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## — INTERPRETATION AND LESSONS LEARNED —

*an essay by*

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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:

**A** *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.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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### - TRANSFORMA PROJECTS REDUX -

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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](http://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

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.

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## COMMUNICATING WHAT TRANSFORMA IS AND DOES TO MULTIPLE PUBLICS

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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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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).

» 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

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.

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## - CHALLENGES OF INTERMEDIARIES -

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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.

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## - CONCLUSION -

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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.<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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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