

Art in Rebuilding Community: The Transforma Project in New Orleans

By Jan Cohen-Cruz



Workshop associate director Ed Buckner of the Porch Cultural Organization taking a bow with the rest of the cast of "Local Heroes," a project of "HOME, New Orleans?" Photo by Rachel Steele

You saw the images of Hurricane Katrina. People on their roofs to escape the rising water, waving their arms as helicopters descended low enough for rescue but — instead of a ladder — extended a video camera. The chalk markings on houses indicating which National Guard troops came by when and how many dead they found. Row upon row of empty FEMA trailers in an Arkansas parking lot. Thousands of mostly poor, mostly black people displaced from public housing — that has yet to reopen and maybe never will. A city of 11 hospitals now down to three. You also saw people in their boats rescuing strangers. Heard stories like the two people who evacuated at the same time to the same house of a friend of a friend in Lafayette, were assumed by their host to be a couple, and ended up getting married. You felt the desire for *something good* to emerge out of catastrophe.

In this context, artist and teacher Richard Ruello recounts the genesis of Transforma Projects, catalyzed by his own bleak outlook upon returning home to New Orleans after the storm in late October 2005:

No one had a vision or a direction. The Catholic Church announced that it was going to deaccession a larger number of churches. That sparked my idea to get in touch with Rick Lowe. My first conversation with him was terrific because he had been thinking about how to do something here. Our initial conversations revolved around turning those churches into creative community centers. That quickly became too logistically complicated for us. After several conversations and meetings, the current "funding model" emerged. The idea is to insert creative people into the rebuilding process.[1]

The hyphenation underlying Transforma — supporting creative work with both artistic and social significance — is part of a movement in community-based art relying on intersectoral partnerships. So, for example, from an office in Portland, Maine's City Hall, artist Marty Pottenger collaborates with city employees and educators to use the arts to enhance diversity in local government and support the multi-ethnic students at area schools. In response to requests from prison reform organizations for culturally accessible ways to challenge overincarceration, theater and video artists from Appalshop (Appalachian Arts Workshop) created "1,000 Kites." It draws on radio, video and theater to insert stories of those most affected by the U.S. prison industry into community organizing campaigns. Concrete, measurable outcomes, anathema to some art, are the sliver of hope in these undertakings. Post-Katrina New Orleans, in all its devastation, is a fecund breeding ground for intersectoral partnerships.

The hyphenation underlying Transforma is part of a movement in community-based art relying on intersectoral partnerships.

It's ironic that art imbedded in social contexts such as Transforma supports is so often looked at as marginal when it is part of the great tradition of creative expression in response to major societal events. People join together in song when faced with enormous obstacles such as characterized the Civil Rights Movement. They light candles and participate in silent vigils, as now in the aftermath of the carnage at Virginia Tech. They tell stories as part of working through trauma. Projects like Transforma release art from delimiting definitions by recognizing its larger context of cultural expression.

For a sense of Lowe's vision of joint social and artistic projects, one need only look at Project Row Houses in Houston, a neighborhood of 22 abandoned 1930s houses that Lowe began revitalizing as art galleries, artists' workshops and low-cost housing in 1992. Shaila Dewan elaborates:

Its grand plan includes a resident artist, a Spoken Word House, seven installation houses, a classroom and a Project Gallery ... and residence facilities, child care and guidance for teen mothers (51% of the live births in the area are to teens), summer camp and workshops. The heart of the project is the seven houses, which, twice a year, are each transformed by an artist whose work deals with themes relevant to African Americans.[2]

Lowe joined up with Jessica Cusick, manager of cultural affairs in Santa Monica, California, and artist/teacher Sam Durant to inaugurate Transforma in New Orleans. Cusick complements Lowe with expertise in art and community development. As director of civic art and design for the Cultural Arts Council in Houston, she developed a plan to involve public art in the improvement of the city's environment. (See <http://www.civic-art.com/>.) She specializes in policy initiatives within which art functions as a tool for civic regeneration. Sam Durant is a visual artist who teaches at CalArts and addresses charged issues in U.S. history through an intermingling of fine art and popular culture. Durant poses one of the questions at the heart of Transforma:



