

AN OPEN FUNCTION

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FIG. 1
Dijkstraat Playground, Amsterdam, 1954, designed by Aldo van Eyck. Amsterdam City Archives



FIG. 2
Cartoon by Cy Hungerford, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 1930. Carnegie Museum of Art Archives

The playgrounds designed for children by architect Aldo van Eyck in the mid-twentieth century emphasized oblique angles and nonhierarchical combinations of forms meant to inspire spontaneity, spiraling movements, and meandering. These designs comprising simple blocks in different sizes and shapes for climbing and jumping have been described as “objects that are not anything in themselves, but which have an open function and therefore stimulate a child’s imagination.”¹ From 1947 to 1978 Van Eyck promoted an urban campaign to transform unused spaces across Amsterdam into public playgrounds (Fig. 1). Of the more than seven hundred playgrounds he designed for the city’s public works office, many were built in the interstices between existing structures, and most were site-specific; the focal point was often a sandpit. Van Eyck challenged the deterministic approach to prewar urban planning, which favored large-scale, top-down plans that divided the functions of the city into separate zones. He valued experimentation, education, and play as both freedom and order, and called for a program sensitive to the emotional needs of the city’s inhabitants. He has been called a “humanist rebel” for his promotion of human values and his insistence on participatory design.² It was in that same spirit that Robert Rauschenberg, in a 1968 speech before a meeting of the New York City Cultural Commission, presented a similar proposal: to build parks that would offer cultural activities in unused public spaces, what the artist called “tent sites” (see pages 229–31). Today, the name immediately conjures the temporary encampments of the Occupy Wall Street movement. That these ideas have had a long arc through art, urban design, and activism of the last half century is not surprising.

How to design as Van Eyck did, with “an open function,” became a foundational question for the development of the *2013 Carnegie International* and provided the inflection in the collective voice of three curators. This exhibition began with a shared set of questions about our world, about exhibition making, and about the possibilities of art in our time. Debates ensued. From there themes emerged from the artworks and artists we pursued collectively and with conviction; new directions begot new directions. Together over time—through our conversations, inquiries, and examinations—these themes coalesced. We aspire to the following: that we embrace ideas of play in a serious way, and in terms closely connected to all the beauty and confusion of daily life both in Pittsburgh and beyond; that we give artists a platform—the museum—around which to convene and respond; and that we welcome inquiry and dissent.

As a way to give structure to this (open) system, we looked to Roger Callois (see page 17), the French social theorist who in 1958—while Van Eyck was still building playgrounds—published an influential sociological study of play.³

For Callois, aspects of play exist across a continuum with order, discipline, rules, and systems (*ludus*) at one extreme, and tumult, turbulence, improvisation, conviviality, and imagination (*paidia*) at the other. Discipline at the one end, improvisation at the other: these were the contours that were defined, interpreted, and revised in our ongoing conversations—at times consciously, at times not. The established order of a 120-year-old institution guided us, while the stuff of dreams and dissidence excited and incited us.

In the expanding field of contemporary art, curators face a daunting task. Even working as three instead of one, we struggled to locate points on a seemingly endless line of artistic production and distribution that now crisscrosses the globe, and expands via the Internet. It has been said many times before: we live in a world of data overload. To navigate this, we invested in the work of artists, and we let that commitment lead us: from an outsider artist with a delirious eye for worldly paradises, to a documentary filmmaker examining women’s rights while under censorship, to a group of sculptors, mostly women, who have each found expressivity in the mundane. Like the Van Eyck playground, the *2013 Carnegie International* embraces spontaneity, nonhierarchy, and play, marked with the intention to depart from the everyday in creative ways. These are the terms alive in the world we see and experience around us, but also in the art that reflects and studies that world. If the artist of today has a mission, artist and writer Frances Stark might come closest to expressing his or her tacit resolve: “to devote [one’s] talent to the service of an idea and perhaps lead us towards a better future.”⁴ The artists in the *2013 Carnegie International* reflect the hybridity, difference, openness, and dissonance we find evident in the cultural identities that make up our world.

