

All Power to the Developing

Lois Holzman

East Side Institute

New York NY

lholzman@eastsideinstitute.org

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It is an honor to be among you, especially at this historic juncture for your country's people. I am so grateful to Antanas Mockus, Corpovisionarios and all who have made this possible.

Dan Friedman (who will speak next) and I want to dedicate our remarks to Fred Newman, whose leadership catalyzed and supported all the work we will be sharing with you. He would be thrilled that we are here.

FRED NEWMAN (1935-2011) **"ARCHITECT OF A NEW PROGRESSIVISM"**

- ❖ An eclectic and unorthodox revolutionary: methodologist, community organizer, philosopher, political strategist, therapist, teacher, playwright, theatre director, lyricist
- ❖ Translated the most progressive ideals of the 1960s into effective instruments of social and personal transformation. The centerpiece of Newman's work in culture, psychology and politics is our capacity to create the conditions for our own development
- ❖ Designer of a network of successful independent institutions in psychology, culture, education and politics for the active participation of all people in personal and social transformation



I speak to you today as an organizer and activist. My organizing and activist work is centered around reinitiating the social-cultural-intellectual-emotional-moral development of people. The psychology I was trained in, especially the psychology of human development, does not foster the development of people; in fact, it hinders it. It has a politic of maintaining the status quo. Its methods and conceptions glorify individualism and stifle collective action. It holds up science

and reason as humanity's saviors and denigrates art and creativity. So, 40 years ago I began—with wonderful colleagues—to create a new psychology. In this work to create a new psychology, I've drawn inspiration from many sources, including historical movements and individuals who fought for social justice.

Among them is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The following words from Dr. King are a scathing critique of the politics of psychology and a passionate call for a new psychology.

You who are in the field of psychology have given us a great word. It is the word maladjusted. It is certainly good to declare that destructive maladjustments should be destroyed. But I am sure that we will recognize that there are some things in our society, some things in our world, to which we should never be adjusted. There are some things concerning which we must always be maladjusted if we are to be people of good will. We must never adjust ourselves to racial discrimination and racial segregation. We must never adjust ourselves to religious bigotry. We must never adjust ourselves to economic conditions that take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few. We must never adjust ourselves to the madness of militarism, and the self-defeating effects of physical violence.

King spoke those words in 1967. In the almost 50 years since, psychology's hold on people has become all encompassing. It is a cultural phenomenon that shapes every institution of society—from health and mental health, to education, to the courts, to the family, and to the interactions we have with each other every day of the week. Engaging psychology means engaging the mass psychology of alienation, individualism, passivity, hopelessness, victimization, retribution, and

violence. This presentation will share the foundations of this new psychology and examples from the US and globally.

The new psychology has a different starting point from the psychology we all are familiar with. Instead of positing the individual as primary, as what human beings are, its starting point is relationality. We are social beings. It is the current psychology that has us believing that we are separate from each other. But what if we instead all believed that—really, really believed—that we are not separate and we were able all to live our lives shaped by that felt experience?

The new psychology is cultural in two ways. First, it is a cultural, not a natural science approach to understanding human life. Second, it relates to people as cultural beings, as makers of culture and not merely as behaving organisms. Human needs, wants and desires are cultural, and one of the goals of this new psychology is for people to create new desires. This involves creating environments in which people of all ages and walks of life participate in a process that involves going beyond meeting their needs to generating new needs and new wantings. In other words, they create their and their community's social-emotional-intellectual-cultural-moral development and thus transform the very culture that holds them back.

The centerpiece of this methodology is freeing the human capacity to perform and play—that is, to be who we are and other than who we are at the very same time. When people perform and play, they create who they are becoming. They create development, and they create the wanting of it at the same time. And when people want development, when they are passionate about creativity, then the possibilities for transformation are endless.

The presentation will include illustrations of two ongoing projects: the organizing of police officers and young people from the poor communities in the US to perform a new culture (Operation Conversation: Cops & Kids), and the organizing of an informal global network of educators, artists, community activists who empower people through cultural-performatory activities (Performing the World).

