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Datastan Meets Storyland: Surfing the *Zeitgeist* Without Wiping Out

By Arlene Goldbard

My friend Dudley Cocke of Roadside Theater in Appalachia likes to say that "we are the storytelling animal, and language and story has been our selective advantage." To me, it is abundantly clear that he is right. Lived experience is anything but shapely: someone dies, someone laughs, someone takes out the garbage, there's a hurricane, an election, a birthday party. One thing follows another helter-skelter, making it extremely difficult in real time to distinguish figure from ground, the static buzz of life from the things that will reverberate forever. Our lives are merely a collection of incidents until we create the narrative that gives them meaning. Until we tell our own story in our own minds or in any concrete form, true understanding is impossible. Individually and collectively, the way we craft our stories shapes our lives.

As I begin this talk, I want to tell you a bit about what to expect, what I am and am not going to say. I am not going to tell you a little story about art and how it is good for you, even though I believe that is true. Instead, I want to tell you a larger story, so much larger I sometimes have trouble wrapping my mind around it. I want to tell you a story about how an old way of understanding our lives and societies—one that I call Datastan—is giving way to a very different paradigm—I call it Storyland—and about the critical role that culture and culture-makers can play in helping the new paradigm into being. Along the way, I'll share stories about projects that can be variously described as community cultural development, community arts or arts for social change, most of them drawn from my own writing. Their importance to me is that each one affords a glimpse of something that is waiting to be born, something that you and I can bring closer to fruition.

My station in the world is at the intersection of culture, politics and spirituality. From there, I am inspired by Rebbe Nachman of Bratslov, the revered 18th century teacher, who said, "The antidote to despair is to remember the world to come." This is tricky. How can we remember the future? I believe it means that the antidote to despair is a foretaste of the world we wish to inhabit, a world we can taste by imagining or experiencing whatever reminds us of what it means to feel entirely awake, alive and connected. This can happen in many ways—in love, in awe, in encounters with the ineffable beauty of the world. But my focus today is on the times when we are at once most human and most godlike: in the flow of creativity, when—as the great Brazilian educator Paulo Freire said—we speak our own words in our own voice. When we proclaim our desires and visions, when we tell our own stories exactly as we choose. When we make art that names the world.

Whatever else is happening in our lives and our societies, when we make art that names the world in all its pain and possibility, we offer an antidote to the epidemic fear and despair all of us can so easily catch from the daily news. We help ourselves and our fellow human beings to imagine, rehearse and prepare for the world of beauty, connection and meaning we all wish to inhabit. We exercise the muscles of imagination

and expression that strengthen our selective advantage as a species, feeding the wellsprings of our prodigious energy and creative capacity.

What work is more urgently needed? I hope I'll succeed in convincing you that the answer is that above all things, our cultural creativity and social imagination hold the most promise of leading us out of the bondage of Datastan into the freedom of Storyland. Now I ask you to relax, to breathe and listen as I explain. If questions or responses come to you, please jot them down, as we'll have time for them when I finish.

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A few days ago, I was in Philadelphia talking to a group of teaching artists. After my talk, we did an exercise together that entailed making notes of those experiences that had been most powerful in shaping our identities as artists and as human beings. The idea was to reframe our personal stories, away from the view we often adopt—a little litany of successes and failures, for most of us a tale of failing to do what we set out to accomplish—and toward the view that each experience has been a necessary part of a process of mastery, a process of self-discovery directed at bringing all we are and all we know into each moment. After the teaching artists made their notes, several of them remarked that they'd been surprised to discover that the experiences that most stood out had been at once the best and worst moments of their lives. These were things that felt unbearable while they were unfolding—the loss of a home or a loved one, a terrible illness, a life-changing disappointment. But in retrospect, they had set each of us on a path marked by much greater empathy, depth and meaning than had previously been possible.

Out here on the bleeding edge of paradigm shift, I really, really know what they meant.

