



TUESDAY, JULY 12, 2011

Bill Cleveland Interview - Part II

Good morning.

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

PART II of the Interview:

BARRY: What has been, if any, the worldview shift in how we think about the arts? Are there old values as relates to creativity that are making way for new values? What are the new values?

BILL: It depends on how far back in history you go and what you consider new or old. Historically I see art-infused community life, with a lineage that stretches back to prehistory stretching up to just before the industrial revolution. I often refer to pre-historic holy persons as pre-art artists. One of the holy person's jobs was to mediate the relationship between the community and the spirit world. A good part of this work involved the invocation of the benevolent spirits as protection against the destructive forces loose in the world. I see an element of those practices in artists working today in service to community development and revitalization. Historically, the separation of art making from community life is a very recent phenomenon. But I think we are turning a corner, just in time.

Globally, the re-integration process has been taking place under the radar for the last 40 years. And, ironically, some of the most striking examples of power and vitality of cultural re-integration come from the most damaged and distressing places. The stories in my book, *"Art and Upheaval"*, are about artists dealing with the horrors like Milosevic, the Khmer Rouge, nuclear testing and apartheid. For those of us living under what I call the tyranny of comfort I think these stories say something universal about the creative process as a

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uniquely powerful transformative force both on the world's front lines and in less damaged places. If you scratch the surface of a community in need you will find artists responding, making art.

BARRY: You also talk about the need for the “*world's creative community (to) revitalize and reframe its transformative power and moral integrity.*” How does it go about doing that given the pressures just to survive? And why is it that other countries seem further along in embracing the value of creativity and, encouragingly (at least in a few places) making the link between the arts and creativity? While philosophical thinking is enormously valuable, we need to link it to practical strategies for moving forward don't we?

BILL: From my perspective, I see very little connection between the transformative power and moral integrity of certain art making and the economic conditions under which it operates. In fact, my experience over the last two decades documenting the work of artists in communities in upheaval has brought home the opposite point. In places where poverty and oppression is a central feature of daily life, questions of survival, integrity, and change making are intrinsically connected. In these situations most community members are in the same boat, regardless of whether they work on the docks, in a hospital or in a painter's studio. From this perspective the decision to join with others to resist or speak the truth or make a difference is not a question of resources or vocation but rather a function individual conscience and commitment. It just so happens that many, many artists in these communities are deeply involved as creators in transformative social and political activities.

One could argue that they had no option. After all, most were literally trapped in the tumult surrounding them. But, amidst the fear and disorder they responded creatively, sometimes with nuance and sensitivity, others with bold strokes. That they decided push back against the toxic tides and stay the course as creators is the most indelible pattern that runs through these stories.

BARRY: True enough, but you and I live in the nonprofit arts organization world. Part of that world is suppose to nurture and facilitate artists and creativity, and part of its charge is to increase the access of the public to more of that creativity. While artists may create

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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and even flower irrespective of the economics and other pressures of the times (and perhaps even because of those pressures), arts organizations and arts administrators do not. If the nonprofit arts sector is going to play any role in the revitalization and reframing of the transformative power of creativity, how do we help them to do that? Or do you think that we don't have to do that, in which case isn't that the argument that we don't really need the entire nonprofit arts infrastructure - that art will happen anyway.

BILL: More and more of the artists who do define themselves as creative change-makers are finding ways around the "you can't do your work if you are not a 501c3" millstone that has defined creative production in this country for the past 50 years. There are also a growing number of funders who are waking up to the fact that their inflexibility with regard to non-profit status is both stifling and, in many cases, missing the creative boat. The arts world is not the only sector that is discovering this. Funders and practitioners in the community development, education, social services sectors are all recognizing that many of their assumptions about how to support and build caring and thriving communities have not played out. As a result, there is in the rich web of new cross-sector intersections emerging. These include: public-private-nonprofit, community cultural-social-economic development, and business-education-science-arts. This is where the ferment is happening. It is also why I find more interesting creative ideas discussed in one \$6 issue of Fast Company, YES Magazine or even Scientific American than I do at typical three day, national arts conference that can cost as much as \$1000.

I would also argue that many arts organizations do not see themselves as active incubators for artistic or community cultural development. The McKnight Foundation, which has recently sharpened its focus on artists' support and development, now takes this into consideration when considering grants to organizations. They are particularly interested in arts organizations that recognize that they are a part of a cultural, social, and economic ecosystem that needs a thriving community of artists in order to survive.

