



DIGITAL FUTURES

CONVERSATIONS
ON ARTS, CULTURE,
TECHNOLOGY AND
RESILIENCE

MA Creative & Cultural Entrepreneurship 2011-2012, MC71104A
Candidate # 33136361



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and Resilience

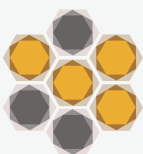
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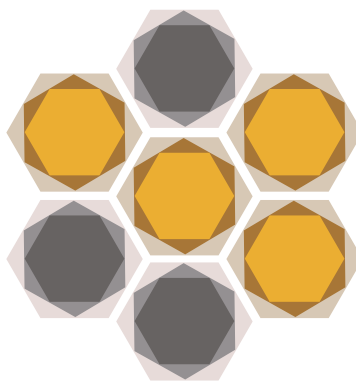
CULTURE HIVE:

The Culture Hive's mission is to empower meaningful, imaginative, and cutting edge creative and cultural enterprise, to fortify the dynamism and diversity of the local ecosystem, to cultivate stewardship of the arts and culture sector and to engender greater social wealth. Our values include reciprocity, innovation, curiosity, resilience, creativity and flexibility.

A major aspect of our work is thought leadership. Our think tank work will offer policy recommendations in support of small and medium scale creative and cultural entrepreneurs and arts organizations to government, foundations, service organizations, angel investors and other interested parties through research projects, convenings, white papers, video essays and blog postings.

Digital Futures is our first project.

culturehive.



FORWARD:

I have been on a journey of formalized curiosity, to nick a phrase from the African American anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, for the last year. Attending graduate school, after a long stint working in the real world, has certainly refreshed me. Learning as a vocation, and not guiltily in my off time, has given me the freedom to let my curiosity run free. This thoughtbook has allowed me to delve into contemporary theory on networks, the differences between bridging and bonding capital, the long tail theory and the experience economy. The real question has been, how are we using new tools to retrieve important behaviours from the past like creating and sharing connections meaningful connections and ideas.

I am certainly not a technologist or a tech savvy millennial but thinking about technology and its relationship to social capital and resilience has been empowering. The interviews have presented a myriad of new angles on textbook theories and endowed me with a well-rounded view of digitization, which is a large and complicated issue. I also love connecting to people I admire and am always delighted when people indulge me, an earnest postgraduate student, in conversation.

In this space I've tried to engage the best thinkers, leaders, practitioners, artists and policymakers in conversation around meaningful shifts related to arts, culture and enterprise. These conversations have also revealed our interconnected nature and where our interests converge and diverge.

It's not just about hardware and software and prototyping. At the end of the day what matters is meaning, creativity and the generation of social wealth. If any of the thoughts contained here inspire more thinking about how arts and culture work is shifting in the digital age, how we are supporting or detracting from the resilience of the arts and culture sector and what pushing the boundaries may look like I will be pleased.

Ebony McKinney



Jaime Austin, Curator and Director of Programmes for Zer01: The Art & Technology Network
Carly Frey, Programme Manager, Creative & Cultural Economy Programme, The British Council
Celine Gagnon, Senior Development Manager, Battersea Arts Centre
Rohan Gunatillake, Innovation Lead, Edinburgh Festivals Innovation Lab
Peter Higgin, Enrichment Director, PunchDrunk Theatre
Ingrid Kopp, Director, Digital Initiatives, Tribeca Film Institute
John Leanos, New Media Artist, Assistant Professor of Social Documentation and 2012 Guggenheim Fellow
Dan McQuillan, Independent Digital Innovator and Co-founder of Social Innovation Camp
Josette Melchor, Executive Director and Founder, Gray Area Foundation for the Arts
David Sabel, Head of Digital, The Royal National Theatre
Nate Shedroff, Director, MBA in Design Strategy, California College of the Arts
Tim Svenious, Producer, Interactive Education Technologies, SF MoMA Josette Melchor, Executive Director and

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-- CARLY FREY

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CARLY FREY

Programme Manager, Creative & Cultural Economy Programme, The British Council

Tell me about your work at The British Council?

The Creative Economy team is part of the arts group at The British Council. The British Council delivers opportunities for people of both the UK and other countries worldwide to grow and build trust and different forms of relationships and new ways of working. We can call that cultural relations.

Within arts you have several art form teams, visual arts, architecture, design, fashion, creative economy, film and media and literature. So the creative economy obviously intersects all of those art forms and has its own identity within The British Council with a role really to develop and nurture creative economies around the world in developed or developing nations and take the best practice or policy from the UK's experience and look at how lessons can be learned through the creative economy's own trajectory and narrative over the last 10 years or more, as well as how do we take learning from overseas, particularly in emerging markets where some of the progression has been leapfrogging our own developments, particularly in digital. So where the entire African continent is missing the landline what is happening in mobile is really interesting for us and how that impacts creative sectors and policy and regulation of such is our bread and butter.

Moving along from policy the other main thing we do and have done more historically is skills delivery and that's really just been about capacity building within the creative sectors. Looking at creative entrepreneurship, what creates enabling environments for creative entrepreneurs and how we promote networks and opportunities to access intelligence from either local colleagues or overseas networks.

