefits, beyond the aesthetic realm, that naturally accrue from certain kinds of community art endeavors.

Definitions of success have broadened: Much of our work at the Center has been focused on how these expanded aims affect the way we define success and failure. In doing this we have had to acknowledge that the "we" has expanded. In addition to citizen participants, every new sector that becomes involved—be it public safety, human services, or community development—now has a stake in the work. In fact, artists doing community work often find themselves contending with a greatly expanded range of scrutiny and judgment. The melding of aesthetic goals and criteria with those associated with community-building and social change has been both exciting and confounding.

The field has expanded: Given the variety of definitions applied to the field, it is difficult to say how much larger it has grown. Based on our interaction with the field and data from national arts service and research organizations, we feel confident in saying that there has been a significant increase in funding and programming in the community arts arena. The greatest expansion we have seen is in the broad arena of youth arts. We would also observe that this growth has not necessarily had a stabilizing effect on artists and organizations with historic commitments to community-based work. As new opportunities have emerged, some have "chased the money," resulting in programs with little depth or commitment. On the other hand, we have also seen the emergence of a new generation of community artists and arts organizations like FutureFarmers and Littleglobe. Many of these newcomers are challenging traditional notions of community arts practice. Some are bringing significant experience from the community development, social service, and business sectors along with arts backgrounds. Others are environmental and community activists and community development professionals who recognize the arts as a primary resource for their work.

Some large investments have hurt: While the field is generally resource-poor, a number of initiatives have involved significant investment by public and/or philanthropic organizations. Unfortunately, despite good intentions, some of these initiatives have come and gone without having a sustained impact. We have learned that, despite good intentions, the presence of powerful outside financial contributors can have a negative impact on local efforts to create healthy and sustainable communities. This does not mean that we believe such investments should not be made. But we do feel these efforts are potentially de-stabilizing and should be entered into with utmost caution.

Some efforts are falling short: Unfortunately, quite a few of the programs we have studied are described by participants and community leaders as unsuccessful. The shortcomings most often cited have been poor communication, differing commitment levels, and a lack of a sustained impact. Almost none of these "failures" had anything to do with the quality of the artists or the enthusiasm level of the project partners. More often than not, the difficulties encountered were due to poor partnership development and artists and arts administrators who lacked basic community engagement skills. All too often, the artists and their partner organizations described themselves as "damaged" in some way by the experience. In some cases, the constituencies being "served" were left with less than they started with because of the disruptions caused by the project.

Off-center is central: We have found that some of the most interesting and creative ideas in the field are being developed away from the centers of economic and political power. Innovations are coming from small towns like Whitesburg, Kentucky and Colquit, Georgia, where programs like [Appalshop](#) and [Swamp Gravy](#) thrive in environments where the gridlock of politics and self-interest does not dominate all policy. We see new approaches coming from urban neighborhoods in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, where efforts such as the [Manchester Craftsman's Guild](#) and [The Point Community Development Corporation](#) have harnessed local capacities to rebuild and re-vitalize their neglected infrastructures and local culture. Many of the field's best "thinktanks" are small, community based, and locally accountable. These efforts often emerge when artists and arts organizations forge partnerships with local non-arts organizations and constituencies based on compelling mutual self-interest.

Arts-centered programs work: Our study of arts programs in community and institutional settings has led us to conclude that the most two most critical contributors to success have been a clear artistic focus and the high quality of the artists involved. The most successful programs have been developed by artists making art, not artists doing something else. These artists have created art programs, not therapeutic or remedial programs that use art as a vehicle. This does not mean that they were not concerned with solving problems or unaware of the therapeutic or self-esteem building effects of their efforts. Quite the opposite, in fact. They often contend that these benefits are the unavoidable consequence of making art. It is their belief that they do the most good by

concentrating on the empowering qualities of the creative processes and not on the diagnosis or treatment of what is "wrong."

Research is needed: A growing body of research supports the efficacy of community arts programs and investment. Documented outcomes include improved economies, academics, and self-esteem; the reduction of violence and recidivism; and an increase in employment and community cohesiveness. It should be noted, though, that in-depth research in the field is not well supported. A small body of good research is only just emerging and is not yet considered conclusive. If and when that point is reached the field will more than likely have to contend with being defined through the lens of the research as a therapeutic or remedial methodology.[11]

Institutionally based programs may pose barriers to constituent involvement: Many institutional environments do not provide easy opportunities for community or constituent involvement in the development of arts programming. Many administrators in prisons, mental hospitals, senior citizens homes, and schools are resistant to student/client collaboration. Artists working in these settings must have the patience to develop collaborations in stages. The challenge is to gain the confidence of staff and participants. Trust is often in short supply in institutional communities. Successful programs have gained cooperation and access by acknowledging their intruder status and learning the ropes before insinuating themselves into an institution's established routine.

