



THURSDAY, JULY 14, 2011

Bill Cleveland Interview - Part III

Good morning.

"And the beat goes on....."

Part III of the Interview:

BARRY: You conclude at one point that: *"The trivialization of the arts in contemporary society has produced many negatives. But none has been as damaging as the undermining of this connection between man and the artistic illumination he needs to explore the transcendent."* Didn't this loss of the sense of 'magic' of the power of the arts go by the wayside a long time ago? How do we get that back? (BTW – I agree with you completely.)

BILL: Art is the one of the most important ways that humans explore the mysteries of the universe. Science and the market have separated the heart and the soul from the head. They are not completely severed but they are pretty far apart. So, in the modern world the head leads. To my mind this is not at all healthy and I think we are suffering the consequences. Another way of putting it is that left-brain dominance is becoming an increasing impediment global health and survival. There is a lot we can learn from our indigenous neighbors and the newcomers to our land whose traditional cultures retain some of these vital connections.

BARRY: We surely can, but how do we do that in a culture that now unmistakably values celebrity over artistry; fame over knowledge; the lottery over hard work?

BILL: Yes, and as my friend Milenko Matanovic, from the

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Pomegranate Center says in the book- “We live in a society that can’t tell the difference between cleverness and true creativity.” But, of course, if that were not the case we would not be having this conversation.

Over the past 40 years I have been extraordinarily privileged to have spent most of my time working with people who do know the difference and have their values straight. They have taught me that values and actions most often align when they are part of a system that has accountability built in. That is why I believe that working in urban neighborhoods, small towns, communities of practice and the like are critical to advancing a thriving, life affirming society.

BARRY: What promotes and nurtures our individual and collective creativity, and of those factors which ones can we actually exert some control over or impact on? Do those things change with time? How do we control those factors? I get the impression that, like me, you think we need to begin soon to address the bigger picture implications of creativity and the arts on a sector wide scale and fast track the idea of brainstorming the challenges until we come up some very specific strategies to move towards the arts taking its role in changing worldviews – is that right?

And given this history of the arts sector’s difficulty to organize themselves just for simple advocacy purposes, what gives you encouragement that as a field we can consciously act in this arena?

BILL: This touches on the last of those three assertions where we state that the shift in worldview toward sustainability cannot come about without the involvement of the worlds art makers. The folks who are spending trillions of dollars annually to maintain the current worldview have known this for a long time. And, they are certainly not likely to yield their gains easily. They are employing some of the most creative folks in the world to create powerful stories that are very good at stimulating unsustainable consumption across the globe. Most of the people who are working to change the global mind-set

Government students should read this as an insight into decision-making as Barry explains how government and groups interact with one another at all levels. Hardball is definitely not a book to collect dust but one to get dog-eared, highlighted, debated and used.”

Representative Adam Schiff, U.S. Congress, 29th District, California

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do not know that they can't succeed without linking the right and left hemispheres of the brain with the heart through culture. They are still doing power point presentations.

One of respondents in the Grace and Fear book is a guy named Burt Mulder who has been both the chief IT advisor to the Dutch Parliament and a member of the EU Cultural Parliament. His view is that the full participation of the cultural sector is crucial to world survival. I happen to agree with him, nonetheless, that kind blunt force assertion would be a hard sell here in the US. It would be a much easier conversation to have with leaders working for sustainable community development, social and environmental justice, education reform, and the like. Not meaning to beat a dead horse here, but again I would ask: When are we going to initiate and sustain and then capitalize on those cross-sector conversations? The folks in the book from those and other related sectors are in complete agreement. Alas they are very likely a small minority.

Some aspects of the siloed sectors syndrome are being breached, by both design and by necessity. These conversations are happening in universities, foundations, in the business world, and most of all in the street. The reason we wrote the book is because the arts silo is one of the most separated in terms of community-wide conversations. Actually, the place where I see cross-sector conversations and collaboration involving the arts is most often is in urban neighborhoods and small towns. There truly is a slow culture movement emerging. Not as a result of a national campaign but because these are the places where the distance between the doers and the gatekeepers are very short and relatively open to influence.

They recognize that getting people to question their foundational beliefs about how the world works requires a powerful and persistent provocation that goes beyond factoid pile-ons and fear mongering. They recognize that the coherent, authentic "story" or narrative is a transformational key. My point here is that we don't need to be alone in this conversation. There are many out there with whom we can join, not in making the case that art is so separately special, but to argue that it is an essential part of the newly emerging, integrated

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Barry, you've hit on a big one. I think it is a problem and a growing one since the economy fell apart in 2008. The resulting financial problems caused a radical increase of ED-identified Board...

