

Challenge, Change, and Space in Vernacular Cultural Practice

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Revised, February 2009

For inclusion in Tim Edensor, Deborah Leslie, Steve Millington, and Norma Rantisi, Eds., *Spaces of Vernacular Creativity: Rethinking the Cultural Economy*, Routledge, forthcoming, 2009. The author would like to thank her co-authors on various cases summarized in this study: Sam Gilmore, Amanda Johnson, Titus Levy, Andie Martinez, and Marcie Rendon, and acknowledge the support of The McKnight Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Leveraging Investments in Creativity (LINC) and the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs for the field research involved. Thanks to Mary Lou Garza for editorial assistance.

I. Introduction

Around the world, high cultures, packaged cultural products, and vernacular cultures exist cheek by jowl, especially in larger cities. Where colonization, industrialization, immigration, deindustrialization, and urban residential dispersion have disrupted prior settlement patterns, the variety of cultural expressions and practices can be profuse and highly differentiated. Space and place foster or suppress particular traditions, as communities, organizations, and individual artists use cultural expression to preserve and pass on tradition, encourage young people and new arrivals, solve problems, mobilize politically for change, and bridge across cultures. Within vernacular cultural communities, tensions and challenges complicate how artists and communities organize and sustain cultural activities, especially in rapidly changing environments.

Vernacular culture practices encompass a wide range of activities that are distinguished by their expression of community values and their inclusion of many participants, in contrast to the individualized and professionalized creation or reproduction of art or culture by experts detached from a community frame of reference. In Gross's brilliant distinction (1995: 16), they value most highly the inherently abundant abilities in people rather than the inherently scarce (e.g. virtuoso violin-playing). They can also be defined as what they aren't—part of the elite canon of high culture or fine art in their respective societies (e.g., European classical music, Japanese Noh theatre) or conceived, produced and

distributed by commercial mass media (TV, films), though as Jean Burgess argues elsewhere in this volume, elements of vernacular cultures are sometimes taken up in these other two spheres. Although such practices often endure or emerge among groups who are marginalized, vernacular cultural practices need not be the province of the oppressed only. Members of different layers of social strata in urban and rural communities around the world maintain, modify and create new expressive, participatory cultural activities.

Vernacular cultural practices carry with them symbolic functions that integrate and maintain social reality for their participants (Gross, 1995). They are governed by conventions the same way that high art and commercial music and films are (Becker, 1982), but such conventions are less protected by institutions such as universities, funders and large, well-heeled arts producing and presenting organizations that nurture the canon. Groups both inside and outside seek to define vernacular conventions, preserve them in the face of mass commercial culture, and alter them in ways that will adapt them to changing community circumstances. Furthermore, certain groups within the community may develop material stakes in particular versions of vernacular culture and its presentation. These include proprietors of cultural space, and artists who may wish to earn income through their artwork. Vernacular culture may also be divided internally, by class and age especially, with respect to aspirations for practice and innovation.

In capitalist society, artistic and cultural practices are valued by their economic muscle, so that those, like high art and mass commercial productions,

that assemble large budgets, whether of earned or contributed incomes, are considered the most successful. For instance, Americans for the Arts (2002), the major arts advocacy organization in the US, concentrates on demonstrating the economic impact of arts organizations, arts businesses and artists as its central lobbying theme in the quest for public funding. In contrast, vernacular cultural creativity is often organized by individuals and groups who ask little or no economic return, since they are gifting their work to the community or engaging in it as a shared expressive practice. These artists and activities are thus not included in most definitions of the cultural economy that rely on statistics based on occupation or industry (Markusen, Wassall *et al*, 2008). Yet their cultural work is of comparable if not greater significance. Indicators probing the value of cultural practices in communities have been developed by Jackson, Kabwasa-Green, and Herranz (2006).

Space plays an important part in the fostering of and challenges to vernacular culture. Often, vernacular cultures must rely on borrowed spaces for participation and presentation—churches, plazas, community centers, for-profit restaurants, or casinos. If the ownership of and access to these spaces are contested or if the neighborhoods or towns hosting them are changing rapidly, it becomes more difficult to rely on particular spaces and to decorate and stage them in ways that enhance cultural experience. However, many groups have been able to build, claim, and manage space to stabilize and invigorate their own cultures.

This paper explores how space, region, insider/outsider challenges, and complex, dynamic community social structures shape vernacular practice. I begin by emphasizing the centrality of challenge and change, illustrated with historic case of Native American visual art in the US Southwest. I then show, using two California-based Asian-American dance groups, how challenges within the community are accommodated through innovations in traditional art forms. I then explore the creation and role of dedicated space as a way of rooting and providing continuity for vernacular cultures while fueling vitality and innovation, using five cases that differ in their origins, spatial and mission orientation, and organizational and governance structures. I conclude with some tentative comparative inferences and identify important routes for future research.

