

rc news



{from the director}



PHOTO BY MOON

To the surprise of many (including myself) and the chagrin of some, I'm back as RC Director for another year. Angela Dillard, who took over three years ago, finished a term as our leader and was prepared to do another, but needed a break in between. I agreed to do the interim bridge. Then Angela got herself appointed the next LSA Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education. Thus I became the successor of my successor who, in a twinkling,

became my boss. In a year's time, we'll have an entirely different Director, Jon Wells, who is new to the U-M and will be serving this year as an Associate Director of the RC to learn its ways.

The RC has always been graced with resilience, even when living on a shoe-string. It has learned to be adept and nimble in dealing with historical circumstances and institutional realities. It has grown and flourished, often in unexpected ways. This year will be no different. Perhaps that is why we decided, for the summer reading we share with the incoming class, to focus on creativity. We've assembled a few articles or book chapters and a TED talk on the subject, all of which are now posted on our website. Anyone one of you can peruse these: find us at www.facebook.com/UM.Residential.College, and join the 2014 RC Community Summer Read Facebook Group.

There's been a lot of public talk lately about a reported decline in creativity among American youth. We include one of these studies by Kyung-Hee Kim, who did a quantitative analysis of Torrance test scores for 'creative thinking' and found them trending downward in recent years. So it's perhaps not surprising—certainly it is telling—that the reading materials we assembled focused, not so much on creativity itself, but on what is purported to be squelching it.

Sir Ken Robinson sees public education—especially test-driven, standardized curriculum—as the culprit. American schooling, he says, has displaced a culture of curiosity—the seedbed of learning—with a culture of compliance which conforms to a hierarchy of subjects and outcomes that celebrate a narrow spectrum of achievement rather than the great diversity of talents and proclivities which children exhibit when left to themselves. The effect is to stigmatize

mistakes and make youngsters afraid to be wrong—fearful of risks—careful in their answers. Hannah Rosin focuses on modern parenting—less on the familiar tropes of helicoptering and bubble packing, than on the cultural shifts in our understanding of what constitutes acceptable risk, and a new consensus that regards accidents (like failure) as thoroughly preventable and not a natural part of life. Parents spend more time with their children and are closer to them, preoccupied with minimizing risks and maximizing happiness, but in the process, they have inadvertently squeezed out the autonomous spaces youngsters need in order to explore on their own, negotiate solutions with others, modify their surroundings, take risks, experience fear, and learn to anticipate consequences. Of course, one can argue that these days young people spend a good deal of time socializing with their peers, beyond the supervisory gaze of adults, thanks to social media. But Sherry Turkle, in her work with high school students, raises questions about the costs that come with the benefits of Facebook, texting, and virtual relationships. The distractions, the stress, and what she calls “the perils of performance” which smart phones incessantly generate push against spontaneity, authenticity, and those “places of stillness”—the idle reveries of staring out the window at nothing in particular (call it boredom?)—that adolescents (indeed all of us) need to collect random thoughts, compose coherence, and think inventively.

This year, we shall be debating these and other reflections on creativity and what promotes or suppresses it. But then a question is: how do we explain the wonderfully creative students we see joining our community every year? We can't account for creativity by merely citing all the pressures that contain it. We must also ask, what helps to foster the capacities of imagination and creation?

One might say: teaching! Effective teaching is not a delivery system, but itself a creative profession. Its effectiveness is measured, not by the act of classroom instruction, but by the learning that goes on in it. Other essays in this Newsletter show that it is possible to invent curriculum, courses, and activities that foster creative practices. RC faculty are good at this; some have also done research on affirmative models of creative thinking and action: Jeff Evans has studied and taught the neuropsychology of creativity for many years; Liz Goodenough has spent much of her career exploring the 'secret spaces of childhood' and 'where children play'; Stephen Ward is finishing a book on Jimmy and Grace Lee

{from the director}



RC faculty Stephen Ward is working on a book about Detroit political activists Jimmy and Grace Lee Boggs.

Boggs, Detroit political activists whose lifetimes of engagement have repeatedly re-imagined their city and its predicates through a restless imagining of alternative possibilities. Indeed, their efforts to go out and create “a little slice of the future we want to live in” is what Andy Boyd, an RC graduate of 1983, calls the “beautiful trouble” of “prefigurative

Our educational philosophy has always been grounded in the benefits of a living-learning community motivated by the best principles and practice of the liberal arts.

interventions”. Andy is a writer, activist, and career prankster, who has brought us the guerrilla theater of “Yes Men” and “Billionaires for Bush” and now a book-length toolbox of tactics for mobilization, demonstration, and action; he will be at the RC in November to talk about creative instigation for the annual Robertson lecture on liberal arts education.

