

Liveblogging "Continue the Conversation - Bay Area Cultural Participation"

By Claire Light , via <http://clairelight.typepad.com/>

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I know, I know. You fell asleep halfway through the title. And today's event that I'm liveblogging might not be interesting for anyone who isn't an **artist or a nonprofit arts administrator**. But then again, I think they've got some fun stuff planned, including a performance by Paul Flores and ... something by [Favianna Rodriguez](#) (does it really matter what? Everything she does is cool.) So I'm holding out for the "hmmm ... iiiinteresting" possibility.

Okay, what this is: a "convening" (read: mini-convention) of artists and cultural workers in the Bay Area, especially the East Bay, under the aegis of a consortium of foundations. This has something to do with the **Wallace Foundation**, and something to do with **The San Francisco Foundation**. And that's the best I can do three minutes before the show starts. I'll fill in the blanks as they do.

(ETA: A little background: The San Francisco Foundation and Grants for the Arts, two of the Bay Area's primary grantmakers, got funding from the Wallace Foundation to give out [individual artist commissions](#) to address "How rapidly changing demographics and/or evolving technologies impact the ways in which artists and arts organizations across the region connect with audiences." I proposed to liveblog APature 10 (which I ended up doing for myself [here](#)), but instead of that proposal, John Killacky asked me to liveblog an artists and orgs convening instead. That is, this one. I worked together with Nicole McGovern of Helicon to set up a [Twitter @reply](#) page where people could send comments during the event, as well.)

Here's the info: Tuesday, December 02, 2008 from 1:00 PM - 6:00 PM (PT) at the Oakland Scottish Rite Center. I'd say just come on down since it's **free**, but they required an rsvp and it "**sold out**" at least a few days ago. (Wow! Iiiiiinnnteresting.)

I'm here, I'm all set up. I just posted instructions to the Twitter page on how people can start posting to our **Twitter** page. (If you have a Twitter account.) People are going to be conversing via Twitter during the convening ... which may or may not be an overly optimistic statement.

The place is organized in tables, labeled with artistic discipline. My first fellow "Literary" person gave me this tip: the "[Have Fun Do Good](#)" blog by Britt Bravo. Will check it out. But first, I have to load up on liquids.

1:16 PM: And we're starting with a welcome from Samee Roberts from the City of Oakland ([Arts Division](#)). Says: no way to quantify how many artists in Oakland. We are poised on one of the most culturally rich regions of the world. 957,000 people are exposed to art--and a bunch of other statistics I didn't catch. Often the city art programs are the **ONLY** art programs left in the schools. Arts one of five key growth industries in Oakland in the coming years. Attracting more nonprofits and supporting the business end. Launching major arts marketing initiative in the spring. Today's event is an all-Oakland production.

1:21: [Diane Sanchez](#) from [East Bay Community Foundation](#). Makes a joke about tables labeled "Other." Is talking about John Killacky, arts program director at The San Francisco Foundation, and listing his accomplishments when I tune back in from explaining to someone how to make a post to Twitter. Killacky's experienced every side of arts organizing. (From what I've heard, it's all true about him. He works his butt off to support the arts in the Bay Area ... and knows everybody.) Intros [John Killacky](#).

1:23: **John Killacky** speech:

Shout outs to the folks involved in this event. Mentions previous, smaller convenings. Group of them also brought back the arts office in the City of Oakland. (Applause.) Describes scene when councilman says "Artists, I have heard you. The money's back in." Time of community power.

Could spend the whole afternoon bemoaning the economy. One of the things we need in a bad economy is a loyal and expanding audience, so today we're going to talk about our audiences, and our relationships to them. New demographics and changing technology. Shout out to me. Points out Twitter.

[The Wallace Foundation](#) focused on arts organizations around the country and looking at community. Last year Wallace invited Kary Shulman at [Grants for the Arts](#) and Killacky to talk about collaboration. Five other cities were invited. Experiment in which Wallace is staying with them for four years, eleven orgs in Bay Area.