I am so grateful to be alive to see this moment in which more and more people are leaving Datastan—that flatland nightmare of an old paradigm that worships hyper-efficiency, hyper-rationality, hyper-materialism and domination—and heading for Storyland, a multi-dimensional, numinous landscape infused with multiple types of knowledge deriving from body, mind, emotion and spirit. At the same time, it is painful even to observe the suffering which Datastan's distorted idea of human possibility has created, let alone live through it. Everywhere we see the detritus of the consumer society, individuals and whole communities who have been counted as collateral damage in the rush to acquire; everywhere we see evidence that the well-being of the planet and its interdependent life-forms, the well-being of civil society, have been discounted as negligible by leaders whose eyes are fixed on grotesque forms of victory.

Paulo Freire wrote that every epoch is characterized by "a complex of ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values and challenges in dialectical interaction with their opposites." It is this complex, this "thematic universe" (rather than a specific idea or position within it) that reflects the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the times. Two powerful rivers flow through our thematic universe. One river, the one I am calling Storyland, ever more vibrant and powerful, was characterized by the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes more than twenty years ago, right here in Canada, in one of his Massey Lectures. Fuentes said that ours is an era of "the emergence of cultures as protagonists of history," necessitating

> a re-elaboration of our civilizations in agreement with our deeper, not our more ephemeral, traditions. Dreams and nightmares, different songs, different laws, different rhythms, long-deferred hopes, different shapes of beauty, ethnicity and diversity, a different sense of time, multiple identities rising from the depths of the polycultural and multiracial worlds of Africa, Asia and Latin America. ...
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> This new reality, this new totality of humankind, presents enormous new problems, vast challenges to our imaginations. They open up the two-way avenue of all cultural reality: giving and receiving, selecting, refusing, recognizing, acting in the world: not being merely subjected to the world.[1]

The other river, the one I am calling Datastan, is conditioned on the scientism that was one of the most bizarrely reductive features of twentieth-century culture. Scientism means taking methods and ways of thinking that work very well in the physical sciences and misapplying them to highly complex human endeavors, where they don't work at all. This thinking concludes that if you can arrive at solid truth about the behavior of minerals or gases by measuring them, you should also be able to reduce social systems or circumstances to quantitative data, and this should enable you to understand and control them with equal success. Scientism is the No Child Left Behind Act, which has shaped public education in the U.S., where the phrase "scientifically based research" appears 111 times, premised on the idea that the quality of education can be measured best by control-group research that yields quantifiable data. Scientism is the vast sum of money that has over decades been invested by public and private agencies in the U.S., trying to come up with "hard" justifications for arts expenditure, such as the "economic multiplier effect" of buying a theater ticket. Scientism is arguing that babies should be exposed to Mozart because it makes them score higher on I.Q. tests.

In contrast, art happens by creating the conditions for happy accident. How many novelists, when asked why a certain character did thus-and-so, reply that they don't know, that the character seemed to take on a life of his or her own? How many visual arts effects are the result of releasing intention and surrendering to chance? In dance, in drama and in storytelling, improvisation and interpretation ensure that no work is ever the same twice, that its message always morphs to bridge the ever-changing gap between giver and receiver. In real science, it is the same.

The mathematician, financier and writer Nassim Taleb, who calls himself "an epistemologist of chance events," has pointed out that in scientific research, "most of what people were looking for, they did not find. Most of what they found they were not looking for." Penicillin was just some mold inhibiting the growth of another lab culture; lasers at first had no application but were thought to be useful as a form of radar; the Internet was conceived as a military network; and despite massive National Cancer Institute-funded cancer research, the most potent treatment— chemotherapy—was discovered as a side-effect of mustard gas in warfare. (People who were exposed to it had very low white blood cell counts.) Look at today's biggest medical moneymakers: the top-selling drugs treat cholesterol. Statins were discovered by Akira Endo, who grew up on a farm where he developed an interest in fungi. After agricultural school and a biochemistry degree, he worked on fungal enzymes for processing fruit juice. Something

[1] Carlos Fuentes, *Latin America: At War With The Past*, Massey Lectures, 23rd Series, CBC Enterprises, 1985, pp. 71–72.

he discovered there led him to think fungi might produce chemicals that inhibit cholesterol synthesis. Even that TV star Viagra was devised for another purpose, to treat heart disease and high blood pressure; it made its manufacturers rich by exhibiting a highly lucrative and quite unintentional side-effect.