But I think it is not so much the teachers as the culture of the RC learning community that makes creative things happen. The college was established in the 1960s to refresh higher education with experiments and inventive curriculum—to instigate a learning program that would enable students to pursue independent inquiry, to work outside their comfort zones, and to take risks, learning from trying and failing and helping each other. As many of you reading this will remember, in mastering a foreign language or doing the arts practicum requirement in the RC curriculum,

students experience the exhilaration and fear of flying high and off the charts while finding the means of navigation through self-discipline and attention to craft. Students placed in an internship with a community organization confront unknown circumstances and a diversity of conditions that are challenging and scary, but through sustained engagement, they find self-confidence and discover untapped capacities in themselves and others. A student-centered curriculum which works across and between multiple disciplines, allows independence and choice, applauds self-direction and experimentation, and demands analytical attention and hard practice tends to produce learners who are proactive, committed, and inventive. They become capable of pursuing divergent lines of activity and study while bringing these into convergent thinking and self-defining coherence. The stated mission of the RC is to enable students to find their voice—in whatever idiom or medium—and to actively use that voice—whether in writing or movement, performance or practice, reflection or action, orally or signed—in college and for their lifetime beyond. The RC learning community does not create creativity—it releases it.

We will need to tap these energies in the coming year as we prepare for a major external review in 2015-16, as a large contingent of new faculty (three full-time lecturers and three full professors) and staff join us, and as we welcome one of the largest first-year cohorts in many years. More broadly: convening and implementing the critical elements of active learning remains central to how the liberal arts will engage the challenges of the future. How will classical tradition find footing in a digital age; how will social media revamp the residential community; how will changing learning strategies among students reshape the curriculum; how will the renovated landscape of East Quad be occupied, repurposed, and modified by students and faculty, as they re-own their spaces; what forms of engaged practice will emerge or be rediscovered; and how will the next generations of students and faculty formulate these challenges and devise responses? These questions are all part of the struggle to make education relevant, compelling, collective, and life-long. How this is done lies at the heart of a liberal arts education and of pedagogical practice in the Residential College.

Charlie

The Residential College (RC) is a four-year, interdisciplinary, living-learning community of 1,000 undergraduates established through the University of Michigan’s College of Literature, Science and the Arts (LSA) in 1967. The distinctive educational mission of the RC is to enable students to develop their intellectual interests and creative talents in an environment in which they can find their own voice and relate learning with doing. The RC faculty and staff challenge students to take the initiative in shaping their own education, to participate actively in classes and in extra-curricular programs, to think critically about what they are learning and reflectively about what they are doing, and to engage with the University community as well as the outside world. Learn more at: <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/rc>.

WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT
WHEN WE TALK ABOUT

CREATIVITY



BY JEFF EVANS

Students come to my courses on the science and psychology of creativity with a mix of motives, anxieties, and curiosities. Some seek to be more creative. Some come already involved and even accomplished in the arts; some, on the other hand, despair: “how can I be creative when I can’t even draw?” Or they wonder what psychology or what science has to do with it; or they simply want to know what “It” is. So in week one, we address the “It” question: what are we talking about when we talk about creativity? For starters we quickly do away with Runco’s “art bias” (1), that when we talk about creativity we must be talking about art. We examine the idea that many things people do, can be done more or less creatively. So, in the language of psychology, we’re talking about human behavior—art and not art—as well as about the mind and the brain, and the social and natural worlds in which we are embedded. Creativity is not just about artists nor even just about innovators or originators. Creativity is about all of us with our “habits of mind” and behavior, our “processes,” our enthusiasms, our imaginations—and our self-definitions. Sternberg reminds us of the self-fulfilling prophesy: deciding we’re not creative (for whatever reason) can unfortunately make it so (2).

Nonetheless, most creativity theorists believe that when something is creative, it is both original and useful. But imagine worrying whether your project is original instead of being absorbed in the project itself. We’d never get anything done!

And worse, it would be less about us and more about what other people think. Originality and usefulness are important of course, but our focus should be on believing that we can be creative and on knowing what helps us along—the people, the places, the ways of working that work for us (3). These pose questions worth answering and that, with a little thought, we are capable of answering, especially in conversation with others. Creativity may be largely an individual matter, but it benefits—hugely—from interaction with other people and with other worlds (4). Evaluating something for its usefulness comes later, after we’ve thrown ourselves into

the work and come out the other end with something, be it a pot or a poem, a proof or an understanding. So, if we are human, we are creative; furthermore, we can develop our creativity. How is this

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(geographically, culturally, spiritually)
is also why you are here.

so? Where do we start?

Prior to knowing what helps us work, we start with interest—real interest: passion, inspiration. I ask my students what in the world they are drawn to. If they don’t know how to answer right off, we ask ourselves: Where am I from (literally and figuratively)? Who am I? What do I believe? (5) Our answers to these broad, sweeping questions are the engines of creativity. Initial answers are often as broad as the questions: “I like to work with children;” “I always wanted to be a doctor;” “I don’t know why, but I’m really fascinated by languages.” Then we may ask: “What is it about children, (or medicine, or language) that really sparks you?” We spend

time thinking, reading, writing, and we compare notes. This is a form of interaction that the RC community is really good at: bringing people with similar interests together in small spaces to talk, and do, and learn together.

