

BEYOND THE BUILDING: PERFORMING ARTS AND TRANSFORMING PLACE

Question 3: Events and Effects: How can temporary performance events transform and imbue lasting meaning and change within particular spaces and communities? How is it tied to broader social and environmental strategies?

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Some respondents challenged the idea that performance experiences do not have lasting value and offered transformative benefits that may be produced - including endowment of physical space with meaning or producing new ways of imaging space. Performance was noted for its particular ability to create psychic space where new possibilities can form and empathy emerge. This power is derived from story and narrative. Temporal performance events are even more effective when experienced as an element of other civic activity or dialogues (or when linked with programming). As well, temporal events create the experience of participation on which further community engagement can be built.

TERESA EYRING: Sometimes, a temporary event spontaneously inspires future action, through new awareness, relationships etc. If there is intentionality about the desire for a temporary event to leave behind some legacy, action, or imbued meaning (whether small or large) then it needs people who are passionate and accountable for making sure that happens. But of course, sometimes it just happens.

MK WEGMANN: I would only apply the word temporary to performance in the sense that an audience sitting in a theater has a temporary relationship with the work in those moments of performance; even that, however, does not take into account how the ideas and experience of the performance resonate with audience members beyond that temporal moment. Performing artists engaged in social justice work, such as Pat Graney in Seattle or ArtSpot Productions in New Orleans [can] make prisons creative places. Even if only temporary, there is a positive impact on those communities.

MARIO GARCIA DURHAM: As to how to make temporary performance events transformative – allow the power of the art to fully manifest itself. I am a strong believer in the power of festivals, which can transform physical areas of a community into a fertile and reimaged place. This transformation can take place in areas that have a troubled or negative history within a community.

MITCH MENCHACA: Performances will come and go, but what is left on an individual (both singer and consumer) is the experience. Choral singing is a more accessible, participatory art form than many. But in most performance settings, there is still a “fourth wall” separating the people on stage singing from the people in the audience listening. One strategy for choruses to connect with the community is with a “community sing.”

ASHLEY SPARKS: Some of the most powerful ways to create place is with performance because it mutually constructs space. Performance can animate civic, physical, and psychic space. Performance goes beyond participation to form/inspire opinions, ideas, and empathy. There is inherently deep power in story / narrative. [Think of] the performing arts as ‘transportation’ – we move people physically, emotionally, conceptually, etc.

HOWARD HERRING: Every long-term affiliation begins with a first experience. Our goal is to specifically welcome new patrons and make them an offer to come back that they can't refuse. If we can integrate someone into the New World Symphony family, this can lead to a lasting relationship. As part of the experience for new audiences, we contextualize the performance with narration and video in order to bring them closer to the music as quickly as possible. I often use the phrase, “informed leads to transformed.” It can strengthen someone's sense of connection to a place.

MARK SCORCA: Leading companies are performing new, community-based works in both the opera house and community venues. These performances affirm the personal experiences of local audiences, their cultural traditions, and their neighborhoods and venues. New works can tell stories that have specific resonance within particular communities

SANDRA BERNHARD: We know our audience can be forever changed or can be more wholly convicted about what they believe by taking a journey through storytelling – whether it be on the main-stage or in the community.

COURTNEY ALICK: OSF has also produced a site specific piece of theater. We also produce community collaborative projects in our public spaces. These shows allow people from different backgrounds to mix and find commonalities. They reconnect us to our local spaces and history in them.

SANDIE ARNOLD: At YBCA we blend performance with other disciplines so we can create longer-term projects that lead to more lasting change. For example, as part of *YBCA In Community* in 2013 and 2014, YBCA worked with musician Meklit Hadero and her two collaborators, Sephora Waldu (visual artist and filmmaker) and Elias Fullmore (musician and visual artist), over a two-year period to develop a placemaking project in Oakland with the Ethiopian and Eritrean community. After a series of gatherings and workshops that led to deeper connections among community participants, the artists then led the community in the shared construction of a traditional Gojo/Adgo hut structure installed at Lake Merritt's Eastland Park. The hut and Lake Merritt then became the site of a week-long 'Home Away from Home' festival held September 7-14, 2014 in celebration of the Ethiopian New Year, with hundreds of participants coming from the larger Oakland community to celebrate at a festival that was centered on music and dance, as well as visual art, with an umbrella decorating station, hair braiding competition, and an art exhibit installed inside the hut.

Some voiced that view that for performance to have lasting value, it must emerge from intentional work and relationship building. It is through relationships that lasting impact can be achieved.

MICHAEL ROHD: I think the trick about performance and space and place is that if a project has as its goal an event, an ephemeral time based art event that seeks to build lasting place by building relationships and delight/meaning within a framework of rigorous, transient art, it had better have placed equal rigor and energy on the strategies for partnership and capacity building in and around that place/space, or I don't believe sustainability is a likely outcome, and I don't feel its legitimately working in the area of place...

CARLTON TURNER: A performance must be part of a larger strategy if it is going to impact placemaking. A performance is not a strategy.

On environmental strategies specifically...

COLEEN JENNINGS ROGGENSACK: as ASU is the first university in the country to have a sustainability institution, so we look at our own carbon footprint and we source our foods locally and work with biodegradable items both in our soy ink printing in our programs and in our own concessions program. We have worked with other artists like Grisha Coleman and how the work we do interfaces with the desert community we live in and how we utilize and think about water and water resources.