But scientism is not science. It is another thing altogether, the misguided and distorted view that human beings in our infinite complexity ought to behave just like computers, or at least allow our behavior to be controlled by computers. On Friday, *The New York Times* reported that scientist Richard Dawkins told Britain's Channel 4 that he is "working on a book that would explore children's relationships with fairy tales and encourage them to think about the world scientifically rather than mythologically. 'I would like to know whether there's any evidence that bringing children up to believe in spells and wizards and magic wands and things turning into other things — it is unscientific, I think it's antiscientific,' Dr. Dawkins told More4 News. 'Whether that has a pernicious effect, I don't know.'" Even highly intelligent people such as Dawkins are made stupid by swallowing the scientistic Kool-Aid. It distorts their vision so they can no longer see that privileging calculation and logic above all other higher human functions is a handicap, not an advantage, especially when we face conditions that require bringing all our gifts and resources to the task at hand. What are we to make of someone so skewed by the orthodoxies of Datastan that he is ready to disregard the whole of human imagination, our wonderful capacity to dream and pretend, the vital role that stories have played in our survival as a species, and feels a sufficient argument for doing so is that these remarkable capacities are "unscientific"? Something is rotten in Datastan.

Luckily, Dawkins' position is extreme, even in Datastan, or daily life would be a much grayer experience. But Datastan is willing to listen to credentialed experts, including cognitive scientists, who have been telling us that although we may believe ourselves to be entirely capable of disinterested and pure logic, their research has proven that even seemingly abstract logic is informed by our emotions and physical capabilities and sensations. Much of the time we think in metaphors, the vast majority of which add an embodied dimension to our thoughts: we "lift our voices" or "stand up for what we believe." Our "hearts go out" to people who are suffering and "melt" with tenderness toward those we love. We hear a lot about such research during election season, because it offers at least a partial answer to a question that confounds diehard rationalists: why have so many people voted against their own interests? Why in political decision-making do the facts seem so often to matter less than symbols and how people feel about them?

So far, Datastan has been willing to implement such insights mainly to support the engines of consumption: nowadays, every commercial advertisement tells a story. But out here in Storyland, artists are working with communities to capture and use the stories that support resilience, connection and possibility.

In *Community, Culture and Globalization*, an international anthology I co-edited with Don Adams, muralist Judy Baca tells the back-story of "The Great Wall of Los Angeles," the world's largest mural, painted by crews drawn from youth gangs. It portrays the buried history of California and its people, the stories that seldom make it into Datastan's history books:

> The site was a concrete flood-control channel built by the Army Corps of Engineers. Once an arroyo (a dirt ravine cut by river water), the

> Tujunga Wash flood-control channel was an ugly concrete dividing line within the community with a belt of arid dirt running along either side. The Wash is in Studio City, a few miles north of Hollywood in the San Fernando Valley….
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> The concreted rivers divided the land and left ugly eyesores, carrying the water too swiftly to the ocean, bearing pollution from city streets, affecting Santa Monica Bay and depriving the aquifer of water replenishment through normal ground seepage. In a sense the concreting of the river represented the hardening of the arteries of the land. If the river overflowing its banks regularly destroyed opportunities for the real-estate expansion that fast became the chief commodity of the fledgling city of the 1920s, then the river would simply have to be tamed. These first decisions about the river made it easier to displace historic indigenous and Mexican communities in the name of city development….
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> The concrete river invaded my dreams, its significance becoming clearer to me as the correlation between the scars on a human body and those on the land took shape in my mind. Fernando, a charismatic leader from the original Las Vistas Nuevas team, was brutally stabbed in his own neighborhood's local store the summer of the painting of *Mi Abuelita*. He suffered 13 wounds to his torso and one to his face. We were devastated by the attack, but Fernando recovered and returned for the dedication ceremony, continuing his work against violence through the murals for many years until he was killed in his neighborhood park in the 1980s, 12 years after he had abandoned "the life." I asked him after he had healed how he was doing with the psychological scars left by such an attack and he responded, "The worst thing is that every time I remove my shirt my body is a map of violence." It was for this reason that I proposed and designed a series of tattooed images to cover and transform the scars on his body.
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> Standing at the river on that first day, dreaming of what it could become, I saw the concrete as a scar where the river once ran and our work in the channel producing the narrative mural, as a tattoo on the scar. The defining metaphor of what came to be known as the *Great Wall of Los Angeles*…became "a tattoo on the scar where the river once ran."