In preparing for this conference I have seen that the work my colleagues and I do overlaps with citizenship culture. We have worked to create opportunities for growth and development for people and their communities. To organize environments that involve all kinds of people—young and old, rich, poor and in-between—in transforming their relationships to themselves, to each other and to the institutional gatekeepers of both local and global culture. To re-initiate hope and imagination through exercising our human capacity to self-organize to meet our needs. To support people to become active creators of their relationality, their emotionality, their learning. To remake the world in such a way that everyone can have what they need to continue to develop themselves and their communities.

The work we do doesn't fit into any known categories and so it goes by many names—social therapeutics, the psychology of becoming, the development community, performance activism, postmodern Marxism are some of the most recent. Social therapeutics because it is grounded in Fred Newman's creation of social therapy 40 years ago. Social therapy helps people in emotional distress and pain by a group process of creating new emotions. A psychology of becoming because it takes human beings to be not just who we are but simultaneously who we are becoming. The development community because it engages in the activity of creating development and the activity of creating the community that supports development. Performance activism because its politics is one of reconstruction and transformation through people creating new performances of themselves. Postmodern Marxism because it is inspired by Marx's revolutionary philosophy

and radical humanism of transforming the very circumstances that determine us through the all-round development of everyone—AND by the postmodern questioning of the tenets of modernism including truth, reality and objectivity. As postmodern Marxists, we don't interpret, predict, commodify, define or deconstruct. Instead, we create new, ever-evolving organizations and programs—in and through which people can exercise their power to create something new, to become historical even as they remain societal, to embrace the individual-group dialectic rather than assume a separate individual and group in opposition to each other, to transform how we do everything, to recreate what culture is and to what it means to be a citizen.

This revolutionary activity of ours is realized, manifest and developed through a network of independent organizations that we have built and expanded over 40 years. Two guiding principles were there at the start and remain to this day. First, to be independently funded and supported, and not take money or be constrained by government, corporate, university, foundation or other traditional funding sources. This involved reaching out to ordinary Americans for financial support and participation, by stopping them on street corners and knocking on the doors of their homes. That activity allowed individuals to become active participants in the activities and organizations we were building together—citizens in the best sense of that word. And because we reached out to all sorts of people on the streets and by knocking at their doors, what has evolved is a new kind of partnership between wealthy and middle class Americans and the poor, a partnership that sidesteps the institutions and assumptions of tradition, ideology and politics as usual.

Our second working principal has been to create new kinds of institutions that in their very design and activity challenge the foundations of their traditional “counterparts.” Some examples from our past and present: a labor union for welfare recipients (unemployed people) who did not labor and, therefore, were at

no point of production; a school for children that denied the individuated, knowledge-seeking model of learning that is the bedrock of schooling East and West; therapy centers with an approach to emotional help that denies that emotionality is in our “heads,” and, instead, locates emotionality in social activity and that defies the medical model of mainstream psychotherapy; a “university” that is free, open to everyone who wants to participate and has no grades or degrees; a national network of talent shows for youth that is based on cooperation, not competition and ignores the very conception of talent; electoral political campaigns that are not concerned with winning and political parties that exist to transform political culture—including the possibility of doing away with political parties altogether and creating more direct and democratic modes of citizen participation.

Today, the organizations that comprise what is now called the “development community” are the All Stars Project and its youth development programs—the All Stars Talent Show Network, Youth Onstage!, the Development School for Youth, and Operation Conversation: Cops and Kids; a university-style development school (UX) and political theatre (Castillo Theatre); the East Side Institute for Group and Short Term Psychotherapy; the Social Therapy Group in NYC and social therapy affiliates in other cities; Performance of a Lifetime, a for-profit business that brings our performance approach to corporations and non-profits to “humanize” the workplace; independentvoting.org; and the bi-annual Performing the World conferences.