We often find creatives going to business schools in areas where the creative economy has not been valued highly enough to have designated career paths or university opportunities. This is directly based on some of the energy and thinking behind Culture Shift. So we decided to pilot in Cairo, the only non-sub saharan African city, Nairobi, Johannesburg and Lagos.

We did this over a very ridiculously intense short period of time at the end of the financial year, just between March and April 2011. We wanted to look at a UK model, tweak it, make it fit a purpose and build it from the ground up in those 4 cities differently if need be.

So we looked at Social Innovation Camp. The SI camp approach was our departure point and we looked at what we could add or embellish or flesh out for creatives and depending on what city the general approach was to recruit based on their place in the creative sector. We wanted them to draw on key challenges they were facing in their work through the application process to have some idea what the salient issues were and try to group some themes beforehand.

Essentially what happened was a 3-day model where half the room was creative types and half were more digital developers, designers, coders, people who actually build stuff. The idea was to address some of the challenges the creative entrepreneurs or representatives from other cultural organizations or other types of artists across the spectrum of arts forms and come up with potential digital solution or ways of collaborating with the digital community that they might not have had before. It's really about relationship brokerage, which is our main output, as opposed to an actual working prototype at the end of 48 hours, although some of them did, which is very exciting.

But on top of that we added a layer of mentorship on the model, where there was locally based mentors in either business management, or creative consultancy, or an entertainment lawyer or a leadership professional, as well as the UK digital mentors, and designers.

Were the digital participants from the UK?

The participants were local. The only UK elements were the mentors that came out for the digital piece and the investors, who on the third day sat on a panel with other local investors. Teams were able to pitch for 5 minutes. There are a lot of flaws in that approach and it has its purpose, but its really quite difficult to ascertain the kinds of solutions you come up with in a 48 hours.

We found that a lot of the ideas were not that new to us, but certainly don't exist there so whether we judge on innovation (but) by who's concept? One was an ebay for South Africa. It doesn't exist there in the same way, so its great if its innovative, but the other challenge was that a lot of the teams were coming up with either quite commercially viable ideas or products versus those that had more of a social impact emphasis. More of a something you'd have an NGO or charity element around, that's not necessarily going to make a lot of money, but they can garner partnerships that could be viable in different ways.

So it's quite difficult to have a panel judging slightly different aims and so we're kind of looking at that now. The difficulty with us with such limited capacity is always the follow up. How do we track the outcomes of these teams?

How do you judge success?

For the pilot, we really just wanted to see what kinds of relationships were being formed, what kind of links we could create between the creatives and digital sector in cities where the challenges in working for either are quite huge



CARLY FREY, cont.

Part of our objective is to encourage private sector engagement in our work and that's one way of doing it. The way that we found investors, the way that the teams are thinking about industry and partnerships and financial viability and how to sustain momentum, and where their next funding is coming from, all of that was part of the thinking, the paradigm which doesn't always occur in art form specific engagement or skill delivery. This can be a different starting point.

What do participants of Culture Shift value most?

We did some assessment and evaluation and it sounded like, as we hoped, the opportunity to build their network, have access to quite high profile investors from the UK, knowing more about their own local sector and various cutting edge stuff.

And I think the opportunity to kind of stay engaged with the British Council and be alumna of something is a drawing factor that they were remarking on as well.

And I think some were genuinely excited about the product that they came up with and wanted to move that forward. So those are the main things.

In terms of relationships, what do you think the digital community brings to the creative community?

So just literally looking at tools and mechanisms in new ways. It can be as simple as someone from the National Museum of Nairobi not knowing that certain web platforms or apps or online opportunities can benefit audience outreach or engagement strategies or anything like that. New inspirations are laid.

Or it could be the other way around. A digital designer or developer who is possibly from a more corporate experience of using IT in a very specific way can have a mind expansion of some sort and considers all sorts of new possibilities, what they can do with their skill, which is an extremely highly valuable commodity in this day and age and see there are other opportunities to work beyond potentially a very siloed way of thinking about it.

In the case of Lago's Culture Shift we decided to do a more narrow theme to begin with instead of taking challenges from the applications and forming more general approaches. Our arts manager in the Lagos office wanted to focus on festivals.

There's a huge festival culture all over Nigeria from cultural heritage festivals to music festivals to film and literature, ect. On the creative side was all festival managers or directors or arts admin people and then the digital coders and what not and that was interesting because some of the products were usable immediately and you could see this great uptake of what came out of it.

So I think it's about trying to influence these linkages. That's our interesting bit or what we've found regarding creative digital alliances in various forms. What can happen overseas for the benefit of the sector.

Do you think it's important for participants to come into the process with a certain mindset or under certain circumstances?

Often you'll find the people who are able to make it from the Central City location or who can take time off are often of a certain social enclave or are the key movers and shakers who

are able to independently finance. But what we try to do is make sure the balance is there in some way or another by building support from different communities and organizations, but it is an ongoing issue.

What are your thoughts on wealth, particularly social wealth?