I. The Challenge of Change in Vernacular Cultural Practice

Most vernacular practices are rooted in evolved or intentional communities. The character of each community changes over time, and its substantive practices may change as well in response to internal innovation or changes in material circumstances or location. On the one hand, vernacular cultures buffer communities from disruptive, often violent, change, confirming identity and guiding their responses. Yet in a communicatively inter-penetrated world, communities of practice are continually exposed to new ideas, art forms, and cultural movements from which they select and reshape their own practices. In addition, entirely new communities of cultural practice may emerge in response to demographic, economic, technological, and/or political disruptions

work. Some of these themes have been explored in excellent in-depth studies by sociologists and anthropologists (Alvarez, 2005; Jackson, Kabwasa-Green, and Herranz, 2006; Peterson 1996; Wali, Severson and Longoni, 2002).

Communities often respond to external challenges to their identities and livelihoods by intensifying and defending their cultural practices, on the one hand, and altering them, out of necessity or a desire to embrace new ideas and opportunities, on the other. Internal challenges also alter vernacular practices, when one group (sometimes in response to external pressures) challenges the leadership or content of received cultural practices. In this section I explore each of these conceptually, illustrating with case studies.

A. External Challenges

Vernacular cultural practices can be challenged in a directly physical, spatial fashion by incursions of others into one's territory. Such a process characterizes the ongoing challenge to Native American cultural and survival in North America on a broad continental scale but also what happens in many urban neighborhoods when an outsider group, higher income whites or an immigrant group, moves in. External challenges can also be non-spatial, such as the penetration of external cultural ideas and forms through television, films and the internet.

Communities respond to these challenges in a number of ways. First, they may invest greater energy in shoring up, codifying, teaching and performing cultural practices to ensure their survival, availability and visibility for their own

members and prohibiting access to or practice of external cultural modes. This may involve the investing of new roles in specialists whose job it is to preserve and enliven cultural forms. There is also the possibility of atrophy in these traditions as the power of external cultural practices divide the community. Second, if a community is poor and small in size, there is the potential for its cultural creativity to become marketable, even “exotic” goods and performances for outsiders. A community’s artists may participate in such markets, but often negotiate their own terms on compensation and on content, including the withholding of sacred practices from the market nexus. Some communities’ cultural practices become the targets of acquisitive outsiders who wish to collect and possess their artifacts and performances and who offer financial patronage in return, often causing traumatic disagreements within the community.

We can explore combinations of these challenges and responses with an overview of the long and complex history of southwestern US Native American interaction with white culture from the mid-19th through 20th centuries (Markusen, Rendon, and Martinez, 2008). Before Spanish and American intrusions and displacement, Native cultural practices were intertwined with material life, in the making pottery, jewelry and weavings that had functional as well as decorative and expressive purposes. But as their land holdings shrank and their exposure to western tools increased, the Pueblos and Navajos began exchanging their pottery, jewelry, and weavings with white traders in return for manufactured goods and staples. This involved, over time, alterations in their work, as traders reflected affluent easterners’ demand for Navajo rugs by favoring particular styles

and introducing vivid commercial dyes from Pennsylvania (Brody, 1976; Kent, 1976; Wade, 1974; Webster, 1996).

Some Native artists moved out of their communities and beyond an exchange relationship into paid work for commercial firms. The Santa Fe railroad and its partner, the Fred Harvey Company, hired potters and weavers to create their works in front of travelers who could then buy the pots and rugs in the hotel's gift shops. Historians debate the extent of exploitation in terms of wages, control over working conditions, and integrity of Indian work (Deitch, 1989; Dilworth, 1996; Moore, 2001). When cars began to displace trains, many Indian potters began to market their work directly to tourists who drove directly to the pueblos (Deitch, 1989).

National cultural elites also challenged Native cultural forms and practices, forcing negotiations that charted a new path for visual artists. In the early 20th century, American anthropologists and elites such as the Rockefellers believed that Indians were disappearing peoples and that their culture and artwork would die with them. In New York and Santa Fe museums, they began to collect and preserve traditional Indian work. A white prairie woman, Dorothy Dunn, set up the Santa Fe school for Indian artists to teach Natives how to paint in the traditional way: flat, pictographic figures untainted by Euro-American innovations in light, shadow, and perspective. While Dunn has been criticized for suppressing artistic creativity, her initiative provided many Native artists a chance to develop their talents, move on to art colleges, and re-discover and use traditional materials and pigments (Berlo and Phillips, 1998; Bouton, 2007).

Eventually, some of her own students became her greatest critics and began to pioneer new forms of Indian artistic expression. Yet they had been acculturated into painting and sculpture, not predominant Native forms, and their sense of purpose for their work had been distanced a community-embedded practice.