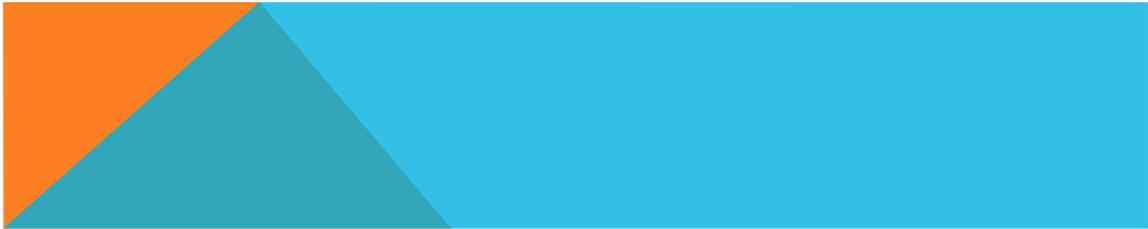
These organizations have national and international reach, with the direct participation of tens of thousands who impact on hundreds of thousands. They reach different people with different specific needs, but all share a methodology that involves people of all ages in the ongoing collective activity of creating new kinds of environments where they can be active performers of their lives. This

methodology “practically-critically” engages the institutions of psychology, education, theatre and politics and their impact on people’s daily lives.

Specifically, it brings the issue of human development into the institutions of mental health, social services, education, health care community development, and politics where the topic and concern is shockingly absent. Not the mainstream understanding of human development, as going from inside out in a series of pre-determined stages. To us, development is a social-cultural-activity, something human beings create rather than something that happens to them. This cuts development loose from the meta-narratives of teleology and ideology, from the notion of progression from one stage to another, and from the idea of progress to some greater good. And without a meta-narrative explaining and constraining human activity, the focus can move from the authority of knowing to the power of creativity, from the glorification of the mythic isolated individual to the embracing of the relationality of life, from the need for instrumental and adaptive behavior to the desire for the revolutionary becoming-ness of performance. Development becomes a practice of method, the process of organizing ways for people to create new ways to relate to each other, to the environment, to culture, to community and to social change.

DEVELOPMENT

- ❖ A social cultural activity
- ❖ Doesn't happen to us—people create it
- ❖ Qualitative transformation of what is
- ❖ A process of becoming

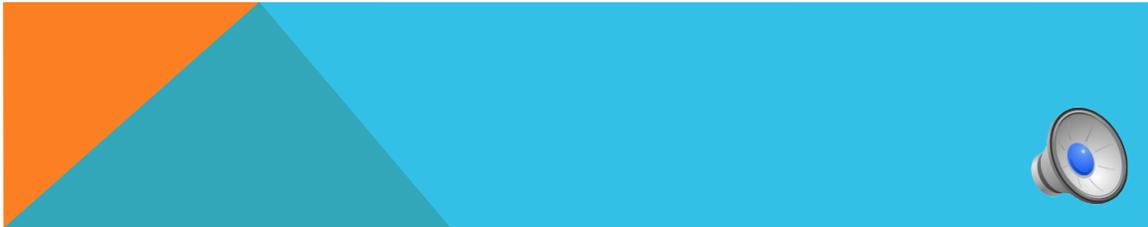


Performance plays a central role in this new psychology. By performance I mean the capacity we all have to pretend, to play. Like actors on the theatrical stage, we all can perform other than who we are. Not only can we, **we must** or else we would not ever learn anything or grow up. For performing as other than who they are is what babies do. They perform as speakers before they know how to speak. We encourage them. We pretend they are making sense. We pretend they understand what we are saying. And by playing this way, performing this way, pretending this way, they become speakers.

My colleagues and I learned to appreciate the developmental value of performance in our study of children's play, which allowed us to recognize that it is through play that little children learn and develop.

PERFORMANCE

- ❖ Performing is being simultaneously who you are and other than who you are.
- ❖ Performing, like the play of children, is how we learn developmentally not only when very young, but throughout our lives.



We're all here tonight because we played our way into becoming who we are today. Way back when, we were babbling, crawling little babies. Way back when, we played—and it changed everything. We played at speaking and walking before we knew how to speak or walk, and that's how come we became speakers and walkers. Our caregivers helped us (they played right along with us) and they absolutely loved us for it and cheered us on. They helped us play at being “bigger” and older and more skilled than we actually were—or as one of my heroes, the early 20th century psychologist Lev Vygotsky, says —as if we are “a head taller” than we are.