Graham Wallas was one of the last century's most important champions of educating for creativity (6). He compiled the testimony of notable scientists and mathematicians, like Helmholtz and Poincaré, on their creative processes. For them, a critical stage was what Wallas called preparation. This sounds boring, but it's not: it's why you are here. In problem-solving it's working hard—becoming a little obsessed, really—with the problem and its solution; in pursuing a passion it's gaining knowledge and skills to which you bring your own purpose and imagination. Where you are “coming from” (geographically, culturally, spiritually) is also why you are here. We are here not just to get a job or to become a certain thing, but, in the company of others, to transform our interests and passions (known only to ourselves, at first) into objects or pursuits that are useful to us and that touch others. Beyond preparation, Wallas, and over the years many others, suggest ways for adding imagination. Key is exposure to diverse worlds, in and outside of our own. Following the historical figures quoted by Wallas, it is well-documented in psychology that focused-attention on a problem or topic, followed by relaxed-attention to something different sparks new and useful ideas. The use is, at first, to us and our project, but once in a while what is useful to us, is useful not only to us. It might even be original. ■

Notes

1. Runco, M. A. (2007). *Creativity*. Burlington, MA: Elsevier Academic Press. Of course biases abound. “How can I be creative when I can't (or am not) (your bias here) .Just say no to this.
2. Costa, A. and Kallick, B. (2000). *Habits of Mind: a Developmental Series*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Sternberg, R. J. (2000). *Creativity is a decision*. In A. L. Costa (Ed.), *Teaching for Intelligence II* (pp. 85-106). Arlington Heights, IL: Skylight Training and Publishing, Inc.
3. Tharp, T. (2003). *The Creative Habit*. New York: Simon & Schuster. This book is often listed under self-help, but it's much more. It's really a creative autobiography with Twyla Tharp telling us what works for her and how she figured that out.
4. This is not a reference to physics or science fiction: Nature is a world. Every culture on earth is a world. We share worlds, but we live in our own as well. And so on.
5. Thanks to Michael Rohd and the UMS Mellon Faculty Institute on Arts Academic Integration, May, 2014, for underlining the power—even outside of the classroom - of this sequence of questions.
6. Wallas, G. (1926). *The Art of Thought*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company. What I like especially about Wallas is that his model of the creative process does not tell you what to do, except in the most general way. To quote Johnny Depp as Captain Barbossa: “The code is more what you'd call guidelines than actual rules.”
7. Thanks to Lisa Evans, MSW and Ami Walsh, MFA for comments on an earlier version of this piece. And thanks to my RC world for great conversations on my passion for the science and psychology of creativity.

JEFF EVANS is an instructor in the RC Social Theory and Practice Program and is the Head of the RC First Year Seminar Program.



Oscar-winning Director Coming to the RC

Malcolm Clarke, who directed “The Lady in Number 6,” which received the 2014 Academy Award for Best Documentary Short, will be visiting the RC on Monday, November 10th. Along with meeting with students, two of Clarke's films will be shown in the Keene Theater. “The Lady in Number 6” features the memories and reflections of Alice Herz-Sommer, a concert pianist who survived the Holocaust in the Theresienstadt concentration camp. “Prisoner of Paradise,” an Academy Award nominee, tells the story of Kurt Gerron, a filmmaker also imprisoned in Theresienstadt and tasked with making the infamous propaganda film in which the camp became a Potemkin village representing “Hitler's gift to the Jews.” The films thus depict art in the service of both resistance and deception, facilitating inspiration, collaboration, and more. Clarke will discuss these issues as well as technical and ethical challenges in filmmaking more generally.

The program is presented in conjunction with Hank Greenspan's RC first-year seminar, “Listening to Holocaust Survivors.” ■

Left: Alice Herz-Sommer, subject of the documentary “The Lady in Number 6”.

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM:

CREATIVITY IN PROGRESS

BY VIRGINIA MURPHY

Every child is an artist, the problem is staying an artist when you grow up —Pablo Picasso

The environmental challenges of today—global climate change, water scarcity, and loss of biodiversity—are exacerbated by an antagonistic political climate. It's no wonder that many students feel a creeping paralysis when faced with the question of what they can do to make a difference. In the early 1970s, when both political parties nearly unanimously endorsed sweeping environmental laws, there was a sense of hope and restoration. Today, many of my students feel that their individual actions mean little in the schematic of earth's crises.

To counteract the lack of early environmental education in our elementary, middle, and high school curricula, and a growing trend among college students towards reluctant acceptance of the *status quo*, I developed a new course entitled Environmental Activism: Citizenship in a Republic. The Activism course begins with an historical analysis of the conservationists, scientists, politicians, and activists whose work allowed positive and sustainable changes to our environmental consciousness, regulations, and behaviours.

We ground our classwork in the literature and theories of some of the foremost environmental thinkers: Theodore Roosevelt, John Muir, and Rachel Carson. As we contemplate and discuss these readings, the students begin to articulate what project they'd like to design, develop, and implement on campus. The ground rules for each group's project are that the project must be original, sustainable, and accomplished in one semester (contrary to how both students and professors feel at midterm, sixteen weeks can go by awfully fast).

Not all students have ideas for projects at the beginning of the semester, but those who do deliver a pitch to the class. Last year's class had a permaculture initiative

that built a garden for a local elementary school and a divest/invest campaign aimed at reducing the University's investments in fossil fuel. This year's class created a site that teaches students how to start their own small gardens and a student guide to eating sustainably. As students join the group that interests them, they bring a personal ideology, their vision for the completed project, and their unique skills. What fascinates me is how well this cooperative endeavor challenges each student's assumptions and allows a creative discipline to take shape. Working as a community allows the students to access multiple cultural values.

The students are also exposed to professional advocates through an interactive speaker series. This year's guest speakers included organizers from the Sierra Club, the Ecology Center, and the National Wildlife Federation. These speakers and environmental entrepreneurs, share their knowledge and wisdom on topics as diverse as organic food and beekeeping and designing a sticker that reflects a community's values towards its environment.

