Minutes of the December 12-13, 2003
Radcliffe Institute Exploratory Seminar on Cultural Agency


Doris Sommer greeted participants and reiterated the particular goal for the meeting: to share experiences and ideas in order to propose strategies that highlight agency as an effect of academic research [and teaching] and therefore an organic link to public service. The focus on strategy should also lead us toward questions of methodology.

-How can Service Learning work in a variety of settings?  
-Should we coordinate student interns with sites that develop Cultural Agency?  
-Ways to engage the media to build expectations of agency through cultural work.  
-Prizes, recognition, appointments that promote Cultural Agency in the academy?  

In preparation, participants were encouraged to prepare brief remarks on one or more:  
-efforts to create bridges from your field of expertise to community  
-success and obstacles you encountered  
-possible strategies to overcome obstacles or to create opportunities

Session 1 - Discussion with Augusto Boal

Following the workshop of Augusto Boal on Dec. 11, several questions were put to him regarding:

1. how he multiplies the effect of his work  
2. how he ensures the continuity of his initial interventions in communities  
3. how he manages quality control of the facilitators he uses for his many workshops  

Augusto Boal insisted on the stories we tell each other and ourselves to understand and explain the world. Acting and telling stories, one gets transformed. The aesthetic process is the search for some sort of unicity. The artistic product is its culmination, in excess of the process, and is not necessarily an outcome.

A.B. prefers to call his facilitators “difficultators”. During a workshop one multiplies solutions, tests out solutions to real problems, creates a social space. Although words are not real, we construct ourselves and others with them.

Continuity of a cultural process is indeed important; otherwise it is just a remembrance. We need to practice. One way of keeping in touch with his practitioners is to have a yearly conference in Omaha, Nebraska on Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed.

On play – Does the game master restrict the freedom of participants? Boal described some of the many techniques used in workshops. Images are used for example to identify what terms like “family” represent. In the Screen technique, words and images are evoked that we project on one another.

An aesthetic education is a necessary component of democratic life.

Session 2 –

Professor Diana Taylor of NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts announced that Unesco has asked the Hemispheric Institute, with members in Cultural Agency, to develop guidelines for Protection of Intangible Heritage. The model of bio-diversity has been considered but is problematic.

On a related note, after school programs and other artistic initiatives fail to validate minority groups or bring about engagement. Very few after school programs include theatre. Latino students are not validated as there develops a slippage between good citizenry (passive), empowerment and the inability to undo social hierarchies. There is a faultline in the way Washington defines engagement. It is about citizenship preparation, not engagement. Federal funding for the Corporation for National Service goes through the Heritage Foundation. Privatization of everything, along with a “biologization” of people’s potential, rather than a consideration of cultural determinants, making cultural intervention less likely. Need to confront this trend.

Session 3

Professor Deborah Pacini showed some student digital stories and outlined the principles and history of the medium. One underlying assumption is that knowing one’s history strengthens a community. The process towards developing digital stories:

1. developing equipment knowledge and competency/Methodology
2. becoming aware of ethical issues
3. understanding project development

Pacini showed 2 works, one on a travel agent seen as Superwoman in a local community, commenting on imagination, identity and women’s issues, and another of Latin American history in its troubled relations with the United States. She talked about the consciousness about community and history that such projects develop as well as the technical proficiency.

Such projects can also be developed with local access channels.

Work can have several applications: advocacy, therapy…

Many institutions have similar programs: MIT and Reflective Community Practice, Duke and a video editing and leadership class etc…

Professor Roberta Oster Sachs, many years a producer for the networks, changed direction to teach media for social change. She teaches a course at Tufts University, sponsored by the University College of Citizenship and Public Service, called “Producing TV Programs for Social Change.” In this class students learn to research, report, produce, shoot, write, and edit their own videos on public policy issues. The students choose issues that are important to them and involve the local community - integrating the University and its neighbors. The class encourages students to work for social change and to use the media to get their message out. She calls her work advocacy journalism. It brings the community into the university by involving residents in making documentaries. She also tries to involve technical schools to strengthen ties between institutions and the community. Process is as important as product.

Oster Sachs showed a documentary on how Homeland Security funding was used by a policeman to clean up and develop public access to a local river in Massachusetts. Some technical problems, including copyright issues, came up. Two websites were recommended: www.creativecommons.org and www.mediarights.org.

Session 4

Dr. Edward Zlotkowski, probably the most experienced scholar on the issue of Service Learning, is the editor of a series on SL across disciplines and travels extensively throughout the country to consult. He has been organizing colleges for 14 years. Stressed the importance for our group not to reinvent the wheel in SL; much is known and has been successful.

Very important resource Campus Compact (website at www.compact.org) with affiliates in 30 states. We should build alliances. Our institutions should consider attending the New England conference on civic engagement for example. Having top research universities participate in this movement which is led by less selective institutions would be an asset to the advancement of civic engagement in academia, particularly in the areas of curriculum development and faculty research. Some excellent universities involved in this direction are Middlebury, Bates, McAllister, Augsburg, Greensboro, University of Pennsylvania.