It's such an important aspect - understanding and value placement on a knowledge economy beyond just the economic growth. That's our challenge really in working with the array of partners that we do because usually the impetus at least from a ministerial perspective is the finance.

Do you think something like this would work in the West or the UK or do you think it works best where the market is not as crowded?

Yeah, there are so many different models of it out here right now. I mean particularly in the UK in fact one of the next things we want to do is bring a roundtable together of all of the people that do this in some way or shape or form like Social Innovation Camp, Culture Hack, Snook design group and IDEO.

And I think it's just a trendy thing and it's a quick buzz. But it does have its real use. I'm really interested in what Social Innovation camp has done around bringing young people in, particularly if there is not a financial reward, if you don't make it as structured like a competition, you're obviously going to be attracting more of the emerging players rather than the established. They just did something with the NHS and young people looking at health messaging and I think that's fantastic.

Are there areas of the programme that you'd like to strengthen or understand more thoroughly?

We're also trying to see how people define themselves in the sector as well. Are digital technologists or coders or builders or designers part of the creative fabric of an ecosystem? Or not?

What is creative content? And what is digital technology? Where do they diverge? I mean if you're someone who can create a video game, but didn't have creative control in that process, are you a creative practitioner? It depends who you ask. And does it matter? Does it matter what you are besides what you consider yourself?

And do you see a skill set malleable enough to impact different communities? That's only going to further your career somehow, whether it goes through phases or not.

I think the more a government is aware of a sector, and obviously if you're digital you're more visible, that's only going to help make the case and that's what I spend a lot of my time doing in policy. So if we can show movement in and the intersection of arts and business and technology and development that's the meat of our goal ultimately.



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I think in the symbolic arena, the consciousness arena that art has the potential to transform the mind. That's the arena that I work in. That's the motivating factor of all of the work, which is how we can create a social shift. Not to be overly ambitious because I know that these things are complex and it happens with not only one person's effort or even a few people's effort. It happens collectively.

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-- JOHN LEANOS

JOHN LEANOS

New Media Artist, Assistant Professor
of Social Documentation
2012 Guggenheim Fellow

What are you working on now?

I'm working on an animation documentary on the Southwest borderlands. I'm working on a series of them. Right now I'm in production for a piece on the Pueblo Revolt. It's a 17th century revolutionary movement by the indigenous people of New Mexico where they expelled 99% of the Spanish and it's considered by some the first American revolution because it happens the same time that the colonies are being settled.

It seems that you use technology a good amount in your work. The kind of traditionally inspired work that you're doing is not always connected to the digital realm so how do you see that connection? Do you think it's very relevant in the 21st century to bring these ideas and tools together?

Yes certainly.

I think my practice is kind of against the avant-garde which has saturated all of art consciousness which means to break with the past and forge a new future. Anything that has been done has been done. Look for the fresh, the new.

So I think digital arts has also been influenced by that ideology really. It's kind of like 'oh narrative storytelling, linear storytelling is all out' and they're all of these kind of notions that we have to create some kind of new form of communication through these new tools and for me it becomes obtuse and borderline elitist and not really understandable.

So for me I'm always looking to look back and move forward as a tactic.

So you can look at the digital murals that I did at Galeria. I established that programme with Carolina. So its using muralist aesthetics right and muralist issues and the tradition of mural making from Mexico and Chicano mural making updated using digital technologies. But also at the same time being kind of informed by these advertising strategies like the billboard.

And animation has been around for almost 100 years or longer. Kind of using the digital tools that we have to tell these old stories, document these old stories.

So that is the approach that I take, looking back and gazing forward and trying to figure out how we can create work with these new technologies, but not necessarily throwing out the essence of communication art and pedagogy.

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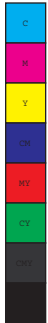
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So is it about reaching new audiences too? Younger audiences? Or thinking of The Long Tail, more wide spread audiences or increasing social capital?

Well certainly it's about that, but it's not only about that.

So yes it is a tactic of reaching new audiences, young Latino and indigenous folk using an aesthetic and also increasing access where we can download these things on our phones and our many screens. So accessing the various screens is important, but at the same time isn't only about that.



JOHN LEANOS , cont.

What happens with the hegemony of thinking about audience and social media and new technologies is that what we get is an obsession with outreach and promote, promote, promote, promote. Get the biggest audience that you can without considering the ethical and cultural transgressions that someone may encounter with such an ideology.

Now kind of being this emerging filmmaker it's a little bit different than the art world, but it is kind of the same kind of ideologies like use every tool that you can to get the word out.

And I think that there are sensitive issues around that. It's almost like a colonial mindset. It's an advertising mindset as well. We're going to create the most possible ways of accessibility so that you will buy in. But I think it really ignores a kind of relational aspect that artwork can have and also ignores the transformative potential of outreach.

So there's a certain kind of fast paced, over excited exuberant, 'get your shit out there' attitude, by any means necessary and that's a disturbing trend because it's kind of skipping over certain steps that I think are necessary for what we're talking about with social transformation, issues of ethics and representation.

So in your mind for social transformation is it more about connection, maybe even interactivity and meaningful content, which may be harder to come by in this fast capitalism?