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Barry: I have seen this a lot - too often - in my work with nonprofits over the last 30 years. If we get at the heart of the issue then we have to admit that it's the system itself that is to...

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Thanks so much, Barry, for the mention and kind words. All three parts of my arts funding series are now up at <http://arlenegoldbard.com/category/cultural-issues/life-implicates-art/>.

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There is a thin line to walk here I think. On the one hand, political success often depends on the ability of a special interest group (and that is exactly what we are) to cultivate and motivate...

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whole. An argument the arts community has thus far failed to effectively make--- not that it is easy.

The art and culture sector suffers from its status as a multivalent, multi-capacity resource. It is process and product, it is means and end, it is reflective and representational, it can be clever as well as transformational, it can be both separate, and the glue that binds. In the comodified, hierarchal world, the transformational, sticky parts have been given short shrift. Unfortunately many of us in the “arts sector” have been co-conspirators here. It’s the clever, sexy, end product-oriented stuff that gets the headlines, so we are inclined to go there. We know that the connective, process intensive aspects of the creativity are important but the translation is difficult, so we tend to leave it alone. Then we convene our own separate parties where we complain that we never get invited to there really big dances. Obviously, I’m unfairly generalizing here because there are a number of cultural leaders who speak to these issues very well. Arlene Goldbard, Judy Baca, David O’Fallon, Claudine Brown, and Lilly Yeh, all of whom are in the book, have a lot to say about this kind of imbalance.

BARRY: Unfortunately, these leaders, good thinkers all, are our leaders and speak largely to the choir. Where are the outside leaders to take up our banner?

BILL: That is why most of the folks in the book are not the usual suspects. For example, Harry Boyte is a well-respected political scientist and organizer, Linda Whittington is a member of the Mississippi State Legislature and youth development advocate, Wilson Yates is President Emeritus of United Theological Seminary and Rod Mast is a marine biologist and Vice President at Conservation International. It’s an eclectic group that all have powerful and insightful things to say about the role of human creativity and the arts as the world confronts its most daunting challenges. Most importantly though, they are all talk-walkers. Their often audacious thinking is informed by long and practical experience. These are extraordinary people, but they are not an isolated group. I cross paths with hundreds of creative leaders like

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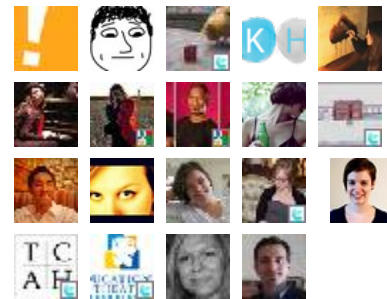
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this every year. The good news is that they are keen to learn from and work with the creative community.

Bert Mulder, the Dutch technology futurist, whom I mentioned earlier, is another of these cross-sector creative leaders. One of his main points is that arts folks are eventually going to be invited to the big dance to help answer some of the most vexing societal questions. Things like: How do we function without conflict in an increasingly multi-cultural world? How does art-making prepare us function effectively in complex systems? How do we respond sustainably in a change constant environment? But, he also warns that we are ill-prepared to engage effectively because we have so little experience working with large systems and translating across sectors.

BARRY: I agree entirely, but when we will be invited to those dances remains a vexing possibility, not yet any probability. Are we running out of time? What makes you think that invitation will someday come?

BILL: People like Mulder are already extending a hand. In his role as a member of the EC Cultural Parliament he has been working with artists and cultural policy makers to redefine the arts as an essential international resource. As you are aware the Europeans are much more amenable to this line of reasoning. The TED folks are certainly doing it. You may not be aware that after a software or product idea leaves Steve Jobs hands the first place it goes is to a team of 13 artists headed by a guy named Jonathan Ive. All the engineering from that point on in the process is done to fulfill the Jobs-Ive function and design concept. In most companies the design part happens last. Ive, a graduate of the Royal College of Art is the principal designer of the most of the major Apple products for the past decade. Many foundations are beginning to meld their programmatic departments into whole systems-whole communities' initiatives. In some cases this leaves the arts out in the cold, but in others it has produced an invitation to the big dance. So, arts folks are being asked the same questions as those in the education, social services, and health sectors. "How does what you do contribute to the vitality and resiliency of our community." This same question is being asked in

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ABOUT ME

[BARRY](#)

Former Director of the California Arts Council; President of the California Assembly of Local Arts Agencies; Executive Director LINES Ballet. Author (Hardball Lobbying for Nonprofits - MacMillan & Co.; Youth Involvement in the Arts - 2 phase study for the Hewlett Foundation; Local Arts Agency Funding Study for the Aspen Institute; City Arts Toolkit), consultant, public speaker.