(Sigh. I missed a whole chunk of what Killacky was saying because my wireless connection went down a bar and all this stopped loading very fast and I was struggling to manage it. Sorry! He was just talking about what's happening today. Also introduced someone whose name I missed.)

1:34: Killacky again:

Cellphones off except for Twitter. No formal breaks today. There are speakers and a performance "expert," but really today is about your conversation and the "World Cafe" discussion.

Introducing [Paul Flores](#). Poet, playwright, spoken word artist who's been on HBO. Asked him to accept commission to do performance text. Bilingual piece.

1:37 **Paul Flores**:

Start with funk music and a video of latino youth in SF, the Mission. (Darren Leon at the next table is sit-dancing to the music.) Here comes Paul. Music fades out but Paul stands in front of screen with images running, he's in the scene and also popped out of it. Busting spoken word. (How long does a poem have to be before it becomes a play? How cohesive does a story have to be to be a narrative?)

Beautiful, "mission communist chicano" standing in front of an image of sneakers on power lines. Back in the day, the poets in the 'hood. Shout outs. "Machetes, machetes, machetes in their voices." The part about the food. "The readings were never paid," but they ate well. Sweeping

history of the movements from seventies to now, shout out to technology. Mentions his size (he's big). Ends in 1995.

1:44: More conversational now. In 1995 left Chula Vista and came to SF. Met *and here he describes every type known to man*. Everybody was a poet.

Goes into a character with a stick-up-the-ass American accent, dropping items of cultural savvy. Turns him on to poetry slams. Story about SF State and a girl selling Guatemalan textiles. Already has a dress to use for her rape poem. Why does everyone in SF want to go somewhere else. He's only ever wanted to come here. Jack Kerouac fan. "Poet or die ... I think I'm dying." He's a punk ... but cool. Starving.

Girl selling textiles actually daughter of a colonel who burned people during the war. Valley girl Spanglish accent, but had purpose and really wanted to move to El Salvador. Had a plan to move to the jungle and marry an Indian. He doesn't have a plan. His upper-middle class parents not a good example. Realizes that all the Mexicans in the Mission could also be Salvadorean refugees. Listened to the Spanish being spoken around him and it was amazing. It was like being in a foreign country. He's a refugee, too. Everyone saying "Son of a bitch."

1:52: Back to his own persona? No. Now he's a woman activist sitting on the ground trying to sell poetry to passersby. Will trade a book for a burrito or piece of pan dulce. selling revolutionary poetry, not to immigrants. They don't need reminding. Back in the day, shout outs to revolutionaries of years past. Bone through my hair, spear in my hand, tribe. Stood out here and told the truth about property. Everybody wants to live in a loft, like a fishbowl. You a businessman underneath that goatee? Tattoos, body piercings.

Now back to his own persona. (A lot of this funny, but my response time is slowed by typing. Nobody else near me is laughing or reacting. I wonder why.)

2:00: Now he's doing a puppet show with beer cans as puppets. Three beers. I can't see the brands. One is Coors. "Wannabe test tube gangster" Three gangsters talking shit about each other. Somebody holding forth about Sam Colt. One of them is sick and somebody goes to get a guy named "Gato." Gato is a can of Tecate, shorter than the others. Sam dies. Argues over baseball teams and shoots Tecate can.

2:03: Back to persona: reminds of incident when Glickstern of Liquid club beat some Latino patrons with a crowbar and wasn't convicted of anything.

Poem about this and gentrification, hipsterdom. "Are you doing that crowbar thing?" Everything is "_____ thing." "How could gentrification be violent if artists started it?" "That English-only thing ... that electronic hate-mail thing ... that Mexican beer is better at room temperature thing ... doing the volunteer at the pirate store instead thing ..."

How was I different from them? Fought for afterschool arts programs, not bike lane. Couldn't call himself an artist in the Mission until he was evicted. Came to Mission looking for an audience. Now when he walks through the neighborhood, he only sees tourists.