I was with Judy a few weeks ago in Los Angeles, when she gave the keynote at a conference of Imagining America, a consortium of universities engaged in collaborations with artists, scholars and communities. Judy told this same story, along with other multi-dimensional stories about her experiences, including one in which the design of a mural was altered at the last moment to accommodate a dream that a key person had a few days before it was to be unveiled. Judy and I have known each other for 35 years. She is brilliant, gifted and brave. At dinner afterwards, she confided that she'd been hesitant to stand before an audience of academics and share these stories of dreams and nightmares, bodies and scars. For years, when trying to convey her experiences to Datastan audiences, she'd planed some of the rough edges off her stories so as not to excite the ridicule that Datastan attaches to bringing body and spirit into realms reserved for disembodied data. But she wasn't doing that anymore, ever. Many of us are recognizing that we need not pay attention to Datastan's embargo on full expression of

body, emotion, mind and spirit—to bringing all we are and all we know into each moment of our interaction with others. At a certain point in life, a little ridicule is a small price to pay for the pleasure of living as if Storyland were all around us every day, which it is.

But Datastan's pressures may be more difficult for young artists to resist. Last month, a report I wrote was released. It describes research into the way that community artists are being prepared in higher education in the United States. You can download *The Curriculum Project Report: Culture and Community Development in Higher Education* at www.curriculumproject.net. Here's how one highly respected community artist and educator who took part in our research described the dominant approach to visual artists' education:

> *The major focus of studio arts is to send people prepared into a commercial gallery system; to get them into the Biennale would be like an ultimate goal. A successful career would be to get major wealthy collectors and be in a major museum collection. So, they're object-makers, and even that they're failing because they're doing 19th-century education for students who are trying to live in the 21st. They're discipline-specific, which is a growing fallacy. With that European bias, the fine arts departments have developed a sort of segmented teaching: we would teach line, we would teach form, we would teach color, we would teach rhythm, and the sum of it all would in the end be a perfect composition.… None of these things taught people what to say or how to say it or what was important to say. The only thing we did do well was self-expression, so that became increasingly self-indulgent and bred these art-for-art's-sake sort of notions.… It still did not leave you with the winning ticket to a creative approach.… Like all the other problems with education, we've segmented things, we break it down and we don't treat the whole person in a holistic way. We don't look at what they bring to the table, what they have inherently in their history and their nature that could be incredibly powerful tools upon which to act on the spring of the creative life.… So that is exactly why I had to do my undoing from all of my training when I came out of the university, precisely because I wanted to speak to my family, the people I grew up with.*

Part of our task, then, in facilitating the transition to Storyland, is undoing those lessons we have been taught that actually block our ability to see clearly what is and what can be. Twentieth-century European philosophers such as György Lukacs and Lucien Goldmann wrote about "potential consciousness," showing how what we are capable of perceiving and understanding can be limited by prior conditioning or simply by ceding real estate in our own minds to concepts that are incompatible with realities that would otherwise be accessible. For example, cognitive scientists have shown us how our minds are susceptible to cognitive errors, such as the "confirmation bias." We humans easily accept whatever confirms our own ideas, and the world being so rich in information, there is ample confirmation for almost any hypothesis. It takes extra effort to interrogate our own assumptions, to do the very difficult thing of trying to disprove our own arguments, which is the only way we can really tell whether or not they are valid.