Artist Rick Lowe (center), who inaugurated Transforma in New Orleans with Jessica Cusick and Sam Durant. Photo by Jan Gilbert

Can cultural activity produce meaningful and sustainable activity in such a devastated community? It is easy to do a festival or a biennial type of thing but in my experience that produces only temporary effects. New Orleans is obviously in very deep trouble (most of it long before Katrina); the problems are massive and a few art projects are not going to restore public housing or the school system. But if they join with the many other relatively small efforts something bigger might be gained. We all see this as a longer term project — hopefully we can hang on and build and keep working.[3]

Current Transforma Projects

What follows are descriptions of the three New Orleans-based projects with which Transforma has embarked. I go into most detail with “HOME, New Orleans?,” of which I’m a part, and the only one of the three up and running. I’ll then discuss Transforma’s role in carrying the projects out and consider some of Transforma’s challenges and opportunities for the future.

Project: “HOME, New Orleans?”

I was introduced to the Lowe team’s effort to support a role for artists in rebuilding New Orleans in early June 2006, ten months after the storm. I was in New Orleans for a small convening of university-based people who regularly do community arts with their students. Our host Ron Bechet, chair of the Art Department at the local, historically black Xavier University, brought us to a meeting that had been organized by Ruello and other local artists for an exchange with Lowe. It was an emotional event, perhaps too soon for most people to wrap their brains around art and recovery. Many wept over the state of their former homes and neighborhoods, lived precariously in trailers, with friends or family, outside of the city or, almost guiltily, in homes not badly damaged by the storm.

I wanted to do something in New Orleans. I had never witnessed my government less responsive to a domestic disaster and it simply was not okay. I also wondered if the level of need in New Orleans would cause people to take art that is as interested in social engagement as aesthetics more seriously. Art with content and in venues at a distance from everyday life is the conventional norm against which community-based art frequently needs to justify itself. Would Katrina challenge those limits? Would it catalyze a crisis of meaning among artists like I witnessed in the immediate aftermath of 911? In the conservatorylike atmosphere of my own work place, NYU Tisch School of the Arts, my political-theater classes overflowed. My office and those of my colleagues were sites of continuous, heartfelt conversations with each other and with students about what kind of art matters, if any, in a world seemingly bent on fratricide if not self-extermination. Given such inadequate official response to the large-scale destruction wrought by Katrina — raw evidence of our troubled world — how can one not try to contribute through any means possible? How can one not question one’s priorities?

I wanted to do something in New Orleans. I had never witnessed my government less responsive to a domestic disaster and it simply was not okay.

Back home in New York, a few days after the June convening, I got an email from a former professor, Richard Schechner, who 40 years before had gone to graduate school and then taught in New Orleans and been part of the Free Southern Theater. He had recently been in New Orleans at the invitation of visual artist Jan Gilbert of The VESTIGES Project. He now imagined a project he called “HOME, New Orleans?”

consisting of installations and theater snippets in front of and inside ruined houses, briefly bringing back to life a range of memories, marking them together before the houses were bulldozed or repaired, turned into condos or otherwise irrevocably changed. He saw the project on a very large scale, necessitating many artists and students, briefly reviving neighborhood upon neighborhood. He imagined the culmination as a giant parade to the Superdome to exorcise the bad spirits from many people's several days' ordeal there upon fleeing their homes in the immediacy of the storm. He wanted Gilbert to coordinate an artist component and me to head up a university component. As an outsider I would not presume to head up the project but I emailed the proposal to Ron Bechet, from the Xavier convening, and asked if he would take that role. He said he would if I'd come down and work with him. We concurred that we would only do what people wanted in the various neighborhoods. I told Schechner that I'd participate with Ron at the helm of the university component with the understanding that once the rubber hit the road, the project could change enormously. That was the new agreement.

