

CONTENTS

P. **-04**

PREFACE

Welcome & Introduction

P. **-10**

THE ARTIST AND THE CITY

Aimee Chang

P. **-28**

THROUGH A PLANNER'S PRISM

Maria Rosario Jackson

P. **-44**

PROGRAMS

*Pilot Projects,
Mini-Grants & Forums*

We would like to take this opportunity to specially thank the major funders who generously supported this experimental initiative in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and our reliable partner, the National Performance Network (NPN), for providing infrastructural support for the past five years.

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Seventh Ward Neighborhood Center
St. Roch Community Church
Students at the Center (SAC)
Tulane University
Waggonner & Ball Architects
Winingder family
Xavier University

P. **-80**

CONVERSATION

*Moderated & edited by
Tom Finkelpearl*

P. **-94**

TRANSFORMA

*National Resource Team
& Staff*

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PREFACE

This volume documents the history and activities of Transforma, a collective of artists and creative professionals formed in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina to support and celebrate cultural practices that impact the social and physical environment. The initiative sought to expand opportunities for artists to use their creativity in the rebuilding of New Orleans by exploring the relationship between art making and issues such as education, health, the environment, and community development. As founders of Transforma and members of its volunteer-based national resource team, we came together following the destruction of Hurricane Katrina to consider how our experience, resources, and networks could supplement and enhance the social and physical recovery of New Orleans. After a few conversations, the initiative was born and the name Transforma followed.

As practitioners within the field, we had seen art and culture become increasingly commercialized, limiting the opportunities for artists to work in public or socially engaged practices. To counter this trend, Transforma strategically supported such practices with direct financial assistance, technical assistance, and networking opportunities. Generally it encouraged a greater emphasis on the role of artists, the arts, and culture in addressing the social and political needs that confront our society.

Transforma was committed to supporting and validating public and socially engaged art practices, which are often overlooked by art critics and rarely considered by those in other fields. Given that such work is often process-oriented and that the physical products themselves are often ephemeral, effective documentation is difficult. For the past two years we have intensely considered how to document Transforma and called on advisers to help determine an appropriate approach. From the beginning we have been dedicated to making the work of Transforma accessible to a diverse audience. Thus, with the input of advisers, we created a framework in which two investigators, working independently, would have the opportunity to research,

investigate, and write about Transforma from their individual perspectives. The two essays in this publication are the result of this process. One, written by Aimee Chang, manager of public programs at the Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin, looks at Transforma through the lens of art history and pedagogy. The other, by Maria Rosario Jackson, senior research associate at the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Center at the Urban Institute, considers the initiative within the context of community development and urban planning.

Given the complexity of Transforma's organization and programs, a unique structure was created to allow both investigators to engage thoroughly with the initiative. We oriented Chang and Jackson through numerous conference calls and e-mails before they traveled to New Orleans to conduct interviews and to meet with participating artists and community members. Although we assumed that the writers would work independently, they were encouraged to share information as they saw fit. For the first six months of the process, they were charged with conducting on-the-ground research and interviews and producing initial essay drafts. During that period we invited trusted advisers and peers to participate in an editorial feedback session for the authors. In January 2010 we met in New Orleans with Chang, Jackson, and the ten invited participants—some from New Orleans, many from other cities, some from the art world, others from the community development and planning sector, some from the public sector, and others from the nonprofit and academic realms. The group convened in New Orleans for two days, during which time the draft essays were vetted, feedback was offered about the texts, and recommendations were made about the overall structure of the publication. Each participant brought a unique and critical voice. After the convening, Chang and Jackson had five months to complete the final drafts, and we used that time to gather other materials for this publication.

Since Transforma was an ever-evolving initiative that incorporated the voices, perspectives, and creativity of many individuals, it was only appropriate to represent the initiative in a dynamic manner. Within this publication you will find a great diversity of writing styles and presentation methods. Please know that this is intentional. The essays reflect the writers' unique perspectives. The interview, edited by Tom Finkelpearl, director of the Queens Museum of Art, captures our individual voices as members of the Transforma national resource team, and the narrative descriptions reflect the individual voice of each mini-grantee and the essence of each pilot project. The essays, interview, and narratives, supplemented by vivid images, are intended to work in unison to give an accurate picture of this five-year initiative. We admit that there may be some redundancy, but we feel that each section provides a unique viewpoint that is essential to understanding the ethos of Transforma.

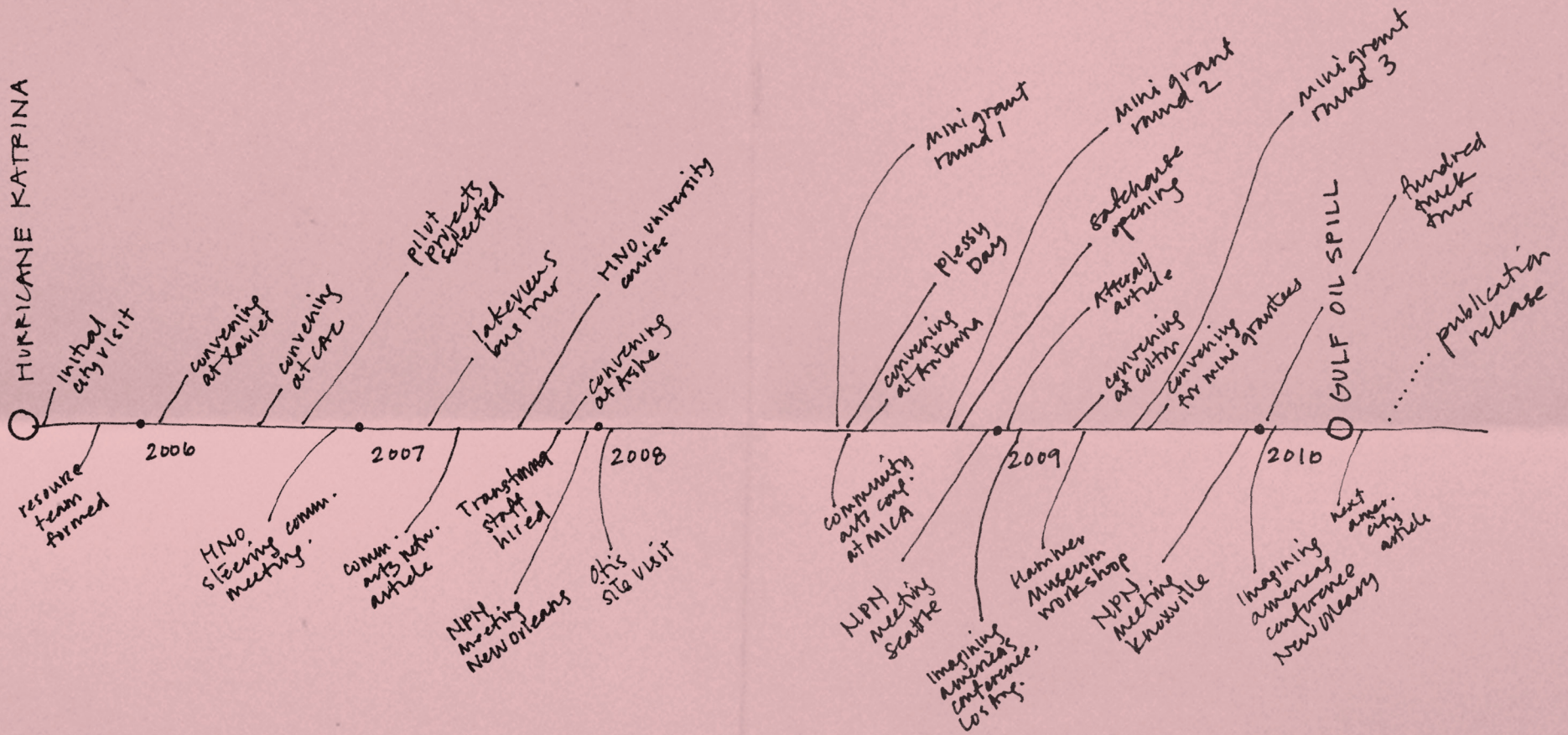
Finally, although Transforma's activity has been focused on the post-Katrina landscape of New Orleans, we would like to acknowledge the innumerable cities and communities throughout this country with shared legacies of disaster—whether social, physical, economic, or environmental (like the current oil-related disaster affecting the Gulf Coast). We hope that this publication, and the past five years of work in New Orleans, will encourage engagement in, and discourse about, art, creativity, and community.

— *Jessica Cusick, Sam Durant, Jess Garz, Rick Lowe, and Robert Ruello*

The information contained in this publication is also available online at

TRANSFORMAPROJECTS.ORG

HURRICANE KATRINA



THE ARTIST AND THE CITY:

— NEW MODELS FOR CREATIVE PUBLIC PRACTICE —

an essay by

AIMEE CHANG

The past twenty years have seen a growing body of scholarship on new-genre public art, activist and community-based art, dialogic art, collaborative and participatory practices, and relational aesthetics, much of it addressing work produced from the 1960s to the present day.¹ Articles, books, and exhibitions; workshops, conferences, and symposia; and academic programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels address the overlapping practices grouped under these terms. During the same period there has been an expansion of undergraduate and graduate programs in the public and community arts arenas, including the MFA in public practice at Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles (est. 2007), the MFA concentration in art and social practice at Portland State University in Oregon (est. 2007), and the Master in Public Art Studies Program at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles (est. 1991; since 2009, the MPAS Program: Art/Curatorial Practices in the Public Sphere). Undergraduate programs include the Visual and Public Art Institute at California

State University, Monterey Bay (est. 1996); the Center for Art and Public Life at California College of the Arts, Oakland (est. 1998); and the Community Arts Program at Xavier University in New Orleans (est. 1999).

» Noting the growing number of MFA graduates designing products for businesses, the February 2004 issue of the *Harvard Business Review* announced as part of its “Breakthrough Ideas for 2004” that “The MFA Is the New MBA.” Authored by Daniel Pink, this brief item garnered a great deal of attention and fanfare, both in the business world and at art schools. MFA programs quickly used the piece to promote the relevance and applicability of their programs. In the feel-good introduction (at least to MFA programs), Pink noted that compared with the MFA program at UCLA, “getting admitted to Harvard Business School is a cinch.” His basic premise was that businesses were “realizing that the only way to differentiate their goods and services in today’s overstocked, materially abundant marketplace is to make their offerings transcendent—physically beautiful

¹ Texts that have been important to my understanding of the topic include Suzanne Lacy, ed., *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995); Lynda Frye Burnham and Steven Durland, eds., *The Citizen Artist: Twenty Years of Art in the Public Arena: An Anthology from High Performance Magazine, 1978–1998* (Gardiner, N.Y.: Critical Press, 1998); Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002); Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October* 110, no. 1 (2004): 51–80; and Bishop, “The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents,” *Artforum* 44, no. 6 (2006): 178–83. Nicolas Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Dijon: Presses du Réel, 2002), also stands as a foundational text but is not included in the list above as it differs in its focus on artworks outside the activist realm.

and emotionally compelling” and that tasks traditionally performed by recent MBA graduates were being outsourced overseas.² This article followed Richard Florida’s 2002 book *The Rise of the Creative Class*, which traced a shift from an industrial to a creative economy.

» What these two trends indicate is the ability and desire of some artists for a practice that extends beyond the traditional art world arena of exhibitions to include “real world” change, be it through community redevelopment, political activism, and public policy or via product development and marketing. Reading Pink’s article highlights one of the main issues facing these artists—the difficulty of having their creativity understood beyond the ability to produce “physically beautiful” objects. Similarly, publicly funded art projects are still largely focused on improving the appearance of urban environments and public spaces such as parks, public buildings, and airports. For those artists interested in being taken seriously outside the decorative arena, there is a need to advocate on behalf of the relevance of artists in a much-expanded field and to challenge the traditional models of how art work—the work of artists—is carried out and understood. Transforma, a five-year artistic experiment in New Orleans led by a group of artists and art professionals in response to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, proposes a new model and pedagogical methodology for the field.

- BACKGROUND -

In October 2005 Robert Ruello, a New Orleans-based artist who had evacuated to Houston in preparation for Hurricane Katrina, returned

to his home in New Orleans. He was met by a devastated city. As he described it: “It was a mess; nothing worked. Eighty percent of the city was unoccupied. . . . It is hard for people who weren’t there to understand. There were no grocery stores, no gasoline stations. No signal lights worked. No street lights worked. And this was not just for a couple of weeks; we are talking months and months. . . . Mail delivery—I didn’t get mail delivered until late April. . . . People were getting laid off in December; the city just couldn’t support things anymore: schools were laying people off, businesses were moving. . . . Crisis after crisis just seemed to continue. It wasn’t just like Katrina hit and then the healing process started.”³ He describes institu-

³ Robert Ruello, conversation with the author, October 18, 2009.

tions “shedding” during the initial months, with the Catholic Church deciding to close about a third of its New Orleans-based churches.

» Ruello was familiar with Project Row Houses (PRH), artist Rick Lowe’s neighborhood-based artwork, and its impact on the Third Ward in Houston, where it is located. He contacted Lowe to see if he was interested in using the empty buildings left by the Church throughout New Orleans as community centers. Lowe visited New Orleans in December and invited arts administrator Jessica Cusick and artist Sam Durant, two of his former and current collaborators, to visit the city to see what they might be able to do. Durant visited in January 2006, and Cusick arrived in late spring of that year. Following those visits, Cusick, Durant, Lowe, and Ruello joined together to explore how they could help with the crisis in New Orleans, a collaboration that led to the founding of Transforma.

» With the exception of Ruello, who describes himself as “primarily a studio artist,” the

founders of Transforma have many years of experience working in the field of community-based and activist art. Cusick, currently cultural affairs manager for the City of Santa Monica, California, was the founding director of the civic art and design program for the Cultural Arts Council of Houston and Harris County, conceiving and overseeing the Houston Framework planning process. Prior to that she founded the art program at the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in Los Angeles. Durant, an artist based in Los Angeles, has undertaken a number of projects with different communities in the United States, including one with Twin Cities Native American community members as part of a residency at the Walker Art Center and one at Project Row Houses in Houston. Lowe is the founder of the multi-award-winning neighborhood-based artwork and cultural organization Project Row Houses. During its sixteen-year existence Project Row Houses has transformed the Third Ward neighborhood in which it is situated, and Lowe has served as adviser to a number of other community-based art projects. In addition to their independent projects, the members of this team were familiar with one another: Cusick, Lowe, and Ruello from Houston, and Durant and Lowe from Project Row Houses and from a project that they have been exploring for the section of Highway 62 between Selma and Montgomery in Alabama. Their relationships with one another go back several years.

» Transforma emerged out of a series of community meetings, called convenings, with local and national stakeholders, including artists, architects, lawyers, journalists, and academics from a variety of fields. People affiliated with redevelopment institutions in New Orleans—including Neighborhood Housing Services, the Office of

Recovery Management, the City Council, and the City Planning Commission—were present, as were people from outside New Orleans, such as Julie Bargmann, founding principal of D.I.R.T studio, a landscape architecture firm committed to working with marginalized communities and postindustrial terrain; Marie Cieri, geographer, faculty member at Rhode Island School of Design, and codirector of Artists in Context; Jan Cohen-Cruz, associate professor at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts; Andrew Commers, Kelley Lindquist, and Bill Mague from Artspace, Minneapolis, a nonprofit real estate developer for the arts; Robert Frankel, museums and visual arts director and visual arts division team leader for the National Endowment for the Arts; Tom Finkelpearl, director of the Queens Museum of Art; and Nato Thompson, chief curator of Creative Time, New York. Artists experienced in the field flew in, including Mel Chin, Ashley Hunt, Suzanne Lacy, Daniel J. Martinez, Linda Pollack, and Sara Wookey. Local participants included artists John Barnes and Ron Bechet, faculty members at Dillard and Xavier universities, respectively; Don Marshall, director of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival and Foundation; and artists Jan Gilbert and Robin Levy.

» Over time participation shifted, with some early attendees remaining involved; others, such as Mel Chin, taking on projects of their own (in this case a Transforma pilot project); and others drifting away. During Transforma’s five-year existence, the convenings drew hundreds of participants. Key elements of the project were its responsiveness to its local context and its collaborative nature. While the founders had ideas for projects in New Orleans, they were, from the outset, more interested in listening and responding to the needs of people in the city. The convenings provided the foundation for Transforma

and ensured its continued flexibility in support of the city's changing needs.

» Recognizing the vitality of projects happening on the ground in New Orleans and wanting to use their talents to support a larger framework rather than to carry out individual art projects,⁴ the founders envisioned a multipronged initiative supported by the skills and resources of a shifting “national resource team,” a “diverse and fluid group of professionals, local and national, that provide the structural backbone of the initiative,”⁵ of which they would be a part.

⁵ From the document “Ars Futura New Orleans,” the first “manifesto” of what was to become Transforma. This document was drafted following and based on the June 2006 meeting.

Experienced members of the resource team, including themselves, would provide methodological and artistic expertise and a broad network of international,

national, and local contacts to artists, both local and nonlocal, working in collaboration with other professionals to rebuild New Orleans both physically and psychologically.