Yes definitely, I want to connect to people. I want to tell stories that are important to people but also to excite and to be provocative. That is my role as a clown, as a trickster, as a provocateur. It is to bring things up that are taboo with the ultimate goal of creating some kind of dialogue or discourse that goes in between people and I think the technologies are accessible to us. So we can create animation, we can create film, we can put up videos. The potential is great. However we have to consider the embedded ideologies that are in these technologies and that's really something that's important.

Can you talk about that a little, the embedded ideologies?

Yes, there are definite class issues, definite money issues. There are environmental impacts. You look at the ideologies of isolated individualism, being attached to our screens with the idea that we're communicating, but it's also separating us.

Also, ideas of globalisation are embedded in technology. That there is an underclass that serves another level of overclass, so that we can afford these technologies and benefits as well. The environmental impact of superfund sites. It goes on and on.

So when the question comes up 'can you destroy the masters house with his own tools' or can you use digital technologies to incite critical artwork I think what we're left with is yes, but you have to be highly aware of these misses in the technology whether they be class, racial or gender biases.

Can you talk a bit about your own work and in what ways you are provocative in content and in who you are connecting to?

The pueblo revolt is the one that I'm working on right now and it's a story that has been well documented and that everyone knows about within the border of New Mexico.

I'm talking about any gringo, any Hispano, any native folk. It's part of their local living history, but once you move out of that state nobody knows about it.

It's just kind of this ignored moment in history. It also carries a lot of lessons in how we can incite change here and now. It's also a stake in the legacy of borderlands conflict.

And it's also a sacred story to the pueblo Indians and so for me as an outsider coming in to tell this story it's very tenuous. There are a lot of issues of representation, of getting it right. There are also a lot of issues that the people have held close to themselves. The oral histories are not out there. The Spanish side is well documented, but the indigenous side is not.

So those are kind of the provocative issues and I'm looking at how I can tell this story correctly and right in a way that connects with the internal communities, and without pissing off half the state because it's a Pandora's box really to open up this story in New Mexico, especially as an outsider.

To the communities outside of that it seems to me that the challenge really is in getting people to understand that this is a living history. That because of these struggles, 300 and some years later people still have autonomy and the pueblos have autonomy. They have their own governors. The richness of the artwork there is really amazing. The pueblos are not desperate like other reservations.

So that's provocative in a lot of ways but the danger for me is doing a piece that fits within the niche of the nice little History Channel. So I'm taking great strides not to do that and to bring the thread of history through to the present.

Well I think that as far as...I mean I'm not up on contemporary theories of digitization and democracy, but I have seen a lot of these discourses and heard them quite often and it seems to me that they're overblown. There are a lot of ways that technology is leaning towards connectivity, access to people who normally don't have it, but there is still this underclass. There are still people who do not have access and maybe you don't want it, right? Who don't necessarily need to buy into a cultural elite, capitalist notion of digitization. That's one thing.

The other thing is one of my students at UC Santa Cruz is doing a documentary about the environmental and labour impact of digital technologies. She's doing research on a country in Africa where roads are being constructed in order to mine certain precious metals that are used in the tech industry and the social injustices, the murders, the back door dealings and China being involved and investing into the roads.

There is so much of this global infrastructure that happens underneath the fascination that happens with our little objects. There is something about that, but what's missing from the discourse is what's the kind of hard Marxist notion or critique where labour is being put into effect where bodies are being affected.

I think all of that gets ignored so often because people are very excited about the potential of technology. And it doesn't come out of nowhere, but it seems to.

JOHN LEANOS, cont.

So what are your overarching curiosities?

I'm very interested in transformation, personal and social and I think a decolonial mindset is always the guiding principle of it. What I mean by that is stepping out of the colonial mindset of capitalism, of the West, of manifest destiny, of white entitlement, all of those issues that are embedded into our society.

Since it's embedded in everything it's kind of easy to break out and figure out how we can tell stories and create art and insert media and messaging that is alternative to that, which is a way of snapping out for a moment that can build it into an alternative consciousness and so I think that's what art does really. In my mind, its potential is to transform our consciousness.

And I think in the symbolic arena, the consciousness arena that art has the potential to transform the mind. That's the arena that I work in. That's the motivating factor of all of the work, which is how we can create a social shift. Not to be overly ambitious because I know that these things are complex and it happens with not only one person's effort or even a few people's effort. It happens collectively.

But I also realize that we have to transform ourselves and through consciousness of one's self one can then create more impactful work.



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At the moment Social Innovation Camp is a bit like watching little things slam into a wind screen. As soon as they try to get out of the inspirational incubator, slam, they're swatted.

So pragmatically, I want things to survive. And to survive they're going to have to tap into a little bit of the grid.

-- DAN MCQUILLAN

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DAN MCQUILLAN

Independent Digital Innovator
Co-founder of Social Innovation Camp

You've worked in a few different areas, experimental particle physics, mental health, social justice and digital innovation. Is there a throughline there or something that ties it all together?

