

September 2007



Mat Callahan's quarterly newsletter of music, art, and philosophy
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Dear Friends:

The last edition of this newsletter announced our visit to the US in March, 2007. We traveled to the East Coast to join David Rovics in a two week sprint that gave us a chance to introduce ourselves to a new audience. It was a great experience and we made many new friends. It also played an important part in our long term strategy of engagement with the struggles of our times. This means, above all, adding our musical voices to the rising chorus opposed to war, corporate plunder and environmental degradation. It so happens, though, that since "The Trouble With Music" was published the number of requests to give talks on related subjects has been increasing. This has led not only to more speaking engagements but also the inspiration for a new book. Our current visit to the West Coast is largely a preparatory step toward that end. Since this is the 40th anniversary of the so-called "Summer of Love" we're being bombarded by tall tales and low slander about a period and a place in which I came of age. As both a native of San Francisco and a musician this interests me a great deal. While my participation in historic events doesn't make me an authority, it sure gives me a basis to criticize distortion and expose outright lies. Unfortunately, these are to be found in abundance. So, I've begun research on a book which will examine the way the music, now world renowned, was actually made. It is my contention that one cannot fully grasp that process without examining how its making intersected with political upheaval that was also, during the same period, focused in San Francisco. Hence the working title: "Some Moments Are Forever" (musical renaissance and social revolution in San Francisco 1965-75). I will report on my progress in future editions of this newsletter. Meanwhile, please take note of the concerts we'll be playing in September and come if you can. We've been invited to join David Rovics again in a concert in Forks, WA. And, thanks to our friends at Broken Arrow Records, we'll be sharing the bill with other notable performers at the Galeria de la Raza in San Francisco.

Between March and September we have not been idle. Mainly we've been performing a lot in Switzerland. That's with Yvonne's band and in the Duet. But there have been other projects as well. I attended two interesting conferences in June and July. (Read the accompanying article for the details.) The people I've met and the exchanges I've made have encouraged further participation in such events. Not only because it gives me a venue to present my own views but because it is convincing evidence that a growing movement has arisen to challenge the Powers That Be. Whether that be called neo-liberalism, global capitalism or imperialism, opposition to it is taking a far more vigorous and confident turn. While it may appear at times that we are weak and marginalized, a basic shift is taking place. Momentum is gathering in many parts of the world for a confrontation with ruling elites. In some places this means massive mobilizations of working people (Latin America is a shining example). In others, there is ongoing, armed resistance to US occupation. In others still, there is the growing struggle against the privatization of everything and for the preservation and renewal of the commons.

Naturally, this is not the impression one gets by reading or watching corporate media. As usual these are filled with hysterics and hype designed to keep us ignorant, isolated and afraid. Fortunately, tireless activists in every corner of the world are organizing and educating, learning and mobilizing with increasing effect. This is beginning to change both the dynamics of public discourse and the actual course of events. This is what motivates us to get out there and sing. We want to contribute, to inspire and to inform. Hopefully, we'll see you at one of our concerts. In any case, please stay in touch so we know these words have reached you.

Cheers, Mat

The following are our concert dates:

Saturday, September 22nd, 7 p.m.
Work in Progress and Cafe Paix
71 N. Forks Ave.
Forks, WA
Contact Patt (pattchon@olypen.com)

We will share the bill with David Rovics

Saturday, Sept 29,
The Galeria de la Raza 2857 24 St, (at Bryant), SF
Reception (w/ food and drink) at 7: 30 p.m.
Admission \$8 (but no one will be turned away for lack of funds)
Proceeds benefit The Galeria de la Raza and The Freedom Archives.

We will be joined by SF Poet Laureate, Jack Hirschman, and others.

Please give our new CD a listen, It's called "Welcome" and it's organic. Two voices, one guitar and no artificial additives. Guaranteed good for your health. Visit the website below to listen or to order.