THE MYTH OF THE BIENNIAL

The globalization of art in the last twenty years affects an exhibition such as the *Carnegie International* in two ways. One is no longer a surprise: there are more biennials and triennials worldwide than ever before, hence we are only one in an expanding field. It is a common belief today that such exhibitions are symptomatic of globalization made inseparable from capitalistic prosperity. Yet in coming together to work on the *Carnegie International*, we quickly landed upon the following question: why are there so few biennials in the United States? The United States is two and a half times the size of Europe, where there are now more than forty biennials, yet until the recent development of exhibitions such as Prospect in New Orleans and the New Museum’s international triennial exhibition in New York, the *Carnegie International* was the only continuous exhibition of its kind in this country.⁵ During some

1. Rudolf Herman Fuchs, foreword to Liane Lefavre, Ingeborg Roode, and Rudolf Herman Fuchs, *Aldo van Eyck: The Playgrounds and the City*, ed. Liane Lefavre and Ingeborg de Roode (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 2002), 7.

2. Liane Lefavre and Alexander Tzonis, *Humanist Rebel: Inbetweening in a Postwar World* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1999).

3. Roger Callois, *Les jeux et les hommes* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1958);

published in English translation as *Man, Play, and Games* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961).

4. Quoted in Henriette Huldish and Shamim Momin, *2008 Whitney Biennial* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2008), 3.

5. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, in New York, ran its own program called the Guggenheim International every two years from 1956

to 1971. The Whitney Biennial, while predominantly an exhibition of work made in the United States, has in recent years on occasion brought in international artists. Site Santa Fe was inaugurated in 1995 with the mission of hosting an international biennial in the Southwestern United States; it eventually grew to host temporary exhibitions year round and has thus far held eight biennials of varying scope.



FIGS. 3–5
Lawrenceville apartment talks, 2011–13

periods, it barely survived. Does the lack of international exhibitions in this country reflect an avoidance of “First-World protagonism” as posited in touchstone global-view exhibitions such as *How Latitudes Become Forms*?⁶ Does the biennial’s intrinsic ties with tourism and travel promote its proliferation in Europe but stunt its growth in the United States? Does the lack exemplify an inherent isolationist retreat? These were questions considered early on as we—like an increasing number of our peers today—questioned the myth of cultural homogeneity supported in the rhetoric surrounding mega-exhibitions. As such, this exhibition at times sings polyphonically, but it also performs in discord.

Perhaps less expected is the other trick of globalization. With more biennials promoting a globalizing face and lingua franca for art, the local has ironically assumed new relevance. While globalization leads to more biennials, at the same time it reinforces local identification, instilling new emphasis on destinations, resources, and production closer to home. The danger, as some see it, is that biennials make pathetic or infrequent connections to local bodies and leave little impact on the cultural life of their host cities. Rauschenberg recognized the need for specificity as early as 1968 in that inspiring speech promoting parks: “All cultural activities should, I believe, be dependent on participation and involvement of the inhabitants in their specific localized environment. It is essential to break down the sense of exclusivity, foreignness, and imposed prestige of conventional attitudes about art.” Most urgent to us in working on this exhibition were the emerging, rumbling voices from our immediate neighbors. From them we quickly recognized our task—which not coincidentally matched Andrew Carnegie’s original decree—namely, to bring contemporary art to Pittsburgh. We tried things out almost immediately; since August 2011 an ongoing program of artist talks and events have taken place in an apartment space at 113 44th Street in the Pittsburgh neighborhood of Lawrenceville; more than seventy speakers have held court there, and shared countless six packs over lively conversation (Figs. 3–5).

In that same way, the *2013 Carnegie International* explores the possibility that the museum itself embodies a micro-history; it is for this reason that we looked to its collection as a backbone for our work as curators. Carnegie Museum of Art’s collection is an accumulation of past experiences in concise form; it reflects the legacy of a 117-year-old exhibition in ways few biennial programs can. It names great artists on its roster. Assembled by people, it is admittedly flawed. Yet without this memory, we run the risk of repeating certain blunders. The archival impulse is growing in popularity among artists and curators; that this trend coincides with the global economic crisis of the last five years is worth considering. As curators become more attuned to their own vulnerabilities, economic or otherwise, and more aware of the erratic shifts of past

6. *How Latitudes Become Forms: Art in a Global Age* was organized by Philippe Vergne at the Walker Art Center in 2003. The exhibition was notable as the first in a series of global-view exhibitions at the Walker that also included

Brave New Worlds organized by Doryun Chong and Yasmin Raymond. The exhibitions were notable for an openness to and curiosity about international art, and filling in where American institutions tended to leave off. As Vergne writes in

the catalogue (p. 20), “The minute one pronounces the words global art or global exhibition, one is already part of the problem, positioning oneself as the other, as a First-World protagonist, as a dominant signifier.”