Datastan purports to value proof, but seldom do its leaders question their own assumptions, which is why they blithely continue to do the same things over and over again, without noticing how useless, even how harmful, they are. All the financial

forecasting that drove stocks higher and higher was conditioned on the serene confidence that computer modeling could foretell the future. That has now been invalidated, as seemingly unshakeable stars of the high-finance firmament crash around us like spent comets. And how is Datastan responding? With even more ink and airtime devoted to forecasting!

Datastan's culture generates messages of timeless permanence, asserting that its way of understanding the world is rooted in truth that will never be invalidated. It is easy to internalize the belief that the future will continue to foster societies based on standardization of human experience, on so-called efficiencies designed with corporate and bureaucratic interests in mind regardless of the consequences for those who are processed by these systems, on data-based forecasts of human futures, on automation that limits human interaction in favor of robotized response systems, and on citizenship conceived as a series of consumer choices. Yet the more these systems grow, the more dissatisfied we are with them. Does your heart sink, like mine, every time you hear that voice say, "Please listen carefully to the following menu, as our options have changed"? In the U.S.A. nowadays, when we hear a corporate or government spokesperson say that even in a time of terrible unemployment and economic stress, we cannot afford to employ enough social workers, teachers and teachers' aides, aid workers for disaster areas or even customer-service representatives to save ordinary citizens from suffering the consequences of lining up forever to be frustrated or damaged just for seeking help, many of us now call to mind the nearly $350 million taxpayers are spending each day on George W. Bush's misadventure in Iraq.[2] We remember the nearly $15 billion in *net profit* Exxon Mobil on Friday announced it made in the third quarter of 2008, almost 60 percent more than the corresponding period in 2007.[3] How long do they imagine we will accept this wildly distorted sense of priorities? How stupid do they think we are?

Datastan has just about run its course. Granted, its rulers and beneficiaries don't know it yet—it seems even the global financial crash hasn't sounded an alarm loud enough to awaken them. Or perhaps the Navajo proverb pertains here: "You can't wake a person who is pretending to be asleep." But if you and I look past the self-ratifying propaganda, it's easy to see that Datastan has nearly run dry. That knowledge will support us in shifting our attention and energy to the mighty stream of Storyland.

Everywhere we look, community artists around the world are working to clear away the fog of propaganda, surfacing true stories of the damage Datastan has done and the remedies that are within our grasp. Ever since I wrote about it in *New Creative Community*. I've been working closely with the Thousand Kites project:

In 1999, Nick Szuberla and Amelia Kirby were volunteer disc jockeys at WMMT-FM, "Listener-Supported, Consumer-Run Mountain Public Radio," the radio station of Appalshop, a multidisciplinary arts and education center based in Whitesburg, Kentucky. As co-hosts of the Appalachian region's only hip-hop radio program, Holler to the Hood, Szuberla and Kirby received hundreds of letters from inmates recently transferred into nearby Wallens Ridge, a new "Supermax" prison built as part of one of the United States' remaining growth industries, installing prisons in regions facing economic

[2] http://www.nationalpriorities.org/costofwar_home

[3] Steven Mufson, "Yet Again, Exxon Breaks Its Record Quarterly Profit," *Washington Post*, October 31, 2008; p. D01.

decline. (In this case, new prisons and prison jobs were proposed as an antidote to Appalachia's shrinking coal economy.)

Mostly African American and Latino prisoners were shipped into Wallens Ridge and its sister Supermax, Red Onion, from overcrowded prisons elsewhere, bringing millions of dollars to the state's general fund. The prisoners were far from home and family, guarded by former coal miners and National Guard members for whom the jobs were a simultaneously desired and resented last resort, and a double-edged opportunity to re-enact rituals of domination in which they had previously played the part of victim. Thus what was proposed as an economic development scheme for Appalachia wound up as the bleeding edge of a culture clash, affecting families and communities close to home and thousands of miles away.