By the 1950s, American arts elites shifted their focus away from preserving artifacts and wished to patronize contemporary Native artists, but insisted that the latter leave their traditional ties behind and become fully modern. In a seminal conference in 1957, the Rockefellers and other patrons proposed to create a school for US Indian artists in Santa Fe, the Institute for American Indian Art (IAIA), but only if students fully embraced modernism (Anthes, 2006; Gritton, 2000). However, the Institute's first Director, Cherokee textile artist Lloyd Kiva New, allowed Indian artists to work in any genre with any subject matter (Anthes, 2006). Some used traditional materials (turquoise, leather, clay, beads) to depict modern Native themes, while others employed modern media (paint, print, metal and wood sculpture) to explore traditional Native myths. This broad-minded IAIA ethic nourished generations of Native American artists, including many who became wellknown and most of whom returned to their own regions and communities to work. The fact that management of the Institute remained in Native hands and that only Native teachers were employed made such a stance possible.

By the 1970s, Pueblo, Navajo, Hopi, and other southwestern Indians had developed robust markets for their pottery, weaving, and jewelry, much of it controlled by artists who remain embedded in their communities and urban

neighborhoods. Contemporary visual artists compete in fine art and art fairs with work that reflects Native themes and is diverse in technique and materials.

Casinos commission work from well-known Native American artists or their own tribal members, further diversifying sources of income and opportunities for large-scale work.

This evolutionary path was long and tortuous, with many setbacks. It took place within a larger genocidal context where American Indian policy tried to dispossess Natives of their land and sovereignty and forcibly separated children from their families in boarding schools that forbade speaking their own languages and practicing their spiritual beliefs. Elsewhere in the US, Native American artists do not enjoy comparable patronage nor IAIA-type institutional support. This history demonstrates the challenges to vernacular cultural practice when an oppressed community faces powerful economic and political forces beyond its control, including the introduction of new cultural materials and modes of expression by outsiders who aggressively attempt to alter their cultural practices through force, displacement, or commercial or patronage relationships.

B. Internal Challenges in Asian-American Dance

Despite the tendency to celebrate community and to infer it from the spatial concentration of distinctive practices, most communities struggle with internal divisions over content and control of cultural practice. Traditionalists have a stake, sometimes material, in the preservation and replication of received cultural practices, demanding purity of form and content and resisting innovations

that younger or more worldly members of their communities may espouse. Men may claim privileges over women, or vice versa. Older people may suppress new young art forms, while youth may reject the advice, or participation of their elders. More prosperous community members may develop property rights or honorific stakes in cultural practices and restrict participation by their poorer neighbors or those who are not fully members of the community (including multi-racial or multi-ethnic people). In this section, I explore such internal challenges using Asian immigrant dance forms in California to explore ways that these struggles play out among contemporary communities.

West coast US cities like Los Angeles and San Francisco host Asian immigrants—Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Pacific Islander, and others—who today reside in extensive, loose-knit auto-based neighborhoods. Many bring their dances and music with them, rebuilding temples, churches and gathering spaces in the image of home, as convening spaces for their communities and as ways of teaching their children about their cultures. As their members become third and fourth generation, practitioners preserve and alter traditional dance forms, reintroducing them to communities who have lost touch and adopting them to contemporary realities.

One challenge to vernacular practice is that members of one's own community have changed with their relocation to new places. Two young Filipino-American would-be choreographers Joel and Ava Jacinto, encountered traditional Filipino dance for the first time as undergraduates at UCLA and devoted themselves to studying it in villages in the Philippines for a year. Eager

to bring what they learned back to Los Angeles, they founded their Filipino dance company, Kayamanan Ng Lahi (Treasures of our People). But they found could not easily replicate the intimacy of the village setting – their people no longer lived this life. They thus adapted the dance movements to the more formal, distanced American theatre format. In this effort, they viewed their role as tradition bearers rather than as individual artists hoarding cultural resources for profit and self-aggrandizement. Today, Kayamanan Ng Lahi performs in the region and around the world. They focus on creating, sharing, and maintaining cultural resources in the process of community-building (Markusen *et al*, 2006: 14–15).

Another challenge is that communities' traditional values, such as attitudes towards gender roles or towards competition versus cooperation, may be in flux. In the Bay Area, Chinese-American Wilson Mah and his brothers teach and practice the traditional Chinese Lion Dance in their community, begun as a way to preserve their heritage. Lion Dance was a highly competitive and male-only dance form, accompanied by powerful music and dazzling costumes. As Mah and his brothers succeeded in building groups among young people, they were challenged by the desire of girls to participate. They chose to open Lion Dance up to girls, including creating a special all-women group for young mothers (photo). They also decided to play down the heavily competitive mystique of Lion Dance so that it could build solidarity and connection within the broader Bay Area Chinese community (Markusen *et al*, 2006: 62–3).