And indeed the project has shifted its center of gravity. We set up projects in four neighborhoods. Only one of them, Lakeview, is focused on marking pre-Katrina life; two involve some commemoration as part of rebuilding; and the fourth is about re-energizing community through youth performance. We also established a fifth, bridging team supporting the other four. We created partnerships among two historically black universities, Xavier and Dillard, and two predominantly white, Tulane and NYU. A mix of students from at least two of the universities as well as artists and local residents constitute each team:



Tulane student Kala Brant in workshop with participants in "HOME, New Orleans?" Photo by Jan Gilbert

- **9th Ward.** Visual artist/ Xavier professor Ron Bechet with sculptor Rashida Ferdinand are working with the NENA (Neighborhood Empowerment Network Association) Center and the Martin Luther King Elementary School in the Lower 9th Ward. Their goal is to support the NENA Center through bringing university technological proficiency to the Center and to develop public art projects with elementary-school children that commemorate and reflect their community.
- **Lakeview.** Jan Gilbert, theater artists Kathy Randels of ArtSpot Productions, Andrew Larimer of the NOLA Project and writer Jan Villarrubia are creating a bus tour that will commemorate Lakeview life — citizens, stories and sites — through performance and installation pieces. Their partners include Rev. Dick Randels of Lakeview Baptist Church, Lakeview AARP, the Beacons of Hope groups, NOCCA (the local arts magnet high school), Metairie Park Country Day School, and others.
- **Central City.** Visual artist/Dillard professor John Barnes is working in concert with the Ashé Cultural Arts Center and the Central City Economic Opportunity Center (EOC) to create a mixed-media quilt/installation. Visual artist Jeffery Cook will offer insight into the found-object collection process and art making in community settings through workshops at the EOC. This group is

developing the contents of the quilt through a series of story circles and conversations with the senior citizens who use the Center.

- **7th Ward.** I from NYU, dancer Stephanie McKee and neighborhood organizer Ed Buckner started a performance program for neighborhood youth in response to that request from the local Porch Cultural Organization. Fifteen 7th Ward children, ranging in age from six to 14, are learning the art and discipline of performance and the educational potential of collective expression. We created two performances, in February and in April. When I returned to NYC in early May, a young local theater director, Andrew Larimer, joined the leadership of the workshop along with McKee and Buckner.
- **Bridging Group.** Tulane professor Amy Koritz, assistant director for Community and Cultural Development at the Tulane/Xavier Center for Bioenvironmental Research, with Xavier's Community Arts Coordinator Shawn Vantree and e/Prime Executive Producer Kevin McCaffrey, are facilitating a team of students supporting the four projects via documentation, publicity and fundraising coordination.

Our goal is not only to create art on site but also to create and expand relationships among the diverse individuals, organizations, institutions and neighborhoods participating.

We begin to see the value of intersectoral partnerships in individual HNO teams. The Seventh Ward performance workshop, for example, fits into our partner The Porch's mission to protect neighbors from being displaced through gentrification and enhance opportunities for community development. By providing local kids with opportunities, we strengthen their families' ties to the neighborhood as well.

Our goal is not only to create art on site but also to create and expand relationships among the diverse individuals, organizations, institutions and neighborhoods participating.

We've taken an asset-based approach, creating shows based on initiatives that already exist in the community in order to offer the kids something of meaning with potential continuity. The first play built on ten black New Orleanian "local heroes" who were the subject of a printmaking and dissemination blitz of the neighborhood designed by artists/Porch members Willie Birch and Ron Bechet. Our theater piece identified the ten figures and their contributions. The second show, about nature, ties into a local community garden, with support from local environmentalist Dan Etheridge, and may lead to some of the kids participating in the growing and marketing of herbs. Incoming theater director Andrew Larimer imagines a youth theater festival presenting the work of our kids, who are all black, with white youth theater groups with which he is familiar. Troi Bechet of Neighborhood Housing Services, another Porch partner, is pursuing youth jobs money so the older kids in our group can be paid by the city to assist a theater workshop in the Porch's summer camp.