Sometimes I think so. It's all coming together for me at the moment actually because I'm coming back to the science again in a funny kind of way. In the same way that there is social entrepreneurship, there is also kind of science entrepreneurship, actually that's the wrong way to put it. There's kind of citizen science, which is a new thing which overlaps a lot of my interests really.

I think the thing that really motivated me was the community empowerment side and that's really what I was about. Even when I was doing the particle physics I was politically active.

So I stuck with particle physics which I then abandoned because of a kind of disillusionment with it which is the same sort of thing that disillusioned me later on about NGO's really, which is the dissonance between what these organisations say they're supposed to be doing and what they really do. Science was the same. Science was supposed to be the exploratory front line of open-mindedness and thinking about the universe and really it was an industry like any other and it was also full of the kind of internal politics that are everywhere of course but the kind of hypocritical internal politics that really. Free thinking wasn't encouraged actually.

I think I just carry the technology with me. I discovered the internet when I was doing particle physics and I thought wow, this is really interesting. And then I wanted to work with people who were really marginalized, out there and as far away from the mainstream as you can get. I just felt those were the people that should be paid attention to and then I discovered that there was a demand for people with technology skills and I was the only person in our organisation who knew what the word database meant. So I started writing databases mainly to keep track of my client contracts and that was ok. It gave me something useful to do, but it wasn't very exciting. It wasn't until the world wide web came along and then in particular the revelatory thing for me was probably the languages. I was working with refugees and asylum seekers and I suddenly realized that you are able to put information in other languages. There is a thing called Unicode which allows you to put the different scripts of the world on the web. So the web suddenly becomes not an English place, but a world place.

So we did this kind of pioneering project to put basic survival information, you know how to find a GP, how to get your kid in school and that kind of stuff in all of these different languages that refugees and asylum seekers could see on the web. And it became very successful.

Could you talk a little bit about hacker culture and the personality or ethos of hacker culture?

Well yes. I'm not a hacker in a sense of a coder hacker. I interpret the hacker ethic more broadly. And I think it does have connections with punk and squatting and things like that which in my background I can feel a connection and you can analyse a connection there. And I think there is something particular about programmable systems that make them suitable to that kind of approach in the sense that once you have some idea about how to use a programmable system or about how to alter it, it is incredibly plastic.

But there is something else that is a precursor of that kind of approach, which I think is common to hacker cultures. For me at the moment the word I'm using is antinomian, which is something that was very big during the English civil war period. It's basically a kind of heresy. The kind of heresy that says I don't need religious structures because I have the spirit within me and so I will act in regard to that spirit.

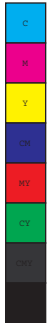
And I was kind of hanging out a bit as an observer of Anonymous thinking I know this attitude from somewhere and I know this kind of perspective. Fan fiction seems to be the same. And I'm not really involved in fan fiction, but I really sympathise with it. As I understand it there are huge conflicts between those who wish to control the idea of Star Wars and people who are writing gay fiction versions of Star Wars, but they're as big of fans of Star Wars as the people who wrote Star Wars.

So you have to have something that's burning enough and I think that's another thread of it really. You have to have a burning wish to do something that motivates you to go beyond what's normally set as the boundaries basically.

In terms of cultural production, do you think technology is about a democratisation?

Cultural production is interesting to me as much as its cultural critique. And its cultural critique as much as it realizes that a lot of the power in our lives resides in the cultures which we inhabit. We inhabit these cultures and so we have certain habits. Culture has the power to change our habits.

It's the power of cultural production to me because its shifts your approach to the world.



DAN MCQUILLAN, cont.

You've talked about prototyping as the new policy. Is that what you're saying? Incorporating the actual doing?

Yes, doing alternative stuff really. It's about sustainability, but it's also about sustaining autonomy. That's kind of overreaching because we can't be autonomous, but we can at least sustain some freedom of movement. So my interest in the technology side is that way it simply gives people a chance to actually change things, produce things, produce their own situation, change their situation in a practical way and cultural way. Not separate from life.

It's my frustration with arts in a way. It provokes, and offers and critiques and stays there and hangs on the wall of the gallery or something.

And that's my interest in technology because it has at the moment this magic power that can help rearrange the world.

But then there is this idea about hybrids. The idea that probably the way forward for these independent exercises is not in an ecosystem of their own. They're not going to survive like that in the current climate. So we have to find some way of creating an ecosystem of these different things together. The institutions are simply not going to fade away.

What kind of intersections?

I'm imagining that the Tate is this kind of Death Star. I like the Tate Gallery. I had a really good day there the other day, but you know it's this monstrous thing with all this power sitting at the heart of the UK modern arts scene or world arts scene. It's too big. There shouldn't be things that big, but anyway, it is there and how can you negotiate anything other than a subservient position in relation to the Tate.

What I'm trying to image is another word I've nicked called assemblages, which basically means collections of stuff. Collections of entities, which could be organisations, objects and people. The interesting thing about the assemblage idea is just that it's explicitly talking about the essentialist thing. Stuff has attributes. That's it. Or basically a social constructivist thing. A thing has the attributes we give it in the social framework that we have.

But the attributes only come out when you put it in this assemblage of things, with these other corresponding attributes. It's an abstract way of thinking about a situation.