2:09: **John Killacky:**

By-play with Flores about baseball teams. Paul says Cubs might make it because look at Obama.

Killacky intros [Holly Sidford](#) of [Helicon Collaborative](#). She authored reports on various things I didn't quite catch because I was looking at how to spell her name. (Sorry! I'll fill in blanks later.) She'll set the frame before we do World Cafe.

2:11: **Holly Sidford:**

Was asked to set the frame for the conversation. Trying to hit the key ideas they hope will frame the discussion.

Theme is change: in the economy and community. Is cultural participation changing in the Bay Area? How is that change affecting you? (Missed the last two. Dude, I do wish speakers would slow down around the key points.)

Change is inevitable. Strains of economic crisis only illuminate trends going on for a while. Rahm Emanuel: a crisis is a terrible thing to waste. Thriving in times of significant change requires five attributes:

- anticipating and analyzing what's going on
- having right attitude, not feeling like victim
- capacity to adapt and change
- articulation and communication, consistently
- audacity think big, think bold, don't get beaten down by current circumstances.

Short term crisis brings opportunities to address long term challenges. So don't do anything that won't address long term goals. Don't try to save jobs that are going to be lost anyway. Anticipate what the world will look like five years from now.

Fight idea of retrenchment and death by a thousand cuts. Any org can cut 10% and look the same but 30% cuts or more will change the orgs. Will have to rethink fundamentals of org.

We are in a global economic upheaval and we're not taking this seriously enough. We are in a once-in-a-lifetime gale that is ripping up the bases of our economy. California will be particularly hard hit. State deficit will balloon. If the auto industry and financial sector are going through a mass transformation, then the arts "industry" will as well.

How the arts have weathered previous crises: in 4 of 9 recession years totals of arts giving increased. But this is different. Responses of audiences vary but in hard times they tend to shrink and their tastes become more conservative. And applications to art school go up. (general rueful laugh.)

This impacts:

- revenue--earned and unearned
- audiences--appetite and capacity
- programming--scale and frequency
- partnerships--ripple effects
- venues--cost, availability.

Need to maintain adaptability b/c all of this is uncertain.

2:20: Lists some statistics about Asian and Latino community growth, white community decline. Rising elderly population. Shows graphs. 27% of Californian population is immigrant. Will grow to 36% within 12 years. (Boy, these are great graphs! I hope they post these. I'll ask them to.) Breaking down ethnicities in Bay Area counties now and in the future.

Implications for arts industry? Young Latino audiences, aging audiences. What themes will artists explore? What technologies? Institutions? How will people manifest support? Continued contests over immigration, language, growth, and public resources. Likely to get more intense. Bigger, more diverse, and older population, smaller working-age population. Immigrants will be supporting Baby Boomers. Women in workforce needed to support aging population.

Alan Brown did [a study of cultural engagement patterns in the Inland Empire](#). Home is most common setting; places of worship and parks are also big for African Americans and Latinos. Taking photos, singing, musical instruments, social dancing are all big. Twice as many Latinos as whites participate in ethnic heritage. Participation is changing: increasing, doing it themselves. Strong and growing desire to create and share what they create. Technology lowers barriers to artistic expression.

Ways of participating: Inventive, interpretive, curatorial, observational, ambient.

2:31: Obama zeitgeist: Lesson for Cultural Sector:

- people want to be inspired; want link to a higher purpose and the future
- the improbable is possible with the right strategy--applying lessons of community organizing, neighborhood by neighborhood
- entitlements are dead--sense of entitlement, that is--could be what sank Hillary and McCain
- empower the young--hire young people, respect them
- participation is our most important renewable resource--Obama's the most diverse campaign, 2.5 million contributions, 1.2 million donors under \$100? Made it easy for them to give small amounts.

Participation is our most important renewable resource.

(Good talk. Really interesting points. I hope they post that powerpoint presentation.)

2:36: People from Helicon speaking and explaining "**World Cafe**" concept. We're getting into small groups of five or six and discussing ... stuff.