Still useful, some early scholarship of engagement; e.g. Ernest Boyer’s Scholarship Reconsidered. We need alternatives to research as critique, especially in the Humanities. It is ironic that History or Philosophy have been more open to engaged scholarship than has Literature.

Levels of implementation in Service Learning: SL as pedagogy, SL as program, SL as philosophy, SL as engagement as a mode of learning.

Need to tease out the best programs; some give it a bad name. SL is about public problem solving.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The 4 quadrants of SL design</th>
<th>Student-Centered</th>
<th>Structured Learning</th>
<th>Academic/Expertise</th>
<th>SL Community/Common Good</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Community-centered Unstructured Learning</td>
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When implementation of actions and problem solving are involved in learning, higher cognitive skills develop. Work in the community does not detract from academic learning, but creates a dialectical relationship.

Levels of reflection are involved:
1. Social – Systems and Issues, promotes reading systems
2. Personal – Student as learner, trains democratic citizenship
3. Technical – Makes the course a better course
   SL is under-theorized and thus would benefit from attention by scholars in top research universities

Issue to attend:
1. What would it mean to develop a praxis proficiency at every undergraduate class?
2. Write on cases of reciprocity between academia and community.
3. Maybe we could think of organizing a meeting/conference with profs who have included community work in English and literary studies.
4. New forms of scholarship, e.g. web essays.
5. Lack of meaning making in Humanities, a dearth of narratives that make sense of the field.

Professor David Theo Goldberg of the University of California-Irvine talked about the general weakening of the Humanities in American academia. In California, outreach budgets have been wiped out in the current crunch. American universities have become middle-classing enterprises; all facets of life are being privatized.

We need to engage the Humanities in the social debates and need to “humanize” leadership. To define and produce “critical literacy” as well as “engagement literacy.” Fortunately examples of success exist:
- use of art to save lives in the AIDS crisis: South Africa, Bangladesh, California …
- Writing mentors programs
- Humanities Out There – Engaging graduate students with high schools; bringing high school students to campuses.
- Internship programs in the court system
- Critical prisons project in creative writing; critical resistance in an abolitionist framework
- Internships in Costa Rica – Pairing of students for language and cultural education
- National Consortium for Digital Humanities

We need to occupy spaces that are available and engage in policy decisions. One of the problems is the set of conflicting demands on our lives and careers.

Session 5

Dr. Cathy Davidson Director, director of the John Hope Franklin Humanities Institute and Vice-Provost for Interdisciplinary Studies at Duke University presented the literature and the outreach activities of Duke. For ten years Duke had a President who was a champion of Service Learning.

Dr. Davidson, like Dr. Zlotkowski, underscored the fact that the term Service Learning had other equivalents such as Research Service Learning or Service Learning for Civic Engagement or Scholarship with a Civic Mission. The name is not crucial, but rather the academic rigor of the work. She herself taught a Humanities course on the history of Wilmington, a project that repeated and accumulated a new archive of local history, a project with investments from students, teachers and community.

Dr Davidson gave examples of successful projects with the community: The Duke U basketball stars who first have to win good will of underprivileged high school students before they can tutor effectively. The middle class museum that exhibited photos of Closing, her book on a failed furniture factory. The administration hired buses to bring residents who had worked in factory, and hired extra janitors, but visitors left the museum spotless. Administration learned something about stereotyping and visitors learned the context of their own personal history.

Several websites were indicated: www.pubpol.duke.edu/centers/hlp/about/index.html
www.duke.edu/web/rslduke
www.duke.edu/web/isis/click/home.html

We need to develop a “critical disposition” toward work in the community. Activities of “lower class” group are devalued.

Marshall Ganz: There is SL that reproduces hierarchy. We need to get beyond “volunteering.”
Art and community: need for creative, alternative narratives.

Zlotkowski: To convince faculty of the value of SL, have them out of regular habitat. By meeting community members they will identify research interests.

Dr. Matory: Indeed, we are more used to seeing ourselves as universalists. Local interest is often seen as belonging to lesser institutions.

Dr. Nakula: The risk prevention program at Harvard is about 10 years old and is community-based here at Harvard.

Session 6

Dr. Lorand Matory, Professor of anthropology, cited academic environment as obstacle for undoing systems of inequity in class, gender and race. Stressed the dissonance between a postmodern world in which differences should not matter and the world as it is. The paper he prepared developed the example of Pres. Summers, who conflated
critique of Israeli government with anti-semitism. A green light to engage shines mostly on white males.

Dr. Goldberg: look at issue of how we embody knowledge.

Dr. Matory: How can we engage? As Humanists, we are both targets and vanguard.