I mean institutions they can't really do much. They can't inspire people. They can't motivate people. They can force people to do things. They can order things. They can regulate things, but they can't do all of the other side which is usually most associated with culture, which is that people love this stuff or they are inspired by this stuff. People want to get up for this stuff. An institution cannot do that. A government cannot do that.

And I think there is something interesting in play where these other things which are somewhat catalyzed by some of these affordances of technology which is the internet which I believe within 10 years will be a memory. It will have been completely controlled and extinguished.

In 10 years?

Maybe 15. I mean there'll be a thing called the internet, in the same way there is a thing called democracy. It won't be a thing that we see our hopes and interests in.

It's something that can come into some kind of negotiation with the incumbent institutions. In a way that simply doesn't lead to it being swallowed. Or bought or whatever.

So it's important to connect to institutions, but not be dominated by them?

I kind of really don't like institutions even though one pays my wages. I just don't like them because of the traumatic experience of seeing how much they diverge from their stated aims.

But my first reason for supporting assemblages is that they're not going to go away are they? Their material, political and economic power is too strong.

At the moment Social Innovation Camp is a bit like watching little things slam into a wind screen. As soon as they try to get out of the inspirational incubator, slam, they're swatted.

So pragmatically, I want things to survive. And to survive they're going to have to tap into a little bit of the grid.

And I'm kind of trying to be open to being persuaded that actually what institutions represent is a useful aspect of life. And there probably has to be some sense of permanence as much as we can understand it. That may possibly be a reason for having institutions.

But they should only ever be 10% of the picture. At the moment they are 99%.

So if you want to take advantage of the generative power of this stuff, you're going to have to find a way to work with them for the time being, while I hope gradually building a bigger and bigger alternative in the gaps.



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So for us here it's about making an ecosystem of urban interventions that can be replicable in any city in the world.

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-- JOSETTE MELCHOR

JOSETTE MELCHOR

Executive Director and Founder,
Gray Area Foundation for the Arts

Would you consider yourself to be an entrepreneur or technologist or an artist? How do you see yourself?

I guess I usually describe myself as a few things. A community organizer. I'm definitely not an artist. That's why I think organizer rings more of a bell for me because I'm organizing social structures and people. I definitely am a technologist and a curator for sure. Social entrepreneur somewhat yeah.

So you've been around for four years. Has the thrust of your programming shifted over time?

We originally started out having exhibitions in the gallery and I think we strategically knew that aligning ourselves with folks like MIT Sensible Cities Lab or Stamen Design would set the tone for the kind of work we wanted to do as a non profit. And so as a curator in the exhibition programme I specifically curated these kind of interdisciplinary research centers into our programme because it's eventually what I saw us becoming.

A research lab?

Yes, a research lab. So over the past year we began a research program. We curated exhibits with Camille Utterback, pioneers in the digital arts field as well as amazing researchers, Erin Cobland and Robert Hodgins.

The fact of the matter is media artists never really have an avenue for exhibition or collaboration within San Francisco in terms of something like Eyebeam in New York. And so I really wanted to fill that void. Its obviously becoming its own movement and its becoming what every company wants around them in this mash up of the creative industry and the technology industry.

So this interdisciplinary approach was always what I was after and why I named it Gray Area because it was about the mash up of sectors and genres and really working within that space that allows innovation.

We started out with exhibitions and now over the course of the past few years we learned that having a gallery and exhibition space isn't necessarily the best way to present the types of projects that we're presenting within the space just because we get a lot more views in the digital world.

So I think we had a residency that was the same time that we had the exhibition space and so there were amazing artists and technologists collaborating in the space and they made a bunch of projects and one of them was called Seaquence and it was launched online and it got over 1 million views over 6 months.

What do you think was so attractive about it? Why did it get so many hits?

It's just a toy. It's really just like an addictive little toy. It's definitely within the gray area of like gaming and art and technology and so kids could use it and adults could use it. It's a grid sequencer where you can make your own compositions of music.

We launched it in 2010 and to this day it gets about 100,000 views and shares per month and that fluctuates depending on where it gets posted.

So we started saying hey why aren't we doing more of this work and it gets way more exposure than having a space with tons of overhead.

You could argue that sometimes a physical connection is a more meaningful experience, which I generally agree with. It allows for random people to meet and they're obviously different things that come out of that, but just in terms of exposure which is what we're really after as a new organisation we saw the value, especially in the type of art that we present.

So without an exhibition space does it mean more online projects or just moving projects around?

I've been talking a lot with people about this and looking to museums to see how they do this. So we've created, over the past year with our research programme, probably close to 100 web based or digital projects through our innovation and hackathon weekends and you don't necessarily need to be anywhere to see those, you can see them online.

But right now in terms of physical space we're really leaning towards more of a maker, collaborative space where we can foster the creation of a lot more of these types of projects and then just have meet ups for people to continue to collaborate.

My whole philosophy has been ok we get 300 people for an opening for an exhibit. If you do a ticketed performance in a theatre you get 300, depending on the size of the theatre. That seems to have more value and an obvious revenue model around it so we're trying to figure out a way for digital art, performance or presentation within a theatrical environment. Just because of the amount of people that we can serve and the experience that we can foster in an environment like that, so we're definitely talking a lot more with theatre and dance folks currently.