Project: Mel Chin in Process

The second project Transforma is funding is by conceptual artist Mel Chin. His hook into the morass that is post-Katrina New Orleans was this comment from the official report: "The levels of heavy metal contamination in the soil did not get worse post-Katrina." *Did not get worse? How bad were they to begin with?* Second only to Cleveland, the worst in the country, he discovered.

Chin had already created projects aimed at concretely reducing environmental toxicity through a combination of art and scientific tools, his particular intersectoral partnership. In 1991 he initiated his first "Revival Field," also based in an art-science collaboration, described thusly: "A plot of tainted ground is planted with 'hyperaccumulators,' plants that naturally draw heavy metal toxins from the soil. They not only cleanse and restore the contaminated land, but once harvested and incinerated, the plants' ash yields metals that can be recycled and reused." The project included photo documentation but "the process, not an aesthetic form but the transformation of a ravaged ecology, is the primary art goal." [4]



Artist Mel Chin addresses a gathering in New Orleans. Photo by Jan Gilbert

Approaching the "disaster before the disaster" problem in New Orleans, Chin plans to again integrate art and science. The shape of the former is, for the moment, shrouded in intentional mystery, since his concept relies on a certain amount of surprise. I can report that he has contacted various scientists and other professionals to work on what it would take to transform the conditions "from below the ground up." One is University of Virginia professor Julie Bargman, a landscape designer focusing on the creation of new landscapes out of former industrial sites, and a team of her graduate students. Bargmann and Chin want to create a workable citywide plan informed by science, engineering and law. (Although some New Orleanians tell me that the phrase "workable city plan" has become an oxymoron here, reflecting the hours they've spent in meetings planning recovery efforts that have yet to manifest in reality.)

Chin's art is transformation of an idea into reality, raising what one New Orleanian described to me as the radical notion that people may be able to actually solve some of the city's problems. In keeping with the underpinnings of Transforma, Chin employs the same creative approach to reality — in this case, imagining how to make New Orleans soil safe for all — as that which governs his visual art. This project, which will take off in March 2008, will have a physical presence in New Orleans sometime that spring. It's too early to say more, other than to acknowledge the enormous task and formidable funding obstacles, estimated in the hundreds of millions, that Chin and company face. While he's sworn me to secrecy, I can say that Chin has guaranteed delivery and we'll see what that means as the project "transforms."

Project: Plessy Park

The third Transforma Project involves the longtime effort to establish a memorial on the empty grass lot at Press and Royal streets in New Orleans. This is the site of an act of civil disobedience designed by the Citizens' Committee, a group of influential African-American civic and business leaders, who recruited Homer Plessy to carry it out. On June 7, 1892, Plessy, from a prominent family of *gens de couleur libres* (free people of color), boarded a whites-only East Louisiana Railroad car at that intersection. He was sufficiently light-skinned to pass for white when he purchased a ticket, but nevertheless aroused the suspicion of the conductor, who asked if he was

"a colored man." (Another version of the story is that he *told* the conductor he was colored.) Plessy avowed that he was, and when he refused to move to a separate car was arrested by an Officer Cain, as had been planned with the Citizens' Committee. Though the action led to the 1896 Supreme Court decision permitting segregation according to the standard of "separate but equal," or "Jim Crow" laws, it is a crucial moment in civil-rights history with positive ramifications as well. The loss of the "Plessy v. Ferguson" case motivated Howard University to create the country's first black law school. Thurgood Marshall, a graduate of that program who went on to become a supreme court justice, worked closely with his former dean, Charles H. Houston, heading up the legal team that successfully argued the "Brown v. the Board of Education" case in 1954, dismantling the legal basis for racial segregation in schools and other public places in the U.S.