A project-based class allows students to use creativity as a mode to solve problems, as the students describe the qualities of the problem that they will attempt to solve. The fear of failure that often narrows the scope of a student's work is mitigated as each group defines their own success. This is exactly the type of creative work that will be essential in addressing the environmental problems of the future, and which encourages successful creativity from today's students. ■

VIRGINIA MURPHY is an instructor in the RC Social Theory and Practice Program.



TELLING IT

PHOTO BY LEISA THOMPSON

Telling It is an award-winning community-based program designed for under-served children and youth grades K-12 that has a close collaboration with the University of Michigan through the Residential College service-learning course, “Empowering Communities through Creative Expression”. Deb Gordon-Gurfinkel is the founder and director of *Telling It* and is also and is also the instructor for the RC class.

Founded in 2002, *Telling It's* mission is to serve children and youth who may be coping with the trauma of homelessness, exposure to gang activity, or any of the other compounding factors that come with under-served communities. The program employs innovative approaches to boost scholastic confidence by using the healing aspects of the arts in concert with

evidenced-based educational and social work practices. In collaboration with multiple community partners and trained support teams, *Telling It* establishes safe and creative environments for the children and teens; stimulates writing and literacy skills through the creative arts; and expands emotional literacy that improves scholastic confidence.

The RC course brings in student interns to participate as mentors at the *Telling It* sites in the community. This opportunity enables university students to develop skills such as planning and leading a group session, and identifying youth needs. The *Telling It* internship opportunity bridges the academic and neighboring communities. ■

DEBORAH GORDON-GURFINKEL is an instructor in the RC Drama Program and Director of the *Telling it* Program.



RAW VISION

You might find JASON WRIGHT'S students building a whirly-gig in a brownfield-turned-sculpture garden in Ypsilanti, or in the studio at the RC bending wires into a quilt squares that build personal experiences into a communal narrative. We asked Wright to discuss the role of creating work from everyday materials and its impact on students.

WRIGHT ON USING FOUND MATERIALS: "Using found material forces you to look at, and think about, the world around us. What is our world made of? Where is all this stuff coming from? Where is it going? And this involves not just thinking about materials as physical resources but as cultural resources as well. Who made all this stuff and why? What are the meanings contained in found objects? Working with found materials is essentially a project of transformation: changing the nature and meaning of something. We're taking things - materials, ideas, culture - and through a process of transformation, creating new things."

ON CREATIVE EMPOWERMENT: "Most of my students, as in the general population, have adopted and perpetuate common cultural attitudes about artmaking as a rarefied activity conducted only by specialists and trained professionals, or alternately of art objects as expensive commodities produced only for elite consumers. My goal is to help students see that art is both an accessible as well as a necessary part of everyday life. Art is not something only found in museums and galleries, art is everywhere in the world around us, and forms the foundation of how we relate to each other.

Most of my students are not pursuing careers in art. However, my goal is to help students understand that we all benefit not only from developing an appreciation of art made by others, but from developing an understanding that we are all artmakers. When we give permission to ourselves to make art, and to foster our creativity, and incorporate art-making into our daily lives, our lives become immeasurably richer, healthier, and empowered." ■

JASON WRIGHT is an instructor in the RC Studio Arts Program.



Lack of discipline is not the same as freedom.

debunking the myth of inspiration

BY KATRI ERVAMAA

Obviously, creativity can exist everywhere and in everything, and is not the sole possession of the creative artist. The RC summer readings study creativity from many non-arts related angles, especially as it relates to education and learning. I am offering my thoughts on the practice of creativity not only as one of the performance teachers in the college, but also as an active performer on the cello: practicing the creative and interpretive arts is a great way to explore your creative processes. Using them as a gateway to discovering your creative brain is not only smart, but also fun and definitely educational, whether or not you intend to make art your profession and life's purpose. This is why the RC Arts practicum is an integral part of the curriculum of the college.

Creative artists are often portrayed like magicians or shamans, in control of higher powers and inspirations that strike randomly and are all consuming. In all honesty, the idea of inspiration as the genesis for creativity is a romanticized 19th century product of great PR. I rather like thinking it's the other way around: creativity is the genesis for the inspirations and if your creative brain is active, ideas will come. If you sit around twiddling your thumbs, waiting for inspiration to ascend from the heavens you might have to wait a long time. If you get lucky, and it happens to come anyway, what then? If you haven't developed the necessary competence to follow through on the inspiration, it will only really exist in your head, and maybe your heart. I would rather it become something real and substantial!

"Creativity is a habit, and the best creativity is the result of good work habits." (Dancer Twyla Tharp). The most successful artists are mostly kind of boring, and, usually, incredibly self-disciplined and organized. I, too, am a great fan of the creative habit. It is an active practice of daily creativity, best done at the same time each day, meticulously organized and

grounded in skill, or in the building of a skill. It is important to define the skill: it could be as conventional as playing the C Major scale perfectly in tune on the cello, or as broadly defined as taking the sounds in your daily environment and organizing them into a piece of music in your chosen medium (recorded, live, rhythmic, vocal, improvised, composed etc). Creative habit is setting up conditions in such a way that they enable the creative processes in your brain—once those processes are activated, creativity is easy. And, in the most

wonderful, or at times inconvenient and messy ways, they carry over to all activities, not just the artistic ones.