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SOCIABLE

city council budget hearings across the land. As you are aware in many jurisdictions the arts are, once again, being pushed aside. But in some the case is being made to stay the course. Interestingly, it is the enlightened business types that are making the case.



BARRY: How can the arts contribute to the development of caring, capable and sustainable communities? And how can we leverage those contributions for better support? What are the structure and dynamics of a healthy artist ecosystem? How would it work?

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BILL: I think the arts community is beginning to recognize sustainability as a both a value and a benchmark. But there is a worry that the sustainable community development movement is bypassing the arts. Some see the trend as a two-edged sword. On the one hand, they see an opportunity to show the rest of the community how the arts sector personifies the idea of a locally developed, renewable, non-polluting, social, and economic resource. Some artists understand that as creators and tellers of meaningful stories, they can be important contributors to the significant shifts in worldview necessary to achieve “sustainability.” On the other hand, many from the cultural sector are concerned that both the “impending emergency” and “back to basics” aspects of the sustainability impulse will become the rationale for abandoning the cultural community.

There is also an increasing concern that the current cultural “system” is flawed, increasingly stressed, and, ultimately, “unsustainable” (ex., lack of health insurance, high unemployment and lack of a living wage for artists, a myriad of nonprofit governance and management issues, etc.). Others view the traditional governance and management structures that support and often define cultural production as becoming increasingly unsuitable and unresponsive for artists navigating a changing cultural landscape.

The health of the overall cultural ecology is highly dependent on the health of its creating and interpreting artists. Some see funding for artists as the critical factor for artist sustainability. No one could argue that funding is not critical but there is much more. Ann

Markesun and Maria Rosario Jackson have both done some great research on what artists need to thrive. We have been integrating these factors into our work with the McKnight Foundation in Minnesota where we are trying to better understand the structure and dynamics of the artist ecosystem. These elements include: markets (monetary, barter, ideas), a system of validation for artists and their work, access to training (arts and business), the existence of formal and informal learning/sharing networks, access to facilities (studio, rehearsal, exhibition, etc.), employment opportunities (as artists, teachers, consultants), benefits (affordable healthcare, pensions, professional development) and much more.

BARRY: Are there not Techtronic changes afoot with the next generation and their perception of what they need to survive and thrive?

BILL: Every one of the elements in the healthy artist ecosystems has a digital manifestation operating as a tool, a delivery system or some form of market. Younger artists are not only tapped into these systems they are inventing them.

Also key is a healthy community of small and mid-sized arts organizations. These organizations not only facilitate the transfer of artwork from creators to interpreters, they also provide the creative spaces that serve as the interlocutors between creative products and local audiences. We also believe that growing cultural participation in what are often referred to as “underserved” communities happens best with the advancement of artists working in and for local venues in those communities.

BARRY: And yet the inequity in funding remains constant.

BILL: Yes, Yet another argument for devising new creative economic models at the local level. Bedlam Theater, in the Twin Cities has combined community engagement, civic discourse and a cutting edge, experimental, fringe repertoire. A line up which is not typically regarded as a road to riches in the arts. Nevertheless, In

2004 Bedlam was named one of 12 innovative companies to watch nationwide by American Theatre Magazine. From 2006-2009 Bedlam grew more than ten-fold in terms of audience, creative output, community activity and budget. They have done this by establishing themselves as a center for spectacle, satire, absurdism, multimedia and music theatre, good beer, fantastic parties, and a great place to hang out in between shows.

BARRY: What is the single best idea that might impact the nonprofit field that you have heard in the past year?

BILL: It's a small one. The Community Supported Arts program created by Springboard for the Arts in Minnesota has adapted the Community Supported Agriculture model to promote and sell artists work. Check it out at <http://www.springboardforthearts.org/AboutUs/AboutCSA.asp>. It's simple, it's basic, it's fun and it has worked incredibly well. I think this is representative of Slow Culture, cross-sector strategic thinking at its best that has great promise.

BARRY: You have made a comparison between the nonprofit arts and the concept of 'peak oil' – wherein you argue that the economy that the arts live in is like the economic concept of 'peak oil'. Can you elaborate on what you mean?

BILL: Peak oil is the point in time when the maximum rate of global petroleum extraction is reached, after which the rate of production enters terminal decline. The Hubbert Peak Theory has accurately predicted that US oil production will peak between 1965 and 1970. It also postulates that world oil production will peak in 2020, and that demand will outstrip supply beginning in 2015. Environmentalists have used the Peak Oil concept to drive home the point that oil is a non-renewable resource with an inevitable toxic and political, environmental, and economic downside. Which in turn buttresses the argument in favor of the development of new renewable energy sources.