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For further tour information contact:

Broken Arrow Records
1395 San Carlos Ave.
Suite C
San Carlos, CA 94070
650-654-1700
<http://www.brokenarrowrecords.com>
info@brokenarrowrecords.com



The following poem is by regular contributor Thomas Powell. Tom is an artist and educator residing in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Audience Wanted

Of what value the act of creation,
If not the act of appreciation?
To bring life, completion, and grace,
Can one truly exist without the other . . . in space?
To create, to give thanks,
Action verbs of yin and yangst . . . embrace
Artist's wanton imagination.

Of what use this twisted metal form,
Which I belabor,
If the plumber, my neighbor,
Across the fence not inquire,
What the hell is that! . . . porn?
Without adore or abhor . . . or lesser fire,
What art is verily complete? . . . intact?

So who is this audience of late,
These completers of art?
The blasé, the applauders, the fanatical,
I compose my list with anticipation. . . .
To start . . . God! . . . that detached incarnate!
Carnal, must every list be hierarchical?
Irony dogs my fate, an unwashed visitation.

But, mom is a close second,
Loves me always, conditionally, I reckon.
My best friend, Ralph . . . loves me without reservation.
Oh, he just raised his leg . . . the damn critic.
Tough the audience not copasetic!
Family rules . . . my art, my heart . . . the cannibals.
Home on the shelf . . . unopened, not fecund . . . not jewels.

What about I and me 'n myself?
The creator/audience in splendid alienation?
God did it! . . . the first mover . . . of Creation
Am I not too omniscient behoover?
This sprocket ordered to that redoubt,
Audience eat what I dish out.
And should they ignore this wealth? . . . Damnation!

A patron! . . . my champion, my meal ticket.
Oh where in this thicket, hides such benefactor,
Wise redactor, to lead with carrot and stick it?
Quick, quick it! . . . not tarry my visionary.
Theater commands this able actor . . .
But wait, wrong . . . servile ingratiation,
Am I to become another's permutation?

A gallery bore? Not! I want more!
Sales, collections, museum walls,
Notoriety, groupies to fawn each eyesore,
Burn my homey . . . celebrity calls!
So what, you say I'm lonely? . . . Hello?
I'm hanging with Jimi and Michelangelo.
I ain't poor! Ain't no dinosaur.

The public, my public . . . minds in the gutter,
Rank gourmands of pubic mutter.
Audience pavloved to consume,
The algae bloom, the creative plume . . . of culture
Junkie vulture . . . Subject noun, and subject clutter . . .
Future opus to exhume,
You need me, I desire yooouuuuummmm.

That's right, baby, I'm your überman.
I snort Nietzsche and Ayn Rand.
Endless present sifts worlds of sand.
Smoke and mirrors? . . . of quality you speak. . . .
Listen, suburb to proverb a flaming piston. . . . trajectory,
My beautiful corpse carves footnotes to history?
Evoke the fears. . . . Now! trumps future bleak.

In this funk, two days stubble,
Reality returns to pop my bubble. . . . not so late,
I am compelled to create.
The artist's fate. . . . so much trouble.
Amidst this bile of fantasy stealth. . . . and decadence,
But where shall I find this audience?
Wagging his tail, here comes Ralph.

Thomas Powell

A Tale of Two Conferences

In late June and early July I attended two gatherings. One was the World Development Movement (WDM) conference in Leeds, England. The other was the 11th session of the Intergovernmental Committee (IGC) of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in Geneva, Switzerland. As their names indicate, both were concerned with global issues. In other respects they were completely different.