» Parallel to the work of the national resource team, Transforma continued to host convenings throughout its five-year history. These provided an opportunity for people committed to the creative rebuilding of New Orleans to connect with one another, to teach and learn from one another, to work collaboratively, and to share resources. The group also launched a website in 2007 to serve as a social-networking site for artists working to rebuild the city. With the Internet functioning before dependable phone service was available, it seemed to make sense to create a virtual forum for the

continued sharing of experiences, lessons, and resources. Together the convenings, website, and broad-based resource team formed a support network—the core of Transforma—for the pilot projects, the mini-grant projects, and other local artists working in New Orleans. A key component of this support network was Jess Garz, the program manager and sole staff member of the project, who joined the team in mid-August 2007. With a background in architecture and urban planning and with a natural tendency to connect people, Garz played a critical part in the success of Transforma. Her role was cited in interviews with pilot project leaders, mini-grantees, convening attendees, and project founders. Garz, a resident of New Orleans for the duration of the project, also played a crucial role as a local member of the team, both in terms of her accessibility to the various projects and as someone who came to understand the local situation intimately.

» The hoped-for outcome of these efforts was a series of creative models, shifting the identity of New Orleans from “catastrophic city” to “rescue city,” a place where solutions to problems plaguing a broad range of other places would be imagined and piloted. Early on, the team identified five areas of particular need and interest—housing, education, health care, economic development, and the environment—selecting three pilot projects that focused on some of these concerns: Operation Paydirt/Fundred Dollar Bill Project, Plessy Park, and Home, New Orleans? The team saw these three projects as representative of three different models of activist and community-based

⁴ According to Rick Lowe: “Creating a particular work in New Orleans at that time for me just wasn’t relevant. Even if it was Project Row Houses right now, affecting some forty households, artists, even if I could have done that in New Orleans at that time, it still wouldn’t have been something I was interested in. What I saw in New Orleans, the impact was so huge; it was just much larger than one single project could have” (conversation with the author, September 5, 2009). During interviews other members of the group echoed this sentiment. Sam Durant said: “This is a major, major catastrophe on many levels: social, political, cultural . . . one of the biggest challenges a U.S. city has ever faced. So the idea of doing an art project there seemed very limiting” (conversation with the author, August 2, 2009).

art practice: artist-initiated, with Mel Chin as the conceptual and organizational center of Paydirt/Fundred, a large-scale artwork tackling lead remediation in New Orleans and environmental and civic education across the country; community-driven in the case of Plessy Park, a grassroots effort to create a park at the site where Homer Plessy was arrested in 1892;⁶ and an institutional collaboration in the case of Home, New Orleans? which integrated neighborhood projects and local artists with the energy of students and faculty from three very different universities in the area. Each project also addressed some of the five areas of interest: environment, education, and health care in the case of Paydirt/Fundred; community development and education in the case of Plessy Park; and education and institutional change in the case of Home, New Orleans? Transforma provided each pilot project with seed money, advisory support, local and national contacts, and the support of Jess Garz. Garz played different and varied roles for each of the pilot projects, with the main ones being serving as a bridge between Chin and the local community in the case of Paydirt/Fundred; facilitator for Plessy Park, moderating the sometimes contentious relationships among the stakeholders in that collaboration; and administrator in the case of Home, New Orleans?

» In addition to the three pilot projects, Transforma also initiated a mini-grant program. Launched in 2008, the program was a late-term outgrowth of Transforma’s other activities. A rotating panel of jurors from a variety of fields awarded grants of \$500 to \$2,500

to artists working “at the intersection of art, social justice and recovery in New Orleans . . . supporting the vibrant activity that occurs on the ground level.”⁷ Key to this undertaking was the removal of the usual bureaucratic hurdles in the field of art funding, which, in practice, give preference to larger, more established organizations. Recipients of Transforma mini-grants did not need nonprofit status, could be individuals or collectives, and were engaged in a variety of activities, undelineated by the Transforma team. Recipients have included a community garden project; a poster project, the collaborative construction of a “semi-utopic virtual town” by marginalized youth from New Orleans and Tallaght, Ireland; storytelling and oral history projects; a jazz hip-hop orchestra; and a Mardi Gras Indian history and bead-sewing course, among many others. The mini-grant program has been very successful, both in New Orleans and in its other incarnations as a nationwide program being piloted by the Andy Warhol Foundation for Visual Arts in San Francisco and Houston.⁸

- PILOT PROJECTS -

The members of the core Transforma team successfully leveraged their own cultural capital into project capital, using their art world and community development reputations and connections to access funding, human resources,

⁷ “Creative Recovery Mini-Grant Program,” Art, Social Justice, and Recovery, hosted by Transforma, <http://www.transformaprojects.org/minigrant>.

⁶ The Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation in public accommodations such as railroads based on the doctrine of “separate but equal.” Homer Plessy’s arrest was planned by a small group of black professionals in New Orleans in order to test the constitutionality of a Louisiana law mandating separate but equal accommodations for blacks and whites on intrastate railroads. The decision was overturned in 1954 by *Brown v. Board of Education*.

⁸ In San Francisco the program is administered by Southern Exposure (more information at www.soex.org/artistsresources.html), and in Houston it is administered by an institutional collaborative made up of Aurora Picture Show, Diverse Works, and Project Row Houses (more information at www.theideafund.org).

and partners in support of both the pilot projects and the mini-grantees. Over three years \$400,000 was raised and distributed, and the Transforma team served as advisers for a wide array of projects.

» Mel Chin, who attended a number of conventions, pushed for a multidisciplinary, project-based approach, and his Paydirt/Fundred has brought together scientists, elected officials, and artists in an effort to clean up lead pollution in New Orleans. Transforma provided connections to local and national collaborators and significant seed monies and administrative support for the elements that launched the project, including *Safehouse*, a physical work based in New Orleans that served as a local anchor and Prospect.1 biennial presence for Paydirt/Fundred; the *Sous Terre* armored truck, which traveled the country gathering “fundred” dollar bills, drawings that symbolize one hundred dollars worth of creative capital, to deliver to Congress for a hoped-for even exchange of \$300 million, the amount needed to implement lead remediation throughout New Orleans using the method developed by Chin and his team of scientists;⁹ and the *Love Where You Live* neighborhood party in the Eighth Ward, which built local support for the initiative. In addition, conversations with the founders have guided the project along the way. According to Chin, “Many times when I was too loosey-goosey, they told me to do something different.”¹⁰

» Home, New Orleans? created vital connections between historically divided black and nonblack universities in New Orleans and, in the first year, between the New Orleans schools and New York University. The innovative college course Building Community through the Arts is

entering its fourth year. It is an interuniversity offering taught by faculty from Dillard, Tulane, and Xavier universities, bringing together students from these historically divided institutions.¹¹ In addition to the college course, Home,

¹¹ For a description of the project in mid-2007, including an insider's perspective (the author was the NYU collaborator in Home, New Orleans?), see Jan Cohen-Cruz, “Art in Rebuilding Community: The Transforma Project in New Orleans,” http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archive-files/2007/06/art_in_re-buildi.php.

successes of this program.

» In the case of Plessy Park the additional energy and resources Transforma brought to the table in 2007 invigorated an ongoing effort to create a park at the site of Homer Plessy's arrest in 1892. In 2008 the New Orleans City council issued a proclamation celebrating that year's Homer Plessy Day, and in 2009 a historical marker was installed at the site. Commemorative celebrations in 2007 and 2008 included a participatory event organized by artist-professors Ron Bechet and Suzanne Lacy and their students at Xavier University in New Orleans and Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles, respectively, and presentations and activities organized and conceived by the Students at the Center (SAC), a writing-based independent program working with middle school and high school students in New Orleans at Frederick Douglass, McDonogh 35, and Eleanor McMain schools;¹² by the New Orleans Center for Creative Art (NOCCA), a state-run regional preprofessional arts-training center for secondary students in the city; by the Crescent City Peace Alliance, a grassroots organization dedicated to increasing peace and safety

New Orleans? is also working to create ties across distinct neighborhoods in New Orleans, a goal that was prioritized in 2009. For the core Transforma members the ongoing university collaboration and attendant infrastructural shift have been the most important

¹² For more information on Students at the Center and its place within the larger educational context of New Orleans, see Catherine Michna, “Stories at the Center: Story Circles, Educational Organizing, and Fate of Neighborhood Public Schools in New Orleans,” *American Quarterly* 61, no. 6 (2009): 529–55.

formation of the Plessy and Ferguson Foundation for Education and Reconciliation.

- MINI-GRANT PROGRAM -

Transforma's mini-grant program leveraged the flexibility of the artist's role within what can be a bureaucratically burdened funding model. As artists and established community organizers, members of the resource team were able to raise funds from national organizations such as the American Center Foundation, Annenberg Foundation, Ford Foundation, Joan Mitchell Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, Open Society Institute, and Andy Warhol Foundation for Visual Arts in support of Transforma and, through the mini-grant program, to use a portion of those funds to support local grassroots projects. Their identity as artists gave the Transforma team more flexibility in how they distributed the funds they raised, and they were able to regrant funds in a way that might not have been possible for a traditional institution, offering quickly responsive

in New Orleans; and Transforma.¹³ Descendents of Homer Plessy and John Howard Ferguson, the judge who presided over Plessy's court case, appeared together at the 2009 unveiling of the new marker. That year they also announced the

funds and expertise to a wide range of innovative projects reaching deep into the neighborhoods of New Orleans. The application process was straightforward and did not require the grantees to be nonprofit organizations, passing on the Transforma team's flexibility to the grantees. According to Durant: “The mini-grant was a good model for ways to fund at the local, grassroots level. [Practitioners] were able to get a grant without becoming institutionalized.”¹⁴

» Bethany Rogers, director of Cornerstones, a project to celebrate “everyday monuments and gathering places” in the city, noted that the Transforma mini-grant process “did not demand unnecessary demonstrations of our qualifications or project details when there is a certain amount of question as to how projects will play out in ‘real time’ and in ‘real life.’”¹⁵

¹⁴ Sam Durant, conversation with the author, August 2, 2009.
¹⁵ Bethany Rogers, e-mail correspondence with the author, October 16, 2009.

In addition to providing much-appreciated funding, which allowed for the remuneration of some project leaders and paid for materials and

supplies, the grants also provided affirmation and lent legitimacy to the projects, as many of the recipients noted. According to Eve Abrams of the Neighborhood Story Project: “It's surprising what being paid . . . for your efforts does to your self-esteem. This perhaps has been the greatest boost of all. The Transforma grant felt like a major pat on the back saying: what you do is valuable.”¹⁶ Joanna Russo of 2110 Royal Stories reported that “having the backing of an organization like NPN/Transforma adds

¹³ The political situation surrounding this plot of land is complex. According to Reggie Lawson, director of the Crescent City Peace Alliance, it was purchased by NOCCA in 2007. Prior to this the Crescent City Peace Alliance held a lease from 2001 to 2004. As part of its purchase agreement NOCCA agreed to allocate 3,000 square feet of the site to commemorate Homer Plessy. On its website is an article published on July 16, 2009, announcing plans “for an eventual expansion from 131,000 to over 500,000 square feet to accommodate NOCCA Conservatory—performance spaces, professional training studios and classrooms for current arts disciplines; kitchens and classrooms for Culinary Arts; studios for new arts disciplines yet unknown; and academic labs; NOCCA Forum—student dining, health facilities, retail cafe and gallery; Residential Hall—serving statewide, national and international students; Visiting Artists Quarters—for visiting arts and academic master artists; Green space and Culinary Arts gardens; Plessy Memorial Park; and on-site parking” (<http://www.noccainstitute.com/index.php/2009/07/a-new-horizon-chapter-3-master-planning>).



SUPPORT

legitimacy to the project. It arouses the curiosity of other professionals in the field and makes it more likely that additional granting organizations will take note. After receiving less than the full amount of funding . . . from Transforma, I was able to procure further funding from the Convergence Center for the Arts . . . to make up some of the difference.”¹⁷

» In addition to providing funds, Transforma brought mini-grant recipients together at conventions, encouraging them to share experiences and expertise. The recipients are also required to post their projects on the Transforma website, promoting communication among the mini-grantees (admittedly not as actively as the team had hoped) and documenting their work, creating an archive of some of the ways that artists are working to rebuild New Orleans. The grantees also had access, through project coordinator Jess Garz, to the expertise of a wide net of Transforma affiliates.

» In spite of its many successes, the mini-grant program suffered because it came so late in the life of Transforma. The funded projects, relatively modest in scale and led by individual artists and activists, could have benefited greatly from the expertise and experience of the type of resource team that the group envisioned. By the time the mini-grant project was launched in 2008, many of the early Transforma participants had scattered, in part because of the demands that the interminable government response to Katrina had taken on their time and energy and in part because their skills were not required by the early pilot projects. Launched earlier, the mini-grant program might have engaged more people more deeply, both as members of the resource team and as members

of panels to select grantees. This engagement could have contributed to a broader-based resource team for the duration of the project.

» This dip in energy included the energy of the core team as well. According to Lowe: “Unfortunately, we didn’t get to [the mini-grants] soon enough. . . . As it turned out, it was only in the last year that we’ve been doing that, and that was the point at which the resource team was less connected.” Nevertheless, he noted, “the New Orleans artists are doing incredible stuff with what they get.” Lowe feels that the New Orleans projects, compared with those that the Warhol Foundation has instituted in San Francisco and Houston, have a different tenor: “The nature of the artists in New Orleans—everybody there is trying to figure out how what they do impacts the city they are in, which is devastated, whereas [in Houston] people are not. [Community] impact is not something they are worried about; it is more personal impact.”¹⁸

LESSONS FROM THE TRANSFORMA MODEL

Transforma’s undertakings in New Orleans provide us with an alternative ecosystem for community-based art practice—one based on a collaborative support infrastructure led by artists, in contrast to current exhibition- and academically oriented models. The founders of Transforma view their project not as an artwork but as “an artistic investigation,” with the distinction that they “didn’t have a particular way of thinking about what might happen”;¹⁹

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Jessica Cusick, conversation with the author, Jess Garz, and Maria Jackson, July 18, 2009.

as a support network and a process;²⁰ and as an experiment in a collaborative approach—a

¹⁸ Rick Lowe, conversation with the author, September 5, 2009.

social infrastructure—to supporting artists working at the intersection of social justice and community development.

» It was hoped that the resource team would help such artists fully realize the multiple goals of their projects. According to Cusick: “We all felt that in our practice the thing that is often missing is constructive feedback. . . . Because often times we have found that the work gets off track. You start out with aesthetic and social justice or social service and community development goals, and usually one of those three suffers tremendously in the course of implementation, whether because of lack of resources or overweening ambition or an unrealistic assessment of what could be accomplished with the project. . . . The idea was that if you could provide a safe group of people who had expertise in a lot of these areas it would enable artists that are doing this type of work to be more consistently successful and to more consistently achieve both their aesthetic goals and quantifiable social change.”²¹

» Durant adds: “Many artist-initiated social projects are failures [in terms of community impact] because most artists don’t have the experience and know-how and aren’t aware of how to get the desired outcome. . . . If you want to increase economic development there are ways that work and ways that don’t work and one can’t be ignorant about it if one wants to be effective. It is a very specific situation and I think that has to be understood. Having said that, I think that Transforma does and hopefully will offer a model for ways for artists who do similar types of things to take what they’ve done and improve on it.”²²

» Notes from the June 2006 meeting that launched Transforma include the following: “The opening is now to really influence

policy. . . . Art/culture need to be at the table for the big issues. . . . Forge artists/creatives as a strong advocacy group. . . . Build partnerships with local government. . . . Create ‘think tank’ groups around the issues.”²³ Different reasons and possibilities have been put forward by the core Transforma team for why they were not able to

integrate artists into the core of the rebuilding process, including an overly optimistic view of the openness of cities to major change in the wake of large-scale disasters. Initially the team thought that the lack of infrastructure would lend them flexibility in reenvisioning the city; instead they found not only that it was difficult to operate without a functioning infrastructure but also that in a situation of such devastation people often gravitated toward what had existed in the past in an attempt to establish security and equilibrium. This finding has been cited by the Transforma team as one of the major lessons learned from this process. These difficulties were exacerbated by the political complexity of New Orleans, especially for a group headed by people who were not living in the city full-time. Furthermore, Naomi Klein’s explication of disaster capitalism and subsequent applications of her theories to New Orleans make it clear that the rebuilding of a socially heterogeneous city was not the goal of the profit-driven corporations, including Halliburton, brought in for the task.²⁴

» In spite of the retrospectively insurmountable challenges of influencing the rebuilding of New Orleans at the policy level, one key to bringing artists to the community development and policy table in any location is a revaluation of artistic labor and an increase in artists’ credibility in the eyes of their collaborators. To Lowe an ability to focus on a larger project rather than

²³ Notes provided to the author by Jessica Cusick by e-mail on October 7, 2009.

²¹ Ibid.

²² “Ars Futura New Orleans.”