“In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were

a head taller than himself.

In this sense, play is a major source of development.”

Lev Vygotsky

This phrase—a head taller—captures how and why human beings develop and learn—because we are not only who are at any given moment or age or stage of life. We are also other than who we are. **We are simultaneously who we are AND who we are becoming.** We are babies who can’t speak a language AND—through play—we are speakers.

This playful way of being in the world with others is something that all of us, at any age, can do. But most of us stop. It’s not our fault. A bias against play is deep in our culture. We’re taught that play is frivolous. That there’s a difference between learning and playing—and that learning is what matters. We’re told constantly who we are—and that limits who we can become. We focus on getting it right and looking good—and that stops us from developing. Without play and without continuously performing in new ways, we get stuck. Individuals get stuck.

Families get stuck. Communities get stuck. Nations get stuck. Indeed, these days the whole world appears stuck in old roles, stale performances, destructive games, and emotional turmoil.

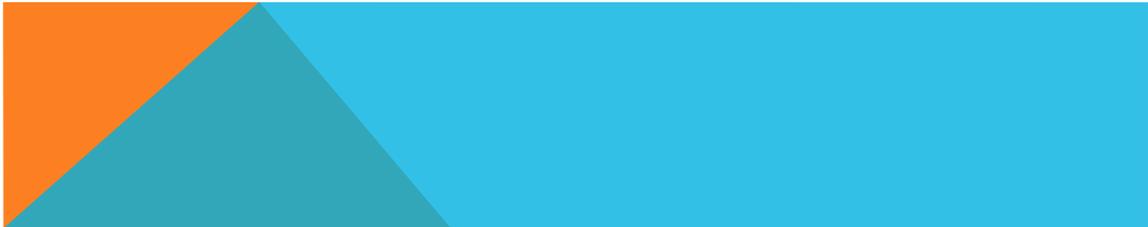
Play and performance help us belong. Belonging helps us move about and around feeling alone, isolated and victimized. It's how we become part of existing communities—the human community, first and foremost, and the thousands of communities, large and small, that humans create. We all have become part of different communities through transforming ourselves into a member of that community, by imagining ourselves as a competent member and creatively imitating others, in other words, by performing as a member before we knew how.

Play and performance is also how we create new communities. There's something very special about belonging to a community or a group that you were part of creating, that didn't exist before, that got built through you and others working and playing together. You not only have the community but you also have new kinds of relationships with your fellow builders, relationships nurtured and supported by the very community you built!

In the words of two young people who participated in performance programs:

“I’ve learned that community doesn’t necessarily mean people who are like you. It’s people who you do something with.” (16 year-old girl)

“Before, community for me was just the people who live in your neighborhood. But I don’t know anyone in my neighborhood really. We moved there three years ago and one of the few people I got to know moved. Now I think that community isn’t who you live with, it’s who you interact with.” (17 year-old girl)



All of the work we do in the US and around the world is based in that simple but profound discovery: we develop and learn when we are allowed to perform, when others relate to us—and we learn to relate to ourselves and others—as simultaneously who we are and other than who we are.

It has been a privilege to be part of an ongoing creative activity that is crossing the borders of nations, classes, cultures and ideologies and that is impacting on the development of tens of thousands of people all over the world. I’ve learned and grown so much from the people who I’ve worked with over the decades building development activities and organizations. From the 8 year-old boy labeled autistic who became a co-therapist of a social therapy group. When the group ended he told the members, “I like that I can help people. I am no longer focusing on my problems. I like that. A way I could describe how the group has helped me is it has

