

Challenge, Change, and Space in Vernacular Cultural Practice

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I. Introduction

Around the world, high cultures 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 cultural practice encompasses a wide range of activities defined chiefly by 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).

My central argument is that in vernacular cultural practice, there exist fewer and more fragile conventions (Becker, 1982) about cultural content. Groups both inside and outside seek to define these 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 themselves 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.

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 cases of Native American visual art and *Música Popular Brasileira* (MPB). I then show, via three recent California-based Asian-American dance groups, how challenge is accommodated by making adjustments in traditional art forms. In the following section, I explore the creation of dedicated space as a way of rooting and providing continuity, using five cases that differ in their origins, spatial and mission orientation, and governance structures. In each, the first work cited is a more extensive treatment.

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 by sociologists and anthropologists (Alvarez, 2005; Jackson, Kabwasa-Green, and Herranz, 2006; Peterson 1996; Wali, Severson and Longoni, 2002).

In this first section, I use two cases to illustrate: Native American visual art and craftwork in the US southwest from the 19th to late 20th century, and the emergence of several distinctive Brazilian musical forms over the same period. In both, I explore broader historic forces at work and the way that cultural actors defend and modify their own vernacular practices (Markusen, 2004).

Native American artists negotiate a century of challenge

Southwestern US Native American culture demonstrates the complexity of vernacular cultural persistence and change over time (Markusen, Rendon, and

Martinez, 2008). As early as the mid 19th century, Pueblo and Navajo tribes in New Mexico began to trade their pottery, jewelry, and weavings to white traders in return for manufactured goods and staples. Over time, 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). Markets for these goods accelerated when the Santa Fe railroad and its partner, the Fred Harvey Company, hired potters and weavers to make their works in front of travelers who then made purchases in hotel 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 potters began to market their work directly to tourists driving to their pueblos (Deitch, 1989).

In the early 20th century, American anthropologists and elites such as the Rockefellers believed that Indians were a dying people and that their culture and artwork 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 a 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.

By the 1950s, American arts elites shifted their focus away from preserving artifacts and insisted that Native artists 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). This broad-minded IAIA ethic nourished generations of Native American artists, including many who became well-known. Some use traditional materials (turquoise, leather, clay, beads) to depict modern Native themes, while others use modern media (paint, print, metal and wood sculpture) to explore traditional Native myths.

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. 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 spiritual beliefs. Elsewhere in the US, Native American artists do not enjoy comparable patronage nor IAIA-type institutional support. This history demonstrates the challenges for 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.

Brazilian regional musicians create *Música Popular Brasileira* (MPB)

New vernacular practices sometimes emerge from existing communities as a response to crisis and/or dramatic changes in ideology, technology, or social mores. In the 1960s, in the US and Brazil, radically new musical forms emerged in response to political repression (the Vietnam War, the Brazilian military dictatorship), the sexual revolution, and the electric guitar. These new musical forms fused elements of older musics—folk, jazz, rock and roll—and reflected age, race, and class cleavages as well. In Brazil, the tropicalista movement led by Bahians Gilberto Gil, Caetano Veloso, Maria Bethania, Gal Costa, and others built on elements of Afro-Brazilian samba, itself a uniquely Brazilian vernacular practice organized around *Carneval* (Guillermo-Prieto, 1991; Tinhorao, 1990), and bossa nova, a sophisticated, jazzy, intellectual offshoot of samba that was

embraced principally by the Brazilian upper classes, adding powerful and poetic lyrics critiquing Brazilian society and politics (Perrone, 1993).

These Música Popular Brasileira (MPB) musicians also broke with the long-time Communist left leadership, still closely allied with the USSR, and the latter's insistence that only folk protest music could serve as a successful response to the right-wing takeover. They embraced electric guitars and elements of pop culture in a highly reflective style that probed all aspects of Brazilian life and paid homage to the great Brazilian poets, folk musicians like Luiz Gonzaga, and bossa nova innovators like Joao Gilberto (Veloso, 2002). Their music, and that of Minas Gerais' Milton Nascimento and his Club Esquina group, constituted a potent challenge to the Brazilian dictatorship, resulting in their imprisonment and exile. But its widespread availability and appeal to educated youth, in particular, played a major role in holding in check the dictatorship and inspired a generation of younger people to work to change their country. Although its implicit anti-Communist stance, its embracing of electric instruments, and its cerebral lyrics and unconventional sounds narrowed its appeal among the organized working class, older people and the poor, MPB has had, as a body of work, an enduring impact on Brazilian music and continues to enjoy an international market (Perrone and Dunn, 2001)

Both these cases demonstrate the complexity of vernacular practice. In each, particular regional environments and traditions (the US southwest, the Brazilian states of Bahia and Minas) shaped emerging cultural content, along with new and borrowed techniques, materials, and sensibilities. These historic

cases underscore the significance of external challenges, including market forces, cultural imperialism, state violence, and technological change, showing how vernacular practitioners responded with creativity and resistance.