²⁴ Vianne Adams, Taslim Van Hattum, and Diana English, "Chronic Disaster Syndrome: Displacement, Disaster Capitalism, and the Eviction of the Poor from New Orleans," *American Ethnologist* 36, no. 4 (2009): 615–36.

solely on an individual artistic vision is critical to winning the confidence of others working to create positive change in communities: "The one side about community-engaged work right now that is still lagging is that it is still so much about the individual artist's vision of what they need to do in a community context. So there isn't a strong trust that artists bring something to the table other than their agenda, that they are engaged in the process to help it move. . . . We have not established ourselves as a legitimate participant in serious issues that are going on in neighborhoods or cities. . . . My question is: how do artists that are working within the community have some aspect of their work rest on the idea that they are doing something meaningful to make an impact on the community or environment beyond what was there before and in a way that balances or rivals the impact they get from it?" ²⁵

» This idea, which suggests a different way of thinking about the vision and priorities of artists, challenges the trope of the individual artistic genius, creating a different model of artistic practice. As Grant Kester has written: "Modern art is often associated with the emergence of the solitary genius out of the lumpen collectivity of the medieval guild or lodge. . . . The future of (European, modernist) art from this point on is foreordained as the titanic struggle of individualistic progress against the stultifying conformity and consensus imposed, variously by bourgeois consumerism, communist propaganda and, eventually, the history of modernism itself. . . . But there has also been, through the modern period, a parallel history of art

practice that runs counter to this tendency. It is a subterranean tradition of dispersed or collective authorship, collaborative interaction and process-based forms of production that periodically emerges into art world consciousness, only to be written off as kitsch, activism, theater, or any of the other pejorative terms reserved for the work of those who refuse the privileges of the exemplary subject." ²⁶

²⁶ Grant Kester, "Conversation Pieces: Collaboration and Artistic Identity," catalog essay for the exhibition *Unlimited Partnerships: Collaboration in Contemporary Art* at CEPA Gallery in Buffalo, New York, in 2000, available online at <http://www.cepagallery.org/exhibitions/Unlimited2/u2mainpage.html>.

» In his writings Kester lays out a continuum of collaborative models: from technical collaborations, like those between an artist and a print studio; to collaborations between artists and spectator-participants, as in Rirkrit Tiravanija's interactive gallery and museum installations; to ones that "involve an even more extreme disavowal of the 'ego imperialism' of artistic identity, through the artist's long-term involvement in a given site or community. . . . Here the sublation of art and life is sought . . . through the dismantling of the artistic personality itself in a splay of mediatory practices and exchanges." ²⁷

» In keeping with this description (though perhaps with less drama), Cusick describes Transforma as "all about process . . . the product is the way of having an impact on all these people." ²⁸ Asked if Transforma was transformative and for whom, Lowe replied: "We were interested in transforming the way we think about artists practicing in community-engaged projects. A transformation from the notion of the hero-artist to a notion of collaboration." ²⁹ In contrast to Kester's description of a

²⁷ Grant Kester, "Collaborative Practices in Environmental Art," http://greenmuseum.org/generic_content.php?ct_id=208.

²⁸ Jessica Cusick, conversation with the author, Jess Garz, and Maria Jackson, July 18, 2009.

²⁹ Rick Lowe, conversation with author, Jessica Cusick, Sam Durant, Tom Finkelpearl, Jess Garz, Maria Jackson, and Robert Ruello, February 21, 2010.

"disavowal of . . . artistic identity," however, the Transforma team argues for an expanded field in which to practice, one that includes collaboration between artists and other professionals on equal terms and in which

their identities and unique skills remain intact, if transformed, and are key to their success.

» The artistic process is critical to the incorporation of deeper meaning into our everyday lives. Much as Nicolas Bourriaud called for alternative forms of social interaction as a challenge to the mandated forms of social discourse endemic to our postindustrial age, there is a need to shift community redevelopment and city building away from its current move toward a homogenized process and product. The artistic process can elevate the mundane, giving it a more layered, richer meaning. As Lowe points out: "Mel is an artist advocating for cleaning the soil, but the method of advocacy is completely not mundane. How can we push housing out of a mundane state, create more poetry and mystery around it, do things that feed the soul in the process of doing it?" ³⁰ In Chin's case his methodology—the creation of hundred-dollar bills by people across the country,

³⁰ Rick Lowe, conversation with the author, September 5, 2009.

» Durant highlights the expansive nature of Transforma: "Rick is not a traditional artist in the sense of producing objects or even producing cultural dialogues or discourses like someone like Suzanne Lacy, although they have done that it in the past. His practice is evolving, so I was learning a lot from him as well in terms of what one can do. [Transforma] has expanded the idea of what it means to be an artist and what one can do as an artist. It is not so much that if you do a social infrastructure project like Transforma that it means that producing objects or installations is no longer necessary anymore. It is a pluralistic idea." ³¹

» In addition to proposing an expanded idea of art work, Transforma also offers a new pedagogical model for community-based and activist art. In spite of the growth of academic programs supporting social and public practice, there is little formalized support for the practice outside academic and institutional settings. ³² The mini-grant program, led by an engaged resource team, is a strong model for a nonacademic, nimble, and flexible support infrastructure for emerging artists in the field. Even without the grant-making element, the model could connect seasoned practitioners with emerging artists, helping them realize the multiple goals these practices necessarily encompass while avoiding the many pitfalls along the way. As a teaching and learning opportunity, this would do much to grow the field, in terms of both practitioners and the success of individual projects. The Transforma team worked with each of the pilot projects to

³¹ Sam Durant, conversation with the author, September 5, 2009.

³² Practitioners have found mentors and rely on support networks that have improved with the growth of the Internet. Art in the Public Interest, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting community-based practices, operates Community Arts Network, a website documenting projects, disseminating information, and connecting practitioners.

articulate goals and later checked in to see how the projects were proceeding, providing mentorship and support. The convenings have been identified time and again as critical to the various artists working in New Orleans.

» The Transforma model also provides us with an alternative support structure for experienced artists in the field, one that offers an additional option to the current museum-based exhibition model. Among the best-known exhibitions showcasing community-based and activist art practices are *Culture in Action* in Chicago in 1991–93; *Places with a Past* at the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1991; and InSite, a roughly biannual presentation of artworks commissioned to address the San Diego–Tijuana corridor. Prospect.1, the first of a planned series of New Orleans–based biennials founded by curator Dan Cameron and on view in 2008, was part museum exhibition and part exhibition of site- and community-specific artworks located throughout the city. Residency programs at a wide range of institutions, including the Walker Art Center and Project Row Houses, invite artists from across the globe to work with local communities under the auspices of and with the support of the organization. Staff at the inviting institutions often provide an ongoing connection with local resources and communities, working with artists who have a limited period of time in the location to realize their works.

» These exhibitions have received both positive and negative reviews, with much of the criticism centered on readings of the work as superficial, ad hoc, and, at worse, self-serving for either the artist or the institution involved or both.³³ The temporary nature of the interventions and the model of pairing nonlocal artists and local communities have come under attack. Artists, often from areas far from exhibition

sites, travel from place to place, creating temporary, site- or community-specific works.³⁴

³³ See Grant Kester, “Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art,” *Afterimage* 22 (January 1995): 5–11.

³⁴ See Kwon, *One Place after Another*, for an in-depth reading of site- and community-specific art, especially a reading of the problematic of “community.”

Often their understanding of both site and community is limited; time pressure can lead to oversimplification in the constitution of who represents “community” and in how artistic labor is divided. These conundrums are to some extent endemic to the field and

indeed to group endeavors in general. But some of these issues—especially in terms of commitment, compromise, and understanding—might be improved through a model supporting local artists working where they live, on projects that they originate, supported by a network of local and national collaborators. In contrast to the exhibition model—which tends to provide local expertise, often in the form of staff support and knowledge, to a wide range of artists with differing degrees of familiarity with the context, both geographic and methodological, in which they are working—the Transforma model supports ongoing local projects through a broad base of resources and expertise.

» This is not to say that there are not advantages to what I am calling the “exhibition model.” Extraordinary works of art have been created through that model, often in part because of the tension between local communities and artists from afar. Fresh eyes can see different possibilities, and nonlocal practitioners may be free of social and political constraints that local artists might feel. Transforma provides an additional model, one that might realize more integrated and longer-term engagement between artists and communities at the local level.

» Critical to the success of this alternative

model is the availability of the type of resources that museums and exhibition support structures are able to provide, including financial backing, critical advice, promotional efforts, and audience—many of the elements of the Transforma support model. At the inception of Transforma its founders had considered the idea of an alternative biennial. This could involve the commissioning of local artists to generate community-based work. Viewers instead of artists could travel from site to site. Given the current mobility of an art world already accustomed to traveling from biennial to triennial to Documenta, it is not hard to imagine the success of such an endeavor, especially if it had the budget of some of these other ventures.

» Watts House Project, “a collaborative artwork in the shape of a neighborhood redevelopment” in the area surrounding the landmark Watts Towers in Los Angeles, is an example of the potential for this model.³⁵ Originally

³⁵ From the Watts House Project website, <http://wattshouseproject.org>.

founded by Lowe in 1996 as part of the exhibition *Uncommon Sense*—organized by Tom Finkelpearl and Julie Lazar for the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles—the project attracted the interest and assistance of Edgar Arceneaux, then an undergraduate art student. After Lowe’s departure the project went dormant. It was relaunched in 2008 by Arceneaux, by then an internationally recognized artist. By 2010 Watts House Project had three projects under way, each bringing together an artist, an architect, and a resident to reimagine a house and its surrounding area and, by extension, neighborhood. Larger projects include an artist residency program; a still-to-be-determined community facility, such as a day-care center; and a café. All these are planned with area residents, and all projects use

and pay for as much local talent as possible. The project is now a nonprofit organization that has drawn the support of a wide range of funders and institutions, including Creative Capital, ForYourArt, the Hammer Museum, LA><ART, and the Soros Foundation. Growing out of the exhibition model, Watts House Project, like Project Row Houses, has thrived with the care and attention of a local artist committed to the project and the neighborhood it serves and is becoming a long-term established player in the transformation of its neighborhood through a network of artists and other stakeholders. Lowe has remained involved as an active adviser.

» Although successful projects have grown out of exhibitions, traditional exhibitions are often not ideal venues for the dissemination of works in the field, which are often site-specific, temporally based, and, perhaps most difficult for traditional methods of art criticism and history, not object based. These projects, when presented in a gallery setting, usually in the form of documentation, often appear lifeless. A comparison might be an exhibition of photographs of sculptures and paintings, something most in the art world would consider absurd, or exhibitions about architecture, which many consider a poor substitute for experiencing an actual building. In order to be truly understood and evaluated, these projects should be seen at their site and over time.

» Art and city building are already intricately linked, with the current system of global exhibitions a key method of city promotion and tourism. There is potential within this system to reach beyond tourist dollars and cultural cachet to harness the arts to create lasting change. Just as artists working publicly have a desire to reach beyond the decorative, there should be a desire on the part of art professionals to create new ways of supporting new

art practices. Similarly, current academic models still favor established hierarchies of class and learning, ones that many of the students and professors in the academy are hoping to challenge. These new working methodologies need new models, and even as it concludes, Transforma offers a promising new template.



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TRANSFORMA PROJECTS THROUGH A PLANNER'S PRISM:

— INTERPRETATION AND LESSONS LEARNED —

an essay by

MARIA ROSARIO JACKSON, PH.D.

Within urban planning and related fields, community revitalization strategies often are concerned primarily with the redistribution of wealth and economic opportunity, economic growth, housing, and, to some degree, education, public safety, health, and environment. While one would never deny that these issues are critical to any city or neighborhood, in my judgment, approaches to urban revitalization are often incomplete because they seldom have any regard for the roles that arts, cultural, and creative activities—including amateur, professional, and grassroots practices—play in creating communities that are healthy and whole. The opportunity for artistic and creative expression in and of itself is an important feature of a viable community. Art and cultural expression give communities identity and places meaning. These activities often embody the history, concerns, passions, and aspirations of a people.

» On these terms alone, arts and cultural activity warrant more attention. But planners and others concerned with comprehensive community revitalization are remiss when they fail to consider how arts, culture, and creative expression can also be integral to the very issues with which they are concerned. Nationwide there are myriad examples of cultural participation as an anchor or catalyst for economic development, integral to reclaiming derelict spaces,

essential to public health and wellness, and important to improving education. Without consideration for the role of arts in community contexts and the ways arts-based community improvement can thrive, people concerned with comprehensive community revitalization cannot possibly do their best work.

» In 2009 I conducted urban-planning field research to understand the work of Transforma Projects. The Transforma Projects initiative was launched in 2005 to address the social and physical recovery of New Orleans following the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina. The effort was founded by Rick Lowe, executive director of Project Row Houses in Houston; Jessica Cusick, director of cultural affairs for the City of Santa Monica, California; Sam Durant, artist and professor at California Institute of the Arts; Robert Ruello, artist; and Ron Bechet, artist and professor at Xavier University in New Orleans. Transforma Projects has enabled artists and other creative people to help rebuild communities through work at the intersection of art and other fields, including environment, health, education, and community development. The initiative has three program components:

■ *project support*, which includes small grants to a wide range of art-based community-building initiatives throughout the city and financial and infrastructural support to three pilot projects

intended as laboratories in which to explore different ways of pursuing this work;

B *resource development*, which includes a website and other social-networking mechanisms as well as the creation of a national resource team of artists, arts administrators, and people from other fields with experience in community-focused arts initiatives; and

C *documentation and knowledge transfer*, which includes convenings, documentation, and dissemination of information, insights, and lessons harvested from Transforma Projects.

» My charge in examining Transforma Projects was to interpret its role from a planning perspective and distill lessons that can be useful to the Transforma Projects national resource team and to people primarily outside the arts field concerned with community revitalization. In this essay I discuss how Transforma Projects can be interpreted as something similar to a planning and community development intermediary. I also discuss lessons learned from Transforma Projects through that framing and analysis.¹

¹ Maria Rosario Jackson and Peter Marris, "Comprehensive Community Initiatives: Overview of an Emerging Community Improvement Orientation," paper presented at the Urban Institute community building seminar series, 1996.

» My observations are drawn from interviews conducted with grantees of Transforma Projects (pilots and others), observation at meetings of grantees, visits to sites of Transforma Projects-

affiliated work, and interviews with the Transforma Projects national resource team and staff. My insights are further informed by twenty years of research on comprehensive community revitalization strategies and fifteen years of research on the presence and roles of arts and cultural participation in various communities, including moderate- and low-income neighborhoods, communities of color, and immigrant communities around the United

States. Previous research—which has focused on the cultural activities that people value in their communities and the reasons that these activities are valued—has included participant observation in cultural events, hundreds of interviews, and scores of focus group discussions with neighborhood residents, community leaders, artists, people who run cultural organizations, and others involved in a wide range of community initiatives.

- TRANSFORMA PROJECTS REDUX -

Transforma Projects has been supported by the Andy Warhol Foundation, American Center Foundation, Annenberg Foundation, Ford Foundation, Joan Mitchell Foundation, Nathan Cummings Foundation, Open Society Institute/Soros Foundation, the Quixote Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Not an independent nonprofit organization, Transforma Projects is a project of the National Performance Network, which is based in New Orleans, and has played an important role in supporting local cultural activity after Hurricane Katrina.

» Transforma has been involved with a wide range of local arts-based efforts in New Orleans. It has supported the work of three pilot efforts through direct funding and infrastructure: Operation Paydirt/Fundred Dollar Bill Project, an artist-initiated effort; Home, New Orleans? a collaboration among artists, community-based organizations and universities; and the Plessy Park project, a community initiated effort. The Paydirt/Fundred project [FUNDRED.ORG] deals with the remediation of lead-contaminated soil, which has been proven associated with a host of negative health outcomes as well as increased violent criminal activity and poor scholastic

performance among children. Led by conceptual artist Mel Chin, Paydirt/Fundred involves collaboration between the artist and scientists as well as the artist and community members in efforts to find solutions for soil remediation, educate people about the perils of contamination, and mobilize people in New Orleans and around the country to demand resources for contamination remediation. Transforma has provided direct financial and management support, and it has been instrumental in connecting the lead artist with individuals, organizations, and public agencies such as the Contemporary Arts Center, the New Orleans Museum of Art, KIDsmART (an initiative to integrate arts into school curricula through the efforts of teaching artists), KK Projects (an experimental arts organization in the Seventh Ward), the Crescent City Peace Alliance, Jericho Road Housing Initiative, and the Tulane/Xavier Center for Bio-Environmental Research. Transforma has also facilitated contact between the Paydirt/Fundred project and the public affairs office of the Army Corps of Engineers, the Mayor's Office, City Council, the Office of Recovery and Development Administration of the City of New Orleans, and the Louisiana Recovery Authority.