There are several facts about my own creative brain that I know to be true:

1. It does not get activated on Facebook or e-mail. Most often the best ideas come shortly after I have started my daily practicing, while doing the warm-ups that essentially stay the same every day;
2. It needs time, space and freedom, not only to work through the idea but also to let the subconscious mind process the new information or discovery;
3. It wants to be grounded in a discipline that needs constant, active nurturing;
4. It finds working with limits often liberating, and helpful.

So what can YOU do to explore your creative processes in the RC? I guess first you have to decide the medium—painting, printing, ceramics, writing fiction, plays or poetry, acting, playing an instrument, singing, composing, improvising... and then go do it, every day! Instead of waiting around for the inspiration to come, enroll in an arts class, start learning a skill and practice every day. ■

KATRI ERVAMAA is an instructor in and Head of the RC Music Program.

Many RC students are motivated by a desire for—and a commitment to—social change. Our Social Theory and Practice Major encourages our students to identify a social problem that they care deeply about and explore it. Traditionally, that meant deepening their understanding of the causes and consequences of that problem, and perhaps also thinking about what policies—if implemented—would reduce the harms caused by the problem. This kind of analysis and understanding remains essential, but it leaves one critical stone unturned: most enduring social problems do not exist because, hitherto, people have failed to notice the problem or invent a policy response. They endure, despite the harm they do, because powerful people benefit from the *status quo*, fear that the prescribed new policies will harm their interests, and use their power to defeat efforts at change.

We already have courses about how political power works and how social movements have sometimes been able to alter the balance of power sufficiently to bring about lasting social change. But knowing how past social movements achieved such outcomes in the environment in which they existed is quite a different thing from knowing how to build a powerful social movement in their own time and place. The study of past movements does not yield universal and timeless lessons that tell us what to do today. Each generation must invent its own ways forward. They must be able to devise strategies and tactics that take advantage of opportunities that did not exist in the past, and abandon old repertoires that defenders of the *status quo* have learned how to neutralize. And they must

be able to motivate large numbers of people to commit to seeing these strategies and tactics through, through the ups and downs of heady victories and demoralizing defeats.

These kinds of skills can be analyzed in scholarly and journalistic work, just as there can be books on how to build a house. But like any other craft, the skills, the know-how, and the instincts necessary to realize social change can only be acquired through years of practice. No four month course can do more than give students a start at acquiring such knowledge, but it is better to give our students an introduction to this craft than to leave this vital task entirely to the world beyond the university. And we can teach something more: how to learn from the experiences, good and bad, that result from our attempts to make social change.

That is precisely what RC SSci 461 (cross-listed with Sociology 489)—Organizing: People, Power and Social



LEARNING THE CRAFT OF SOCIAL CHANGE

BY IAN ROBINSON

STUDENT VOICES

“Without a firm understanding of the basics of organizing, we will not build the relationships we need to make genuine commitments, and without genuine commitments, nothing will happen. Besides this nugget of knowledge, the second greatest lesson I learned is to not only build leadership within myself, but in those around me. Because once we do that, that is how we mobilize a community, from its roots.”

“I learned through this course that I’m definitely a fighter: instead of just helping people, I want to organize around taking down the systems that bring about oppression in the first place.”

“Learning how to use theory mindfully is a basic part of learning how to organize. Organizing is as much about action as it is about researching, taking the time to think critically, reflect, debate, and experiment.”

“TO ME, ORGANIZING IS AN INCREDIBLY USEFUL THEORY AS IT GENERATES POWER FOR THOSE WHO ARE OFTEN THE MOST POWERLESS. WHAT MAKES ORGANIZING SO UNIQUE IS THAT IT IS ONE OF THE ONLY “SOCIAL JUSTICE/SOCIAL CHANGE” THEORIES IN WHICH POWER IS CREATED BY THE PEOPLE AND FOR THE PEOPLE. IN THIS WAY, ORGANIZING IS A MORE HUMANISTIC TAKE ON SOCIAL CHANGE. ORGANIZING IS A BOTTOM-UP STRATEGY MOTIVATING THOSE WHO WANT CHANGE TO CREATE IT FOR THEMSELVES.”

Change—aims to do. The course, developed by Ian Robinson and David Harding, a colleague in the Sociology Department who has since moved on to UC-Berkeley, builds on a syllabus developed by Marshall Ganz, the Freedom Summer volunteer who became the Director of Organizing for the United Farm Workers, and now teaches organizing at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government. Students must be willing to commit 10 hours a week to an internship with one of five to seven community organizations that are doing real organizing work. These organizations, in turn, must be willing to help train our students in organizing and assign them to real organizing work. Students then do readings and meet for four hours per week as a class. The class time is designed to help students learn to apply the theory and concepts in their readings to the lived realities of the organizing campaigns to which they are contributing. Students learn not just from the work they do on their own campaign, but from those of the other students in the class. The juxtaposition of multiple organizing campaigns—pursuing different goals via different kinds of strategies, and facing very different opportunities and challenges—helps give the students access to a much wider range of experience than their assigned organizing campaign alone could generate.