BARRY: You talk about the need to “*see the fundamental necessity of re-integrating of the arts into all aspects of community life.*” How do

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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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Note: I am posting this comment on behalf of C. Reed who had trouble entering it via Safari on the Apple format. If anyone else has experienced similar problems, please let me know. thanks. Barry...

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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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we go about doing that? What are the baby steps?

BILL: The baby steps are already happening. More and more artists and arts organizations are recognizing that the “artist as genius-hobo-Martian narrative” is a dysfunctional product of our comodified culture. (And hey, more funders too!) These creators see their work and their roles as part of a cultural ecosystem that can only thrive when it is woven into the broader fabric of community life.

BARRY: Elaborate please.

BILL: There are hundreds of examples but I will share two that I have worked with:

The first is the Pillsbury House Neighborhood Center, in Minneapolis. Pillsbury House Theatre and Pillsbury House Neighborhood Center have been located in the same building for the past 17 years. During this time, they have share both resource and community outreach efforts to their mutual benefit. Recently, Pillsbury has committed itself to more deeply integrating cultural practice into its community building efforts. To accomplish this, they have merged the Theatre program and the Pillsbury House Neighborhood Center, and placing them under the leadership of the Theatre’s Co-Artistic Directors, Noel Raymond, and Faye Price. The long-term goal for this amalgamation is to develop a cultural community hub that will become “a new model for nonprofit human service work that recognizes the power of the arts and culture to stimulate community participation, investment and ownership. This new model which has been underway for the last year extends these reciprocal relationships to full collaboration. This means that human and health services are becoming a primary gateway through which individuals access the theatre, and the theatre will be a catalyst that creates opportunities for personal advancement and community development. It’s important to keep in mind that the extraordinary theater work happening at Pillsbury House feeds off of its relationships with the Centers constituents and surrounding neighbors. They are regularly recognized as one of the most inventive and powerful company’s in the Midwest.

The Center is also creating a comprehensive, creative community development program to strengthen and build “creative clusters” as a

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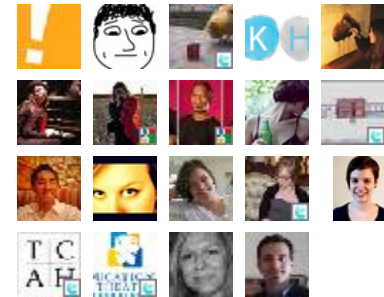
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way to help fulfill community-building goals in the Powderhorn-Central neighborhood. This goal is informed, and guided by research conducted by Susan Seifert and Mark Stern, at the University of Pennsylvania's Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP). SIAP's research shows that neighborhoods with very dense, highly interactive networks of artists and arts organizations produce specific benefits for those communities. These benefits include poverty reduction, population retention and growth and increased civic participation. They postulate that the power of culture derives, in part, from the dynamic social networks it creates, particularly among active cultural participants. They also say that the presence of cultural organizations produces high levels of "cross-participation" in a neighborhood that stimulates residents' involvement in other civic activities.

The other example is actually two programs that have sprung from a common source. Community Arts Training Institute (CAT) developed by the St. Louis Regional Arts Council and the Creative Community Leadership Institute (CCLI) run by Intermedia Arts in Minneapolis. CAT has been a national model since 1997 and is the oldest sustained training of its kind in the country; the CAT Institute facilitates cross-sector training of community arts partners. It's a rigorous 5-month training for artists, social service professionals, community organizers, policy makers and educators. CCLI has a very similar format and has been around since 2002. All told 320 graduates from these programs are currently working in neighborhood organizations, at-risk schools, prisons, homeless shelters, hospices, labor unions, community centers, jobs programs, and daycare facilities. These graduates are now recognized as a transformational force in the both the St. Louis and Twin Cities area with many in positions of cultural, community development and political leadership.

These two personify the strategic, long term commitment needed to alter prevailing attitudes and policies that determine how culture manifests in modern life. Other sector bending/blending, rule breakings, sector bending examples of include:

- The San Francisco Symphony: creating a citizen symphony

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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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online.

- The Wing Luke Museum: community sourced and curated exhibitions.
- Liz Lerman Dance Exchange: The Matter of Origins,” a fusion of art and physics.”
- Animating Democracy: Over a decade of investment in and study of how culture and democracy are an essential amalgam.