» Home, New Orleans? is a community-based, arts-focused network of organizations, universities, artists, and neighbors collaborating within and across four New Orleans neighborhoods that were severely affected by Hurricane Katrina: Central City, Lakeview, and the Seventh and Ninth wards. Projects in each neighborhood address community development and recovery through visual and performing arts. For example, in Central City, the Ashé Cultural Arts Center works with senior citizens through dance and with youth on community history and pride and the legacy of racism and inequality. The Porch in the Seventh

Ward offers theater and visual arts programs also dealing with community history and a range of long-standing social challenges that have been aggravated since Hurricane Katrina. In the Ninth Ward, several projects have been connected to Home, New Orleans? including collaborations between Xavier University visual artist and professor Ron Bechet, sculptor Rashida Ferdinand, and the Neighborhood Empowerment Association; involvement in curriculum development at the Martin Luther King Charter School; and development of the Sankofa Marketplace (supported in the first round of Transforma mini-grants).

» In the Lakeview area, several community organizations—including ArtSpot Productions and Convergence Center for the Arts, operated by Sojourn-Lakeview Church—have been involved in theater dealing with race relations and interpretations of home and place. A major production included a theatrical bus tour of the community that stopped at designated sites particularly damaged by Hurricane Katrina. At these sites, original theatrical pieces probing home, recovery, life, and death were performed.

» Dillard, Tulane, and Xavier universities are affiliated with Home, New Orleans? and developed an interuniversity seminar/fieldwork course associated with the project. Building Community through the Arts is open to students from arts and other departments within the universities. Students' fieldwork has been connected to the organizations and communities involved in Home, New Orleans? (In the first year, New York University was also part of the university collaborative.)

» Particularly in its early stages, Transforma provided Home, New Orleans? with direct financial and advisory support. Before Home, New Orleans? hired a staff person, Transforma staff served as the project's interim

administrator. During this time, Transforma also provided conflict resolution services to address tensions among project leaders. Home, New Orleans? now operates independently.

» The Plessy Park project was initiated by community activist Reggie Lawson of the Crescent City Peace Alliance, artist and Xavier University professor Ron Bechet, and community members to commemorate the historic site of the 1892 arrest of Homer Plessy, an African American/Creole activist. Plessy's arrest led to the Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which legalized segregation through "separate but equal" laws. The Plessy Park effort was launched in 2000, well before Hurricane Katrina. Much work to document Plessy's activism and arrest was drawn from *The Long Ride: A Collection of Student Writings for the New Orleans Civil Rights Park*. The collection was created and published by Students at the Center (SAC), a program of Frederick Douglass, McDonogh 35, and Eleanor McMain schools.

» After Hurricane Katrina, the project organizers sensed that the time was right to amplify efforts to commemorate the site with a park (for which plans had already been drawn by a committee of local artists and with community involvement). Transforma provided direct financial support and strategic advice, and connected the project leaders with national resources—faculty and students from the Graduate Public Practice program at Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles—that brought greater visibility to the effort by helping animate the space on Homer Plessy Day in 2008. Transforma was instrumental in providing financial resources for a state-issued historic marker at the Plessy site. It also supported the effort and helped advocate for it to key gatekeepers. The politics of the project have become more complex given change in ownership of the land desired for the park.

» In addition to supporting the pilot efforts described previously, Transforma Projects made small grants to a wide variety of initiatives around New Orleans. Initiated in 2008, the Creative Recovery Mini-Grant program has supported programs concerning youth exploration of social disparities and their solutions through creative practices, a poster project celebrating the history of the Nine Times Social and Pleasure Club, the history of the Desire Development, and the efforts of the Nine Times Social and Pleasure Club in the rebuilding of the Ninth Ward. Transforma also supported the Oretha Castle Haley Green Market and Community Garden project of the Latino Farmers' Coop of Louisiana and other partners in rebuilding community gardens and providing access to and education about sustainable urban agricultural resources. Transforma supported the St. Claude Avenue Sankofa Sustainable Marketplace in the Lower Ninth Ward, showcasing local artists' work and providing access to new retail options and social services; Street Talk Production Outreach Training Program, the cultural news arm of wwoz, a community radio station that covers aspects of New Orleans life not covered in mainstream media; and Cornerstones of the Month, a program documenting people and places that make New Orleans unique. In addition, Transforma supported Newspaper, Theater and Ethnodrama, a youth theater in the Ninth Ward that deals with how the media shapes perceptions of communities; the New World Wailing Wall, a sculptural installation that brings attention to the rebuilding that has yet to occur and reanimates the site where a flooded home once stood in the Seventh Ward Gentilly Terrace neighborhood; a puppet arts program for youth intended to share autobiographical stories; and the Streetcar Serenade



PHOTO by Jan Gilbert

project involving spoken-word artists and musicians focused on improving public transportation—an issue important to poor and working-class New Orleanians. Additionally, Transforma supported a project organized by Rondell Crier at Yaya Youth Arts Organization to create new signage for businesses reopening post-Katrina; the Louisiana Drumline Corps, started by a parent concerned about augmenting his child's educational experience; a storytelling program focused on senior citizens in the Central City area; and efforts to sustain and enhance the Mardi Gras Indian tradition through bead work at the Porch in the Seventh Ward.

» Transforma Projects' resource development work has involved twenty local meetings and two national convenings intended to foster networking among artists and others involved in community-based or community-focused initiatives. Ranging in size and with diverse participants, convenings have provided participants with the opportunity to learn about one another's work, share resources, and create useful partnerships and collaborations. Transforma also developed an interactive website to facilitate networking and information sharing.

» Transforma's national resource team, a volunteer group that includes the initiative's founders, exists to guide the efforts of Transforma as a coherent entity but also as an advisory body from which individual Transforma-affiliated initiatives can draw for their specific purposes. In 2007 Transforma Projects hired a part-time staff person for the initiative. This position became full-time in 2008. The staff person hired, Jess Garz, brought both insider and outsider perspectives to the project.

» Having conducted extensive urban-planning and design research on New Orleans in college—the history of the city, its neighborhoods, and its natural and built environments—Garz moved

to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina to offer assistance. With a natural inclination as a networker and researcher, Garz had vast knowledge about the range of organizations and initiatives afoot to rebuild the city when she became Transforma's program specialist.

COMMUNICATING WHAT TRANSFORMA IS AND DOES TO MULTIPLE PUBLICS

At the beginning of the initiative, clearly conveying what Transforma was and what it did proved challenging for the initiative's founders. Describing the individual components was simple, but talking about Transforma Projects as a coherent whole proved complicated. The Transforma structure grew out of an intention to be catalytic and helpful. At the beginning, it was appropriately fluid and adaptive. This was the smartest way to proceed, but the resulting entity and process were difficult to describe. Transforma Projects was inventing itself while facilitating a wide range of activities. The team's inability to be immediately coherent about Transforma Projects should not be understood as a flaw or a failure. The team boldly and bravely set out to do necessary work that has not been grasped or named sufficiently in the arts or the many fields with which they intersect, including urban planning and community development.

» During interviews, when I asked respondents to describe Transforma and their relationship to it, I got many different responses. Members of the national resource team were very thoughtful and reflected on Transforma as a “support group for socially engaged artists,” “a forum for the expression of imagination in a time of crisis,” and a “national and local connector.” Some grantee respondents called it primarily a funder. Others saw it as a more comprehensive

resource—providing opportunities for networking, technical support, and advice. Some respondents saw it, or interacted with it, only as a convener. Still other respondents did not resonate with Transforma, the initiative or organization, at all. Their experience was a one-on-one personal relationship with the initiative's staff person. One respondent called her a “fairy godmother” who helped by providing necessary funds, connections, and occasional advice.

» Through my urban-planning and community development prism, I think Transforma Projects is best explained to people outside the arts field as an *intermediary entity that facilitates art-based contributions to the comprehensive community revitalization process*. Based on my research—review of Transforma materials, input from several different perspectives, and observation of Transforma convenings—the following are what I see as the entity's guiding premises and key functions. Transforma's key functions are discussed in turn.

Guiding Premises —

- ➔ Artists have a role to play as community leaders.
- ➔ Artists have multiple relationships with different groups—not only as performers and producers of artistic goods for consumption but also as social critics, problem solvers, community organizers, teachers, and cocreators with community members.
- ➔ Creativity is a community asset from which to build.
- ➔ Art, local aesthetics, and creative initiatives that organically come from communities are worthy of investment.
- ➔ Trust in process and possibility is essential.
- ➔ Experimentation is worthy of investment.
- ➔ Art and creative activity are integral to effectively addressing a wide range of community issues.
- ➔ Partnerships and collaboration within and outside the cultural sector are essential to bring art-based community-building work to fruition.

- ➔ Building capacity to carry out art-based community-building work is important.

Key Functions —

- ➔ Providing direct funding.
- ➔ Connecting resources (influential people, information, space, and other material supports) to people who need them.
- ➔ Facilitating collaboration.
- ➔ Convening and providing opportunities for networking.
- ➔ Providing staff support—management, clerical, etc.
- ➔ Offering technical assistance and advice.
- ➔ Advocating.
- ➔ Training current and new practitioners.
- ➔ Documenting lessons learned and transferring knowledge.

— Providing Funding —

Transforma Projects, as stated previously, has provided direct funding to pilot projects as well as through its mini-grants. The pilot projects were selected by the national resource team and invited to participate based on their unique features and organizational structures. The mini-grant program includes a straightforward competitive application process. The guidelines state that the “program supports work that exists at the intersection of art, social justice, and recovery in New Orleans. The program fuels the recovery process with the energy of the local creative community by supporting the vibrant activity that occurs on the ground level. Mini-grants provide direct project support for the work of independent artists, unincorporated groups, gathering spaces, publications, and collectives that contribute to the rebuilding of New Orleans.”

» In the first round of grants, members of the Transforma national resource team (within the arts field) served as panelists to select the mini-grant recipients. In subsequent rounds, the

selection panels have been composed of people inside and outside the arts sector. Consistent with the spirit of the work, the panel was intended to include the perspectives of people from intersecting fields, including housing, community development, education, and mental health. A total of twenty-six mini-grants (ranging from \$500 to \$2,100) were awarded. Grantees were required to sign contracts outlining use of the funds and reporting requirements. Resources provided by Transforma were unrestricted; the team felt strongly that unrestricted resources (not predetermined by the grantor for specific uses), even in small amounts, were the way to be most helpful to grantees. Transforma's funding function, much like the funding experience of any new entity, called for fine-tuning.

» After three rounds of mini-grants, the staff and resource team had a much better sense of how to create multidisciplinary panels and process feedback from different perspectives. To do this well requires more time and work than assembling a review panel only from the arts field. People with different professional backgrounds must be able to discuss a common topic. For viable communication and deliberation, participants must be (a) mindful of the source of their points of view, (b) articulate in explaining their mode of thinking and rationale for conclusions, and (c) patient and open to learning about the other perspectives around the table and even calibrating their judgments to consider ideas that may not be natural to them. Certainly, these traits are desirable for any optimal deliberative process. However, they are crucial when attempting to communicate and deliberate across professional fields.

» The Transforma team also learned about the best ways to deliver constructive feedback to unsuccessful applicants. In the end, the team provided commentary that helped the applicant

reevaluate goals, fine-tune an approach, and/or develop more effective ways of presenting the idea so that many different potential stakeholders might understand what was being proposed.

» In hindsight, Transforma staff felt that they could have demanded more documentation of the projects supported from the grantees. Requiring significant documentation, however, may not be realistic given the effort required of the grantee and the small size of the grant. Perhaps documentation involving periodic interviews and observation by a third party would have been useful.

— Connecting Resources to People Who Need Them —

Through the efforts of the initiative's staff and the national resource team, Transforma Projects has connected individual artists and community practitioners to both national and local resources. For example, in the Plessy Park project, Transforma was instrumental in enlisting the talents and participation of Suzanne Lacy, a seasoned California-based conceptual artist with extensive experience in community contexts, and her students at Otis College of Art and Design to provide assistance with animating the Plessy Park site and bringing greater public attention to it. In the Paydirt/Fundred project, Transforma staff connected the lead artist with a range of local agencies whose support or involvement is needed to bring the project to fruition. This brokering function proved extremely important for Transforma and is consistent with other research on intermediaries in community development and planning. The strength of this function, however, depends on the intermediary's knowledge of local and national resources, its ability to see or imagine fruitful connections, an ability to garner good will, and a posture that is not burdened by politics or other impediments to collaboration.

» In the case of Transforma, staff have made connections both inside and outside the arts. Among members of the national resource team, there is some sentiment that outreach to people in non-arts fields (who could have been resources to the project) could have been more robust. The team attempted to enlist people outside the arts but found it difficult to maintain their interest. One Transforma team member said he thought that people outside the arts may have been tapped to participate too soon. The team thought that it was important to bring collaborators on early in the project so they felt ownership of the effort. In hindsight, however, team members feel that it might be more effective to bring in people outside the arts when the project has been developed to the point where they can envision a clear role for themselves.

» Perhaps now, with a better handle on what Transforma is, the language to describe what it does, and information about the kinds of projects it has enabled, the prospects for attracting and maintaining the interest of resource people outside the arts would be much better.

— Facilitating Collaboration —

While often necessary, collaboration sometimes is no easy feat, especially among players and agencies from different fields with their own jargon, criteria for success, and, in some cases, preconceived notions about other fields. It requires time, resources, and patience. At their best, collaborations are organic and all parties involved benefit or take turns benefiting. At their worst, they are imposed with one or all involved feeling used and mistrustful. In the case of Transforma, staff catalyzed collaborations among local players and often offered some support to sustain collaborations.

» Reflecting on collaborations within the context of Transforma, one national resource team member said that a key to keeping

people collaborating is providing the opportunity to come and go from the union as necessary. Overburdened participants burn out and can become resentful. Another key is acknowledging beforehand that collaboration often requires compromise. There will likely be trade-offs, and people need to recognize that going into a collaborative arrangement.

» An examination of Transforma's role in facilitating collaboration reveals that it can include matchmaking—introducing potential partners to one another or creating the circumstances where they might meet. It might also include providing the staff support to help the collaborating entities work together. Additionally, it can include helping the collaborating parties formally or informally clarify or determine the terms of the collaboration. And in some cases, facilitating collaboration might require providing mediation when tensions peak or parties have reached an impasse.

— Convening and Networking —

Through its many convenings, Transforma has enabled New Orleans artists working in similar or potentially complementary ways in different parts of the city to meet and exchange ideas. Through national convenings in collaboration with the National Performance Network and the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, opportunities to extend the Transforma network to people outside New Orleans have also been possible.

» Here again, the intermediary's capability to be an effective convener relies on many of the same skills as previously discussed: knowledge of the terrain and the ability to see connections, garner good will, and secure appropriate, neutral space conducive to exchange.

» Previous and ongoing research on artists pursuing hybrid work (at the intersection of arts and other fields) indicates that convening and networking opportunities for artists doing this



kind of work are particularly important because so few mechanisms for validation (recognition, critical discourse, etc.) and training and professional development for this work exist.² In interviews with grantees, many indicated that participation in Transforma convenings had been extremely helpful to them—for advancement of their work and as a mechanism for moral support. Reflecting on this function and acknowledging the benefits of such meetings, Transforma staff indicated the desire to have had more and more frequent meetings of the mini-grant recipients. National resource team members also felt that in hindsight it would have been beneficial to be more aggressive about including more players from outside the arts field in Transforma convenings.

» Convenings are clearly essential to advancing the work and potentially creating infrastructure that persists beyond the duration of Transforma Projects. Documenting such convenings also provides another way to develop and examine language or nomenclature used to describe the work as well as revealing insights about essential practices. Transforma has been able to effectively document many of its convenings. However, the content has not yet been mined for nomenclature or emerging themes about best practices.

» In hindsight, Transforma convenings could have been even more significant if they had been treated consistently as opportunities to enlist the participation of people from outside the cultural sector to network and make connections across fields. While there is evidence of collaborations with people outside the cultural sector in most projects that Transforma supports, it seems that participants at Transforma convenings were

mostly from the cultural sector—artists and arts administrators. Unfortunately, collaborators from other fields who participate in Transforma-affiliated projects were typically not part of the convenings.

— Providing Staff Support —

For all three pilot projects (Home, New Orleans? Paydirt/Fundred, and Plessy Park), Transforma provided essential management and operations staff support at various points. Previous research on intermediaries in planning and community development points to the importance of this support. Staff support from the intermediary often makes the difference between an effort that comes to fruition and one that withers. As indicated previously, it appears to be especially crucial in efforts to ensure that collaborations among dissimilar agencies survive. The risk in intermediaries providing staff support to initiatives is that, unchecked or without prescribed limits, it can consume the resources of the intermediary to the point that it diminishes its ability to act as an intermediary at all. Transforma project staff agreed that staffing demands can get out of hand, but staff also thought that it is one of the most important functions that Transforma performs.