"Holler to the Hood" became a meeting-place for countless prisoner families, broadcasting heartbreaking messages from families too distant to visit and letters from prisoners reporting human-rights violations and racial conflicts between prison staff and inmates, inspiring H2H's founders to investigate. The result—Szuberla's and Kirby's documentary film, *Up the Ridge*—explores the domestic prison industry, particularly the social impact of moving large numbers of inner-city prisoners to distant rural settings.

From response to the radio program and film, Szuberla and Kirby and their colleagues at Appalshop realized there was a much bigger task here: to surface all the facets and layers of this incredibly complicated story to a larger society unaware of the effects of having become Incarceration Nation, with the globe's largest prison population. The project, *Thousand Kites* (in prison jargon, to "fly a kite" is to send a message), is a multiyear partnership between H2H and Appalshop's Roadside Theater, collaborating with prisoners and prison employees, their families and their communities. Roadside has a long track-record of participatory play creation and presentation, grounded in story circles with those directly involved: the *Thousand Kites* play, based on the highly specific stories of two Appalachian prisons, is being adapted by and for countless communities, urban and rural, that have been touched by the prison-industrial complex. Through a Web portal, thousandkites.org, organizers and participants around the world are able to link up, share stories and access a huge array of tools and artworks.

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Brain scientists have gone a long way toward explaining why storytelling is our selective advantage as a species. They have demonstrated that the exercise of creative imagination strengthens our power to act. We have learned that when we remember or imagine experience, our brains act very much as they do when we enact the same experience with our bodies. Athletes have made good use of this information, training in their imaginations for the feats of physical prowess they will perform in actual competition. Artists know this too: when we weep at the death or rejoice at the triumph of a character in a book, play or film, it's not because we've developed a deep attachment to that fictional person. It's that by allowing ourselves to enter imaginatively into the story, our capacity for empathy and compassion activates the same neurological impulses as when we experience a real loss or gain in our own lives.

If our higher purpose is to develop societies grounded in possibility, compassion, and connection, we need to deepen our ability to imagine these things, and there is no more

powerful way to do that than by making art that rehearses the future we wish to help into being.

In *Community, Culture and Globalization*, my friend Maribel Legarda, artistic director of the Philippine Educational Theater Association, wrote these few paragraphs about one of her group's projects:

> Smokey Mountain sits on a mountain of garbage at the outskirts of Manila. Most of the children who live there work as scavengers, often rather than going to school. In this project, 20 children were gathered for a two-month workshop introducing theater performance skills through games, movement, action songs, storytelling and improvisation. Its aim was to build the child-participants' sense of self and community. PETA artist–teachers guided the children toward mounting a production about what it is like to be a child at Smokey Mountain.
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> The challenge was increased by the circumstances surrounding these children. Firstly, they had uneven educational backgrounds. Some were full-time students, others went to school on a part-time basis because of their scavenging work, while others dropped out of school to become full-time scavengers in order to increase their contribution to family income. Their lack of education was exacerbated by the fact that the children lived under the shadow of malnutrition, breathing the poisonous fumes that decomposing garbage emits. Even simple instructions such as stepping right and stepping left were difficult for children to execute after years of exposure to this social and physical decay.
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> Playful use of what PETA calls the "Basic Integrated Arts Approach" to theater transformed the workshop venue into a virtual play space. The Integrated Arts Workshop is a systematic and cumulative weaving together of creative drama, creative sound and music, body movement, creative writing, visual arts and group dynamics. In essence, it is creative drama experienced and understood through various art disciplines. Exercises focusing on these different components are geared toward stimulating the participants to discover their creative potential for self- and collective expression. The process of creation and discovery is experiential and improvisational. The key to creation is spontaneity and the belief that we each contain a gold mine of riches, waiting to be discovered, brought into the light, polished and honed.
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> After months of challenging workshops and rehearsals, it was amazing to watch the children sing and dance and move and laugh as other children do. For that one moment, they were able not only to reclaim themselves but to reclaim their space. The children of Smokey Mountain realized a most fervent wish—to have a playground. For me, this is what the pedagogy of PETA's children's theater is all about: to create playgrounds in seemingly impossible environments—if not playgrounds in physical spaces, then those that grow out of the imagination.