helped me live my life.” From the 65-year-old retired health care worker who had given up her dream to be writer decades earlier when she had to support and raise a disabled daughter. She literally wept when she realized she could take a playwriting workshop for free at the All Stars’ UX—and who went on to write a play about her teenage years in the slums of Manhattan’s Lower East Side. From the 17-year-old tough teenager from the South Bronx who learning about improvisation in Youth Onstage! began to teach his friends to say “Yes/And” to whatever offers, however unwelcome, life dealt them in order to get beyond complaining to creating new possibilities. From the New York City police officers who through our Operation Conversation: Cops and Kids program play theatre games and improvise silly skits with poor young people of color as a means of creating an atmosphere where the cops and kids can actually have a meaningful and growthful conversation. From the head of a major American oil fortune who gave \$10 to one of our organizers on the street in the early 1990s and went on to become an influential advocate of our performance approach to development and to donate over \$2 million to our organizing efforts. From the academics and practitioners in Sao Paulo Brazil, Tokyo Japan, Dhaka Bangladesh, Pretoria South Africa, Belgrade Serbia, Juarez Mexico, and London England who have been inspired to start organizing developmental activities in the poor communities in their cities. From the hundreds of educators, youth workers, medical and mental health people we have trained over the years. Like Peter Nsubuga from Uganda who started a village school outside Kampala knowing only that the children weren’t developing, and how he, his program and his community have grown into practitioners of developmental performance. Like Ishita Sanyal and Prativa Sengupta, two Indian psychologists working in different ways with the mentally ill, who wanted at first to only restore to them some dignity and meaningful activity, but who came to experience the far greater potential of relating to these people in emotional distress as active creators and performers of their lives. Like Miguel Cortes and Jorge Burciaga in Ciudad Juárez Mexico, among the most

violent cities in the world, who opened the Fred Newman Center and organize and support people to transform the emotionality of fear into one of hope. And like Elena Boukouvala, who brings young people in Greece's refugee camps together with native Greek youth to create music and art and meaningful relationships.

These individuals and countless others have taught me so much about the development that comes from diverse people self-organizing new activities and building new organizations in response to what they want and need.

Now I want to take a closer look at two projects. They are social interventions based in performance. Each of them challenges the traditional psychological approaches to solving social problems, including violence. The first project is Operation Conversation: Cops & Kids, a performance-based intervention on the intensely conflict-ridden relationship between police officers and young people of color in the US. Ten years ago, an especially brutal police shooting of an unarmed young man in NYC prompted Lenora Fulani, co-founder of the All Stars Project and a long-time political activist and grassroots educator, to try a new approach to the community's anger. She brought some police officers and inner-city teens to do something quite unusual—to improvise and perform together. Over the next 10 years well over 100 workshops have taken place in housing projects, community centers, churches, schools and Police Athletic League Centers, with about 2000 young people and 1500 police officers participating. Twice a year, there is a public demonstration of a workshop that all new police officers who have just graduate from the police academy must attend. Let's take a look.

OPERATION CONVERSATION: COPS AND KIDS



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t7sJ96ZTfE0>

Operation Conversation: Cops & Kids resists what American social psychologist Ken Gergen calls “the tyranny of the normal”—the normal ways of understanding and trying to alleviate tensions between law enforcement and young people. These include surveys, education on drug and violence prevention directed at youth, and sensitivity training directed at police). More broadly, it is an alternative to ways of understanding and resolving racism that derive from traditional psychology and sociology. The program disrupts normal ways of relating, which is as if we are fixed characters acting out an already scripted play. It disrupts a behaviorist psychology that insists what we can change is an individual’s or a group’s behavior. It disrupts cognitive approaches to dealing with tough social problems, which assume that if you learn the facts—how to have safe sex, what the traditions

of a particular ethnic group are, or how to act when a policeman stops you—then the problem will vanish.

Framing and organizing the workshop as performatory, including directing the participants to perform both as themselves and as different characters, is the disruption. The workshop isn't designed to change anyone's behavior or to teach anything. Rather, it is designed to provide the young people and the police officers the opportunity to create together because in that process they might see, feel, think, speak and listen in ways they hadn't seen, felt, thought, spoken and/or listened before.