FIG. 6
Installation view of the 1961 Pittsburgh International exhibition

and present, there is a new promise of transparency for the museum. This is not meant to be a narcissistic exercise.⁷ We believe that the museum today is undergoing a redefinition of institutional character and behavior that we acknowledge and support. No longer simply a storehouse for art, the museum is both a hub for new information and a new means of communication. At the nexus of this transformation are new uses, new modes, and new means of production and distribution that welcome new terms for art.

THE CONFUSION OF LIFE

“Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life [play] brings a temporary, limited perfection.”

— Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*⁸

For cultural historian Johan Huizinga, “play” manifests as a social construction, appearing across disciplines and informing activities such as language, myth, and ritual. His 1938 study *Homo Ludens* was influential on Van Eyck’s attitudes toward playgrounds and architecture, and inspired Callois’s own investigations on the subject.⁹ Huizinga’s conception of the essential nature of the play

7. See Carlos Basualdo, “The Unstable Institution,” *Manifesta Journal*, no. 2 (Winter 2003–Spring 2004): 50–61.

8. Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950), 7.

9. By some accounts, Callois saw Huizinga’s definition of play as too limiting, for Huizinga focused only on the competitive aspects of play, whereas Callois defines play across four separate categories: *agôn* (competition), *alea*

(chance), *mimicry* (simulation or role play), and *ilinx* (balance or vertigo). In other ways, Callois found Huizinga too broad and sought instead to draw distinctions between play and the ritualistic aspects of the sacred.