— Offering Technical Assistance and Advice —

Both Transforma staff and national resource team members have offered technical assistance and advice to pilot projects as well as grantees through the mini-grants program. Advice has included counsel on managing politically volatile situations as well as advice on where Transforma-affiliated efforts might turn for additional financial or other support within and outside the cultural sector. Technical assistance has included assistance with event planning and logistics related to arts productions and installations. In community development, technical assistance is often provided by “circuit riders” that

² Maria Rosario Jackson, Florence Kabwasa-Green, Daniel Swenson, Joaquin Herranz, Kadija Ferryman, Caron Atlas, Eric Wallner, and Carole Rosenstein, *Investing in Creativity: A Study of the Support Structure for U.S. Artists* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 2003).

visit projects with an eye toward providing assistance. In the context of Transforma, close contact between grantees and Transforma staff has had a similar effect. Also, relationships among local players catalyzed through Transforma-sponsored convenings have resulted in the provision of peer advice and assistance.

— Advocating —

Transforma has also played an advocacy role through its support of the Plessy Park project, a particularly politically challenging effort that is still under way. Additionally, Transforma, together with the National Performance Network, initially sought to be an active player in local policy discussions concerning plans for rebuilding parts of the city affected by Hurricane Katrina. The intention was to infuse a concern for artists and the arts into those discussions. However, efforts to penetrate that process proved difficult and fruitless. As a result, Transforma, like other initiatives seeking a voice, withdrew and shifted its energy to focus almost exclusively on programmatic facilitation.

» In community development, it is often difficult for intermediaries to play robust advocacy roles. In part, this difficulty stems from the fact that advocacy often jeopardizes other intermediary functions when the entity that is the target of a grievance also is essential to the provision of some other resource upon which the intermediary relies. This has not been the case with Transforma, but it is something for which anyone in an intermediary capacity should be alert.

— Training —

Training and capacity development for the execution of future work is evident in the university component of Home, New Orleans? in which university students from different academic departments have the opportunity to explore the role of artists and arts activity in solving social issues and to contribute to on-the-ground

efforts. In this regard, Home, New Orleans? and Transforma are contributing to a growing, although still too limited, body of training for work at the intersection of arts and other fields.

» National resource team members also noted that Jess Garz's involvement and that of Rachel Caricco, the new staff person for Home, New Orleans? are evidence of training that will potentially lead to a new generation of people doing work at the intersection of arts and other fields. Garz and Caricco are both bright young women in their twenties for whom this is a formative professional experience.

— Documenting Lessons Learned and Transferring Knowledge —

Documentation and knowledge transfer have occurred to varying degrees. The Transforma website is certainly a tool for this, as are the national convenings where Transforma's work has been presented, discussed, and analyzed. Transforma national resource team members often expressed some frustration with conveying the value of this work within the arts field as well as outside it. The fact that much of the work supported by Transforma places less importance on an end product than on the creative process leads to validation challenges in the arts as well as intersecting fields. In the arts, conventional showcasing and presentation methods as well as critical reviewing methods are inadequate because perhaps there is no ultimate object to assess when the heart of the work has been the creative process. Or perhaps the ultimate object created is more an artifact of the experience than the culmination of the work. In intersecting fields, metrics used to measure success—such as widgets produced (housing, jobs, etc.), clients served, or evidence of policy change—also are often poor fits for adequately gauging the effectiveness of art-based community-building efforts. Certainly keeping counts of how many

people have participated is important, but it is only part of the picture.

» I have often observed that when it comes to work at the intersection of arts and other fields, seldom does anyone comprehend the import of the work in its fullness—its relevance artistically and its relevance in the intersecting field. There was agreement about this among Transforma national resource team members. However, one member very thoughtfully added that while very few people comprehend the work in its fullness, perhaps it is not so important that “people get all of it.” What might be more important is that they “get what they need.”

» National resource team members felt that documentation and information-sharing efforts ideally would have been more robust. Initially, there was a strong desire to develop nomenclature to discuss work at the intersection of arts and other fields more effectively, both in the arts and in the intersecting field. However, in the face of actual project implementation, this ongoing analytical function fell by the wayside to some extent.

» Given the poor state of documentation and data about this kind of work fieldwide, I think that an area where Transforma also could have made an important contribution, perhaps had funds and logistical realities permitted, is in the documentation of the work of its mini-grant recipients. Among Transforma grantees there are remarkable, often exploratory and experimental examples of arts-based initiatives of varying scale contributing to the recovery of New Orleans. These are often bold ideas born out of the fertile soil of crisis. However, the grant-reporting requirement fell short of capturing enough information about project processes and impacts that could help people outside the arts field better understand the relevance of these individual efforts or their value collectively.

- CHALLENGES OF INTERMEDIARIES -

My years of research on intermediaries and comprehensive approaches to communities lead me to the following conclusions, which might be helpful as Transforma considers its legacy and next steps. First, in a world characterized by ineffective, fragmented approaches to complex problems with interrelated components, intermediaries that can help to address issues more comprehensively are absolutely essential. While funders often support intermediaries with the intention of them lasting for only a finite period, very seldom does an environment completely outgrow the need for intermediary functions, despite important strides that may have been made in how people approach their work and the prospect of working across professional fields or other boundaries of difference. Effective intermediaries are like glue, oil, and fuel. One only misses them when they are not there and things fall apart, freeze up, or stop. While one cannot expect intermediaries to last in perpetuity, long-term benefits are more likely if critical functions played by an intermediary can be spun off and assumed by another entity poised to effectively carry out that function. For example, in the case of Transforma Projects, if it were to end, could some other entity in New Orleans assume responsibility for the mini-grants program? For convening artists and others involved in art-based community-building work?

» Second, the most effective intermediaries tend to be behind-the-scenes players. Moreover, without special strategic efforts to document and track process, seldom is the work of an intermediary obvious and tangible enough to satisfy demands for proof of impacts by funders or others seeking accountability. Transforma

national resource team members acknowledge that multiyear funding commitments and a foundation's openness to the organization's process have been essential, as has the National Performance Network's support of the initiative through fiscal agency, physical space, business infrastructure, and the connections of its staff to the local New Orleans community. Any sustainable continued operation in an intermediary capacity is likely to require more robust documentation of process and effects or contributions in designated spheres of influence. In planning and community development, intermediary efforts are often funded as experimental multiyear initiatives. However, after the initial multiyear commitment is over, continued funding depends on demonstrated impacts, which rely on documentation of process and the achievements of the entities supported by the intermediary. In Transforma's case, this would mean more stringent ongoing documentation of its functions and follow-up with grantees and other entities touched by Transforma's work. While it might seem onerous, such documentation can lead to important fieldwide contributions in terms of documenting good practices and developing nomenclature and other necessary infrastructure for this work to continue.

- CONCLUSION -

While I discussed Transforma as an intermediary from a planning and community development perspective, it is important to note that in many fields, including urban planning and community development, people tend to default primarily to the funding function when thinking about what intermediaries do. The simplistic way of thinking about intermediaries is that they just regrant money. However, a strand of

practice among intermediaries encompasses much more than just regranteeing money. The comprehensive planning initiatives focused on impoverished communities and sponsored by national foundations such as Rockefeller, Ford, and Annie E. Casey during the late 1980s and early 1990s resulted in the proliferation of many multifunctional intermediaries with particular points of view.³ To some extent, the work of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation and its local offices offers evidence of more comprehensive and strategic intermediary functions. The interest in comprehensive approaches to communities comes in cycles. Every twenty to thirty years there is recognition that approaches to complex issues are too fragmented and that comprehensive approaches are in order. Now, more than twenty years after the last wave of intermediaries attempting comprehensive approaches to problems in communities, there is a revival of interest in comprehensiveness, and surely a reprisal of intermediaries with a point of view and interrelated multiple functions will follow. Might Transforma's work to date—its guiding principles and its intermediary functions—influence new comprehensive approaches to communities that could be inclusive of the arts? This is a time of new ideas and great possibilities.

³ Peter Marris with Maria Jackson, *Strategy and Context: Reflections on the Community Planning and Action Program* (New York: Rockefeller Foundation, March 1991).



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PROGRAMS

AN OVERVIEW —

Transforma supported public and socially engaged creative practice through direct project support in the post-Katrina landscape, and also through broader resource development and knowledge transfer. Financial support was provided to New Orleans-based projects on large and small scales through two programs: the pilot projects and the Creative Recovery Mini-Grant program. In addition to monetary resources, Transforma made contributions by hosting a website—a digital forum—and convenings—physical forums. The multiple structures of support allowed for a great diversity of individuals and projects to engage with the Transforma initiative—some on a one-time basis at a convening, some on multiple occasions through the website, and some on a daily basis through direct project support.

These individual program areas are outlined in this publication. Given that Transforma was primarily concerned with being responsive to local conditions, however, the team allowed the programs to adapt to satisfy stated needs. There was interconnection, interplay, and intercommunication among the distinct areas, making the initiative as a whole highly dynamic.

NATIONAL PERFORMANCE

NETWORK (NPN)

HOME, NEW ORLEANS

TRANSFORMA

CROSSROADS
CREATIVE FORCES

VATH

WEBSITE

social
networking

blog
events

CONVENINGS

local

national

arts
audience

other
sectors

PILOT PROJECTS

MINI GRANTS

art

social
justice

recovery

WRITING

docu-
mentation

val-
id-
ation

HOME, NEW ORLEANS

neighborhood
activity

7 ward

9 ward

C.C.

Lakernew

the porch

Mik
etern.

Boy/
Ashes

1st baptist church

Stephanie
miller

rashida
ferdinand

Jeffrey
Cook

Kathy
randels/
Jan
Silbert

Andrew
Larimer

documentation

helena
shedecker

"building comm-
through the
arts"

xavier

felicia

delland

nyu

ron becker

amy
koritz

John
barnes

Jan
C.C.

FUNDRED/PAYDIET

net chain

many
rubin

amanda
wiles

julia
baumann

art21

schools

traca

kidsmart

echo

university
of
texas

dr. hunt

dirt studio

jendro
road

kk
projects

pres
kolacoff

chris
farrar

UVA

CBR

office of
recovery
manager

christen
rivers

PLESSY PARK

crescent city
peace alliance

rejoice
louis

NOCOA

Dimless
high

collaboration

students
at
center

NOCOA
Institute

mat
schur.

ron
becker

afu
public
practice

OTIS

Suzanne
lacy

laverne
arvin

homeless
te

Keith
plessy

Keith
medley

lois
eric
die

project
lazzarus

phoebe
ferguson

gerald
white

ed
bender

Mardi
Srag
indian
summer
camp

daryl
montana

xavier
univ

PILOT PROJECTS

HOME, NEW ORLEANS?

p. 51

PAYDIRT / FUNDRED

p. 53

PLESSY PARK

p. 55

In the initial phase of Transforma, the national resource team chose three pilot projects to receive seed support in the form of financial and infrastructural assistance. Each exemplifies a distinct model for engaging in social artistic practice: collaboration among artists, community-based organizations, and universities (Home, New Orleans?); an artist-initiated project (Operation Paydirt/ Fundred Dollar Bill Project); and a community-initiated project (Plessy Park). The projects are varied in scale, scope, and duration and are representative of a combination of local, national, and international creative practitioners, including artists, architects, activists, and others. Transforma has supported each project in a unique manner and on an individual time frame.

HOME, NEW ORLEANS?



» Home, New Orleans? (HNO?) is a community-based, arts-focused network of artists, neighbors, organizers, schools, and universities that brings together diverse constituencies in long-term collaborations to create positive change in New Orleans. HNO? is committed to forging a healthier New Orleans through art and community activities that move local participation forward in strengthening, revitalizing, and rebuilding community. It was formed in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and subsequent floods, when a group of New Orleans artists and educators saw a need to involve themselves as activists in the city's rebuilding. With the participation of allies from across the country, the concept was formed, funded, and moved into action in the summer and fall of 2006.

» Community-based arts organizations located in four distinct New Orleans neighborhoods—Central City, Lakeview, and the Seventh and Ninth wards—serve as the loci for the neighborhood projects, all of which address issues of community development and recovery through the visual or performing arts and directly involve residents from the local community. The diverse projects and programs of HNO? take various forms, however, according to the needs and goals of community partners. Interneighborhood collaboration is one goal of this project, especially since New Orleans is a city of proud and sometimes insular neighborhoods.

» HNO? engages local universities through an interuniversity course, Building Community through the Arts, in which professors from Dillard, Tulane, and Xavier universities teach students from multiple departments within those institutions. The course centers on the theory and practice of community-based arts, civic engagement in higher education, and the relationship between art and community development. Students work in cross-institutional teams with local artists on the projects of HNO? Although these three universities and four neighborhoods form the core network of HNO? other relationships have been forged over the duration of the project, such as that with the performance studies, drama, and interactive telecommunications programs at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts.

» As intended, the seed support offered by Transforma in the early phases of HNO? has allowed for the project to develop and become self-sufficient through independent funding and staff support.



ABOVE Home, New Orleans? steering committee meeting. Photo by Jan Gilbert.



RIGHT Performance of "Spaces in Between." Photo by Jan Gilbert.

TOP Theater workshop held at the Porch and LakeviewS bus tour. Photos by Jan Gilbert.

BELOW Safehouse, Fundred collection center, located in St. Roch neighborhood, New Orleans. Courtesy of Paydirt / Fundred.



LEFT AND ABOVE Student inside Safehouse and Fundred armored car making pickup in Roswell, New Mexico. Courtesy of Paydirt / Fundred.

PAYDIRT / FUNDRED

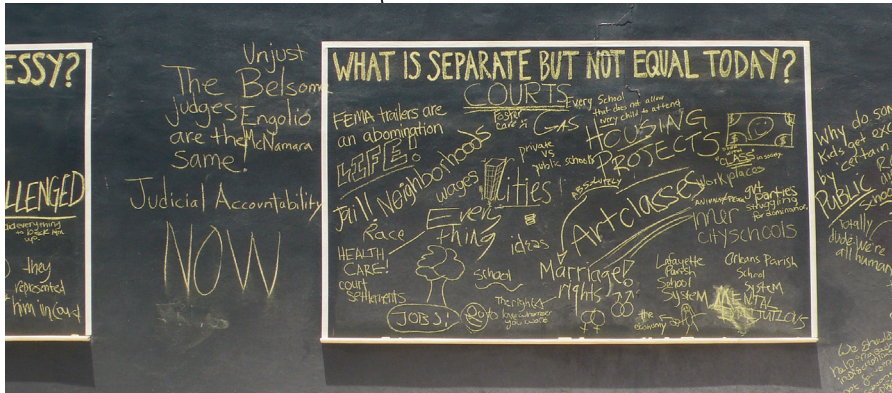
» The project was initiated when conceptual artist Mel Chin was invited by Transforma to contribute to rebuilding the social, cultural, and physical infrastructure of New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. In researching the impact of the storm and the preexisting conditions in New Orleans, Chin discovered that New Orleans was the city with the second-highest levels of lead contamination in the United States. Elevated levels of lead had existed in the soil before Hurricane Katrina, but as a result of the contamination of almost eighty-six thousand properties, nearly 30 percent of the children living in the inner city suffer from lead poisoning. Scientific studies have linked lead poisoning to elevated rates of violent criminal activity and poor academic performance. The presence of polluted soil and the absence of capital to respond to the situation motivated the creation of this dual-layered project. Paydirt/Fundred is a method to respond to this condition through art and to transform an environment that compromises human health through science.

» Operation Paydirt offers a pragmatic, scientifically proven method to neutralize hazardous lead that contaminates soil and compromises the health of children. This plan has the potential to serve as a model for all cities in counteracting an environmental factor that undermines the health of society.

» Supporting Operation Paydirt is the Fundred Dollar Bill Project, a collective artwork of three million original interpretations of the U.S. one-hundred-dollar bill created by children and adults across the country. These unique artworks will be delivered to the steps of Congress, where an even exchange of this “creative capital” will be requested to obtain funding for implementation of Operation Paydirt.

» The Paydirt/Fundred project seeks to facilitate the complete transformation of New Orleans into a city with lead-safe soil through the delivery of a scientific solution to lead contamination while calling for action through a nationwide drawing project designed to engage young people. The approach extends across the disciplines of art, science, and education and is sensitive to aspects of community development and urban infrastructure. Paydirt/Fundred receives its own funding and has its own staff. — FUNDRED.ORG.

PLESSY PARK



LEFT Temporary chalkboards installed at Plessy site and buttons produced for Plessy Day 2008.



RIGHT State historic plaque installed at Plessy site in February 2009, NAACP Centennial.

» The project was initiated by community activist Reggie Lawson of the Crescent City Peace Alliance, artist Ron Bechet, and other community members to acknowledge the site on which Homer Plessy was arrested on June 7, 1892. The staged arrest of this light-skinned man of color resulted in the historic Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which legalized segregation through the implementation of “separate but equal” laws, which were upheld for more than fifty years. Lawson has worked for several years to create a park honoring Plessy at the corner of Press and Royal Streets. Due to zoning complications and funding limitations, the comprehensive plan remained unbuilt. In January 2008 the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts Institute (NOCCA) purchased the land. Lawson, in conversation with Transforma, decided that organizing an event-based project would be an effective way to bring together the various stakeholders on the site. Transforma and Lawson invited Suzanne Lacy and the students from the MFA Public Practice program at Otis College of Art and Design to participate in developing the events for Plessy Day 2008. Much information about the site and the surrounding sociopolitical context was drawn from *The Long Ride: A Collection of Student Writings for the New Orleans Civil Rights Park*, created and published by the Students at the Center (SAC) Program at Frederick Douglass, McDonogh 35, and Eleanor McMain schools. Although the faculties of SAC and NOCCA did not directly collaborate, the celebration of Plessy Day 2008 effectively incorporated the work of the two groups.