JOSETTE MELCHOR, cont.

Can you talk a bit about the Urban Prototyping Festival, the goals behind it, what made you decide to do it and how you picked your partners?

Over the past two years we've been focusing on the mash up of citizens and activists and government and architects and designers and artists.

Since our inception we've been working alongside City Hall which has been really unusual. I was running a gallery in SoMa and the Mayor's Office of Economic Development said all of a sudden 'Hey, can you move your space to Mid-Market or Tenderloin? We're trying to do economic development.

What we were able to do was use the connections within City Hall to mash them up with our community. That's what our programme Summer of Smart, Creative Currency and now this Urban Prototyping Festival are hoping to do, really mash up those connections and to get them talking to actually make things, rather than just like sit in rooms, have community meetings and talk about problems. Because I've been to too many of those and its just like ok guys lets just get our equipment out and prototype things and get them out the door and see if it works.

So Urban Prototyping really came from us running these urban innovation programmes over the past couple years.

What kind of projects?

I always use this one because its one of my favourites. It was this project called TenderNoise and the team installed decibel readers around the Tenderloin. They didn't ask DPW for permission or anything, but it was only for 24 hours. And so they recorded decibel levels and then visualised them on a map so you can kind of see the noise threshold on this map.

They did research and the Tenderloin is one of the noisiest neighbourhoods in the US based on the existing data that they could find. That has health implications.

And how are artists involved?

It's really hard to describe an individual in our community because they wouldn't necessarily describe themselves as an artist technologist. So they're really these people that just care about something and want to think about the best tool to use. So they're pulling from design or technology or art. So it's really these multidisciplinary thinkers we try to get involved.

Do you find that a lot of the projects that come out of hackathons end up being realized or meeting long-term needs?

Through Summer of Smart we did 12 projects per weekend. There were probably 30 projects and 4 of them we chose as winners, which means we continue to keep up with the teams and help them make connections and fund raise. So really there are 2 that are going on to this day and it's a year and a half later. So 2 out of 30.

So the Urban Prototyping Festival..How is that different or the same? What hopes do you have for it?

Urban Prototyping as a whole is really a rebranding of Summer of Smart for us. Urban Prototyping in our minds, is more of a movement, of citizens creating projects for government.

And so we actually did one in Singapore. We did it in July. A company called us during Summer of Smart and said we're working with the economic development office here, how can we do Summer of Smart in Singapore? Boston's Mayor's office just emailed us to find out how to bring UP to Boston.

So that's why I'm saying more and more we don't need a big public space we need more of an office and creation space because we're getting called to do things around the world.

So for us here it's about making an ecosystem of urban interventions that can be replicable in any city in the world.

And who are your partners in San Francisco? I know Intersection for the Arts is one.

Intersection is our main partner. GAFTTA and Intersection are jointly funding the UP SF festival.

So working with Intersection has been really interesting. We both do multidisciplinary work. They do more traditional theatrical and spoken word and different things like that and we are so technology driven and it's so apparent. Just in terms of our staff - we have a designer on staff and a developer on staff and that's really important to us. They don't have any of that stuff so we've been complementary with our staff skill sets.

Do you find that there is any type of gap in the language or perspective?

We move really fast. We move really, really fast and what I described about iterating and getting things out the door and seeing what sticks can cause some trepidation between the organisations.

And so I'm trying not to move as fast as we do, but sorry, things change all of the time. Especially in the tech industry things just change all of the time.

So I'm going to wrap up with two last questions. Going back to your work with theatre and dance companies, how do you think that work may evolve?

We're trying to create this immersive environment for AV performance, specifically for digital art performance. Nobody's ever collaborated with dance or theatre in that environment and it's been around for a few years. So figuring out how to get theatrical and dance groups to interact in that environment in interesting.

I heard that you like DJ culture. And I just wanted to learn more about your affinity with that.

Yes, people are always like why are you doing this rave thing?

Its funny because I just think the conversations that happen at a dance club are much different and much more relaxed than at a coding meet up. And we get those people that come to the coding meet up to go to the dance club. And so it's just a much deeper connection I feel sometimes when you get different aspects of people's personalities in a room.