The WDM is a 37 year old NGO whose mandate is to organize campaigns to fight poverty in the world. They are highly critical of the Make Poverty History campaign because it mobilized celebrities to divert a social base (largely young people in the rich countries) toward vague appeals to the G8 for charity. The WDM maintains that poverty has a history. It was created and can be ended by people. Instead of charity they seek justice. The themes addressed in workshops were the following:

- Reparations and the legacy of enslavement
- Apartheid
- Climate justice
- Struggles against privatization
- Art and Resistance
- Women's rights
- Migration
- Corporate globalization

At the plenary session the speakers included: **Ngugi wa Thiong'o, George Monbiot, Mohau Pheko and Esther Stanford.**

Their presentations were different but all were compelling. Ngugi spoke philosophically about connection, how the distant must illuminate the near and the near be seen as one step in a long sequence that has direction. The direction must clearly be the ending of the conditions under which oppression and injustice can prevail otherwise we are going nowhere. He also explored the geopolitical situation making the link between the rifts within and between countries, emphasizing the interpenetration whereby the so-called Third World (its people, its poverty) is in the rich countries just as there are wealthy elites in the poorest countries. He evoked the images of the homeless person and the prisoner. These, he said, were the images by which visitors are met as soon as they reach LA or London. With this, Ngugi was elaborating two crucial ideas: one was the basis for unity that could be grasped in the world as a whole. He emphasized labor as the determining component in migration and in control by states and in this lay emancipatory potential. The other crucial point was one derived from his long history of anti-imperialist struggle for which he was imprisoned in Kenya. This concerned removing the privileged position (in language, law, property, etc.) of the European powers who began colonizing the world following the Columbian event 500 years ago. I have to add that this was far away from the 'identity' politics made so fashionable at the end of the 20th century. It was, instead, the firm principle by which Fanon, Lumumba and many revolutionaries in Africa and throughout the world began the process of dismantling both the psychological and legal shackles that made slaves of people of color, in particular, and humanity as such. Ngugi wa Thiong'o is a wonderful writer. Read his latest novel, *Wizard of the Crow*.

George Monbiot is a widely known environmental activist. His column appears weekly in the Guardian UK and it focuses on exposing the diverse effects of capitalism. George gave two speeches. In the first, he spoke of the totalitarian regime under which we live. "There is no alternative" has been repeated ad nauseam for the last 30 years (or ever since Margaret Thatcher first uttered the phrase) and its con-

tent is clear: capitalism is the end toward which all human history has been directed. It cannot be surpassed and it cannot be destroyed. We must, therefore, submit to the discipline of the Market and prevent any unwilling, deluded souls out there from disrupting its natural unfolding.

That this has ravaged the public sphere and all essential services is beyond doubt. Equally beyond doubt is the ecological ruin it has visited upon the Earth. But what Monbiot sought to expel was the pernicious illusion that somehow this was an expression of the popular will, that capitalism and democracy were one and the same, that we are all beneficiaries of decisions we have made and all equally responsible for negative outcomes. We must identify this totalitarianism- and name it such-precisely in order to unmask it and to undermine its totalizing effects. By recognizing its actual nature we begin to break the grip of its pathology.

In his second address, Monbiot, situated current resistance in history. He insisted that our attempts to change the world are part of a much longer struggle from which we can derive perspective, lessons and inspiration. He referred to England's long and colorful history of rebels including the Levellers, the Diggers, followers of Ned Ludd and many others. He cited Gerrard Winstanley as the composer of the first communist manifesto, quoting some of its passages full of irreducible logic and poetic grace. He told the tales of Captain Swing, the Daughters of Rebecca and, of course, the Luddites all of whom rose behind imaginary leaders in very real rebellion. The crucial link between them all and to the present day is the preservation of the Commons against its Enclosure by men of privilege be they monarchs, lords or corporations. Moreover, it was by challenging what was deemed "possible" or "realistic" that these risings brought about change and etched their names in history. Outsmarting and outrunning the clutches of the State are lessons we need to learn. Even more importantly, it is through collective action, illuminated by collective vision, that a better world can be created.