Various advocates of social justice have sought to mark Plessy Park one way or another. The current iteration involves local activists and Director Reggie Lawson of the Crescent City Peace Alliance and students from Douglass High School working with Students at the Center. The park is being designed in the same collective spirit as the original 1892 act, and is based on a concept by artist John Scott. It involves the creation of a railroadlike path through the park, each railroad tie marking an important person, place or event in the long and ongoing struggle for civil rights. Plessy would be neither the first nor the last. Fifteen banners marking important moments in the Civil Rights Movement that have been researched by the high-school students will also be created, in partnership with Xavier University art students. Current efforts are underway to establish who actually owns the lot and if it can be acquired, perhaps through the intervention of the National Park Service, in order to grant it landmark status and create the New Orleans Civil Rights Park. Alternatively the park may be created at Douglass High School. Jim Randels, co-director of Students at the Center, notes the same resistance to the "separate but equal" doctrine in current struggles against inequities in education as in Plessy's main activist work — seeking equitable funding for black students in public education. Randels gives the example of two local public school buildings: the state-of-the-art NOCCA Riverfront, an arts magnet school composed of a majority of white students, and the neglected Douglass High School, serving an all black population.

The design for Plessy Park involves the creation of a railroadlike path through the park, each railroad tie marking an important person, place or event in the struggle for civil rights.

Transforma Support and the Role of Critical Discourse

Cusick observes that "there seem to be only a few structures to support public art and/or community-based art projects." Transforma proposes itself as an expanded model, imagining three components in its structure of support: 1) funding; 2) access to and participation of Resource Teams; [5] and 3) discourse and critical analysis of the projects throughout their duration.[6]

While "HOME, New Orleans?" has already benefited from Transforma funding, interaction with the Resource Team has been modest thus far. During the fall '06 planning period, before I arrived in New Orleans, my colleagues Ron Bechet and Jan Gilbert presented "HOME, New Orleans?" to the core Transforma team and invited evaluators. They asked good questions, and we were excited at the thought of them accompanying us when we executed the first phase of the project in the spring. But that has not happened. Other than one meeting (described below), a process of critical discourse around Transforma has yet to be implemented, as well. Lowe has, however, articulated that critical discourse



NYU student Jenny Soo with kids from "HOME, New Orleans?"
Photo by Rachel Steele

... is about education. Not only education for artists and creative practitioners but also for those who might not understand or put a premium on the importance of creativity in the process of dealing with the mundaneness of social constructions, i.e., how we build communities, etc. The idea behind Transforma's critical dialogue is to increase awareness among funders, too, of the role creativity and creative practice play in dealing with serious social, environmental and political issues. Also, it is to increase awareness among communities of the importance and value of a role for creativity in efforts to re/build community.[7]

Cusick elaborates on the informal nature of the education Transforma intends to provide:

There was tremendous value-added to be had through a process of ongoing supportive critique — much like you get in school, but from a real-world perspective — that it was perhaps through a lack of that kind of professional feedback loop that projects lose their way sometimes, and are rarely able to have a real and significant social impact — that these dialogues could help the projects evolve and mutate as they must to become real in the world, but not lose track of their original goals.[8]

Lowe imagines critical discourse in Transforma's hands taking many forms, including celebration:

If we broaden our initiative to connect with the many efforts going on in the city, it might be worthwhile to host some kind of celebration where we highlight all these projects on a weekend and try to get folks who are interested in this kind of work to come to New Orleans to visit them. We could have part of the celebration as just tours of these sites with representatives explaining them. This could be a logical departure from the "disaster" tours that may still be going on. Transforma tours would be about the healing.[9]

Lowe suggests that spotlighting creative rebuilding rather than only overwhelming loss is a form of critical discourse itself. Lowe's plan is grounded in self-representation of post-Katrina efforts rather than only those mediated by the national press. Part of the criticism may also be aimed at the government and its glaring absence from recovery efforts.

Lowe suggests that spotlighting creative rebuilding rather than only overwhelming loss is a form of critical discourse itself.