Both dance troupes demonstrate the role of artistic leadership in preserving and adapting traditional cultural practices in immigrant communities. Dance is particular is not a remunerative art form—unlike visual art, it is not collected nor does it appreciate in value over time. These dancers/choreographers made compromises in their careers. The Mah brothers accept no compensation for their dance work and support themselves with unrelated jobs. Joel Jacinto is the Director of a large Filipino Social Services agency and does his choreography on the side. They would not be tagged as artists in formal data sources. Their prominence in their respective communities is a product of devotion to traditional practices combined with innovations in participation and form fit for transplanted communities in new environments. Their innovations include adopting a village genre to fit the American stage and an urban immigrant audience, altering the gender definition and ethos of a dance form.

III. The Role of Dedicated Space for Vernacular Culture

Artists and community leaders often create dedicated spaces to nurture vernacular practices, address community issues, interpret their cultures for others, and transcend static conceptions of their own cultures through innovation. Such spaces may convene cultural participants on the basis of common tradition or interest, and/or they may serve a surrounding neighborhood or district. Some may be cross-cultural. They may be run on a commercial, non-profit, or public basis. Often, they are designed and constructed by artists who use their skills to

make the space attractive and engaging while serving artists and communities simultaneously. Many involve non-professional community members in artistic creation. In this section, I use five cases of the construction and operation of vernacular cultural space to explore diverse patterns, including who founded each and for what reasons, who is served, how each is governed and operated, and the spatial relationship between each and its neighborhood and regional constituencies.

Factors influencing the formation and success of dedicated spaces include the following, drawing on inferences from a study of 22 artists' centers in Minnesota and selected case studies from California (Markusen and Johnson, 2006; Markusen *et al*, 2006)). First, there is the design choice between serving a surrounding neighborhood or a more diffused constituency through a broader region. Those spaces that aim at neighborhood constituents are often successful in bringing people into their space, strengthening bonds within the area (sometimes across cultural lines), and preserving traditional cultural capital. However, when the community is poor or not well-organized politically, sustainable funding for operations can be a problem. Such spaces are also often challenged by demographic or economic changes in the neighborhood that alter the character of participants. Inner city churches are an example of the latter. Spaces that aim at a larger more diffuse audience, sometimes along disciplinary lines (visual arts, literature, theatre) and sometimes along ethnic lines (e.g. an Italian or Chinese cultural center in a large metro) will draw higher income

participants who can afford to commute but will have looser and perhaps contentious relationships with the community in which it is embedded.

Second, the organizational format will make a difference as well. Some vernacular spaces are run by city governments, as in San Francisco and Los Angeles' neighborhood arts centers, or receive budget support for renovation, IT or physical space upgrades, as in New York City or Minneapolis. The budgeting and regulatory process is often formidable and can result in heartbreaking delays; but in good times, they are spared these concerns. There is also, for publicly-funded spaces, the problem of content and freedom of expression – public officials may discourage outrageous, violent or overtly sexual presentations, especially if exposed to children. Non-profit organizations, in order to receive the tax benefits for their operations and their donors, must abide by government regulations regarding structure (Boards of Directors), accounting and reporting. Critics argue that in recent years, non-profit arts organizations have become more like commercial businesses, and some community groups have eschewed non-profit status altogether (Markusen *et al*, 2006). Small, community-serving nonprofits have a very difficult time competing with the large, well-heeled “high arts” organizations for wealth patron and foundation funding. For-profit vernacular cultural venues – and these exist, as the cases below show, often devote a portion of their space to sales of goods (CDs, T-shirts, artists' work) and services (performances, food and drink) in order to underwrite their community service, but this leaves them vulnerable to fickle consumers.

Third, vernacular cultural spaces may be operated under very different governance structures. Those taking a public or non-profit form are constrained in this regard, but for-profit or unincorporated spaces (three of the five cases below), considerably creativity can be employed in governance design. Two of these cases involve a leadership team that makes all decisions, a highly effective form of governance but one that relies on benevolent motivations and may pose problems of succession, especially if the principals have a material stake in the space. A third involves an extraordinary experiment at democratic governance without a hierarchical leadership structure. And a fourth case, a non-profit, demonstrates how bottom-up creation of a common cultural space led to an unusually responsive and member-dominated Board structure. After brief profiles of the five spaces, I draw some tentative inferences regarding relative success and the causes thereof.

Café Royale: Space for jazz and African-American history in San Francisco

Jazz, a truly American art form kept outside the canon until recently, remains chiefly composed, performed, and appreciated in commercial spaces. In an unusual variant, San Francisco's Café Royale nurtures musicians and visual artists by providing space for work, rehearsals, and exhibitions as well as performance (Markusen, *et al*, 2006: 44–45). Programming includes a winter history series in which big band jazz innovator Marcus Shelby teaches the evolution of jazz in its African-American context, breaching the conventional gap between audience and performer. The jazz space, in the heart of the city, serves

a city and even regional market, though its regulars are more apt to come from neighborhoods closer in.