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Another source for relevant strategies is a book containing research I conducted for Art In the Public Interest called Making Exact Change. It contains case studies of 10 arts organizations who have made sustained (10 years or more) and measurable positive impact on their communities.

As such, they are not the sole weavers of the fabric weaving the fabric they are contributors. These artists know that there a lot of raw stories and melodies and images caught up in the weave and they are riffing off of them---they are investigating them, revealing them, amplifying them. They are also interrogating and celebrating them. The hunger for these “true stories” on the street is palpable. I think there is a growing understanding that the essential difference between an authentic story and a false narrative is in the making. Community engaged artists know that authentic stories are truly hand built, with and for the communities that will bear the consequences of their materialization. This, of course, is the cornerstone of all effective community building. Something you might call, “slow culture.”

BARRY: Can you expand on the slow culture movement as you see it.

BILL: The common element in the many varieties of community arts practice is the “with, by, and for” nature of the work. This means that the art making process engages community members in all aspects of creation and presentation. A good example is Pomegranate Center. They combine design and art with community planning, public participation, environmental methods, hands-on learning and mentoring in an integrated process to help communities become more livable, sustainable, and socially engaged. One prominent expression of their work is the creation of community gathering places—shared public spaces including parks, neighborhood focal points, community trails, and public artworks—that contribute to community distinction,

vitality and social interaction. Pomegranate believes that no one understands a community like its own residents. It makes sense then, that they engage community members at every stage of development: from planning and design through construction.

I like to say that community-based artists and arts organizations invented the “Slow Culture” movement long before Carlo Petrini (God bless him) sounded the trumpets for the Slow Food parade. Supporting indigenous creators whether they are making food or art is a cornerstone strategy for building caring, capable, and sustainable communities. I have found that when the stories on stage (or on the walls or screen or in the concert hall) speak to the stories rising up in local communities then people respond— not just as audience members, but as co-creators of the evolving community cultural ecosystem.

And, hey I’m not just talking about community-based arts here. I’m talking about community-informed, community-responsive arts at every level. What do Willy Loman, King Hedley, and the Joad family have to say to job starved communities like Detroit and Fresno and Charlestown. What does a dance like Martha Graham’s, “Time is Money” or “Appalachian Spring” have to say about hard times and hard feelings in Des Moines or Tallahassee.

BARRY: Perhaps we need to delve more into what actually constitutes "community" and what only passes for real community. I think the whole concept of "community" may need to be drilled deeper as I suspect it is one of those concepts that can neatly fit myriad definitions and perspectives and that there is really little consensus on it.

BILL: As you can imagine, the word “community” features prominently in my day to day interaction with clients and colleagues. We say we work to build bridges and make translations between “community” arts resources and the needs of the broader “community”. We call it Arts-Based “Community” Development. Others call it community cultural development or just plain community arts. But, of course, as the field has grown and proliferated, so has confusion about what it is and what it is trying to do. And so the need for clarity of purpose and intent has become critical to us in our work at the

Center. So we have a dictionary of sorts. It is not intended to provide “the definition” but rather, a working definition to advance some degree of clarity in our communication.

So, we begin with “community,” which we define as *groups of people with common interests defined by place, tradition, intention, or spirit.*

Then we actually try to define the field of arts-based community development, or “ABCD”, which we say is *arts-centered activity that contributes to the sustained advancement of human dignity, health or productivity within a community.*

These include arts-based activities that:

- NURTURE and HEAL people and/or communities
- EDUCATE and INFORM us about ourselves and the world
- BUILD and IMPROVE community capacity and/or infrastructure
- INSPIRE and MOBILIZE individuals or groups

Since we use words like sustainability, accountability and excellence we define those, and many other mangled and abused words and terms, as well. We also understand that that bringing human creativity and the arts back to the community commons will require a dramatic shift in the prevailing view of how the world works. It will require a new paradigm that views the arts and human creativity as central the development of a healthy world in all aspects. To advance this notion we offer the following three assertions as a foundation for this audacious task.

- Arts-centered learning is necessary for the healthy development and growth of every child.
- Robust and pervasive cultural development is necessary for the creation of healthy, productive and sustainable communities.
- The development of a worldview that supports a sustainable future is not possible without the active participation of society’s creators and story makers.

BARRY: When you say that transforming your three assertions in support on an arts infrastructure “*into widely held assumptions and an unquestioned support for our creative capacities and resources will continue to be a challenge*” – isn’t that putting it extremely mildly and leaving one with the impression that this *challenge* is just something to be met, when in reality it is something we haven’t been able to really address in decades.