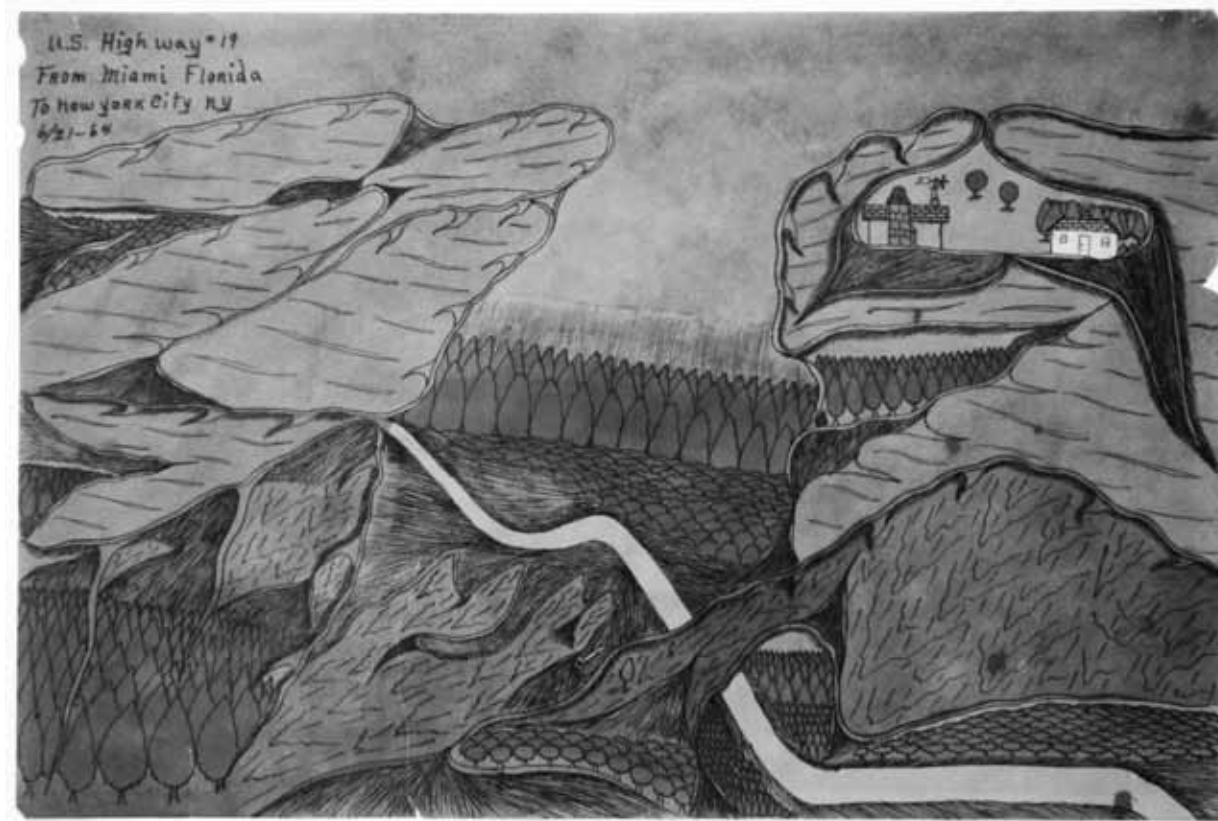


FIG. 7
Joseph Yoakum, *U.S. Highway #19 From Miami Florida to New York City N.Y.*,
June 21, 1964, cat. no. 267

instinct and its importance to creativity funneled through various manifestations of art in the postwar period, arguably influencing CoBrA, the Lettrist International, and the Situationist International. The widespread influence of these avant-garde groups on post-1960s counterculture extends from outsider art, DIY, and punk rock to Occupy Wall Street and beyond, intersecting with a wide range of artistic impulses today.

Unconnected to any of the art movements of his own time, artist Joseph Yoakum started drawing in the 1950s with the simple desire to record a view of Lebanon, as he had recalled seeing it in a dream vision. Rocks and mountains hug the sky and flowing colorful streams crisscross a landscape made up of sinewy lines that multiply and spread across the page (Fig. 7). Yoakum's dreamscapes are, on the surface, as far away from the postwar avant-garde as they are from Mark Leckey's recent incantations in the digital realm, yet Yoakum and Leckey seem to share a worldview defined by a belief that all substances have divine power, contain a spirit, and breathe with life. For Leckey, "The more computed our environment becomes, the further back it returns us to our primitive past, boomerangs us right back to an animistic world view where everything has a spirit, rocks and lions and men.... Paradoxically cold autistic cyberspace takes us

back to an appreciation of sensuality."¹⁰ Leckey's films and videos *Made in Heaven* (2004), circling around the avatar-like form of a digitally rendered Jeff Koons bunny, and the quasi-erotic *Pearl Vision* (2012), a self-portrait in which the artist, never quite in the frame, plays a snare drum, are both beautifully mundane and self-consciously sensual experiences that speak to the way humans live in a world increasingly mediated by technology. Upending our presumed relationship to the electronics and technology that inhabit and share our lives, Leckey's works occupy the space between, where the artist and the object/machine cross over, merge, and dissolve one into the other to become a third thing entirely: a network, a communion, a new being, a new myth (Fig. 8).

Other artists similarly remix the uneventful and the uncanny, as in Frances Stark's prosaic sexual exploits mediated by the culture of the Internet. Stark works in drawing, video, and writing, but is predominantly a text-based artist. The self-reflexivity of language provides a means for her to transmit her role as an artist into the very production of her work; it is in this process that deep feelings of ambivalence and doubt emerge. Pulling back the curtain on a parallel world, we discover a realm where inhibitions cease to exist and sexual innuendos and free-flowing thoughts prevail (Fig. 9).

10. Interview with Lauren Cornell, "Techno-Animism," *Mousse Contemporary Art Magazine* 37 (February–March 2013): 55.



FIG. 8
Mark Leckey, *Universal Addressability of Dumb Things*, 2013, Hayward Touring



FIG. 9
Frances Stark, *installation view of Osservate, leggate con me*, 2012,
Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise

Nicole Eisenman's inner life is similarly introspective, and humorous—sentiments born out in the euphoria and turbulence of her paintings and sculpture.¹¹ Her works track and digest centuries of classical myth, ancient ritual, and visual history, testing the bounds of what is accepted and what is not, and what is expected and what is not (Fig. 10).

Much of human history is marked by the kind of persistent sexism addressed by numerous artists in the *2013 Carnegie International*. Most insistently, Sarah Lucas humorously plays with the erotic abstraction of the readymade in her feministic sculptural assemblages of found objects and mutated female forms. Chair legs become sexualized, tables turn into torsos, white plastic patio furniture transforms into hanging devices. Lucas's *NUDs*, bulbous abstractions that at once reference Louise Bourgeois's androgynous sculptural lairs and suggest Vincent Fecteau's spherical, cavernous sculptures, seduce with sex, flesh, and suggestive form (Fig. 11).