» The day commenced at Frederick Douglass High School with a discussion of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case and personal stories of segregation shared by the school's alumni. Those participating processed through the Bywater neighborhood to the Plessy site, where they participated a performance-based piece focused on the presence of eight temporary chalkboards. Participants answered questions presented on each that connected historic moments to present conditions of social and racial equity, especially related to the contemporary education system in New Orleans.

» In February 2009 a state plaque was placed on the site. Descendents of Plessy and Ferguson, as well as members of the NOCCA community, were present at the unveiling. This unveiling was a significant event in this history as this date was the centennial of the founding of the NAACP and the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth. Participants included members of both the Plessy and Ferguson families, the McDonogh 35 High School choir, students of both Frederick Douglass High School and NOCCA, two women who were among the students who integrated Orleans Parish Schools in the 1960s, and an array of community members.

MINI GRANTS

ROUND ONE

p. 58

ROUND TWO

p. 62

ROUND THREE

p. 66

The Creative Recovery Mini-Grant program supported work produced at the intersection of art, social justice, and recovery in New Orleans. It fueled the recovery process with the energy of the local creative community by supporting the vibrant activity on the ground level. Mini-grants provided direct project support for the work of independent artists, unincorporated groups, gathering spaces, publications, and collectives active during the rebuilding of New Orleans. During the first round of the mini-grant program, more than eighty applications were received, and five grants were distributed in July 2008. During the second round, approximately forty-five applications were received, and five grants were distributed. In the third and final round, more than ninety applications were received, which led to the awarding of sixteen grants. (The granting fund for the third round was twice the size, hence the additional grantees.) In each round the applications were reviewed by a different panel made up of individuals with professional backgrounds in art history, community organizing, education, community development, urban planning, urban agriculture, real estate, and housing rights.

ROUND 1

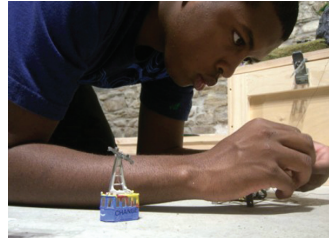
2008 2009 2010

ONE YEAR

Review Board—

Jessica Cusack
Sam Durant
Rick Lowe

The project descriptions have been extracted from writing produced by the lead contact for each grant recipient and reflect their diverse voices, tones, and styles. All images were provided by the grant recipients and are courtesy of the project with which they are associated unless otherwise noted.



A=AGHT

Jackie Sumell

This project created a semi-utopic virtual space/town whose rules, population, and culture were generated by marginalized youths from New Orleans and Tallaght in South Dublin County, Ireland. Adult facilitators and artists from both cities challenged the youths to explore historic moments, social grievances, and ethnic and racial disparities and encouraged them to solve identified concerns through creative projects. A=AGHT empowers young people with a virtual voice and practical skills as they construct solutions through film, video, photography, sculpture, and design. There were five kids from Ireland and five from New Orleans who participated in the physical exchange and ultimately developed the international social-networking site AEQUALSAGHT.ORG.

"I'm the kind of person who appreciates open, friendly, flexible, and informal arrangements in my work, and the Transforma grant was all of these things."



NINE TIMES 10TH ANNIVERSARY POSTER PROJECT

Abram Himelstein

The project met the intended goals of creating an installation about the Desire Development for the Nine Times Social and Pleasure Club's Tenth Anniversary parade. Three posters—one focused on the history of the club, one focused on the history of the Desire Development, and one focused on the rebuilding of the Upper Ninth Ward—were collaboratively created by the Neighborhood Story Project, Nine Times Social and Pleasure Club, and independent graphic designer Erik Kiesewetter. The screen-printed posters were stapled along the parade route, and as the five thousand parade participants passed through, people took down the posters as intended. A drive along the route after the parade found only six of the one thousand posters remaining. Many of the posters can now be found hanging on living room walls throughout the city.

"We definitely would not have been able to afford the quality materials that we used if not for the grant, and I believe that the response from the audience would not have been as positive."



O. C. HALEY COMMUNITY GARDEN

Kathia Duran

The Latino Farmers Co-op of Louisiana brought together artists and community farmers to develop the vision for an ecological mural at the O. C. Haley Community Garden. Participants agreed that the image should convey themes of peace, harmony with nature, food, history, and community identity among people of all colors. As a site of community-oriented programs for the Central City neighborhood, the garden was intended to provide access to educational and agricultural resources to encourage the production and consumption of healthy food. The process of creating the mural reinforced this goal. Twenty-five youths and adults engaged in the design process at the garden during six sessions while simultaneously learning about urban farming practice, nutrition, and diet.

"The Transforma mini-grant was instrumental in inspiring, engaging, and empowering Latino families. These efforts were and will continue to be crucial in integrating this emerging population into the 'new' New Orleans landscape."



OUR LIVES IN STORY

Eve Abrams

This project supported the five young New Orleans-based authors involved with the Neighborhood Story Project by recording each of them reading one of their stories. The purpose of these recordings was twofold: they provided experiences for these five young authors with microphones, elocution, and expressively reading in front of an unfamiliar audience. In other words, these recordings provided an opportunity for the authors to gain comfort with the readings that accompanied the release of their books. The secondary purpose of this project was to create a product that could be posted on websites and social media sites. These recordings captured the texture of the authors' voices, their cadences, and their word choices, all of which give a richness to their stories that is largely absent from the print versions.

"The only change I'd suggest for the mini-grant program is for more initial contact with other grantees. I wonder what sorts of collaboration might have flourished."



SANKOFA MARKETPLACE

Rashida Ferdinand

The launching of this market brought activity to the historic Lower Ninth Ward. The market, which continues to operate, is open from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on the second Saturday of each month at the corner of Caffin and St. Claude Avenues. Visitors to the marketplace have access to health and wellness information, community rebuilding resources, a farmers' market with fresh produce, a crafts market, prepared food vendors, youth activities, and an exhibit on Lower Ninth Ward history and culture. This community-building initiative supports the neighborhood revitalization of the Lower Ninth Ward and is a significant catalyst to the community's economic development.

"The Transforma mini-grant provided the funding needed to initiate production of this grassroots project."



"The Transforma mini-grant certainly helped to get the ball rolling on this project, not only in financial terms but also in the encouragement and support provided by the opportunity to meet with and engage other artists working in the community."

— TRISTAN THOMPSON

ROUND 2

2008 2009 2010

ONE YEAR

Review Board—

Anne Gisleson
Leslie Lawrence
Rick Lowe
James Perry
Robert Ruello

The project descriptions have been extracted from writing produced by the lead contact for each grant recipient and reflect their diverse voices, tones, and styles. All images were provided by the grant recipients and are courtesy of the project with which they are associated unless otherwise noted.



CORNERSTONE OF THE MONTH

Bethany Rogers

In the months after Hurricane Katrina, *Cornerstones: Celebrating the Everyday Monuments and Gathering Places of New Orleans' Neighborhoods* was published, showcasing seven social and cultural landmarks that helped revive the city. By creating a monthly print series, this project called to attention a selection of overlooked and threatened landmarks. Each month one site was selected, and two hundred collectible-quality postcards featuring site-specific photographs, quotations, architectural drawings, and maps were printed and distributed. This allowed the featured site to more dramatically showcase its inclusion in the place-promotion project and remain relevant and acknowledged during the city's rebuilding process. By documenting and advocating for the "unofficial" monuments of the city, *Cornerstones* was an outspoken advocate for the preservation of integral spaces that keep community environments and social networks intact.

"In total, around fifteen hundred people were able to take home a tangible mark of this project, and many more were introduced to unique histories, stories, architecture, and people of New Orleans."



LIVING NEWSPAPER

Aminisha Ferdinand

Teens in New Orleans are most often discussed in print and television news in reference to crime or education. In the two-part residency program, the teens of All Souls Episcopal Church Community Center read multiple news stories from the *Times Picayune* and the *New York Times* that referenced their peers. They re-created the printed stories of success and violence, from their perspectives, through image theater, retelling the news through sound and gesture. In the second part of this project, third-graders at a Gentilly charter school explored how the images of younger children were used to sell the news. They re-created the print ads as living commercials, exaggerating the happiness of the children and the products that they were being used to sell.

"The convenings with the other grantees were definitely a large part of the success I felt with the Transforma mini-grant program."



NEW WORLD WAILING WALL

Cynthia Scott

This project was a sculptural installation sited on the vacant slab that was once the site of a family home in the flooded Gentilly Terrace neighborhood. The goals were threefold: to mark yet another empty spot to which a family had yet to return, to reanimate the partially repopulated community by providing an artistic and social focal point, and to help the community attract attention to its continuing struggle to recover. Made of twelve-foot-high plaster reinforcement panels scavenged from Katrina piles as a base, the sculpture incorporated hundreds of clear plastic strands that reflected sunlight by day and were illuminated by fiber optics at night. This referenced volumes of water. The neighborhood association enthusiastically supported the project as a means to draw attention to this forgotten corner of New Orleans.

"The Transforma mini-grant made the difference between solvency and my going into debt to complete the project."



PUPPET ARTS AT COLTON SCHOOL

Nina Nichols & Pandora Gastelum

As a series of performance-oriented workshops, this project fostered collaboration between us, as puppeteers and storytellers, and the youth of our community. Working with fifteen ninth-graders from Carver High School, we guided the group through a process of developing unique puppets that were assembled to form a Mardi Gras float. In the brainstorming workshop, the students settled on Obama's presidency as a theme. They became empowered by the freedom to express their frustrations about the former president, George Bush, and his treatment of the city during Hurricane Katrina. Our workshops included narrative development, paper sculpture, costume design, character development, vocal performance, puppet construction and operation, and physical theater. The puppets were created with found objects and recycled garbage, and the work was fully interactive. Our work offered a unique opportunity for a dialogue to occur between cultural perspectives in a format that transcends the limits of language.

"After the program was established and documented, it was awarded a grant from the Annenberg Foundation. The Transforma grant helped the group to grow and gain credibility. It gave us a foothold in the community."



STREETCAR SERENADE

Raymond "Moose" Jackson

This project was a historic and boundary-breaking gathering to celebrate and rethink the functions of our public spaces and services. Seven of New Orleans's finest spoken-word artists—including Lee-Meitzen Grue, Quess, Gina Ferrara, and Moose Jackson—performed their works on the St. Charles line, both at the stops and aboard the streetcar. The performances engaged other riders in a rolling narrative that examined our diverse neighborhoods, backgrounds, and approaches to recovery. These soulful works encouraged listeners to examine our process of rebuilding as well as the possibilities available for a social forum in our everyday lives. As other riders moved closer to become part of the poet's circle, community formed, hearts were lifted, and the journey became the destination.

"This culture is our lifeline, our salvation. It lives in the defiant celebrations, memorials, music, architecture, and supper-table soliloquies that make up our everyday life. It's what gives us the strength to struggle through our recovery, and we make it happen."



PHOTO by Cynthia Scott

ROUND 3

2008 2009 2010

ONE YEAR

Review Board—

Johanna Gilligan
 Miranda Lash
 Asia Rainey
 Paul Richard
 Robert Ruello
 Jerald White

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2110 ROYAL STORIES

Joanna Russo

The stated goals of the workshop were to “promote social interaction, engage the imagination, and build confidence and listening skills,” and I believe that all these goals were met. 2110 Royal Stories provided a space for empathy and story sharing within what is sometimes a lonely living situation for elders, many isolated from friends and family. During each session, participants were encouraged to share stories related to a single theme. This encouraged friendship among participants, many of whom had not previously interacted. At the end of the residency, there was a celebration for our storytellers, during which residents shared stories with a broader community. The project encouraged the sharing of the memories of the elderly in a post-Katrina environment, which will foster a more coherent and thoughtful rebuilding of the city.

“Having the backing of an organization like NPN/Transforma was useful in adding legitimacy to the project. It helped to arouse the curiosity of other professionals in my field and made it more likely that additional granting organizations would take note.”

Summer 2009 through Summer 2010



DOCUMENTARY WITH IBERVILLE BOYS/GIRLS CLUB

Lily Keber

In summer 2009 New Orleans VideoVoices partnered with the Iberville Boys and Girls Club to teach documentary filmmaking techniques to youths aged ten to fifteen. We assisted the participants in creating new films focused on issues important to the Iberville community. Through community interviews and ongoing discussions, the youth producers investigated what community strengths and concerns exist. At the end of the program we hosted a public screening and community discussion, encouraging parents, professionals, young people, and policy makers to come together to discuss issues presented in the film and to mobilize for action. In an era known for increased youth violence and decreased levels of opportunity, this project served as an important vehicle of empowerment, creative stimulation, and self-expression.

“Through the partnership with the Boys and Girls Club, we were able to encourage critical thinking and media literacy skills, and to bridge the technology gap often found between inner-city youth and their suburban counterparts.”



FIELD GUIDE FROM A WORK IN PROGRESS

Tristan Thompson

This project was designed to address the complex nature of the reconstruction of New Orleans by bringing together the collective energies and expertise of artists, writers, community activists, and engaged citizens. The publication serves as both a resource and an artistically engaging documentation of the renaissance of community-led initiatives since the storm. “Field Guide” spotlights the resilience and creativity of individuals and groups from across the city’s varied demographics who have filled the civic voids left in the wake of the levee failures—those who hand-painted street signs; who started or reopened businesses against all odds; who tend our parks, reforest our diminished urban canopy, clean our streets, lobby for stronger levees, and organize campaigns to counter crime and violence—as well as the artists and cultural institutions whose work helps people stay hopeful and engaged.

“The project is a positive reflection of the community’s efforts, advocating for the city’s continued rebuilding, acting as a resource for those outside the city, and presenting stories that might not otherwise be told.”



JAZZ HIP HOP ORCHESTRA

Angelamia Bachemin



JUNEBUG JABBO JONES

Royce Osborn



LOUISIANA DRUMLINE CAMP

Terence L. Higgins



MARDI GRAS INDIAN HISTORY & BEAD SEWING

Ed Buckner

Jazz Hip Hop Orchestra taught hand percussion instruments, songs, and jembe drums to New Orleans youths between the ages of three and thirteen. We convened at various sites throughout the city, such as the Sojourner Truth and River of Hope Centers, as well as community health fairs hosted by churches. We spread knowledge through our programs and also managed to stay in touch and in tune with the needs of our youth, many of whom are at risk due to limited resources. Through this work we were able to further our mission and to secure funding from Berklee College of Music in Boston and Project Rizing Sun to continue programming. We are currently teaching a summer music camp at Langston Hughes Academy with ReThink New Orleans.

The original proposal submitted was for a project titled *Junebug Jabbo Jones: Talkin' My Way Back Home*, and the plan was to produce a documentary on the artistic director of Junebug Productions, John O'Neal, and the evolution of the Free Southern Theater (FST) into Junebug. After interviews with O'Neal and others involved in FST and Junebug were shot, the project took a different turn. Producer Royce Osborn is currently involved in a production with Junebug titled *I Want My Money Back*, a multidisciplinary project that combines theater, video, dance, music, and visual arts. Osborn is working with Junebug to document the process of creating this work and will also create video installations as part of the project. Some of the footage will eventually be used in the original project (*Talkin' My Way Back Home*) to show John O'Neal's method as a producer-director of relevant social theater in New Orleans.

The principal objective of this project was to educate students and to preserve a long-standing drumming tradition in New Orleans. The mini-camp allowed the students to develop discipline and leadership through the hands-on learning of the fundamentals of drumming and also exposed them to contemporary drumming skills. The camp was staffed by a team of veteran drum instructors who donated their time and talent to ensure that the students received a high level of instruction and guidance. The students were enthusiastic about the camp, and their parents expressed extreme gratitude for the free program.

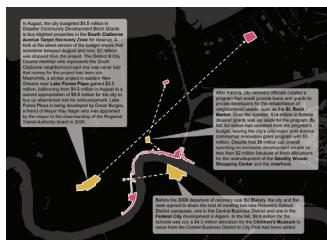
These workshops have brought together a supportive, inspiring, intergenerational community in which participants have shared and learned the knowledge of Mardi Gras Indian artistry and are now able to explore new possibilities for the art form. A core group of youth came out as Indians this past Mardi Gras in the suits they made during this project. During the first phase we conducted a daily summer session at the Porch, led by Collins "Coach" Lewis of Fi-Yi-Yi, for ages three through fifteen. In the second phase the program's most interested and dedicated youth participants continued working with Chief Jermaine of the Seventh Ward Creole Hunters. The participants became passionate about their suits, and the transformation of their energies is very apparent when it comes to their involvement in this tradition.

"After the Transforma grant we were able to secure further support to keep this project going."