Every person in this room knows that even though it can't be measured with Datastan's instruments, Maribel's story conveys urgently important truth. Only through

human connection, through deep listening to unique and profound stories, through humane and reciprocal collaboration in unearthing the meanings of those stories, relating them to choices in the world and using them to weave new stories—only through these sacred and powerful activities, encoded in the very essence of what it is to be human, can we gain access to all the strengths and gifts we need to face this challenging time of paradigm shift, to surf the *Zeitgeist* without wiping out.

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We have also learned a great deal from researchers and health practitioners about storytelling's remarkable role in healing both the human heart and the world we inhabit, grounded in understanding how our brains process trauma, how we do or don't recover from psychic injuries. My thinking about the healing role of culture has been stimulated by reading the work of John Briere, a specialist in the treatment of psychological trauma who teaches in the medical school at the University of Southern California. He writes that it can be healing for a traumatized person to tell his or her story in fullness and in detail, so long as the telling is received in a way that's in strong disparity to the original trauma. Traumatic abuse insults every aspect of one's personhood: the traumatized person is disrespected, used, harmed, shamed, blamed, made to feel worthless and dispensable. If in retelling the story, anything evoking those insults is again experienced, the result is more likely to be a repetition of the injury than its healing. For healing to begin, the story must be received with respect, presence and caring.

From my experience, the same is true in healing social trauma. There are many sore spots in the global cultural matrix, old wounds where people have been made to feel they are less than full citizens of the world, even less than fully human. One of the tasks of cultural development in this time is to help heal those injuries. In recent decades, we've see more and more people trying, sometimes skillfully, sometimes ineptly, to do this work. I've seen people squirm with discomfort while listening to tales of oppression that reflect in even the remotest way on the oppressors in their own family trees. I have seen stories of suffering rooted in racism and other invidious, dehumanizing prejudices used to fuel a competition of oppressions. I have heard African Americans tell Jews to shut up about the Holocaust; and Latinos tell African Americans they have heard enough about slavery. I have experienced this tendency in my own mind, observed myself listening to a tale of collective suffering or exile while a nasty voice in my own head interrupts to whisper, "What are they whining about? Look what happened to us!"

Whether in my own mind or out loud in a group setting, this has always seemed petty and repellent. But having learned something of the science, I know why: if such sharing is coerced under the wrong conditions, if it falls on a hardened heart and closed ears, if it is merely endured or used to generate a guilty resentment, it reinforces injury rather than healing it.

In *Community, Culture and Globalization*, oral historian Mary Marshall Clark described an experiment in "theater of witness":

> [T]he group Theater Arts Against Political Violence brought artists and survivors of political torture together to explore dramatic uses of testimony. Oral histories were conducted with torture survivors as a way for others to enter into the experiences of remembered torture, but in a

> broader landscape than one-to-one therapy (or oral history) could provide.
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> The actors modeled the experience of torture through their bodies, symbolically transferring the words into a lived experience that would be witnessed by the public to break down the conspiracy of silence that often confines the survivor in a world of isolation… The project developed in close collaboration with those who lived through political torture. The project included three testimony sessions held in a group setting to avoid re-creating isolation. In between, the theater company met to develop and rehearse scenes from the stories. The goal of the production was to give the torture survivors the ability to stand outside their own experiences and to witness the transformation of their suffering on stage in the company of friends and fellow survivors. The survivors became the critics, and ultimately the authors, of the transformation.[4]

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I agree with Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker movement, who famously said that "The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us?" A revolution of the heart is a paradigm shift in which our collective deck, our model of the world, gets reshuffled, changing the story for everyone. In a revolution of the heart, those who have put themselves to sleep awaken, and healing begins to emerge where there has been harm. Such a revolution infuses every aspect of reality, so that even people who are unaware of precisely what is happening are able to sense that something new and important is going on. I think we can see in the remarkable level of active citizenship evident in the run-up to tomorrow's U.S. election, in the liberatory ways people around the world have used the astounding connectivity and creativity enabled by new technologies for communication and collaboration at a distance, in worldwide resistance to the exploitive effects of globalization, in the interconnectedness demonstrated so painfully in the current financial crisis, and in countless other ways that this awareness is growing.