BILL: There was a time in this country, not long ago, when slavery and child labor were unquestioned norms and universal education and women’s suffrage were considered pipe dreams. The three assertions that you mention are basic tenets of a democratized culture. I believe they are also essential to community health--- just like access to adequate healthcare, employment, shelter, nutrition, etc. It is true that cultural rights are not legally codified here as they are in South Africa and in the Universal Declaration of Human rights, but I believe we ought to act as though they were. Fighting for universal access to cultural resources and the means of cultural expression makes both common and moral sense.

You’re right about the difficulty. We are an irreverent nation that finds it easy to trivialize artistic activities that fall outside the comodified realms of decoration, entertainment, and investment. When the chips are down the arts community unusually falls into the trap of arguing economics, solely, which of course severs the cultural head from the rest of its body. Most of us have a very difficult time making the case for cultural, social and economic equivalency. But it needs to be done. Yes, it’s hard, but not impossible,

Consider this: Recession or no, this is still the only a place on earth where average annual expenditure for pink flamingo garden ornaments exceeds the budget of the national arts agency.

BARRY: Without meaning to be contentious, isn’t saying this is ‘hard’ quite the understatement? How, specifically, might we begin the long process then of changing that? Without some sort of way out of this forest, without some suggestions for what to do and how to do it, without some sort of attempt to fashion a plan,

these kinds of discussions, while enormously satisfying, are not much more than the equivalent of an all night college bullshit session.

BILL: I don't think there is any national "we" that is going to change this state of affairs. And I also do not think that the mainstream arts community and its advocates are going to a driving force for this kind of significant shift in attitudes about art and culture, particularly in the political sphere. The hard part about changing attitudes about the arts is that unlike many issues that are debated in public square culture does not translate well as an issue. Art is an experience, not an issue. Art making is an experience, not an issue. In France every kid can tell you that French culture is what distinguishes a French person from an English person. But there, art and the much larger realm of culture (language, food ways, traditions, etc.) are intrinsically linked. Of course, as France changes through immigration this is becoming a hot button issue. In the US, "culture" is both hundred conversations and silence. The vibrancy and identity of local communities here are most often defined through culture. But, you will never see an American Presidential race determined by a candidate's position on the arts as has happened in France.

So, when we make our case in the policy world we are always hitching a ride on some other public concern such as the economy, quality of life, or education. These are all legitimate and at times, powerful advocacy arguments. But, economic and educational arguments for cultural support all are secondary to the larger and more critical conversation about the intrinsic relationship between culture and art, which arts folks avoid like a plague. ("*When we say culture we mean art*") By culture here, I mean the integrated system of socially acquired values and beliefs that creates a shared sense of meaning and identity that, in turn, manifests the shared body of knowledge that is the lens through we see the world. This shared knowledge and understanding is where art and the creation of social, economic, political and spiritual meaning all come together. But when you try to separate art from all this you are traveling down the slippery slope of an increasingly disconnected and often trivialized conversation. I guess what I am saying is that we need to clean up the messy way in which we both conflate and

separate art from this broader definition of culture.

Unfortunately, I think the thin-ice conditions that have historically impacted America's cultural economy have weakened the sector's imaginative muscles. This is supposed to be our stock in trade.

We are in the imagination business, are we not? Where is the audacious, expansive, thinking that we need? The irony here is that I think some time in the next 20-30 years brain scientists will likely end up making the unequivocal case for the arts as essential for human and social development.

BARRY: Where indeed and isn't that a fundamental question? Where is that thinking? What happened to it? What can we do to resurrect it, or are we somewhat kidding ourselves thinking it once flowered to a greater degree than truth would bear out?

BILL: "That thinking" is alive and well. It's just not being exposed to the same degree as Charlie Sheen's and Lindsay Lohan's trivial travails. You will find it out there, mostly at the local level because that is where audacious thinking and doing get tested. Blogs like yours and other digital infection agents are the perfect vehicle for sharing the interesting ideas and voices that are already out there percolating. It would be nice if we could create some local creative think-and-do tanks (I distrust thinking that is disconnected from doing) to add to the conversation. The 30 people in Between Grace and Fear are iceberg tips, with each representing an informal a thinking-doing network of thousands.

End of Part II. Part III Friday.

Don't Quit.

Barry

POSTED BY BARRY AT [4:44 PM](#) 

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[JULY 14, 2011 2:27 PM](#)

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