"The mini-grant program is especially helpful in getting projects off the ground. The 'first money' is always the hardest to secure, and the mini-grant program gives you a boost in getting the project started."

"Without this grant the project may not have become a reality since no other funding was secured."

"We had about fifty youth involved, but the most dedicated sewers are the five young boys from the Porch's neighborhood."



OPEN WINDOW PROJECT

Ariella Cohen

The Open Window Project offered journalism mini-trainings for New Orleans grassroots organizations. The mini-trainings were geared toward members of Puentes and Neighborhood Partnership Network, two community-based organizations serving underrepresented groups. The goal was to teach young people in marginalized groups how to make their voices louder in the local public process. One outcome of the trainings was the discovery of a largely unused city grant intended for use by nonprofits doing citizen engagement training. After the story of the unused grant was published, the grant was extended, allowing Neighborhood Partnership Network to participate in the competitive bidding process tied to the grant money and make neighborhood voices heard in a discussion of engagement. In addition to this by-product, the trainings created a forum for information sharing and helped build media competency among community activists.

"The mini-grant program enabled us to get started on an initiative that was needed in the neighborhoods of New Orleans."



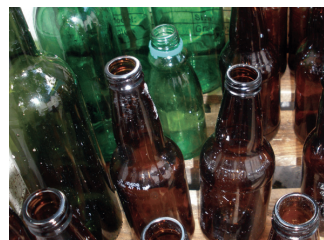
OUR PRAYERS FOR THE CITY

Vanessa Adams

The Flags for the City youth silk-screen workshop involved students from Carver High School. We taught students the screen-filler technique inspired by paper cutting and the photo-emulsion technique with photocollage. We shared with students the work of a wide range of contemporary artists—from big-name artists like Kara Walker to lesser-known printmakers like Xander Marro. By working with students one-on-one, we were able to gradually expand upon their arsenal of techniques, images, and ideas to help them develop successful compositions for printmaking. Each student printed and sewed at least sixteen flags, all of which were displayed in the central walkway of the school like prayer flags. They were also exhibited at the Ashé Cultural Arts Center, the Sound Café, and the Contemporary Arts Center of New Orleans.

"We will continue to run a youth printing so that we can continue working with our six students. We are pursuing funding to pay them as teaching assistants so that they can help us train other youth in New Orleans."

Summer 2009 through Summer 2010



RECYCLED GLASS ARTS & JEWELRY

Yasmin Bowers

This project responded to the overwhelming amount of wasted glass and the termination of glass recycling in the City of New Orleans. In this project, glass was "up-cycled" into unique and environmentally friendly jewelry and accessories, diverting its life cycle from waste to commodity. YB Green, a trademarked brand of recycled jewelry and accessories, is a community effort, creating ownership in the process of collecting the glass in the Ninth Ward. The goal was to fill a gap in the post-Katrina recovery process by providing service, product, and recycling education. Materials were collected from local bars and at a monthly table in the Sankofa Marketplace, and products were sold at the Essence Festival and Green Festival and are available online and at local boutiques through the city.

"The project received subsequent funding through the Louisiana Cultural Economy Fund and the Good Work Network."



SEVENTH WARD ARTIST RESIDENCY

Maria Hinds

This project was a multidisciplinary, multifaceted six-week-long, artist-in-residence program based in the Seventh Ward. It was a cross section of where art meets activism, answering a need in a community that has long been neglected and fallen prey to opportunistic developers and landlords. The residency invited international visual artists, writers, landscape architects, musicians, filmmakers, and photographers to work with youth and adult groups in the Seventh Ward to identify needs in the community and initiate creative resolutions. In the Seventh Ward we have a deep need to inform and equip community members with the means to address and discuss social issues that immediately affect our psyches, particularly in relation to disenfranchisement, violence, opportunistic development, education, and health and particularly in the wake of Katrina.

"We collaborated with local children, schools, community organizations, and businesses to produce meaningful and engaging works."

**SIGN UP***Rondell Crier*

After Katrina there was a great need for creative support in the recovery process in New Orleans, especially in areas of youth empowerment and community development. The overall goal of the project was to support neighborhood recovery by utilizing art to strengthen local businesses and empower young people. Signs were designed and built by young artists for local businesses such as Liberty's Kitchen and Alpha Coffee Shop. We accomplished the intended goals: to provide visual arts training for the local youth participants, to create signs for small businesses that were in need, and to provide opportunities for young people to develop a sense of serving as contributors to their neighborhoods.

"It's great that Transforma supports smaller grassroots projects that may not be eligible for traditional funding sources, and without the mini-grant it would have been very difficult to realize this project."

**STORYPOD***Emilie Taylor*

One goal of this project was to challenge young designers to develop a greater social awareness and to become better designers through community interaction and involvement. Throughout the process the students interacted with the community client, the Neighborhood Story Project, while creating a design solution in a studio environment. The final product, located at the NSP's storefront office and classroom space, is a series of storage boxes configured in a way that is both functional (as storage that partitions off an interview space) and sculptural. The community partner has expressed gratitude and delight in the project. Their feedback, ideas, and criticism were crucial to the design process, and the students responded positively and proactively to the real-world interaction.

"Transforma's program has been a delight to work with, especially compared with other grants I have applied for."

Summer 2009 through Summer 2010**STRETCHING SKY ARTS LABORATORY***Hao-Peng Liao*

The workshop was led by instructors from the New Orleans Noisician Coalition, all of whom were interested in exploring new mediums for noisemaking devices, and Peter Spring, who earned a living on the craft show circuit as a flute maker. With a mix of students from Frederick Douglass High School and community members, we made a gamut of horn instruments using the extruder method. We began with short, straight flutes, in which the concerns resided in diameter-to-length ratio (to obtain a wider sound range), smoothness of the interior walls (to optimize the resonance), and mouthpiece shape (to induce enough air pressure). Later in the workshop we explored more creative forms and made pieces in the mold of Swiss alpine horns, multiple-pipe forms recalling abstracted back pipes, and large pieces resembling didgeridoos.

"I thank Transforma for being patient with me throughout the granting process."

**WHAT MY NEIGHBORHOOD MEANS TO ME***Ariya Martin*

The New Orleans Kid Camera Project facilitated a series of workshops designed for young people to explore the self-posed question "What does my neighborhood mean to me?" Students learned the technical aspects of photography while simultaneously considering the role and impact that art can have in a community. As the participants learned how to be visual storytellers, they were documenting their impressions of the neighborhood, focusing on what makes them proud and what they would like to change. To supplement the photographs, the students created biographies with text and imagery to express what they think about themselves and articulate what they imagine for their futures. The images were shared with family and community at a final exhibition and reception.

"What Transforma provides is extremely significant to the community in which these projects are realized."



WORDPLAY NEW ORLEANS

Valerie McMillan

WordCamp was a free two-week boot-camp-style poetry project sponsored by WordPlay New Orleans. The program taught the craft of spoken-word poetry (poetry that is written primarily for performance) to teens and provided multiple forums for youth to practice the art form in community with one another. Participants, referred to as WordCampers, networked with their mentor writers, local artists, and other youth to share their work and better their craft. They worked with spoken-word veterans to learn how to host, maintain, promote, and produce an “open mic” show. WordCampers promoted and produced their own event, called Comeunity Poetry Cyper, which was held at the Craige Cultural Center. The final event was a success, as evidenced by the packed house. This was symbolic of the overall success of the WordCamp.

“With Transforma funding we were able to provide honoraria to the mentor writers, allowing them more time to teach.”

Summer 2009 through Summer 2010

“It was a small boost that made a huge difference.”

— NINA NICHOLS



TOP Storypod design review at Neighborhood Story Project. Courtesy of Storypod Project.

RIGHT Open mic produced by WordCampers. Courtesy of WordPlay New Orleans.

FAR RIGHT Student photograph. Courtesy of the New Orleans Kid Camera Project.



FORUMS

CONVENINGS

p. 78

WEB

p. 79

Transforma hosted digital and physical forums to establish a space for artists, community members, and residents of New Orleans to share their projects, ideas, troubles, and solutions. The original website was developed as a social-networking site for people involved or interested in community-based projects. Although the site is now inactive, the content is available in an archived form and accessible through the new home page, [TRANSFORMAPROJECTS.ORG](https://transformaprojects.org). The new home page serves as an access point for all documentation materials related to the initiative, including the contents of this publication.

The convenings, which were held in various neighborhoods throughout New Orleans, were open to the public and intended to engage active members of the local and national communities in critical conversations. The combined physical and virtual forums encouraged project development and creative collaboration among artists and communities alike.

CONVENINGS

The following institutions and organizations donated spaces for convenings:

Antenna Gallery
 Ashé Cultural Arts Center
 Contemporary Arts Center of New Orleans
 Creative Alliance of New Orleans
 Neighborhood Story Project
 New Orleans Center for Creative Arts
 The Porch—7th Ward Cultural Organization
 Seventh Ward Neighborhood Center
 St. Roch Community Church
 Tulane University
 Waggonner & Ball Architects
 Winingder family
 Xavier University



ABOVE Forum open to those in New Orleans interested in sharing about local creative projects, December 2007



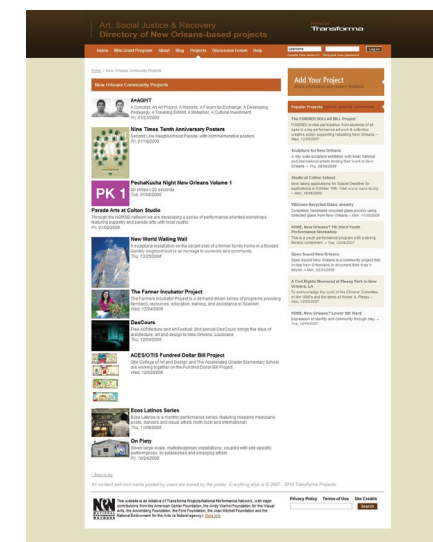
ABOVE Networking convening for rounds one and two mini-grantees, May 2009.



LEFT AND ABOVE Networking convening for round three mini-grantees, July 2009, and Idea Forum, held at the National Performance Network Annual Meeting, December 2007.

WEB

transformaprojects.org



ABOVE Landing and projects pages of the archived Transforma website.



CONVERSATION

MEMBERS OF THE TEAM TALK ABOUT TRANSFORMA —

moderated & edited by

TOM FINKELPEARL

Given that Transforma's creation and evolution were an organic and collaborative effort, traditional documentation methods, such as linear narratives or program histories, would not be authentic or effective means of capturing the spirit of the initiative. Acting on the advice of colleagues and peers, the team chose a more informal method of telling the story: a conversation. Transforma was a collaboration, but it is important to know that it was a collection of individual voices that made the initiative strong and dynamic. In February 2010 Tom Finkelpearl, director of the Queens Museum, moderated a structured (but not too structured) conversation with Transforma's founders and staff. This conversation—which was recorded, transcribed, and edited for this publication—offers insight into the visions, adaptations, and outcomes of Transforma.

To prepare for this discussion, we asked if there were questions that individuals wanted to ask the group. Several of you sent in questions, and I will pose them to all of you—and then open it up for further discussion. The first question comes from Jessica Cusick, and it goes back to the original team: what did you hope to accomplish, and did your goals evolve over time?

To address my own question, I think, as with any project, there were multiple goals. The first, most obvious one was to help New Orleans rebuild. And then—in my mind initially at least—there was a notion of validating this type of artwork at the intersection of all of these arenas—pushing the envelope in terms of how this could happen. In fact, we had a long list of things that we hoped to achieve. So I don't know if Sam, Rick, or Robert would like to add other goals.

Well, my goal was very simple—to try to bring some creativity back to the rebuilding of the city. My initial thought was just—can we do something right here, right now in the rebuilding process?

I think Jessica kind of laid out the core goal, but I'll add that we tried to explore a new way in which artists can engage in community-building projects. We tried to see how we could look at a balance between the artistic or aesthetic agenda and the social benefits that would come out of the artistic engagement. One important aspect was what we called the “resource team,” which could monitor that engagement—that was an unusual aspect, something often left out of projects promoted by arts institutions.

The project did evolve constantly. In the beginning, in our first trips to New Orleans, we had all kinds of different ideas, including possibly getting a building and renovating it with a group of cultural producers and making a community center or something really modest. We realized pretty early on that those things weren't really necessary because of the scope of devastation and damage. And I think having the community meetings with all of the folks in New Orleans early on really changed our direction.

It's not so much that our goals changed, but our ways of approaching them, our methodology was constantly in flux, and it was so responsive and iterative.

Another goal for me personally was to assure that it was collaborative and to try to figure out ways of constructing collaboration with a certain level of buy-in, participation, and engagement among a broad group of collaborators. It seemed from the beginning that when Robert came to me he assumed correctly that this wasn't something that I wanted to take on by myself, so immediately Robert was a collaborator—not just somebody calling up to ask for advice. Then Sam and Jessica joined, and later Jess as a staff person. It was really about everyone understanding collaboration—the process of being collaborative.

Jessica's last question is: Do you think it's worthwhile to undertake something like this in another city, given the complexities of New Orleans and what happened there? And what do you take away from this in terms of your own practice?

One of the big take-aways from this project is the importance of infrastructure. In the beginning we thought that New Orleans would be a great site for such a nontraditional approach because so much was broken. We thought perhaps the doors would be open for any kind of creative approach to enter into that rebuilding process. But we found out that actually without adequate infrastructure it's extremely difficult to get the support and the kind of focus that you need to make a project happen.

My biggest lesson—I was hoping for an immediate reaction. Let's do something right now. And I realize in hindsight that was more of a knee-jerk reaction. It really wouldn't have benefited anyone to just start doing something. Sitting back and listening to the community and then forming a loose strategy was really the correct way to go. But when you are completely surrounded by chaos and destruction, your impulse is to jump in and start doing something. That is why the national team was so important—because just having local people, we were running around trying to get stuff done as quickly as possible. The national folks slowed down that process, which was essential.

One of the things that I am certainly taking away is a new empathy with how incredibly complex and difficult it is to parachute into a situation. In general, I am the person on the ground facilitating the project. I have the local contacts and make them available to the artist, who has to work with those contacts and has to figure out what to do. Now I understand better how hard it is to really get the lay of the land, no matter how good a set of local contacts you have—because we had an incredible local resource team. I don't know if it was aggravated or not by the circumstances in New Orleans. So I'm not sure, having done this in New Orleans, if there's a way for truly facilitating the work of artists in other communities—there are a bunch of

hypotheticals, but making it practical is easier said than done. You can try to network or provide access to different resources, but it's incredibly difficult to get up and running. So that reinforces what Robert was saying about the time factor. And the other thing that I took away from it is that, even with our level of expertise and understanding, it was really difficult to get any cross-disciplinary participation until we had specific projects. The concept that all of these other disciplines would be involved was just too conceptual.

I think I would agree with Jessica, although I had some experience with this—being the parachuter in—how long it takes and how hard it is. But Rick's comment about the infrastructure is important. If I were going to do something like this again, I would start with much smaller-scale ambition, a very specific intervention, very targeted. The other thing I would mention is this: when you are volunteering in another city, it is hard to overstate how much energy that takes, especially if you're trying to do something long-term.

Okay. Having heard from the original inner circle, are there questions from the observers?

I am interested in hearing more about the mentorship/peer support function that Transforma played.

I think it happened in a lot of different ways. Aimee: It happened through the convenings, where we were able to get a number of people together to discuss their projects and to provide peer critique and support. It happened throughout one-on-one sessions with the national resource group and the individual artists. And then it continued when we hired Jess Garz. I'll let her describe the different ways in which she provided support and mentorship.

There was not really a systematic way to deliver support. However, in my mind there were a handful of different strategies. There was the support of the pilot projects and then the mini-grantees. More broadly, there were the convenings and the website. In addition we interacted with other arts organizations and projects, some not formally supported by Transforma. With the pilot projects—Home, New Orleans? (HNO?), Paydirt/Fundred; and then Plessy Park—my role as the Transforma staff person offering technical assistance was unique, based on the projects—much more administrative for HNO? whereas for the Plessy project it was much more as a facilitator, helping to coordinate a lot of what Suzanne Lacy was trying to do with that one event and also trying to navigate the politics between some of the groups involved on that site. And with Mel Chin, the Paydirt/Fundred project, we have maintained prolonged connection, though in truth

our role has ebbed and flowed—everything from fund-raising support to hooking him up with the local scene, whether it was political or organizational.

All of this support is clear to me. I am curious to hear more about the mini-grants. I was looking at the idea that Transforma could be an alternative pedagogical model in these contexts.

Well, the mini-grants were less structured even than the pilot projects. There were so many mini-grantees, and their level of expertise was really varied! Some of the mini-grantees saw Transforma as a real lifeline, in terms of not only financial support but also access to other information, whereas others were already very confident and well connected. It depended how much the grantee inquired about who we were and how we could help. And I think the convenings opened up our role a bit. For the first round of grantees the relationship was much more formal. We would communicate via e-mail: "Here's your contract; here's your check; this is when I need your final report by, etc." Given the nature of New Orleans but also given the fact that we had more grantees in the second and third rounds, the relationship became more informal. They connected more, asking about space or opinions about transportation. They connected more with one another in addition to connecting more with us.