Androgyny and identity abound in the labored abstractions of Sadie Benning based on drawings the artist made with the quick swipe of an iPhone and then later

transformed into hand-built paintings composed of layers of plaster and milk paint. Benning refers to these works as bodily "containers for the 'inside,'" and their sequence and mutation across forty separate panels suggests (human) transformation. Collective transformation is the stuff of Zanele Muholi's classically beautiful black-and-white portraits of lesbians from South Africa and beyond; these faces not only initiate but also insist on reconsiderations of cultural identity in today's world, casting new meaning for a worldview of Africa from both within and beyond its borders (Fig. 12). These are truly works of "self-revelation," to borrow a term from former Carnegie director Gordon Bailey Washburn's introduction to the 1961 *Pittsburgh International* catalogue (see pages 213–15). (His phrase still rings true today, although it is probably fair to say that the art he was responding to bore little resemblance to the work assembled here.) The *2013 Carnegie International* creates a model for making amid the hybridity we find in the world at large. Whatever the truth—knowable or not—these artists find diverse, playful, sensual, and serious ways to repurpose the confusion of life.



FIG. 10
Nicole Eisenman, *Fishing*, 2000, cat. no. 18



FIG. 11
Sarah Lucas, *NUD* 10, 2009, cat. no. 118



FIG. 12
Zanele Muholi, *Trashe Makapila*, Harare, Zimbabwe, 2011, cat. no. 146



FIG. 13
Yael Bartana, still from *Mary Koszmary (Nightmares)*, 2007, cat. no. 7



FIG. 14
Rokni Haerizadeh, selection from *Some Breath Breathes Out of Bombs and Dog Barks*, 2011, cat. no. 77

THE DISCIPLINE OF DISSIDENCE

"The Constitution does not guarantee us only the right to be correct, we have a right to be honest and in error. And the views that I have expressed in the pamphlet I expressed honestly. I believe they were right. The future will show whether or not I was correct, but under the laws, as I understand it, and under the Constitution, as I understand it, every citizen in this country has the right to express himself ... on public questions."

— Scott Nearing, *The Trial of Scott Nearing and the American Socialist Society*¹¹

Joel Sternfeld, known for his series of images of utopian communities in the United States, photographed Scott and Helen Nearing in 1982, when the idea for his larger project was just beginning to take shape in his mind. By then, the Nearings were aging homesteaders famous for authoring *Living the Good Life* (1954), a guide that advocated a simple life of labor and leisure, rather than one motivated by monetary gain. Back-to-the-landers of the 1960s applied the Nearings' alternative theories throughout the United States, especially in New England, where the couple eventually settled. As early as 1915 Scott Nearing was already well known for having been fired from teaching economics at the University of Pennsylvania after an incendiary Marxist-inspired critique of capitalist wealth. In 1919 he defended himself in court against charges that he had obstructed military recruitment by disseminating a pacifist pamphlet in and around New York City. Sternfeld visited the couple some sixty years later, one year before Scott Nearing died at the age of one hundred. Nearing's wisdom as a young man is a timeless decree that demands repeating as a mantra indispensable to art. Artists today have the right to be honest, whether correct or in error.

Kamran Shirdel's film *An shab ke barun amad (The Night It Rained; 1967–74)* tested those waters in 1960s Tehran (Fig. 15). The film was commissioned to document a well-known story involving a young village boy who purportedly saved a 200-passenger train from a crash one rainy night when a flood washed away a segment of track. Shirdel traveled to the village of Gorgan to investigate the lore for himself and interview the supposed hero everyone was talking about. Piecing together the course of events as told from opposing viewpoints, Shirdel's film is both comic and serious, and delightfully full of contradictions. Everything hangs in the balance, and eventually we acquiesce; finding any real truth is impossible. *The Night It Rained*, like most of his other films, was confiscated and banned until 1974, when it was shown once in a film festival in Tehran, and subsequently banned again until after the Iranian Revolution. Shirdel's circumstances, working under the Shah's authoritarian rule in the 1960s and 1970s, represent an extreme, but his motivations are shared by many other contemporary artists. As Martha

Rosler, always a savvy commentator on our present moment, has noted, "Artists have the capacity to condense, anatomize, and represent symbolically complex social and historical processes."¹²