Café Royale opened in 2000, when Shelby's business partner Kate Dumbleton purchased it, envisioning a performance space with a non-profit feel where musicians, writers, visual and spoken-word artists could come together and feel a stake in the place. Besides food, drink, and live events, Café Royale offers a large downstairs rehearsal and discussion space and two painter's studios that are bartered for visual arts services. Not just a performance space, it is a place of spontaneous connections where artists end up working together. Shelby's ensemble performs here frequently, as do others.

Café Royale is also designed by partners Shelby and Dumbleton to be an educational center. In 2005, during Black History month, Shelby ran a series of public talks there, playing important recordings and reviewing the history of jazz, traveling from the blues to big band, and bebop. The gatherings explored the historical context, including slavery, and succeeded in drawing a repeat crowd from the broader community.

In part because of the financial stability afforded by the Café, Shelby has been composing new music on African-American themes. His full-length big band composition, *Port Chicago*, commissioned by the Equal Justice Society, explores the racism and politics of a 1944 Bay Area Naval explosion. Recorded on the *Noir* label, it has been performed for diverse audiences throughout the Bay Area as a way of remembering and healing. Shelby subsequently composed and produced a jazz oratorio, *Bound for the Promised Land*, about the

life of Harriet Tubman. These compositions are infused with history and politics, filtered through the language of jazz.

Shelby and Dumbleton envision an ongoing mix of composing and presenting, more projects like Port Chicago and Harriet Tubman, and a continuing role bringing together jazz musicians, artists, and their audiences. They ruminate on performing space and how to extend what happens at Café Royale beyond performance per se—how music can be used to tell stories, teach, discover oneself, and how it works in the community. Café Royale is a pioneer cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural space where the normal, Western distance between performer and audience is diminished and where the larger community is invited to explore the embedding of African-American jazz in its larger historical context.

KAOS Network: Space for young Los Angeles musicians and filmmakers in Los Angeles

Serving the Leimert Park neighborhood of Los Angeles, the heart of the city's African-American community, KAOS Network is a state-of-the-art multi-media center that offers young musicians and filmmakers a place to do their work (Markusen *et al*, 2006: 12). It was founded in 1984 by filmmaker Ben Caldwell, an artist and social activist who made a commitment to live in the neighborhood and chose to use cultural expression as a way of creating futures for neighborhood youth. Currently, KAOS' three buildings host a small store, a screening room, a recording studio, and space for open mic hip hop, yoga

classes, teaching, and other activities. For more than twenty years, it has provided life-changing opportunities for artists of color.

Caldwell began making films as a master's student at UCLA in the 1970s, a member of the Los Angeles School, a group of politically-minded black independent filmmakers. An artistic innovator, he wanted to make films that are more like jazz, more African. His seven films, including *Medea* and *I and I*, are experimental with influences of magical realism. He has also been using film to document the work of Los Angeles African-American artists, including legendary jazz pianist-composer-community-icon Horace Tapscott and the artists associated with the Watts Towers Arts Center.

KAOS Network opened with a digital arts program for youth, teaching video production, television, and film. In 1992, it added Project Blowed, a Thursday night open mic event. To encourage young artists, Caldwell drew on African and especially jazz formats but made space for them to develop their own genres and styles, including hip hop as a widely influential art form.

From the start, KAOS has been a for-profit operation but one where fees are set low enough to ensure accessibility. Costs are covered by staying active and open throughout the week. KAOS' structures were built slowly, out of pennies, selling clothing and CDs as a part of the enterprise. Caldwell believes that working at the grassroots levels would broaden KAOS' distribution system over time. For instance, the long-running Project Blowed event and recordings from it serve as a platform to reach Black audiences globally while simultaneously engaging youth in the neighborhood.

El Centro Cultural de Mexico: Santa Ana cultural convening space for Mexican immigrants

In the mid 1990s in Orange County's Santa Ana, one of the poorest US mid-sized cities, a group of Mexican immigrant women began meeting and hosting community gatherings designed to preserve and pass on their cultural traditions (Sarmiento, 2006). In 2002, they moved into their first of several Santa Ana spaces, offering music, dance, art, English, literacy and theatre classes, and space for community participation. They set challenging principles for their group: they are inclusive of all art forms, from "punks to Jarochicanos" (Sarmiento, 2006: 7), and they operate on a participatory basis, with decisions made in consultation with all rather than by their volunteer leaders. Unusual for immigrant groups, they have chosen to work across borders as well as locally.