In the most recent iteration of the class, fifteen students worked with six different community organizations. Three

worked with Michigan United on the ballot initiative to raise the state minimum wage, and efforts to promote immigrant rights; three others worked with the Detroit Action Commonwealth to build public support for new city housing policies to reduce homelessness; and two worked with the Washtenaw Regional Organizing Coalition (WeROC) to build support for a millage increase to expand public transit in Washtenaw County by 44%. All three of these sites proved excellent places to learn about organizing.

The campaign against homelessness is slowly building, but the other two campaigns won major victories in May, in time for the students to see them: on May 6th, the millage increase to expand public transit won 71% of the vote; and in late May, the Republican-dominated Michigan legislature passed a new law raising the state’s minimum wage from \$7.45 to \$9.25 an hour by 2018, at which point it would be indexed (for the first time) to inflation. Our course cannot promise that our students will always be able to contribute to such rapid and important victories. But we can promise that, win or lose, short-term or long-term, they will begin to learn how to think—and act—like organizers for social change. ■

IAN ROBINSON is an instructor in the Social Theory and Practice Program.



what's *food* got to do with it?

BY EMILY CANOSA (RC '07)

Part of my role when I came on board this past winter as the U-M Sustainable Food Program Manager was to try to get a bird's eye view of what is going on in sustainable food on campus. This quickly brought me to the recently renovated dining hall in East Quad--the home of my alma mater, the Residential College (RC). Amidst the din of sizzling food, clinking dishware and conversation, I stood alongside Chef Buzz and Executive Chef Frank Turchan and marveled at newly reinforced sustainable food options. The walls between the freshly-made food stations were covered with giant photographs of the local farms where some of the produce was sourced from. I rooted through my memories of the RC, and couldn't help but feel strongly that although my experiences there had little obvious connection to food, I wouldn't be where I am today—a deeply engaged sustainable food educator, activist and producer—without them.

What were the links between my Arts & Ideas in the Humanities major and food? It suddenly became apparent that a strikingly large number of farmers I knew had also graduated from the RC. How could it be that a residential learning community focused on the arts, social science and language is leading so many graduates to careers in food and agriculture?

I looked at the ranks of RC foodies I knew: Noah Link, a 2007 graduate of RC Social Science (now Social Theory and Practice) and Middle Eastern and North African Studies who now runs Food Field in Detroit; Aneka Kaul, who graduated in 2011 and went on to be involved at Tantre Farm, SELMA Cafe, and The Grange Kitchen, and is now pursuing a MA in Public Health; Liza Frolkis, a fellow Arts & Ideas major who worked at four organic farms in four states before starting her own business selling herbal products... the list goes on. I began contacting these folks, and asking around about other RC alum working in food and agriculture.

How could it be that a residential learning community focused on the arts, social science and language is leading so many graduates to careers in food and agriculture?

"I am an urban farmer in Detroit," Emily Brent told me, a 2006 RC graduate in French and Social Science. Brent runs Singing Tree Garden along with fellow RC graduate Meg Marotte (Arts & Ideas, 2007). Brent can see a strong connection between the RC and her pathway to agriculture. She was turned on to delicious and organic foods by working at the Merchant of Vino, Whole Foods, and Zingerman's, and after college she sought to simultaneously pursue her knowledge of the French language and organic farming.

"I would say dually trying to learn French and organic farming at the same time led me to where I am now. That was my *raison d'être* for some time," Brent explains. "I wouldn't have been passionate about French if I hadn't been to the RC... one of my readings classes was actually food and culture with Carolyn Anderson-Burack, so that was really awesome and sparked my interest for sure." Brent also took coursework in social science, and her classes on globalization and political economy drew her attention to how broken the food system is. ■

▶ To read on, visit lsa.umich.edu/rc.

Learn more about sustainable food efforts on campus, check out the UM Sustainable Food Program at umsfp.org, and the Sustainable Food Systems Initiative at sitemaker.umich.edu/sustainablefoodsystems/home.

EMILY CANOSA graduated from the RC in 2007 with degrees in Arts and Ideas in the Humanities and Art History and is Manager of the U-M Sustainable Food Program.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF EMILY CANOSA

BEAUTIFUL TROUBLE

BY ANDREW BOYD (RC '83)

Many of us spend so much time trying to stop bad things from happening that we rarely take the time to sketch out how things could be better, let alone actually go out and create a little slice of the future we want to live in. Prefigurative interventions seek to address that imbalance.

The lunch counter sit-ins of the U.S. civil rights movement are frequently referenced as defiant, courageous and ultimately successful acts of resistance against America's Jim Crow-era apartheid. They were certainly that, but they were also profoundly prefigurative. The students' actions—mixed-race groups of people violating the law by sitting at



Pranks, art interventions, tactical media, alternative festivals and temporary communities, even electoral guerrilla theater, can also be effective ways to prefigure the world we want to live in.

lunch counters and demanding to be served—foreshadowed victory and prefigured the world they wanted to live in: they were enacting the integration they wanted.

Pranks, art interventions, tactical media, alternative festivals and temporary communities, even electoral guerrilla theater, can also be effective ways to prefigure the world we want to live in.

Prefigurative interventions are direct actions sited at the point of assumption—where beliefs are made and unmade, and the limits of the possible can be stretched. The goal of a prefigurative intervention is twofold: to offer a compelling glimpse of a possible, and better, future, and also—slyly or baldly—to point up the poverty of imagination of the world we actually do live in.