Training opportunities are increasing and improving: There has been a significant increase in the number and depth of community arts training and education opportunities available at both the community and university level. Many of these programs also explore the common ground that creative processes and community development and organizing processes share. Most also provide enough hands-on arts-based experiential learning for students to begin to better understand with the enormous demands inherent in the work and their own capacity to meet those demands.

LEARNING FROM THE FIELD

Power imbalances have been destabilizing: Another complicating factor has been the imbalance of power and influence that is often present when large organizations from outside the community attempt a collaborative project with smaller local entities. We have found that it is often very difficult for large, successful organizations to truly share power. Their instinct is to take control when the going gets tough. Success depends on having the patience to share the struggle and share control.

Local ownership has been key: Our research also shows that the success of community-based work is often tied to role the community has in identifying its own needs, formulating possible solutions, doing the work, and owning the result. If there is broad community participation in, and ownership of, the processes and products developed through an initiative, then the work has a better chance of contributing something lasting and worthwhile.

Outreach is out: We have also concluded that it is harder for arts organizations and funders to forge equitable and successful partnerships with constituencies with whom they are unfamiliar. Numerous well-meaning "outreach" efforts have failed because the initiating partner has underestimated the complexities of the environment in which they were attempting to work. The term "outreach" itself assumes a center, a source, and a destination or target. Many "under-served" communities have been subjected to a cycle of outreach and abandonment that has undermined local efforts and produced a legacy of bitterness. Many are now demanding that community arts investments and partnerships focus on developing a capacity for self-determination and self-service.

Unfamiliarity can also lead outside partners to mistake their conversation with a community-based partner as representative of *the voice of the community.* Very few of us would make this mistake in our own communities. Outside partners have a responsibility to learn as much as they can about the social ecology of the environment in which they are working. This is a demanding task that can take an enormous amount of time, energy, and commitment.

Partnerships have been central: Successful practitioners say over and over that their most important resources are relationships. Effective community-based work is about partnership. Once again, many of the most productive collaborations we have seen have been initiated from within the community itself. In these efforts, the most effective organizational partners have been those with missions that are in sync with the needs articulated by the community. Many times, the most appropriate lead partner is the organization that has shown the greatest historical commitment to the issue and to the constituency being addressed. Community-based human service, educational, recreational, and religious organizations are often very good partners because of the central role they play in the community.

Clear intentions have produced better outcomes: Another indicator of success is the degree of clarity with which the partners have articulated their respective roles and the anticipated outcomes. Social, economic, political, and artistic goals are not necessarily incompatible. While combining them increases the complexity of the work, it may also exponentially raise the potential for extraordinary outcomes on all fronts. All this makes the work far more demanding. Professional artists are particularly vulnerable in these kinds of partnerships. The artists' processes and the sources of their effectiveness are not universally understood—not even by the artists themselves. Nevertheless, everybody has

a stake in the product of the collaboration. The most successful artists in community settings are those who see the process of collaboration as part of their palette.

Effective training promotes cross-sector learning and leadership: The best training programs we have found have been long term and rigorous. Community arts partnership institutes in St. Louis, San Diego, and Minneapolis are good examples. These programs include 50-70 hours of class work spread out over a three- to six-month period. The time between classes includes both individual and group research and field study. Another aspect of good training has been field placement in an array of community-based programs that offer opportunities for the development of master/apprentice, mentor/mentee relationship.

These programs also:

- Provide participants and faculty sufficient time to develop a learning community, using the program's own internal dynamics as a forum to confront some of the basic questions that emerge in the development of community arts programs.

- Provide students a range of strategies for discovering what they need to know to engage communities respectfully and effectively.

- Provide exposure to the history and ecology of arts-based community development, partnership development strategies, community research and reconnaissance methods, learning and teaching strategies, evaluation, funding, and legal issues.

- Use an arts-infused curriculum that emphasizes multiple learning styles.

- Challenge students to confront their motivations and assumptions about the work and the communities they engage.

- Develop a resource center and a lasting support network to advance the work of graduates.

- Integrate the issues of race, rank, and privilege into the overall curriculum.