Following Monbiot were Mohau Pheko and Esther Sanford, two women from South Africa and Ghana, respectively. Their speeches mutually reinforced each other. Pheko addressed a wide range of questions facing activists throughout the world. While she spoke directly to her English audience about the campaigns in which they are engaged she argued from an internationalist perspective for the integration and unity of purpose of all struggles against oppression and exploitation. She emphasized that, right now, organizations and individuals throughout Africa were waging determined struggles while remaining largely unreported in the media. It was no small matter, she pointed out, that militant resistance to colonialism, to women's oppression and to religious obscurantism were deliberately hidden by daily reports of famine, disease and tribal or religious massacre. While acknowledging the desperate circumstances in much of Africa, Asia and Latin America, she pointed out that it was the guilty parties' attempts to hide their crimes that lies behind the constant harangue we hear which amounts to little more than an attempt to blame the victims by painting them as ignorant savages.

Pheko peppered her speech with humorous references to the verbal hi-jinx masquerading as public discourse. Such were the substitution of globalization for colonialism or imperialism; of celebrity for leadership; of text messaging for mass action, and so forth. She ridiculed the venal and vacuous justifications given by politicians for their blatant abuse of the public trust and slavish devotion to their corporate masters. Her message, however, went far beyond any litany of woes or damning condemnations. What Pheko called upon us to do was to become militants; to redouble our efforts and focus our aim, to have the courage of our convictions and the audacity to demand. We need justice before us to put injustice behind us. This will never be fashionable or chic but it is more timely than ever. Indeed, she concluded by not only calling for but predicting an upsurge in popular resistance.

Pheko was followed by Esther Sanford who gave an excellent summary of the forgoing speeches. Crystalizing essential points she placed emphasis on two: that, first, the conference was itself an act of resistance that had to be carried forward every succeeding day. Secondly, it is transformation that is demanded, not adjustment or accommodation.

This requires a thorough and comprehensive exposure of systematic injustice, not only its worst symptoms. For poverty to be eliminated its origins and its beneficiaries must be indicted while its sufferers must be mobilized to free themselves from it.

It was a powerful message which I can wholeheartedly support.

My own participation took two forms. I had originally been invited to be a panelist in the seminar called Art and Resistance. When the organizers found out I could sing they asked if I would do that as well. I performed at different points during the day's proceedings, kicking off the plenary session and giving a demonstration in the seminar. Overall, I found the concentration of experience, thoughtful inquiry and passionate commitment to be excellent. There were several hundred participants, mainly from England but also from Africa and the Caribbean. The great majority were activists already engaged in a variety of campaigns. Participation in the seminars was, therefore, lively and focused on problems arising from actual work mobilizing popular resistance. Indeed, few of those attending the Art and Resistance seminar were themselves artists. They were mainly representatives of groups seeking to improve their work with artists, with performance and exhibition, in conjunction with their ongoing political organizing. Thus, the questions posed had less to do with theory or aesthetics and more to do with fostering oppositional culture at a time when, as the seminar announcement said, "corporate globalisation extends its reach into ever new areas of what were previously social and communal spaces..."

I argued for a twofold strategy of invasion and evacuation of public space. On the one hand, to seize every opportunity for festival, theatrical or musical performance, exhibition and ceremony in parks, streets, libraries, schools or whatever is open and, ostensibly, the commons. On the other, to build social centers, use temporary event sites, even people's living rooms, where it is possible to create community and share ideas through the performance and exhibition of art. The public space is dominated by advertising, anti-music and the police. But it can be reclaimed. The underground or guerilla encampment is invisible to the media and without official sanction. But it can be crucial to sustaining creativity and connection for oppositional art and artist.

I argued further that the terrain of the creative is where we are strong and our enemy is weak-unless we surrender to the delusions that fill the atmosphere like poison gas. Especially toxic are riches and fame. These not only lure with their obvious appeal to egotism but, more insidiously, they degrade the actual, lived experience that art making is. Furthermore, they trap us in the servility of waiting for a savior be he Jesus or Elvis or Bono. If we uncritically adopt the logic of media recognition then we hand over the very tools we need to subvert its grip on the popular imagination. We can prevent this by realizing that, together, we make experience with which the consumerist spectacle cannot compete. There is simply no substitute for participation in art making and community forming. Its rewards are ends in themselves and the means by which preparation for larger scale social transformation can be conducted.