Dr. Goldberg: There is no quick fix. Overdetermined problems need overdetermined as well as multilateral solutions.

Dr. Yunte Huang, brought 2 examples of cultural agency: I.A. Richards’ traveling literacy program; and architectural wonders made with discarded materials and residents’ help in design. Both developed among elite practitioners with eye to public service.

Dr. Nakkula, reviewed his development of connections with community. The first exercise with high school students is to reflect on where we come from, who we are. We come with foundations (class, gender, race) that we learn in culture. In class often, students are asked to be static, are imposed a textbook. Some students reject this static model. We as institution must consider culture, not just impose ours.

Another risk is to pathologize difference. Interpretive processes are part of scholarship, cultural agency, cultural activism. But anyone who does not translate values into efficiency measurements is at risk now. A new authoritarianism “patrols disorder.”

Marshall Ganz attempted to synthesize and regroup some of the ideas that were discussed during the seminar in view of further action.

We should respond to questions such as: who are we? What values do we have? What strategies should we develop? (David and Goliath story).

Our job is to develop stories, narratives of hope that underlie the plausibility of the possible rather than the necessity of the probable. The logic of cultural agency is in the narrative of the possible. Agency is eliminated from the discourse of economics; pernicious justifications keep the status quo of everyday life. The marketplace seems to be the yardstick for all human activities, including art, health etc… In times of high uncertainty we need imagination, creativity and alternate pathways. Proactive vs reactive stance.

Agency + motivation: we should not be risk averse.

Dr Nakkula: To invent the future, we dare to go from prevention to invention.

Marshall led the final “strategic” session, in which we brainstormed about vision, resources and steps to take. A large summative and prospective chart was drawn, and Dr. Ganz asked all present to brainstorm freely in three areas:

**1) the outcomes that we would like to see from our work (without limiting our vision with notions of (un)realizability)**

2) the resources we have at our disposal

3) the opportunities that we currently see around us

4) the strategies we could follow
**Possible outcomes**

Take over Harvard/NEH
Ways students and faculty learn from community
Stronger voice for the Humanities
Public call to attention/action: call, (web) papers, ad
Regime change at home
Fairness for the poor
Research outreach/integration
Alternative economic model
Humanities as discipline to communities
Art education as basis of civic education
Humanities as discipline that multiplies possibilities
Reintegrate art in education
Racial justice
Gender equality
Cultural agency network
Focus document
Game plan

**Resources**

Op Eds/media
Tenure
Politics
Curriculum/Common readings
School superintendents
Publishers
Artistic, social and cultural capital
Prestige
Internet
Elite alumni
Center
Funding

**Strategies**

Ten National Organizations Committees
Campus Compact conferences (930 schools)
Speakers Bureau
Panels at MLA, ASA
List of listservs – statements
Lobbyists – National Humanities lobbyists
Woodrow Wilson Outreach
Info pamphlets for politicians
Community radio/TV
Websites
Materials to use to train faculty
Emory, Vanderbilt
Host training conference at Harvard
Stanley Kurz – Title VI – Constitute a group to lobby on Title VI
Contact other Title VI centers
Soros
Articulation at the national/regional level

**Opportunities**

Curriculum review
Potential
Cultural Agency events
Mayor Merino + need to expand
ASA-libraries
New Brazilian affirmative action policy
Democratic convention
Muslim networks
Religious social services
We then looked at:

**Targets – Timing – Tactics**

Some outcomes are long term and relevant to the narrative more than to the strategy.

**Research/Outreach outcomes**

Foundational Values:

- **Culture as agency**
  - **Clusters**
    - Strong voice
  1. Collectively articulated statement of purpose
  2. dissemination, reactions
  3. programs to enact
  4. organizational capacity/network

Speakers bureau “Profs in the Hood”
A course on the university
What is the Humanities? A place where voices are heard, count in some ways.

Innovation theory
  1. national policy
  2. research and community integration (to be recognized within universities)
  3. rooting of these principles in communities

There needs to be urgency.
What is happening to American culture today?
  - what we want of our culture
  - Title VI – what is happening there?
  - What our American culture is doing abroad
  - Militarization, economistic model – something else is possible.
  - Need for creativity

Whom do we try to reach? Universities, Hollywood, High school teachers
Voices that count with whom? Goal?

**Decisions**

After discussing the results of the brainstorming session and possible decisions that could be made, initial working areas were selected for immediate action. Each is listed with the individuals who committed to working on that part of the project:

1. What we say (articulation, message, words to be used, essential concepts to convey, what we propose to do): **Doris, Diane, Michael**
2. Who to? (who is our audience, list of people we are addressing our message to) Yunte, Tom, David, Ed

3. Program (what kind of activities do we propose, what programs do we want to enact? What other organizations can we ally with?) – Mike, Randy

4. Network organization; organization of a Cultural Agency listserv – Josiane, Jose


We need to think of a time and place for the next meeting.

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