El Centro celebrates the culture of the Veracruz region, including Son Jarocho, played on unique stringed and percussive instruments, made in Veracruz, at fandangos, i.e. festivals based on traditional music and dance. El Centro offers dance and music lessons in various styles taught by volunteers. It hosts older women knitting together and young people experimenting with contemporary American music and spoken verse. It cultivates mutual respect: "mothers may volunteer at a rock show, and punks may volunteer at a Son Jarocho presentation" (Sarmiento, 2006: 10). Decisions about programming and space are made by large inter-generational meetings of the whole (see photo), a strategy that gives all members of the community a sense of ownership of El

Centro and raises the visibility of volunteer teachers and administrators. A shared leadership structure decentralizes responsibilities among five volunteer leaders. The structure is sometimes cumbersome, and makes it impossible to contemplate non-profit status, but so far has yielded important benefits in community support and solidarity.

El Centro nurtures relationships between its community and Veracruz, a poor region that has lost many younger residents to the US. It brings teachers from Veracruz to teach Son Jarocho and sends Santa Ana youth with their innovative versions of traditional music to Mexico. It commissions instruments and costumes from Mexico and markets them on a national network in the US, generating income and economic development in Mexican communities.

Transnational exchange of Son Jarocho through El Centro is part of an expanding cultural movement and is not confined to the place of origin of its participants.

El Centro has confronted ongoing challenges, including dismissive attitudes on the part of city government. Santa Ana is a first home for recent Mexican immigrants, especially from Veracruz, and by 2000, Latinos accounted for 76% of the city's population. But the City of Santa Ana has tried to remake itself as a gentrified artist-friendly place, including making way for a University of California Irvine student "Artists' Village" (housing for arts students that include studio space) and hanging banners that state "A Place for Artists" over a newly developed area that is displacing Mexican families. El Centro receives a tiny chunk of Community Development Block grant moneys from the City, covering

only 17% of its operating costs, compared with much higher public spending for most other area cultural organizations. El Centro continues to fight gentrification and to lay its stake to downtown turf.

The Textile Center: Cross-cultural space for women fiber artists in Minnesota

Minneapolis's Textile Center was founded early in this decade to increase the stature of fiber art and act as a gathering, work, and feedback space (Markusen and Johnson, 2006: 63–66). It serves as a home for weavers, sewers, knitters, and other textile artists in Minnesota, almost entirely women. Drawing members from the broad metro region and surrounding states, it is not a neighborhood center but rather a gendered and cross-cultural place, as Hmong weavers, African-American quilters, and Native American beadworkers are increasingly included in the fold.

The Center is the creation of weaver Margaret Miller and three colleagues from the Minnesota Weaver's Guild. In the 1990s, they grew weary of supporting themselves in isolation, unable to find presentation space and audiences. Textiles were not considered an art form, disparaged as women's hobby work. Few museums and galleries would buy or exhibit it. The weavers spent a year traveling the region and meeting with anyone who might be interested: quilters, knitters, weavers, basket makers, textile shop owners, rug makers, jewelry makers, wire artists, and beaders. They discovered an extensive underground community of textile artists meeting in church basements, libraries, VFW halls and homes, including 1700 quilters meeting in a machinists' hall.

The physical space that now hosts the Textile Center took seven years of perseverance to find, fund, and renovate. The founders toured hundreds of buildings and considered five floor plans, to find an affordable space to house looms, quilt layout, a fabric print-making lab and messy dye shop as well as offices, classrooms, and meeting space, a gallery for solo and member shows, a juried gift shop, and the nation's largest textile and fiber art library (books, videos, and magazines). Anyone interested in creating textile and fabric art can belong to the Textile Center for a modest annual fee: membership reached 3000 by 2005. Artists of all ages and abilities choose from a panoply of classes—from embroidery and lace-making to needle arts—that simultaneously offer accomplished textile artists an opportunity to teach and earn income. Fiber artists may apprentice to masters (including fiber artists from all over the world), see the latter at work, hear how they have built their careers, and get feedback on their own work. Every artist member may display her work in one of the Center's eight gallery shows each year.

The Textile Center is governed by a Board that includes one member from each fiber arts organization under its umbrella, as well as accountants, business owners, attorneys, and others with textile experience. Its founders bucked the trend towards non-profit boards comprised only of professionals and wealthy individuals, insisting on active governance by women artists themselves. Although it was founded by white women of European-American origin, it has in recent years reached out to serve women of color in regional communities who practice and innovate in the fibers arts indigenous to their cultures. As a space

dedicated to textile work, the Textile Center is a novel development in vernacular culture, created by women artists as a convening, networking, and service home and building connections among practitioners of a vernacular art form who were previously divided by both ethnicity and distance.