Community art making is necessarily cumbersome, messy, and slow: We have found that one of the most important elements in successful arts-based community development is the understanding that there are no micro-waveable short cuts to participatory art making. Every community's cultural, social, and political ecology is unique. Our research tells us that assumptions and expectations accrued from other sites can inform other programs, but should not drive them. This is not because those experiences are not potentially valuable and informative, but because the time spent learning about a

community's culture is an indispensable part of building community trust.
Participants in successful creative collaborations know that a good partnership is like a good marriage. That means that even though it takes 10 times more energy to find consensus and get things done, the results make the journey worthwhile. Successful partners also know that at various times on that journey the partnership will be tested, and that those tests will not only measure of the strength and resiliency of the partnership, they will also become the crucible upon which the strength and resiliency of the collaboration will be forged.
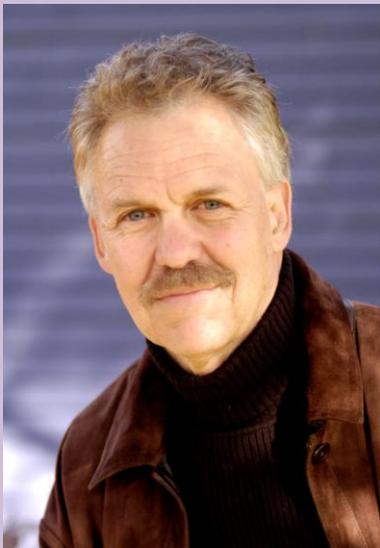
William Cleveland is a pioneer in the community arts movement. His books *Art in Other Places*, *Making Exact Change,* and *Art and Upheaval: Artists at work on the Worlds Frontlines* are considered seminal works in the field of arts-based community development. Activist, teacher, lecturer, and musician, he also directs the Center for the Study of Art and Community. Established in 1991, CSA&C works to build new working relationships between the arts and the broader community, specializing in the development and assessment of arts-based community partnerships and in training for artists and their community and institutional partners. Cleveland's 25-year history of producing arts programs in cultural, educational, and community settings also includes his leadership of the Walker Art Center's Education and Community Programs Department, California's Arts-In-Corrections Program, and the California State Summer School for the Arts. Recent projects include the book *Between Grace and Fear: The Role of the Arts in a Time of Change* and his CD *Songlines*, based, in part, on stories from *Art and Upheaval*.

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End Notes

[1] Enacted in 1973 and repealed in 1982

[2] For more on CETA see "Postscript to the Past: notes toward a history of community arts," Arlene Goldbard, *High Performance* #64, Winter 1993.) or go to www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archive/goldbard64.php. Also: "Artist!*,*" Mike Mosher, *Bad Subjects*, Issue #33, Jan. 2001 or go to: eserver.org/bs/53/mosher.html

[3] Artists have always been an integral part of social and economic development in America. Both the Works Progress Administration arts programs and the civil rights movement are prime examples.

[4] See "Bridges, Translations and Change: The Arts an Infrastructure in 20th Century America," W. Cleveland, *High Performance Magazine*, 1992. Available at www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/1999/12/bridges_transla.php

[5] A Regional Organization of Theaters South, www.alternateroots.org

[6] From the Community Arts Forum, Belfast Northern Ireland, www.community-arts-forum.org

[7] This is inspired by a similar list developed by Maryo Ewell, a long time community arts activist and Community Development Coordinator at the Colorado Arts Council.

[8] Derived from a definition used by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development.

[9] See *Building Communities for the Inside Out*, J. Kretzman, J. McKnight, ACTA Publications, Chicago, 1993

[10] Some recent CSA&C research projects providing "state of the field" relevant data include*: Making Exact Change: How U.S. arts-based programs have made a significant and sustained impact on their communities.* William Cleveland, Art in the Public Interest, 2005. *A Study of Model Community Arts Programs*, W. Cleveland, P. Shifferd, 2002, for the Howard County Arts Council with the Center for Cultural Assessment (CCA). *Continental Harmony: A study in Community-based Arts*, P. Shifferd, W. Cleveland, 2001, also with CCA and *An Evaluation of the Mississippi Arts Commission's Core Arts Program 1998-2000*, W. Cleveland, 2001

[11] Three useful sources for ABCD research are the Social Impact of the Arts Project, www.ssw.upenn.edu/SIAP/, the Urban Institute's Arts & Culture Indicators Community Building Project, www.urbaninstitute.org/nnip/acip.html, and the Arts Education Partnership's Champions of Change, aep-arts.org/Champions.html