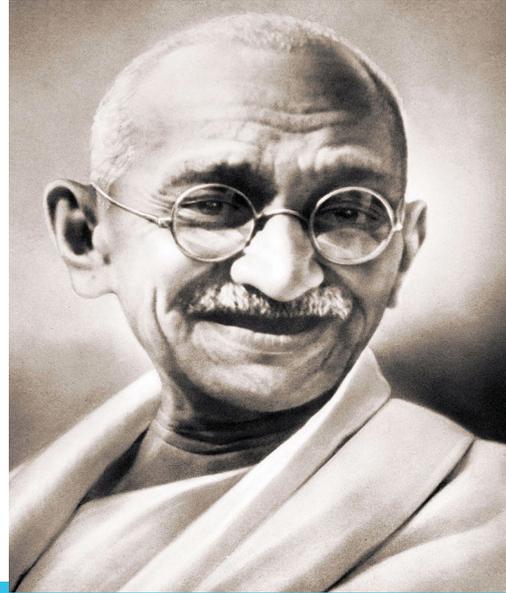
When they perform together, the young people and police officers have done something they have never done before. They have created a new piece of culture out of something in the broader culture and their separate subcultures. They have this new performance in their individual and collective experiences. They have added a new element to their overworked scripted ways of relating to each other. Having done that once, they could do it again. In the future they may or may not choose to exercise this performance option when they encounter each other on the street. But they now have that choice. Creating choices is how we grow. Performance is a means of growth because it gives people the license to make new choices of how to relate to oneself, to others and to the world.

The young people and police officers are performing “a head taller” just like I mentioned earlier the way very young children do. They are playing with their identities by performing both who they are and who they are not—*and experiencing that they did it*. Creating the performance space and the performance—cops and kids performing moving slowly, performing improvisational skits, performing conversation and performing empathy—is a

collective creative activity that is, for both the young people and the police officers. It is a venturing beyond “the narrow circle and narrow boundaries” of their own individual experience. Their experiences are broadened and with that, they have more choices for being/becoming.

Non-violence, which is the quality of the heart, cannot come by an appeal to the brain.

Mahatma Gandhi



The second project I want to share with you is the organizing of a global community that supports the emergence of a new form of social activism, a new way to work for progressive, revolutionary change. Increasingly around the globe, people are recognizing performance as a transformative, developmental activity that allows human beings to develop beyond instinctual and socially patterned behavior. This understanding of performance is changing the very nature of social change activism. We call it performance activism. Since 2001, we have helped connect performance activists with us and each other through nine Performing the

World conferences. These international gatherings support the growth of the performance activism movement by exploring and celebrating performance as a catalyst for human and community development and culture change, in order to create a new and more humane world.

PTW '16 took place last month and it was a privilege and an honor to have Antanas there.



To give you a flavor of Performing the World here is a short video...

To add to those scenes and voices, I've chosen a few performance activists to tell you about.

Alexandra Sutherland of South Africa's Rhodes University's drama department works with the theatre company Ubom! to challenge the fixed identity of the disenfranchised and poor. The Art of the Street Project creates devised plays with township children who perform them in the National Arts Festival. This performance of who they are becoming (actors in an arts festival) transforms who they "are" (poor children who beg on the streets). Similarly, Alex's theatre-making workshops with prisoners is more than "rehabilitation"—it is an identity-challenging, "becoming" activity.

In Peru, Ursula Carrascal's VIDA involves children from very poor areas polluted by marine debris, lead and trash, in performance activism through "Eco Dance," her environmental education dance program. In 2012 Ursula led "Dance to Survive," a performance created by children of the indigenous Cantagallo people who live on a garbage dump next to the Rimac River in Lima. Their dance gives them possession of their people's traditional culture and, at the same time, puts forward their demands for environmental clean up and concerns about global climate change.

Sanjay Kumar leads the Pandies' Theatre for children, women, slum-dwellers, and the homeless in New Delhi. Sanjay's recent presentations have been plays devised from improv scenes of the lives of boys who live on the train platforms—as part of an effort to bring about humane legislative policies toward the rape of boys in India.

I end my remarks today summarizing our goal in transforming culture which links the building of community with reshaping subjectivity. These words are taken from a book written by myself and Fred Newman.

To reshape our emotional practice—
to decide

for ourselves
what it is we want to do with anger,
joy, humiliation and the rest
of our incredibly complex subjectivity
(which is nameless)
and with the emotions newly created
through/in
the activity of building community
that redefines subjectivity—
we must make the tool
which makes this possible.