II. 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, often material, sometimes 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. In this section, I use several cases from Asian immigration dance experience in the US 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 dance and music with them, rebuilding temples, churches and gathering spaces in the image of home. As their members become third and

fourth generation, cultural practitioners preserve and alter traditional dance forms, reintroducing them to communities who have lost touch and adopting them to new challenges. Several dancer/choreographers illustrate these tensions.

Los Angeles' Filipino dance company, *Kayamanan Ng Lahi* (Treasures of our People) was founded by choreographers Joel and Ava Jacinto. As UCLA undergrads, the two encountered Filipino dance forms for the first time and spent a year in the Philippines to study dance in traditional villages. Eager to bring these back to Los Angeles, they could not easily replicate the intimacy of the village setting and began to adapt the movements to the more formal, distanced American theatre format. Today, their Filipino dance troupe performs in the region and around the world. They view their roles as artists as tradition bearers rather than hoarding cultural resources for profit and self-aggrandizement, and they focus on creating, sharing, and maintaining cultural resources in the process of community-building (Markusen *et al*, 2006: 14–15).

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. 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).

Patrick Makuakāne, Director of the Hawaiian dance company, Nā Lei Hulu I Ka Wēkiu, teaches traditional hula to members of the Bay Area California Hawaiian community and to non-Hawaiians interested in the art form.

Makuakāne fell in love with hula in his Honolulu grade school, seeing in the dance a way to comprehend his genealogy, history, ancestors, environmental issues, and social issues. During a resurgence of interest in tribal Hawaiian culture in the 1970s, all-male Hawaiian troupes became very popular. To learn the traditional dance forms, the ancient kahiko and the more modern auana, Makuakāne studied with two hula masters for more than ten years. But in California, he uses his knowledge to serve anyone interested in learning about Hawaiian dance, not just Hawaiians, preserving tradition but also focusing on innovation and skill (Markusen *et al*, 2006: 47).

All three 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 appreciates in value over time. These dancers have had to make compromises in their careers. 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. 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, and opening up to participants outside of the traditional ethnicity.

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. 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.

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.

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.

In 2005, during Black History month, Shelby began a series of jazz talks at Café Royale, playing important recordings and reviewing the history of jazz: early forms of the blues, big band, and bebop. The gatherings explored the historical context, including slavery, and succeeded in drawing the community in.

In part because of the financial stability afforded by the Café, Shelby has been composing new music on African-American themes. His big band work *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 in the Bay Area as a way of remembering and healing. Shelby subsequently worked on a jazz oratorio 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, 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 where fees were set low enough to ensure accessibility. Costs were 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 believed 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: Cultural convening space for Mexican immigrants

In the 1990s, in Santa Ana, California, in Orange County, one of the poorest mid-sized cities in the US, 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 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 volunteer leaders. Unusual for immigrant groups, they have chosen to work across borders as well as locally.

El Centro celebrates the instruments, music, and dance of the Veracruz region, including Son Jarocho, played with special stringed and percussive instruments made in Veracruz and the heart of fandangos, 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 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.

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, helping generate 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 funding shares for most other area cultural organizations. Recently, however, the owner of a

vacant theatre space has volunteered to let El Centro use and animate it. 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 2001 in an older Minneapolis neighborhood, women artists opened the Textile Center, designed to increase the stature of textiles in the art world 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, and 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 beadworkers. 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 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 in 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, see the latter at work, hear how they have built their careers, and get feedback on their own work, including with visiting textile artists from all over the world. 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 resulted in 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 funds 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. It 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 exhibits 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 together exhibit striking variations in the design, creation, and operation of vernacular cultural spaces for diverse communities. In each, individual artists or groups of artists saw an opportunity to further their own work while serving a broader constituency, devoting considerable amounts of time and ingenuity to the effort. Some are highly localized—KAOS Network and Homewood Studios serve neighborhoods, while others address artists and cultural audiences in broader regions (Café Royale, El Centro Cultural, and The Textile Center). Some are organized for profit (Café Royale and KAOS Network), while others are non-profit (The Textile Center) and others operate outside of either of these organizational forms (El Centro Cultural and Homewood Studios). Each has a relatively unique governance structure and mission, tailored to the needs of its founders and constituents.

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 affluence and suburban dispersal of immigrant populations. Internal challenges include tensions over preserving traditional formats versus innovations that are often informed by external cultures, 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.

Many of these tensions deserve greater attention in future research. And as vernacular cultures evolve, they confront further organizational challenges. How does the search for space, funding, and support from public, nonprofit, and commercial sectors alter cultural practices? What happens when ethnic visual

art becomes collectors' material and possessed by museums and outsiders?

How can communities deal with tricky issues of artistic freedom and youthful

artists' penchant for critique when the targets are venerable cultural practices?

Vernacular culture practices have received very little attention from contemporary

cultural policymakers and developers of urban space. Better research will help

communities articulate their needs and place them squarely in the middle of the

policy table.

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