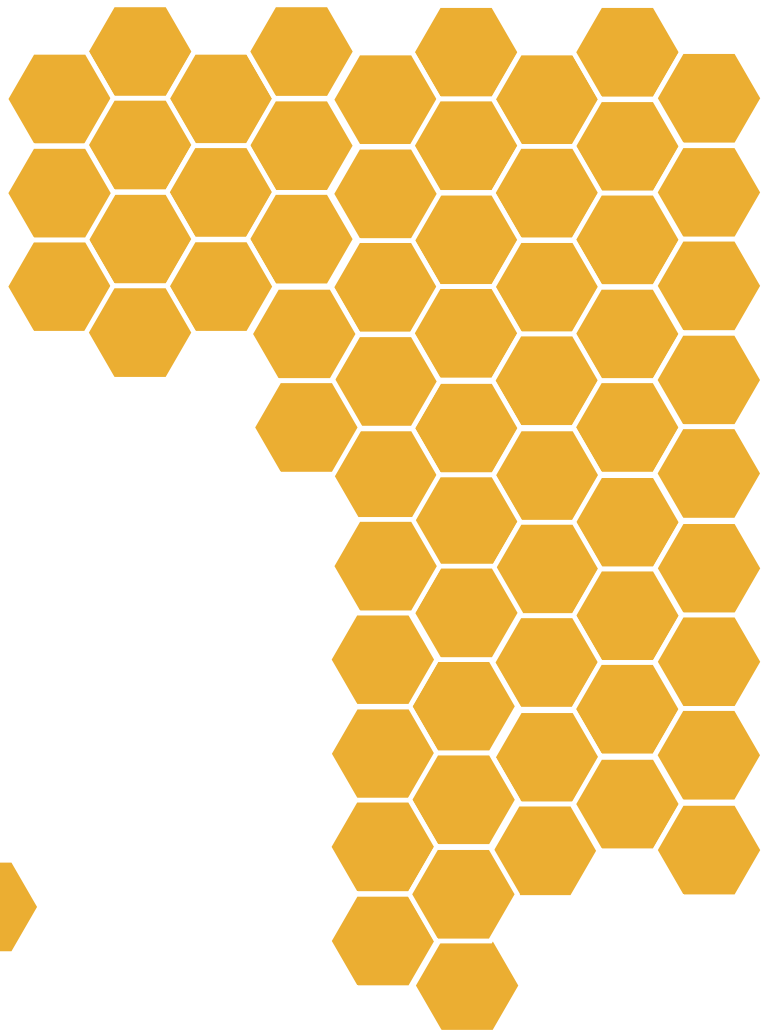
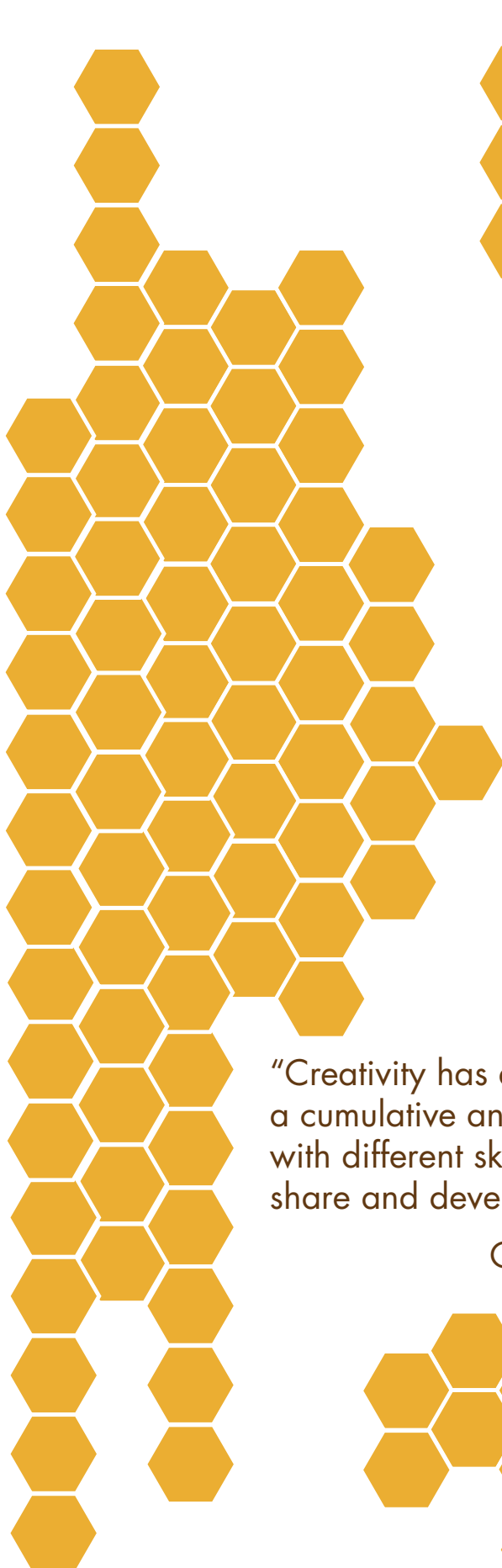


JOSETTE MELCHOR, cont.

It's just a different sense of connecting. It's about connections and experience and understanding that when you're developing code and electronics there are the other ways of experiencing it. So electronic music is made with all of the tools that you might make your next start up with and you have to know a lot of different software and I'm not talking about laptop DJ's I'm talking about people that create music with actual hardware and maybe even write their own software. So those are the types of people we try to book and curate even though it's in a club.

And you can kind of get out of your head a little bit. That's why I like it, because I'm constantly on my computer and when you are in an actual audio and video experience you're feeling technology. Feeling and experience, dancing and moving.





"Creativity has always been highly collaborative, a cumulative and social activity in which people with different skills, points of view and insight share and develop ideas together"

Charles Leadbetter, *We Think*, 2009