This assured ability to anatomize complexities holds true in the projects of a number of artists who take on some of the boldest, broadest, and most controversial topics of our day: from Pedro Reyes's wondrous mechanical instruments transformed from decommissioned weapons; to Taryn Simon's taxonomy of power, sexism, wealth, and weaponry in a series of photographs documenting the James Bond franchise; to Yael Bartana's films on cultural and religious displacement and the search for belonging (Fig. 13). Dinh Q. Lê's film *Light and Belief: Sketches of Life from the Vietnam War* (2012), told in an illuminated and illuminating documentary style that takes up the perspective of the Vietnamese soldiers, reanimates a now rather distant conflict whose repercussions are felt to this day.

Iranian artist Rokni Haerizadeh addresses the most pressing social phenomena of our day as he witnesses their broadcast on television, on YouTube, and in print from his home in exile in Dubai, zeroing in on violence, protest, and ritual as chronicled by the media (Fig. 14). He questions our complicity as disengaged spectators both of atrocity, as occurred during the Iranian demonstrations in 2009 or the more recent Arab Spring uprisings, and of spectacle, as with the media obsession surrounding the British royal wedding in 2011, watched by tens of millions around the world. One short animation by Haerizadeh is composed of thousands of beautifully bizarre drawings of fictitious worlds full of surreal mythic creatures—part human, part animal—fighting for survival, food, and sex. As mirrors on the personalities that we simultaneously fawn over and fight against, Haerizadeh's character-filled dramas express a harsh, complex, and exuberant planet.

These artists engage in the retelling of social histories as they truly are, as discursive systems susceptible to the fluctuations of time, experience, and belief. Fact and fiction merge and cross over; contradictions abound; success and failure are fantasized, played out, and abandoned as terms in and for themselves. The bold, brave dissidence of such artists is continuous, and assuming we grant its safe passage—correct or in error—it will forge the way to a better future for all.

11. Quoted in Joel Sternfeld, *Sweet Earth: Experimental Utopias in America* (Göttingen,

Germany: Steidl, 2006), 36.
12. Martha Rosler, "Take the Money and Run? Can Political and Socio-

Critical Art 'Survive'?, in *What Is Contemporary Art?* (New York: Sternberg Press, 2010), 134.



FIG. 15
Kamran Shirdeh, still from *An shab ke barun amad (The Night It Rained)*, 1967-74, cat. no. 186

PROPOSALS FOR PUBLIC PARKS (1968)

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

You can't bring culture to people, you can only bring it out of them.

In time of change and crisis, the most important element is the people themselves. Therefore, I believe that all cultural activities should be designed to encourage the personal initiative and sense of responsibility in each individual, thereby creating and inspiring a sense of personal dignity, self-respect, and community spirit. All cultural activities should, I believe, be dependent on participation and involvement by the inhabitants in their specific localized environment.

It is essential to break down the sense of exclusivity, foreignness, and imposed prestige of conventional attitudes about art. The already existing cultural resources of the city should be utilized to develop a sensitivity that is essential to an understanding of art and to a basic revitalization of the senses, which leads to an awareness of the possibilities for enriching one's own private life.

Being imprisoned in the limitations of possibilities breeds a boredom more dangerous than rats. Tolerance of limitations manufactures hostility and resistance, promotes rivalry, and encourages class consciousness. Projects should be directed toward a sense of expanding possibilities rather than to an adjustment to limitations. One is static and negative; the other is active and positive.

Fundamental ideas, as opposed to sophisticated ones, encourage curiosity, counteract boredom, and destroy the cultural separation of the neighborhoods from the city as a whole. Some projects which accomplish this are:

1.

To utilize existing available spaces within the neighborhood, such as unused movie houses, supermarkets, drycleaning establishments, and empty lots which can function as tent sites; they should be converted even temporarily into cultural centers, employing local professionals and volunteers for the conversion.

Renovations should profit the economic structure of the neighborhood. A representative from the community can be appointed to manage and coordinate local needs and outside invited activities. Using neighborhood facilities and people will avoid patronization and intimidation. It will also change the residents' attitude toward the neighborhood without rebuilding. Space should be made available for activities of social groups as well as being used for exhibits and performances by either professionals or aspiring locals. These centers could function as a headquarters for future plans and activities which the Committee deigns worthwhile.