(For more on these subjects read the last chapter of my book, *Conclusions and Solutions*.)

All in all, the conference was a success. I was glad to have participated. From Leeds I flew to Geneva.

The 11th session of the Intergovernmental Committee on Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore, mandated by the World Intellectual Property Organization (an agency of the UN)

Having written previously about the process unfolding at this UN body I won't go into it here. (check earlier newsletters for details) This is for two reasons: first, there is little new to report. The wheels grind on and the same arguments are advanced by the same parties with little to show for it either in terms of new agreements or new approaches to making them. Second, my purpose in participating was, as I stated at the time, to present Pete Seeger's proposal, thereby making it a part of the public record. I was drawn into further participation due to the interest shown in certain ideas contained in the proposal and by my engagement with representatives of indigenous groups and ethnol-

ogists interested in archiving and protecting music from many parts of the world. I have met some thoughtful and committed people for whom these meetings are an important focus of ongoing efforts to, at the very least, ameliorate or minimize the most egregious abuses of globalization. While there is no great movement sweeping the world as there was in the decades following the Second World War, there are both echoes of that period and clarions of another approaching that insinuate themselves at the most fortuitous moments.

Such, for example, was the informal lunch meeting called by Pauktuutit, an organization of Inuit Women of Canada. (The Inuit live in the polar regions of four countries, the US, Canada, Greenland and Russia) By chance I was seated next to the head of the US delegation. To the other side of me were the delegates from New Zealand and the UK. The presentation gave compelling evidence of both the legacy of imperial conquest and the efforts to organize against it. And the Canadian government, principle architect of some of the worst abuses against these people, paid for the drinks and sandwiches!

A detailed account was given of two projects these women have been mounting for more than a decade. The first involved the Amauti, a garment worn by Inuit mothers that is a brilliant synthesis of utility and aesthetics. Essentially, it is a large overcoat made of caribou that has an ingenious pouch for an infant to be carried, nursed and kept warm in. It is also beautifully decorated with patterns that mark the region and individual of each garment's origin. It has been pursued aggressively by fashion designers and garment manufacturers for years. Having already seen the kayak, the parka and other Inuit inventions turned into enormously profitable industries-for others, Pauktuutit has organized Inuit women to protect the Amauti by means of patent law. They are in the process of forming a manufacturing cooperative following legal guidelines set forth by the Canadian government and WIPO. This "happy ending" is fraught with difficulties, however. Not the least of these involve the deep conflict between Western concepts of ownership and Inuit ones. Attempts to establish compatibility between customary or tribal law and Canadian law have, thus far, produced more problems than solutions. Pauktuutit expressed guarded optimism but were clearly fearful of being ripped off.

The second project involved the practice and knowledge of midwifery. The midwife once occupied a special place in Inuit society. She was trained in medicinal plants and techniques for pre and post-natal care that were the products of generations of experience and insight. A girl's first sewn garment was given to the midwife who delivered her as was the boy's first kill. Obviously, the social bonds created were vital to the health of the community. Yet they were destroyed by the Canadian government in the 1970's when it declared that births be performed in hospitals most of which are in cities thousands of miles away from Inuit communities. Attempts to restore this practice to its rightful place began in 1993 with a massive effort to collect oral histories from midwives across the vast Canadian north. The archive thus created has been coveted by universities and government agencies demanding that it be presented to them as the only authorities capable of deciding its proper use. This Pauktuutit has refused to do.

Delegates from New Zealand, UK, US and even the Inuit Circumpolar Council all expressed interest in the legal, medical and ethical ramifications of this body of knowledge and the unwillingness to release it for general use. And this interest was expressed with the customary careful regard for a people's cultural sensitivities. Nevertheless, when even the Inuit Circumpolar Council, a UN sanctioned group representing all Inuit people in four countries, was told it could not have access-at least at present-the chill in the room was palpable. Indeed, this is both the blessing and the curse of the UN as a whole. It does provide a place where violently antagonistic parties can talk. Yet it has utterly failed to resolve any of the questions put before it. So, why do countries, tribes, organizations and individuals continue to participate? This is the subject I want to explore in the following text.