Homewood Studios: Space for visual artists in an inner city neighborhood

In high turnover and insecurity-ridden inner city areas, residents have often fought to take over vacant or tax-forfeited space, enlivening it with cultural activity that will reverse neighborhood decline and offer youth an alternative to drugs and gangs (Markusen and Johnson, 2006: 68–71). An example is Homewood Studios, serving Minneapolis' Near North and Willard-Hay's racially, ethnically, economically, and socially diverse neighborhood where single parent and low-income families predominate and fifty percent of the population is under the age of eighteen. Homewood Studios, a community-based gallery with six artist studio spaces, nurtures neighborhood artists by providing a place for them to create and show their work. The visible presence of working artists in a neighborhood contributes to the vitality, self-image, and connectedness of that community. It also offers opportunities for young people to use art as a way of tackling community issues. Homewood's transformation from a vacant storefront to a transparent, inviting community space animated by artists and artwork led to the expulsion of drug dealers from adjacent vacant properties and attracted new cultural venues.

Long-time Homewood residents George Roberts, a retired high school English teacher and printmaker who desired his own studio space, and his wife Bev, a community organizer, began in 1997 to create Homewood Studios as a way to combat neighborhood housing stock deterioration and drug use by converting a vacant corner building into an art-focused community center. Rejecting the non-profit route, the Roberts took out a mortgage on their home to finance the purchase, to be repaid through studio rentals. From City TIF moneys dedicated to neighborhood councils, their neighbors voted to help fund the building rehab effort. Over the five years that it took to complete the building, the Roberts identified over a hundred artists in the neighborhood who could either rent space or animate it with exhibitions, projects, and activities.

Homewood's gallery and studio space supports emerging artists, who must be neighborhood residents, and provides them a stepping-stone to wider audiences and evolving careers. In its gathering and workspaces, artists reap advice on their work and talk with other artists about career challenges. Homewood Studios also gives them the tools to reach out into the community. In a neighborhood where many young people are not making good choices about education and career, Homewood uses the arts as a way of helping them identify and choose among options, including becoming artists themselves.

Homewood Studios has had an important impact on internal and external perceptions of the neighborhood. The gallery shows not only expose the work of neighborhood artists to a much larger audience, but exhibit the positive qualities of the neighborhood to visitors, demonstrating, in the words of one of its artists,

that “violence isn’t the only thing here.” As the new, non-drug anchor for the local commercial strip, Homewood has created a safer environment for the community, demonstrating how a long history of turf issues and racial divides can be overcome by providing space for latent cultural practices. Its unique and low budget, non-hierarchical structure offers a viable model for smaller-scale artistic space in neighborhoods that might otherwise have nothing. It demonstrates that a supportive arts community, for both artists and residents, can thrive in a difficult and balkanized neighborhood while serving as a seedbed for improvements in the immediate built environment, both commercially and residentially.

These cases, all artist-initiated, exhibit striking variations in the design, creation, and operation of vernacular cultural spaces for diverse communities. In each, an individual artist, an artists/non-artist team or groups of artists saw an opportunity to further their own work while serving a broader constituency, devoting considerable amounts of time and ingenuity (and sometimes their own financial resources) to the effort. Not all vernacular spaces are initiated by artists, but most have close partnerships with key cultural actors. Overall, the managers of vernacular arts spaces and the artists they serve emphasize the significance of dedicated space. Cultural organizations that operate out of an office that does not act as a convening space have a difficult time winning loyalty from those they serve and nurturing the myriad connections and shared experiences that are possible when a space offers and harbors spontaneous contacts among cultural workers and community members on a recurring basis. The preciousness of

space is especially mentioned by organizations that experience or fear displacement or loss of their quarters.

Although the research underpinning this review of space has not been broad enough to draw definitive inferences about spatial constituencies, organizational form or governance structures, some suggestive conclusions can be offered. Those spaces that are primarily oriented to a neighborhood or local constituency enjoy greater ease at convening participants and encouraging lasting connections among them. This does not prevent them from reaching out more broadly, as KAOS' international broadcasts, Homewood Studio's service to youth and artists in the surrounding metro, and El Centro Cultural's strong ties to Veracruz demonstrate. The more regionally oriented spaces - Café Royale and the Textile Center of those showcased here – face less certain patronage and even the possibility that competitors in suburban areas may begin to compete with their offerings. More specialized art forms or more dispersed constituencies (e.g. ethnic groups that are scattered around a metro region) may, however, be better served by a regional focus.

The case studies and others in the larger research efforts demonstrate that the organizational differences between non-profit, commercial and unincorporated (or not not-for-profit) formats shape prospects, but no one form is clearly preferable. Each offers tradeoffs among forms of financial security and subsidies, flexibility in decision-making, responsiveness to constituents, and (in the case of the public sector and vis-à-vis public service missions of non-profits) freedom of artistic content. In the US, the rather unique non-profit form of space

provision offers considerable financial advantages in tax forgiveness and deductibility of donations by patrons, but imposes heavy accounting burdens and an often complicated governance structure that diverts leadership attention from service to members or community. Many youthful space creators in recent years, observing the rigidity, huge staff costs and sometimes mediocre results of non-profit cultural groups, have decided to go the for-profit or simply unincorporated route.