Though I would much rather live in Storyland than Datastan, I do not mean to represent Storyland as a utopia. For one thing, the idea of utopia terrifies me: throughout human history, when people fix on the need for a new human being freed from all the flaws of the old, for a cadre marching united toward a glorious future, the next thing that happens is that a great many old-style human beings have to be killed to clear the way, and noble ideals drown in spilled blood. Some things may actually be timeless: more than two hundred years ago, German philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote that "Out of timber so crooked as that from which man is made nothing entirely straight can be carved." Despite all the best efforts of Datastan to line us up like widgets in a factory, Kant was obviously correct.

So Storyland is of necessity a messy and imperfect place, just as all of us are messy and imperfect. The world to come that I am trying to remember has time for people who

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[4] Mary Marshal Clark, "Oral History: Art and Praxis," in Adams and Goldbard, *Community, Culture and Globalization*, p. 102.

share common conditions or purposes, as well as for people whose differences are great, to sit and share stories, to allow contradictions to exist, to know that there are multiple ways to look at all things, and yet to use our collective creativity to find sufficient places of commonality that together we can build communities, educate children, heal the sick, feed the hungry, work, play, worship, investigate the world and all it contains without accepting deep dehumanization as the cost of doing business. In the world to come that I am trying to remember, enough of us awaken from Datastan's spell to redirect our nations' commonwealth to healing and opportunity for the many rather than wars of conquest against other nations and against the natural world.

In a narrow sense, community cultural development is a profession and a field, with its own methods, ethics and parochial concerns. But those who work within it and who understand its broadest implications have something to offer every extant social sector and type of community. We understand that Datastan is not serving our higher purposes and that only Storyland shows us how relationships must be our pre-eminent concern, rather than the misguided, scientistic notions of standardization and efficiency that have captured far too much of our attention and resources. I have never met a community artist who is not eager to work with anyone to help bring our new, largest, collective story into focus. I have never met a community artist who does not comprehend that finding creative ways to address the complex problems that now plague our societies is essential to our survival as a species and to the survival of the planet. I have never met a community artist who is not eagerly anticipating our awakening from the trance of Datastan to the reality of Storyland, who is not seeing evidence of that awakening every day.

I am impressed with the project Judith Marcuse and her colleagues have set out to accomplish at the International Centre of Art for Social Change. Around the world, this is precisely the sort of nexus we need to connect and support the countless artists, activists, healers, educators and others who understand that something very far-reaching is happening, to call on our selective advantage as storytellers to strengthen what is most dynamic, rich, resilient and creative in our lives and in our communities, to equip us for the voyage ahead.

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I want to close with a brief quotation that has inspired me for decades. It is by Francis Jeanson, who distinguished himself as a member of the French resistance during World War II, a supporter of Algerian liberation who imperiled his own safety and standing in calling attention to France's crimes as a colonial power, and as a lifelong human rights activist—for instance, as the founder of the France-Sarajevo Association which advocated a multicultural Bosnia. He articulated the goal of cultural democracy, the commitment to pluralism, participation and equity that is Storyland's credo, as follows:

> [I]ts aim is to arrange things in such a way that culture becomes today for everybody what culture was for a small number of privileged people at every stage of history where it succeeded in reinventing for the benefit of the living the legacy inherited from the dead.[5]

[5] From Francis Jeanson's "On the Notion of 'Non-public,'" quoted in *Cultural Democracy* Number 19, February 1982

Despite all the claims Datastan continues to make for its wisdom and dominance, its hold on us weakens every day. Now, more than ever, we have a chance to live in Storyland. Datastan is trying to conceal its poverty of means and imagination with loud proclamations of its power. Don't lose heart. Don't be distracted by the noise. The antidote to despair, always close at hand, is to remember the world to come.

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