I just wanted to say that the circumstances around the mini-grants were also connected to the idea that, from early on, we wanted to have a range of ways to engage with artists or projects. We wanted to be engaged with some projects that were long-term and broad in scope, but also to explore the possibilities of smaller projects that were more immediate, short-term, less involved. We expected that we'd support projects that would just be at the whim of the artists. We would just be investing in them to see how they would address issues with a minimal amount of support, hopefully finding some nice surprises—people doing things on their own in ways that we might not have otherwise been able to see, given that we were not looking from their perspective. Of course we were deeply involved with the pilot projects, so we had a deeper sense of what was going on. But most of those mini-grant proposals we didn't really have the opportunity to explore too deeply in terms of their methodology.

Given the really amazingly positive feedback that you guys got from the mini-grants, is one lesson from Transforma that in a distressed situation, in a fractured city like New Orleans was, the thing to do for the most bang for your buck might have been to very quickly set up a mini-grant program and organize convenings (which also seem to have been very strongly embraced)?

You may have hit it on the head. You know, I am thinking about Sam's comment about scale. But as Robert said, the scale of the disaster almost forced everyone to think about things on a large scale. I mean, the needs were so great.

Early on, the need was purely survival. So holding off for a while on the mini-grants actually put the money to better use. A little bit of time to allow people to get their bearings, get on their feet. At which point an injection of money was helpful. This was more effective than trying to get something started with that money.

I think that the mini-grant program was effective, but overall I also thought that the convenings, dialogue, and conversations were really impactful—informal, unstructured mentoring. This was a part of the project from the very beginning. From day one, we brought people together. Circling back to Aimee's question about this pedagogical or mentoring goal, as the administrator, I would say that it was pretty formal. We worked with each of our pilot projects to have them articulate goals, aesthetic and social-impact goals. I'm not sure how visible it was, but we worked with them, checked in to see where those goals were going. So it was formal mentoring, initially, but I don't think it was as effective as the convenings. Like at a convention, you get way more out of the conversations in the hallways with your peers than you do out of the formal sessions.

Again, the situation in New Orleans was unique. If you were going into another city in the U.S., you could start off with mini-grants pretty quickly. Even if you're going to a devastated community like Detroit, there is still somewhat of an infrastructure there—people working, electricity, and running water, etc. In New Orleans, I'm not sure that there would have been anywhere for the grants to go, at least in the first year.

From the local perspective, I don't know if the national team really understands how important those convenings were. They made all the difference psychologically as well as in the formation of a network. Suddenly local people from Home, New Orleans? and these other grassroots groups who were at the convening were meeting Bob Frankel, the visual arts head of the NEA. And it made connections for people who were feeling cut off from the rest of the world. As Jessica said, lots of conversations were going on outside the general talks, and these

were very important. I think it's an important model for going into communities that are struggling or looking for interaction, something that could be replicated elsewhere.

I am not sure that Transforma needs to continue in order to facilitate that sort of conversation, though. In New Orleans, those convenings were connected to a specific time frame and a specific set of events happening in the city. In themselves, the convenings in New Orleans were very important because they filled a void, but I think if you look around the country, you'll find people are actually having those conversations in specific neighborhoods.

I came down to a convening not so long after the storm, and there was an incredible urgency in the air, a lot of emotion. It reminded me of the first meetings of the Visual AIDS—the sense that the art community had to do something though nobody was quite sure what. (Eventually that energy was translated into projects like Day Without Art and the AIDS Ribbon, coordinated by a small office at Visual AIDS.) Importantly, both Visual AIDS and Transforma were not conceptualized and executed by outsiders. In Transforma there were local folks who had been displaced, just as in Visual AIDS a number of the key players were people with AIDS, creative people coping with incredible challenges and wanting to see how art might be applied to the situation.

I think you're right, Tom. The presence at the table of people who wanted to do something and people who were actually affected was a key part of the dialogue.

| And it wasn't like "us and them"; it was everybody trying to figure out something together.

I agree for the most part. Engagement in disaster relief is a great humanistic urge. But from the standpoint of an artistic or creatively engaged project, I would be more inclined to look for opportunities that are not so closely connected to disaster relief. If you're not in the center of that sort of effort, there might be less tension, and you can actually galvanize rational intent and capacity—to move it in a direction that is helpful, as opposed to just the outpouring of emotion.

At one of the early meetings, Rick, you pointed out that while we were in the midst of this disaster in New Orleans, there are mini-disasters happening everywhere, and perhaps these are the places to go into—not trying to intercede in Haiti after the earthquake. Now that we've taken lessons from New Orleans, is there a way to go into communities within other cities and do some projects where the issues are not catastrophic?

What about the interdisciplinary goals? If you were going to give advice to others seeking a similar pursuit at the intersection of arts and other fields, what would you tell them based on what you learned?

I would start out by making a clearer case for why it is relevant or important for people from other sectors to participate. I think we made a very good case to the art people for why they should be there, but I don't think we made an effective case for why people in the fields of the environment, housing, and education should spend energy working with artists. "How can we work effectively together to address all of our shared interests?" We found ourselves defaulting to what the art issues/solutions were, so if I were an environmental justice person, I might have said, "I think what they're doing is great, but my time is better spent focused on the wetlands."

Again, I feel that the lack of infrastructure is probably a big reason for not being able to connect the sectors outside of the cultural stakeholders. For instance, if somebody has a wetlands project already up and running, we could quickly connect them with an appropriate artist. But we weren't able to do that, unfortunately.

I also would advise people not to attach themselves to the idea of cross-disciplinary collaboration just because it seems to be a good idea in general. There has to be some specific need. Generally the projects themselves should lead the way. What kind of cross-sector collaborations are needed? I think that there is an issue when we try to insert a conceptual and idealistic perspective. It's great if we have housing or education folks at the table because we knew that these are issues relevant to the city, but what we didn't pay attention to was the fact that our projects were not venturing into those areas yet. We brought people in prematurely. For Paydirt/Fundred, if it continues to go along and gets into the implementation stage, there will be plenty of opportunity to engage with housing issues. But it's just not far enough along that you can clearly articulate exactly what form that engagement will take.

So the work should dictate the collaboration?

Yes, but there is also the general problem of placing the different disciplines in different silos—art is here, politics is here, sociology is there. What about the question of training—the problems that we have talking across disciplines? Where are there obstacles to discussing an artistic response to Katrina?

Yes, training is important. If the artists are going to work cross-sector, to work on an issue around housing or community development, they need to understand the field. But perhaps they do not need to be an expert. There is something to be said for having a fresh shot, and that's what artists might bring. In Transforma we all have varying degrees of experience, from Rick being a pioneer in this field to me being someone who is just getting started—and several steps in between. I think we were fortunate in that way.

Yes, the team includes an experienced arts administrator, a coordinator/producer, a politically based artist, a social artist. Robert, while you were a crucial instigator of the project, it seems furthest from your normal practice.

Yes, as a studio artist, I consider what I do, how I do it, and maybe how it will be interpreted, but the collaborative part is not there. That was such a learning curve for me in the beginning of this project. I was thinking, "Why aren't we doing something?" But a certain amount of it is conversation—talking and strategizing in a way that even the people you're talking to may not understand. I think Plessy Park is an interesting example because they had such an agenda, but it was really hard for them to actually see a side step or see past that agenda. At one point Rick had talked about getting a railroad car and putting it on the site, but that was completely foreign to them as an option, and they quickly seemed to eliminate it as an option. So it's this weird balance—what is going on in the community and your reaction to it. That's not something you learn about in school.

Well, there are art and public practice graduate programs now where perhaps you do study that, two years of study where you come out with training on how to be a community practitioner. And I'm learning how important it is that people pick up some very basic things in those programs. But it seems important to have a vehicle through which people can explore and make use of their training in ways that are more directed. Because most of those people who will come out of those programs at this point will have to navigate themselves into communities. I feel the best projects happen when people find their own way. And find what's interesting to them. And find people interested in how they think and invite them in and they become part of a community process. But I also think that having other opportunities that challenge people in a community-engaged process is really important. Places where people can experiment and get experience. I'm going to talk to a museum that is going

to set up a public practice residency. Those kinds of things are starting to happen. But then, since there is not a “best practices” handbook out there, the question becomes how to navigate projects that are valuable for the artist, the communities, and the institutions. I can see it very easily going in a direction where the museum gets to talk about how great their public practice residency programs are and their artists are out there running amok in neighborhoods where people don’t really understand or appreciate what’s being done.

■ Or simply don’t need what’s being done.

■ The first thing is that you have to be there.

■ Yes, I think you know what I’m talking about, Jessica.

■ Speaking of being there, you, Jess Garz, were the person on the ground here in New Orleans. I was just wondering how you felt you had been prepared for this endeavor.

Somehow I felt that part of my strength was that I wasn’t so strong in any of the fields. Initially Transforma was very allied with the arts community or the arts field, and that was the field with which I was least familiar. Coming from a context of design and urbanism, I had a general interest in housing and environmental issues in New Orleans. I did not necessarily know the details, but just the broad strokes politically and organizationally. This allowed me to bring a broader perspective to this project. Frankly, I did not know what was going on aesthetically with a lot of the projects. Initially that was not my primary concern. So much of what I did was keep my eyes open and my ear to the ground. In terms of cross-disciplinary collaboration, I think we brought in some people at key moments with limited expectations, which seems okay. For instance, we brought in people from other sectors to be panelists for the mini-grants, just so that they could look at these projects and maybe gain a greater understanding and offer a different perspective. It was important too that they felt empowered to share their opinions. I think those were important moments of cross-fertilization.

I agree. It was meaningful. It is important to get people involved, even without a specific thing that is related to what they’re doing. So if you can get somebody in housing involved in the process, even though there’s not a real housing issue on the table at that moment, it could become an educational possibility for them, and for the other people who are not from the housing sector as well. More perspectives are in the room. If you can get people to open up to a conversation that’s in a field just outside of what their expertise might be, that can be productive. Just like Sam said, artists are not experts in doing certain things in the community, but they bring a fresh eye to problems. Just so with people from other fields, who can surprise you if they feel comfortable enough to express themselves. I think there are opportunities for learning to happen—in both directions.

■ Was Transforma transformative and, if so, for whom?

At the start there was that basic idea that we wanted to be a part of transforming New Orleans from its catastrophic situation. But I also think we were interested in transforming the way that we think about artists practicing in community-engaged projects. A transformation from the notion of the hero artist to the notion of collaboration. And for me there is the notion of personally transforming. Because I think that if you are truly collaborating and you’re working with people, there are things that should happen in the process that give you some different insights in terms of what you do and how you do it. Not just as a practitioner, but as a person. For me, Transforma has been very layered.

■ Transforma has a collaborative aspect. Another word might have been intervention. We were not interested in intervention; we were not interested in simply going in and telling people what to do. We were hoping to merge our ideas with their ideas and push projects forward.

■ In the beginning of the project, we were playing around with a number of titles that had to do with the notion that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. In choosing a name for what we were trying to do, we recognized that when you come together you transform in some way.

■ Thank you, Jessica, for discovering the name.

So the name of the project is Transforma, and the goal is a set of small and larger-scale transformations. Does this mean that if you sponsored a project that had a positive social impact on a particular community it was a successful work of art?

Not necessarily. I see two different sets of criteria: one for social impact and one for the type of artwork. One does not necessarily equate with the other. I feel that really strongly.

I think it's a question of how you define what is a good or successful work of art. That's a constantly debated idea. I guess one of the aspects of Transforma was to challenge some of the commonly held definitions.

You know, there are great projects that have significant impact, but depending on the eye of the beholder, there may or may not be meaningful aesthetic quality. A lot has to do with the context and the intent. So if there is a project with positive social value and a complex and interesting process, but the intent of the production was not necessarily as an art project, then, well, it doesn't have to be an art project. It can just be what it is. But if the person who is exploring it can find quality and value from the standpoint of both impact and aesthetics and they have a desire or need to contextualize it in an art context, then so be it. That observer can make it a great work of art. I always like to boil it down to this simple point: it is what it is, and you can call it what you want to. That's the basis of readymades, found objects. If somebody sees it and puts it into an artistic context and can articulate it in a way that that context actually demands and has a format for criteria and it meets it, then yeah, it's a great work of art. But it could be a project with no arts agenda. Then it just is what it is, just a great project in social service.

As you're talking, I'm thinking of another way to read the name Transforma, dividing the two parts: *trans* and *forma*. In art criticism there has traditionally been a distinction between form and meaning, or form and function. Formalists try to look exclusively at aesthetic form, to isolate the artistic gesture from the historical conditions of an artwork's creation or its social function. They focus on what is going on within the frame that is inherent to the medium of painting, for example.

But when you think of social practice, one is inherently questioning a formalist approach. Then if you look at the other half of the title, *trans*, the root Latin meaning is "across" or "beyond." So Transforma, in its overt interest in the social aspects and their relations with artistic form, works across or beyond form. Artworks like Paydirt may have formal qualities, but Mel Chin and the tens of thousands of others who have participated are also working outside the normal precinct of form.

Indeed, the implication is that we were going beyond the form.



TOM FINKELPEARL is the director of the Queens Museum of Art, where he is working on an expansion that will double the size of the museum. Located in America's most diverse county, the Queens Museum seeks to serve as a cultural crossroads through art programs, community organizing, and educational outreach. Prior to joining the museum in 2002, Finkelpearl worked for twelve years at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in Long Island City, New York, first organizing fifteen exhibitions in the 1980s and then returning in 1999 as deputy director and helping to organize its merger with the Museum of Modern Art. Between his stints at P.S.1, he worked as director of New York City's Percent for Art Program (1990–96), where he oversaw 130 public art projects, and as executive director of programs at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (1996–99). He is the author of *Dialogues in Public Art* (MIT Press, 2000) and is working on a new book on art and social cooperation. He received a BA from Princeton University and an MFA from Hunter College.

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more than twenty years of experience working in the arts for government agencies, the private sector, and nonprofit organizations. The firm specializes in cultural policy, civic art, and community development through the arts. Cusick's initiatives have received awards from the American Planning Association and the American Institute of Architects. She has also been recognized by the Women's Caucus for Art for her work in the field of public art and on behalf of women artists and artists of color. Cusick has a degree in art history from the Sorbonne in Paris and a master's degree from New York University. She has written numerous articles about civic art and has contributed to a variety of publications, including *Public Art: By the Book* (University of Washington Press, 2005). She has been an adjunct professor in the Public Art Studies graduate program at the University of Southern California and a guest lecturer at the University of Houston and Otis College of Art and Design. She is currently an adjunct professor in the Arts Management Program at Claremont Graduate University.



SAM DURANT is a multimedia artist whose works engage a variety of social, political, and cultural issues. His work has been widely exhibited internationally and in the United States. Durant

teaches art at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia.



RICK LOWE is the founder of Project Row Houses, an arts and cultural community located in a historically significant and culturally charged neighborhood in Houston. As an artist, he has participated in exhibitions and programs nationally

and internationally. His work has been shown at the Phoenix Art Museum; the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Neuberger Museum, Purchase, New York; the Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju, South Korea; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the Glassell School of Art, Houston; and the Kumamoto State Museum, Kumamoto, Japan. From 2001 to 2002 he worked in collaboration with arts consultant Jessica Cusick on the arts plan for the Rem Koolhaas-designed Seattle Public Library. Lowe worked with artist Suzanne Lacy and curator Mary Jane Jacobs on the Borough Project for Spoleto Festival 2003, in Charleston, South Carolina,

staff



JESS GARZ has served as the sole staff person for Transforma since 2007. In addition she conducts research for the Urban Institute on how arts and cultural activity influences the health of commu-

nities throughout the country. She is also working as the interim project director on the Multi-Tenant Arts Facility Project for the National Performance Network. Previously she worked on various aspects of the post-Katrina recovery of New Orleans with an urban-planning firm, H3 Studio; an architecture firm, Waggonner & Ball Architects; and the Tulane City Center, the community outreach program of the Tulane School of Architecture. Garz holds a bachelor of arts degree in architecture from Washington University in St. Louis and will begin graduate studies in city planning at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the fall of 2010.

and was lead artist for the Delray Beach Cultural Loop, Delray Beach, Florida. He has received many honors, including the American Institute of Architects Keystone Award (2000), the Heinz Award in the arts and humanities (2002); and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture Governors Award (2005). He was a Loeb Fellow at Harvard University in 2001–2. Lowe has taught at the Skowhegan School of Art, Skowhegan, Maine; has been an artist-in-residence at universities throughout the United States; and has lectured internationally.



ROBERT RUELLO is an artist who was born and raised in New Orleans. He received his BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and his MFA from Columbia University,

New York. Ruello's work has been exhibited nationally to critical acclaim. He has participated in numerous residencies, including the CORE Residency Fellowship in Houston, the Skowhegan residency in Maine; and the Dora Maar Residency in France. His awards include grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Gottlieb Foundation. He continues to work as a studio artist, an educator, and a Web designer.