With respect to governance, public and non-profit space are subject to constraints on decision-making embedded in political and legal structures. Even with these, there are many degrees of freedom in decision-making, as the Textile Center's unusual member group Board presence demonstrates. The two spaces run on a commercial basis (Café Royale and KAOS) and a third unincorporated space, Homewood Studios, illustrate the range of flexibility and initiative accorded their founder-managers, all of whom operate as benevolent executives and whose impact is a function of his/her deeply held personal values and commitment to community. They demonstrate that you do not have to become a non-profit to make substantial contributions in multiple ways to a community. Each does, however, face succession problems in the future, which may also involve ownership questions regarding the space itself. Where fully unincorporated, cultural groups operating spaces like El Centro Cultural are free to experiment with governance, including participatory decision-making.

Conclusion

Vernacular cultural practices are continually challenged and changing. Their development is more diverse than in high culture, since they lack prescribed organizational formats and long-standing public and elite patronage. Artist and community group initiative and leadership has been central to preservation and innovation, as the cases reviewed here have shown. Taken together, the cases show the purposes of practicing and housing vernacular culture: preserve tradition and teach it, build confidence among community members (especially youth and women), address politic issues, and bridge cultures and regions.

External challenges include urban and rural demographic change that can vary from genocidal forced migration and dispossession, as in the case of Native Americans, to the depopulation of Appalachia through coal and agricultural decline, to the growing affluence and suburban dispersal of immigrant populations. Internal challenges include tensions over preserving traditional forms versus innovations that often incorporate elements of external cultures or new technologies or materials, how to alter perceived inequalities in rights to participate in one's own cultural practice (along age or gender lines, for instance), whether to serve only the current community or to encompass outsiders, and how to deal with the needs of some artists for income versus the historic practice of culture as a volunteer participatory activity, as gifting.

As vernacular cultures evolve, they confront content and organizational challenges. These tensions deserve greater research attention. One dimension involves how the search for space, funding, and support from public, nonprofit,

and commercial sectors alters cultural practice. Funders have norms and performance criteria they bring to bear. The struggle over control of 20th century Native American visual art demonstrates a long process of encounter and negotiation that altered Native painting and sculpture, disembedding artistic practice from community settings and professionalizing artists, but in ways that offered Indian artists continued freedom to choose media and themes and to address issues of their own community. Does this trajectory also hold for other vernacular practices under pressure?

Second, what happens when vernacular cultural creations become commodities or collectors' material and possessed by museums and other outsiders, as in visual art, or are copyrighted, produced and distributed by others? Nineteenth century Navajo rugmakers altered their patterns to suit the preferences of remote Eastern buyers. Ojibwe communities have fought for years for the return of their sacred scrolls from US museums and collectors, finally winning Congressional law requiring all public institutions (but not private owners) to return such materials (Oakes, 2006). Native historical figures like Pocahontas and Sacajawea have become known through non-Native writing and film, often gross distortions of their people and own lives. There are good critical studies of many instances of such alienation and appropriation but almost no adequate comparisons across vernacular cultures.

Third, how can vernacular communities deal with tricky issues of artistic freedom and youthful artists' penchant for critique and introduction of external artistic modes when the targets are venerable cultural practices? El Centro

Cultural, through its extraordinary consultative process, has developed an explicit ethic of respect for both old and new expressions through face-to-face listening and volunteer time commitments to support of artistic practice across age barriers and varying degrees of assimilation. The Textile Center, due to its inclusive constituency-building and member group seats on its Board, also resists the development of fiber art hierarchies. Are these exceptions? In contemporary Native communities, struggles over the use of sacred texts, drum music, and artifacts like stone pipes, dreamcatchers and eagle feathers are often vociferous and judgemental. In many other ethnic art forms – Japanese Butoh dance, for instance – founders and purists advocates reject experimental forms that venture beyond the evolved set forms.

Vernacular culture practices have received very little attention from contemporary cultural policymakers and developers of urban space – El Centro Cultural's struggle for respect from its City Council is a powerful example. This is changing in some US cities, like Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and Minneapolis, mainly because of communities' self-organization and demands for a share of public resources. Research work exploring causality and outcomes has tended to take the form of individual case studies. Comparative work is daunting – time-consuming and expensive in terms of resources. The Markusen and Johnson (2006) comparative study of 22 Minnesota artists' centers took two years and \$55,000 to complete. "Studies of studies," where a researcher reads through many case studies and summarizes the insights, would be an alternative. Unfortunately, many of the studies of vernacular cultural

organizations/spaces are quite uncritical, while critical studies of vernacular expression and content do not address material or organizational aspects. Better research would help communities articulate their needs and place them squarely in the middle of the policy table.

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