[World Cafe](#) core assumptions:

- The knowledge and wisdom we need is present and accessible
- Collective insight evolves from honoring unique contributions:
 - connecting ideas
 - listening into the middle
 - noticing deeper themes and questions.
- Intelligence emerges as the system connects to itself in diverse and creative ways.

We're splitting into small groups by discipline.

ROUND ONE: This first session will be about 25 minutes. **Describe your experience of how cultural participation is changing.** What lessons have you learned?

I'm going to sign off now and I'll check in at the end of each group.

3:14: So I was in a group with [Emily Sevier](#) of [CCI](#), [Khan Wong](#) and Valerie Tookes from GFTA (lotsa funders here!) and a ceramic artist who didn't put on her name tag until the end. We talked about new technologies of course. Khan is a gamer! We talked about expanding communities online, and how online apps and games (like World of Warcraft!) are changing the type of cultural participation that happens online. Also how games (like Guitar Hero! You Rock!) brought arts participation back into the home.

ROUND TWO: New question: How would you **describe the Bay Area arts community's experience of how cultural participation is changing?**

3:20: I'm now at a table with Isaias Rodriguez of [YBCA](#), Samee Roberts of City of Oakland, [Rene de Guzman](#) and Indra Mungal of the [Oakland Museum](#). René and Indra talked about Museums being the television model: where you have to be on the couch at 8 PM to see your show. But nowadays, with TV shows online, you can watch what you want, when you want. How do museums update? I complain about bad museum websites.

3:42: The most interesting result for me from this discussion was the consideration that Favianna Rodriguez' really amazing and successful real-world studio sales couldn't happen without the internet. The internet changes the way we organize things in the real world ... not just how many people we can get to the event, but how the event operates. Talked about the long tail of internet commerce.

ETA: This was a really interesting discussion group, but because I didn't take notes during the time, I've lost a lot of what we said. Bad Blogger!

ROUND THREE: The question is what do you see as the **future possibilities for cultural participation the Bay Area** given what you are hearing today (including your conversations and the context presented)?

3:46: I was looking for a table with total strangers and found it! Nirmala Ramalingam of The San Francisco Foundation, [Sherwood Chen](#), [Sade Huron](#), [Jonathan Darr of Young Audiences of Northern California](#).

I mention my previous museums online complaint and Tate Modern website [Tate archive](#) is recommended.

We spent a lot of time going over what was said in previous sessions. We didn't much get to the question at hand, but did talk about the need for arts education to be put back in the schools.

4:14: **HARVEST:** harvesting ideas after the three rounds.

Changes:

- people have to get into the electronic public space
- attentiveness to younger people's perspectives
- social networking for marketing and communications
- redefining sense of community
- multilingualism, multicultural, multiracial
- definition of "culture" is much broader
- increasing self-curating; ipods; harder to get audiences to take risks; at same time a yearning for connection; social dancing is exploding
- changing look of performances
- participation is more in demand
- arts are becoming more democratic; elite art forms becoming more unpopular
- accessible, neighborhood-based and family-based activity

Possibilities:

- barter? easier to carry a credit card than a chicken; embrace being different things to different groups
- importance of arts education; audience development
- opportunity to tap into nonarts groups
- arts could function as amazon functions--if you like this maybe you'd like this
- wikipedia doesn't have more obscure stuff; use wikis to make more stuff available
- arts groups interacting with nonarts groups, social change element
- partnering with existing local agencies for transportation
- expertise vs. participation; access for public to make their own traditions.
- adopt web standards, tagging system, pull each other's feeds
- Obama's push for rebuilding country's infrastructure, make sure some of those funds are earmarked for artists (yes! the new WPA!)
- artist-led integration of arts technology to inspire; BA perfect place to incubate that relation.
- does technology widen or close cultural gap?

4:35: now, take 30 seconds to reflect, then we'll do a modified version of "open space." Come up with a topic of a discussion you'd like to be part of. Then people who propose topics will be leading discussions.