Inside, Outside, Upside, Down

For those of us politically activated by the revolutionary storms of the Sixties "working within the system" was a common and conflict-laden phrase. If one was serious about changing the world then it signified a dead end to be avoided at all costs. True social transformation

was only possible by attacking the System from the outside. Outside was the place where the excluded reside, meaning almost everyone. Inside were the privileged and powerful, their lackeys and their running dogs. Also inside, were those who, however well intentioned, were deluded by the false promises of bourgeois democracy, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, indeed all the liberal institutions that were obstacles to real change. Reforming them was a waste of time or worse, it was the means of perpetuating the oppression and exploitation for which they were responsible.

This attitude extended to the United Nations, although with a twist. Since many countries had recently liberated themselves from colonialism, their membership in this international body signified their victory. Furthermore, proposals and declarations made there by militant opponents of the old world order could not be ignored by the shapers of public opinion. Therefore, in spite of the liberal structure of the UN as a whole and the control of the Security Council which effectively denied the great majority of nations any real power, there appeared to be a purpose for working inside this body. Besides, unlike the nation states which comprised it, the UN derived its legitimacy from the potential it offered to transcend the divisions of the world's peoples and to bring an end to war.

Now all of this has come to ruin. None of the world's great crises is being effectively addressed by the UN. Wars abound. Epidemics abound. Global warming threatens. An international body capable of mobilizing the world's resources to overcome these problems would be welcome. Such, alas, does not exist. So what does? What do "inside" and "outside" mean today? Is there a "system" within which to work? Is there one to oppose with the militant struggle of the world's excluded majorities?

This is where "upside down" comes in. There clearly is an order, or set of component parts functioning together to benefit wealth and power. This is a system and it works for those with wealth and power. To all the rest it is chaotic disorder of a magnitude beyond measure. Its rationales and justifications do not make sense either logically or practically. Logically, because at every turn inconsistency and hypocrisy erupt. Practically, because one cannot overcome death and destruction with nonsensical explanations. Thus, inevitably, the ancient divide of have and have not, rich and poor, master and slave, resurfaces even if it is cloaked in new guises. For example, the public interest vs. privatization, the Commons vs. Enclosure. Or, the indigenous people vs. the nation state. Or, traditional knowledge and genetic resources vs. inventors and entrepreneurs. Out of a complex web of "identities", "interests", histories and territories, the fundamental division in the world emerges. From one perspective this is the best of all possible worlds. From another, the world is upside down. While it is folly to oversimplify what is indeed very complicated, it is worse to consider it incomprehensible. To accept with resignation what one should be rebelling against is the ultimate betrayal.

In fact, the system is the same as it ever was. Imperialism by any other name is still imperialism. Efforts to reform it are as futile today as they were when I was a teenager refusing induction into the US Army. Nonetheless, while I am deeply suspicious of any parliamentary procedures, I recognize the importance of diverse forms of struggle. These include the efforts of indigenous peoples at the UN. Were they unaccompanied by, for example, militant street demonstrations in Venezuela, Bolivia and Mexico, they would certainly lose much of their usefulness. But when serving to articulate just demands which are already mobilizing people where they live, participation in the UN makes sense.

Having said that, it is important to strictly adhere to principle. This means the struggle for justice must never give way to realpolitik which is just a polite way of saying might makes right. What unites the vast array of local, popular struggles is this common demand. Whether it is made in terms of rights, distribution of resources, against the oppression of women or in any other form, it derives its force from its universality and its unique ability to constitute a politics of emancipation. Anything else will be easily diverted or crushed. Divide and rule are the time tested techniques of empire. Solidarity and equality are the antidote. These cannot be applied piecemeal or on a case by case basis. Either they apply to all or they exist for none.