Like the occupation of Tahrir Square in Egypt and the encampments in public squares across Spain by the Indignados movement, the Occupy encampments across the world are crucibles of prefigurative intervention, providing a space for people to create in microcosm the communitarian and democratic world they want to bring into being. Likewise, the Burning Man art festival works as a temporary

THE RC WELCOMES
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November 14, 2014

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Please watch our website for more details.

The Robertson Lecture Series was established in 2011 by the Robertson family to honor the memory of the RC's first director and his wife, James H. and Jean B. Robertson.

autonomous zone where people can live out values, test out ideas and experiment with the future in real time.

Monthly Critical Mass bike rides prefigure future cities in which bicycles actually hold their own as traffic. Or PARK(ing) Day, in which people in cities across the country put a day's worth of coins into a parking meter and transform their parking space into a mini-park or jazz lounge or tiny public swimming pool, prefigure a greening of urban space and a reclaimed commons.

The Oil Enforcement Agency was a 2006 theatrical action campaign in which environmental activists—complete with SWAT-team-like caps and badges, posed as agents of a government agency—one that didn't exist, but should have. Agents ticketed SUVs, impounded fuel-inefficient vehicles at auto shows and generally modelled a future in which government took climate change seriously.

If hope truly is a muscle that we build by exercising, then interventions that prefigure the world we want to live in—whether by prophetic acts of civil disobedience, the formation of alternative communities or the staging of prankish provocations—are one of the best ways to work that muscle. ■

Excerpt from the book *Beautiful Trouble: A Toolbox for Revolution*.

ANDREW BOYD is an author, humorist and veteran of creative campaigns for social change. He led the decade-long satirical media campaign "Billionaires for Bush." He co-founded Agit-Pop Communications, an award-winning "subvertising" agency, as well as the netroots social justice movement, *The Other 98%*. He's the author of several books, most recently: *Beautiful Trouble: A Toolbox for Revolution*. He and his laptop live in New York; you can find him at andrewboyd.com and beautifultrouble.org.

A Mid-Semester Adventure:

CORSICA

BY MARTIN WALSH



A small group of RC Drama students participated in an important cultural event in the town of Patrimonio, Corsica over the long weekend of November 8-11, 2013. The week-long *Festivale d'autunnu di a ruralita*, founded by Christian Andreani, culminates in the feast day of Patrimonio's patron saint, Martin of Tours and showcases traditional music, contemporary dance, and Corsican culture and language. While an important venue for local and pan-European performers, the festival had not included live drama until our appearance. Our liaison was ex-pat, "Doc" Rossi. A former U of M student and Ann Arbor folk musician, Doc participated in several RC drama projects in the 1980s and has in the intervening years become one of the leading players and authorities on the Renaissance gittern. His group, Ensemble Gontia has been a mainstay of the Corsican festival since its inception.

Under our early drama rubric of "The Harlotry Players" (from Shakespeare's *Henry IV*), we took a team of three students with two "suitcase productions," an experimental interface of *La Moralité d'aveugle et du boiteux* (Morality of the Blind Man and Cripple), the farcical afterpiece to Andrieu de la Vigne's *Mystère de Saint Martin* (1496), performed in the original French, together with a related blind man/cripple one-act by Samuel Beckett, *Rough for Theatre I* performed in an Irish-accented English. Participants were Harrison Lott and Jaqueline Saplicki-Lausell (RC), and Ellen Sachs (Theater & Drama) under the direction of Martin Walsh. Both plays were performed on Saturday afternoon, November 9 in front of the magnificently sited Church of San Martinu in Patrimonio. The procession of the Saint's healing relics in the medieval play was realized by the *Cunfratèrnita di San Martinu* chanting their traditional Martin hymn in Corsican. These plays were very well received and got positive notices in the local paper *Corse-Matin* (11/10/2013) and the national on-line *Le nouvel Observateur* (11/16/2013).



The cast, our musician friends (Doc Rossi formerly of Ann Arbor on far right), and the *Cunfratèrnita di San Martinu*.



Top: The medieval *Blind Man and Cripple* play. Bottom: The team—Martin Walsh, Jacqueline Saplicki Lausell, Harrison Lott, Ellen Sachs with Patrimonio in the background.

Our actors attended several of the festival's musical and social events concluding with the November 10 Vigil and bonfire and, the following morning, the solemn Mass of St. Martin with the procession of the saint's image down the mountain to the town plaza for the blessing of the *vin nouveau* and a long afternoon of communal feasting—a scene right out of Bruegel. Short tours of Cap Corse with its wildly beautiful landscape and many ancient monuments completed this very special long weekend out of Ann Arbor.

With an invitation now extended for 2014, plans are to bring a group of six students next Fall, and integrate the project more closely with RC French and with RC Drama offerings. Our piece will be a self-standing one-act play extracted from that same three-day-long *Mystère de Saint Martin* mentioned above. We are calling it "The Widow and the Usurer." An unusual example of early courtroom drama, the episode features a bourgeois heroine, a slimy predator with a supposed claim to her vineyard, a desperate challenge to trial-by-combat, and finally, a miracle by St. Martin which brings the widow's dead husband back from the dead to testify in court. With the musical participation again of the *Cunfratèrnita*, this promises to be another exciting experiment in resurrecting 500-year old theatrical material. ■

MARTIN WALSH is an instructor in and Head of the RC Drama Program.