Topics:

1. drawing audiences to East Bay arts events
2. what this recession means, the value of cultural participation in terms of civic action
3. how to engage audiences to participate more actively in specific art projects
4. getting artists and programs for people in the baby boomer generation
5. how do we hold the dept of education accountable to getting arts education
6. organizing a lobbyist in washington to influence obama re: arts
7. people who are using media technology and other internet tools and resources for cultural participation (Isais)
8. how oakland and east bay arts orgs can cross promote
9. new paradigms for sustaining nonprofit orgs
10. next steps after this event

4:58: **Technology** group is by far the largest group, and splits very reluctantly into two groups at moderator's insistence ... and then only when Isaias and Favianna, who are leading, each take a different group. I'm with Favi's

She asks: What apps do you use? I'm just gonna list them here:

- constant contact--email management
- facebook, myspace, linkedin, tumblr--social networking sites
- surveymonkey
- typepad, wordpres, blogger--blogging sites
- youtube, tubemogul--video share
- gmail
- googletalk
- paypal
- yahoogroups
- basecamp, dot project--project management
- google docs
- flickr--photo share
- itunes, amazon--creating product lists

What great models have you seen of people's use of technology?

- Using paypal to facilitate money exchange.
- Integrating blog posts with event announcements; integrating different media/apps: embedding videos into event announcements
- Using tagging, keywords, trackbacks to increase traffic to website. But this requires cost/benefit analysis b/c it takes time.
- What about rights to images on Flickr?

5:15: Back to center. **Each group is going to share one thing they talked about.**

- What's the deal with the recession? group: Keep the conversation going, have another forum on this topic specifically, use your space to convene, have a barter board.
- Audience participation group: identify how to let ppl into creative process, which is fragile and messy.
- Getting Boomers to begin creating art group: celebrate those boomers who may have given up a while ago, create intergenerational art opportunities.
- Next steps group: creating an online way for Bay Area arts orgs to communicate with each other. Also, a physical space.
- East Bay arts orgs attracting audiences and cross promotion groups (which were actually two groups which melded): openly foster a culture of collaboration among arts orgs of the East Bay. Don't be territorial.
- Online media tech tools and how to prioritize them group one: good next step is to share best practices.

- Creating new paradigms for nonprofit orgs group: changing language, 21st century language for fundraising; outreach on Obama campaign model; redefining funding levels to be more comfortable for those in the service area; what does sustainability mean?
- Lobbying Obama for arts policy: reaching out to Barbara Lee and a whole list of orgs. (Did nobody get the memo about saying just ONE thing you talked about?) Arts to no longer be satisfied with crumbs, etc. (Wow, he's listing too many things for me to type.)
- Media group two: big list concept turns into genome concept (Amazon's "If you like this then you'll like ...")
- Arts education group: willing to partner with other agencies to work with Ron Dellums' office; how to integrate arts into core subjects; understand what they're allowing students to miss out on and why this is unacceptable

5:25: We did amazing work today. Tip of the iceberg. (Seriously, though, are there ever next steps to these things?)

Closing with thank yous and ... oo! Next steps. Question answered. We can't have another day where we sit and talk about great ideas and not have any next steps. This is a four-year initiative. There will be many conversations, and there *can* be other activities. Can use these topics as workshop themes.

Closing with thank you and invitation to reception. Thanks to various participants and funders:

Wallace Foundation

The San Francisco Foundation

Grants for the Arts

East Bay Community Foundation

City of Oakland

San Jose Cultural Office

Theater Bay Area

Staffs of Theater Bay Area, The San Francisco Foundation, and Grants for the Arts, who staffed the event

Favianna and Reed who are producing a film about this, Moi, Paul for performance

Sound people and folks at Scottish Rite Temple

Paul McGovern who organized entire event

Okay, I'm off to the reception. Will clean up and add links and comments later tonight.

December 02, 2008 at 11:23 PM in [arts 'n' culture](#), [nonprof](#), [Web/Tech](#), [Weblogs](#) |

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