There has been controversy concerning critical discourse around art that responds to social injustice. Dance critic Arlene Croce, in a much discussed essay in the New Yorker, condemned as unreviewable what she calls victim art — meaning art in which the creator can not separate himself from the condition expressed, as exemplified in HIV-positive choreographer Bill T. Jones's production about terminal illness, "Still/Here." [10] Is the kind of art Transforma advocates similarly immune to criticism? Can one critique art whose creators are thoroughly enmeshed with the real-world issues at the heart of their work?

As I've written elsewhere, I believe that such work can and must be critiqued, but in relationship to criteria befitting each hyphenated effort. [11] For example, a goal of Chin's project is the eradication of toxins in New Orleans' soil. The degree to which he achieves that, or comes up with a process that has such potential, needs to be part of its evaluation, as does the ability of the art components he employs to engage large numbers of people. In other words, assessment must correspond to intention so that a hyphenated intention, in the realm of the aesthetic and the social, calls for a hyphenated critical approach. We also need to expand our sense of criticism as something we may do as allies rather than detached observers. In that spirit, we would not wait until the end to comment but rather be engaged during the process so the critique could help shape the work. This engaged rather than distanced conception of the critic departs from the norm in a way appropriate to the goals of this kind of art.

Lowe believes the relative newness of community-based art explains the underdeveloped critical discourse surrounding it:

This work is not a clearly defined form of creative expression in our modern society. I look at it the way I imagine the evolution of all creative forms went through. For instance, I'm sure that when artists in significant numbers began to explore abstraction, it was difficult to understand how to have critical dialogue about something that broke from the form that everyone understood. It was probably seen by many as frivolous. We all have heard it, we still hear it now — "I could do that!" or "A child could have done that." However, over time, abstract practitioners have found a way to articulate what makes for better abstraction than others. I think that we are in the early stages of exploring what it means to look critically at community-based and socially engaged work. [12]

Transforma convened a meeting on March 31 and April 1, 2007, with the core local and national team, participants

from the funded projects, and other New Orleanian artists. It was more of a show-and-tell than a critical discussion. The decision seems to have been to provide a platform for many local artists who see their work in social context rather than engage in in-depth critical analysis. Both are worthy goals and indeed important values but they are not the same — especially when time is limited, choosing one will leave out the other. We heard about a number of projects the first day and although we focused on two of the funded initiatives the second morning, the format was informal Q & A with no planned way to get at selected issues in depth. The people in the room were at all levels, from beginners to those with upward of 25 years' experience in art and social-sphere practice. Maybe the broad mix would have been fine if in addition to presenting our projects there had been some method to mine the work for its critical implications. For example, the presenters might have been asked to talk about the major challenges and discoveries we'd encountered, or to

I believe that such work can and must be critiqued, but in relationship to criteria befitting each hyphenated effort.

respond to two or three specific questions that are part of Transforma's motivating inquiry. How is each project a model of art serving a social goal? How have participants made meaningful collaborations with people in other spheres? What have been the creative ramifications and possibly also limitations of the dual aesthetic/social focus? What specific progress has been made to what specific social goals and how? Indeed, getting at critical discourse needs real planning, just like art projects do.

Moving Forward

Transforma is about to launch a Web site — <http://www.transformaprojects.org/> — on which people can easily post their art-based community projects. Web builders Robert Ruello and Ian Johnson hope it will be the foundation of Transforma's identity and a resource for those interested in art-based community engagement. Simply go to the site, choose a topic — healthcare, food, transportation, etc. — and view the project postings dealing with those issues. Asked how they will make sure that the projects conform to Transforma's vision, Ruello emphasized letting people decide for themselves. I appreciate their commitment to be inclusive, but assessing to make sure the projects have one foot in art and the other in a social realm is necessary for making the site useful. Who has time to read through a Web site with postings so loosely gathered that one has little idea if they adhere to Transforma principles or not? Is the decision not only philosophical but equally monetary, as a staff person would be required to do the Web site selection? Lowe assured me that the Web site "won't be a catch-all site without any focus. Transforma will have to push selected projects... that have been a part of dialogues that allow us to distill meaningful questions." [13]