30

RC Deutsches Theater feiert 30 Jahre!

RC DT CELEBRATES 30 YEARS



"You keep repeating that."
It's true.

"And what if there were a way out?"



One of the RC's unique programs is RC *Deutsches Theater*, which has performed German language plays annually since 1985, including several new plays that made their US debut in the Keene Theater.

Founder and director Janet Hegman Shier says she looks forward to special events celebrating the 30th anniversary year, beginning in September when Mike Gould (RC Music) and she will host dancers from *Tanztangente* in Berlin in a two week artists' residency, which will culminate in workshops and public dance concerts.

Janet views *Deutsches Theater* to be a natural extension of the intensive language program, a means to take proficiency to another level through the experience of acting. According to Janet, DT addresses aspects of language learning that are hard to teach even in the intensive language classroom, e.g., intonation, diction, speaking tempo, phrasing, and appropriate emotional expression. Acting enables students to get outside of themselves and inside of the text as student actors approximate the language use of a native speaker.

The DT company's strength comes from students' ability to work together and to experiment boldly. Janet says that buying into the ensemble process is the key to being able to do ambitious projects with success. The organic way the company works teaches students multiple ways to present an idea on stage and pushes them outside their own comfort zone. DT students learn to consciously interact with each other and with the audience in new and unaccustomed ways. As they discuss these interactions with each other, they come to an awareness of the impact they can have on others; an awareness that is valuable in the context of theater, of course, but that would also seem to be essential in a global society in which social contacts limited to the virtual world sometimes discourage cooperative effort,



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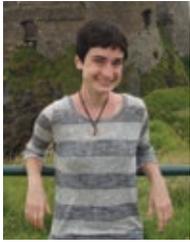
empathy, and compassion. DT's own performances since the early years have generated donations of food and money for charities.

Since 2002, fundraising efforts and grant support have enabled Janet to lead annual theater and arts trips to Munich and Berlin where students use their German and witness the type of physical theater they have been learning (and performing!) in her class. Janet is grateful for the supportive environment of the RC and the many individuals who have helped DT grow.

"The kind of bonding that occurs in DT makes it feel like an extended family and the loyalty of alumni is one of my favorite things about working at the RC" says Janet. In recent years, DT funding has come primarily from alumni donations and calendar fundraisers, thanks to RC Alumnus Peter Shin and Asgard Press. RC alumni have also remained involved, participating in workshops, working side-by-side with current students and even performing and working behind the scenes.

As an art, as an educational tool, and as a means of fostering synergy between individuals, *Deutsches Theater* exemplifies the founding principles of the Residential College. Please join us in wishing DT another thirty years of augmenting and complementing RC students' personal and intellectual growth. ■

Announcing the Emerging Writers Award



Thanks to a donation by an alumnus, our program was pleased to offer a new award to creative writing majors this year. Two talented program seniors received the Emerging Writers Award at the Senior Dinner. Allison Epstein received the award for her fiction honors thesis, a novel speculating on playwright Christopher Marlowe's reluctant espionage for Queen Elizabeth I. Eliana Fenyes won the award for her honors poetry thesis manuscript.



The Emerging Writers Award was established to recognize, nurture and encourage young creative writers in the Residential College's creative writing program who demonstrate excellence in creative writing but have not received a U-M writing award. If you would like to contribute to Emerging Writers, or to provide other support to future RC writing students, please contact Laura Thomas at lcthomas@umich.edu.

CALLING ALL CREATIVE WRITING ALUM!

RCWriters.org is a new website for the RC writing community. It contains information on local as well as alumni events, links to alumni publications and activities, back issues and selections from RC Review and other student publications, and information for prospective students. Find the link at <http://sites.lsa.umich.edu/rcwriters/>

WRITERS BLOC

sign up! Starting in the fall, we will begin sending a twice-a-month e-mail message about local events of interest to the writing community.

To sign up, to ask questions, or to make comments or suggestions, send a note to RCwritersbloc@umich.edu.

A Celebration of Writers and Independent Presses Held in East Quad's Newly Renovated Atrium



On March 22, 2014 the RC Creative Writing program partnered with the regional literary journal *Midwestern Gothic* to create *Voices of the Middle West*, a festival and book fair featuring writers and presses from all over the Midwest. This one-day conference and book fair brought together writers, independent publishers, U-M faculty and students, and our regional literary community all in one place, all on one day, to celebrate the diversity and richness of Midwestern regional literature. Area authors, publishers, and U-M faculty offered panel discussions on writing opportunities, the art and business of publishing, and the current state of Midwest literature. The book fair featured 28 literary organizations, publishers, and authors from all over the Midwest. Curtis Sittenfeld, author of the bestselling novels *Sisterland*, *American Wife*, *Prep*, and *The Man of My Dreams*, delivered the keynote address.

The festival drew over 1,000 visitors to East Quad. Due to this success, we are already planning next year's festival. Mark your calendars for Saturday, March 21, 2015, when noted Midwestern author Stuart Dybek will headline another exciting day of panels, literary exhibitors, and a community open mic.



PHOTO BY DAVID SHIER

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