It occurred to me that we might be in a similar situation with public arts funding. If you look at public arts giving over the past three decades one could postulate that while it follows the general up and down trends of the US economy, there seems to be a natural ceiling somewhere between \$1 billion and \$1.5 billion. This is particularly true in light of the current downturn where arts advocates are defining victory as either minimizing the hit or holding on to an address and a phone number in anticipation of better days. (Battle weary arts advocates will tell you that one of the most difficult advocacy challenges is to reclaim lost ground.) So, since public support peaked somewhere around 2001-02 and is not likely to go higher in real dollars for a long time, maybe we should get serious about the need for new resources, new economic models, --- IE. The cultural equivalent of a green car. I say this not to urge the abandonment of advocacy for public dollars (which I think should continue with gusto) but to spur what I think is an urgently needed conversation about the condition of the American cultural ecosystem.

BARRY: You and I have previously discussed the idea that the business sector is virtually obsessed with the idea of creativity, imagination and innovation – yet, there seem to be almost no intersections between our field and business on this topic. One would think we are the natural partners for business in moving forward this concept, but that collaboration is virtually nonexistent.

Why is that, and what can we do to make those connections happen?

BILL: First of all we need to recognize that there is a very large community of sole proprietors out there that we call “individual artists.” They may not all belong to the chamber of commerce, but, if they are in any way successful, it is because they are operating effectively both artistically and business wise. Also, more and more younger artists that I meet are much more attracted to entrepreneurship than they are to non-profitness. What are the implications of this last statement? See earlier comment on next generation above. So some of our first arts and business intersections should probably be with colleagues who are already a part of the growing for-profit artist driven business sector.

Next I think it is important to recognize that the business world is not a monolith. There is an emergent part of the business sector that is challenging prevailing assumptions about the nature of profit and the development of sustainable business models and markets.

Organizations like the California Sustainable Business Council, The Business Alliance for Local Living Economies and The Bainbridge Graduate Institute here on Bainbridge Island are all potential fellow travelers. This is one of the main points made in the book. These sustainable business and community development impulses are present in most communities large and small, the arts sector just needs to get its multiple heads out of the sand and make some new friends.

BARRY: How might we better intersect with those entities?

BILL: We could start by call them up, introducing ourselves, and going out for coffee. Seriously, one of the reasons we put the book together is to spur those conversations. That is why we asked people who are leaders in these other sectors about the need for new bridges between the arts community and their neighbors who are on the front lines as change agents.

Finally, the cutting edge discussions that the arts community desperately needs to be exposed to and involved in about communication, technology, markets, and yes, even creativity are happening in the business environment. If I were running a non-profit arts organization right now I would be spending time listening to TED talks or attending the Innovations Uncensored Conference. On the flip-side, a great symptom of a healthy arts ecology would be arts conferences that were seen as places where new and interesting ideas were flying and folks from all sectors would go to be re-wired and inspired.

BARRY: I echo your clarion call for this to happen, but who is going to try to make it happen, who will pay for that effort, can it be done without someone taking responsibility to move it forward? The

private business sector prefers to use the word "innovation" where we say "creativity." The linkage between the two may be obvious to us, but not yet to them. Why? What can be done?

BILL: It doesn't matter what they call it, they are lusting after it. It's up to us to do the translation. I think that's supposed to be one of the things artists do well.

BARRY: We have both lamented the lack of any national conversations on key, critical issues to the arts, and our own lack of success in trying to jumpstart those dialogues and interest those with platforms that might make those conversations happen to do something. Why do you think there is such reluctance and resistance to supporting those kinds of efforts and is there anything you think we can do about that?

BILL: I am a believer in having conversations with folks who are interested in listening and exchange. That's the great promise of connecting to people in other community sectors who are interested in building healthy communities. But I also think that when assume that some people are going to be adversarial there is a greater likelihood that they will be. When I was running the Arts-in-Corrections program in California one of my jobs was to communicate to community leaders in the 40 or so communities that surrounded correctional facilities. My best audiences during this time were the local Rotary Clubs. During my 10 years at the California Department of Corrections I probably did 20 or so lunchtime Rotary talks a year. Those Rotary folks were interested and engaged and open to the idea that the arts could contribute to public safety. Many of those chapters ended up as our strongest supporters.

BARRY: Thank you Bill.

Have a good weekend.

Don't Quit.

Barry

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