Lowe has stated Transforma's intention "to assess the specific impact of these creative activities from an aesthetic as well as a community perspective." [14] We would welcome such an evaluation of HNO. So, for example, a trauma specialist could evaluate the Lakeview tour that emphasizes art's healing role in the wake of disaster. A housing expert involved with antigentrification efforts could make suggestions of how the work with the kids in the 7th ward could better serve that purpose. A city planner with experience in rebuilding neighborhoods could assess Bechet's efforts in the 9th ward and Barnes in Central City. A community organizer knowledgeable about coalition building could advise Koritz's bridging group. Such assessments, not just reviewing what's happened but also improving our projects as they move forward, would be of value for critical discourse around intersectoral collaboration involving art generally.



NYU student Jack Judson reads with workshop kids. Photo by Rachel Steele

Transforma faces many questions at this juncture. While I identify with Lowe, Cusick and Durant's impulse to move quickly from idea to action in response to Katrina, as a grantee, I'm worried about decisions that did not get made in the haste. How many years is Transforma committed to fundees? Even now, the organizers can't tell our "HOME, New Orleans?" team if we can include them as potential matches in ongoing funding efforts. How does Transforma's structure compare to that of other funders who also provide more than monetary support? For example, Nathan Cummings

Foundation (the other major HNO supporter) holds convenings, panels and exhibitions. What are the implications of Transforma's core group being people who do work related to what they are supporting? What are the advantages and disadvantages of all three being from outside New Orleans (although they have a local committee as well)? Chin, on the other hand, has no local partners, at least as yet; aren't there people already working on toxic soil here that he would do well to contact? What are the pros and cons of Transforma functioning as a middleman without funds of its own to disperse? Is it like a state arts agency dispersing federal dollars to a geographical community that they know better than the feds but, in their case, representing a community of ideology that they know better than many funders? Will Transforma's Web site risk redundancy with elements of CAN's?

To be sure, Transforma hit the ground running barely a year ago. None of the three national core members gave up their already over-the-top day jobs. Not surprisingly, they are already talking about how Transforma must transform — how they can't keep this up. What will it take to sustain this barely begun yet deeply significant endeavor? Who needs to be in on the discussion? An organization with an expanded notion of what it takes to support art that impacts the social realm would be an enormous boon to the field; what kind of support do *they* need to bring their vision to fruition?

Jan Cohen-Cruz wrote "Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States" (Rutgers ,2005), edited "Radical Street Performance" (Routledge, 1998), and with Mady Schutzman, co-edited "Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, Activism" (1994) and "A Boal Companion: Dialogues on Theatre and Cultural Politics" (2006). Cohen-Cruz spent the spring '07 semester in New Orleans piloting "HOME, New Orleans?" with colleagues from local universities, neighborhoods and the arts.



Jan Cohen-Cruz with project participants.
Photo by Rachel Steele

Endnotes

[1] Personal correspondence with Rick Ruello, April 5, 2007.

[2] "Art in the House: Project Row Houses," [http://www.communityarts.net/ Reading Room](http://www.communityarts.net/ReadingRoom).

[3] Sam Durant, personal correspondence, April 30, 2007.

[4] creative-capital.org/project_297.

[5] local people intended to "help open doors, provide specific expertise and technical assistance, and implement community outreach strategies." Along with national team members, they also "assist in defining the aesthetic and community agendas for the Transforma Projects."

[6] Personal correspondence from Jessica Cusick, April 8, 2007.

[7] Correspondence from Rick Lowe, April 11, 2007.

[8] Personal correspondence with Jessica Cusick, April 8, 2007.

[9] Rick Lowe, unpublished thoughts on Transforma, February 2007.

[10] Croce, Arlene, "Discussing the Undiscussable," the New Yorker, 26 December 1994/2 January 1995.

[11] See my book "Local Acts: Community-based Performance in the U.S." (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), Chapter 5, Criticism.

[12] Ibid

[13] Personal correspondence from Rick Lowe, April 11, 2007.

[14] Ibid.