

CULTURAL DEMOCRACY™

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FREE SPEECH?

*Well, the price of
everything is going up!*



CIRCULAR A-122: OMB Writes Cultural Policy

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is the ultimate in Washington bureaucracies. Operating at the core of federal government, OMB writes budgets, evaluates programs, and thereby exerts a powerful impact on federal policies and programs in all the agencies. Not surprising, then, that the most dramatic threat to cultural democracy yet posed by the Reagan administration should come from OMB.

On January 24, OMB published proposed amendments to "Circular A-122" in the Federal Register, the daily catalogue of proposed rules and regulations governing federal pro-
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(Do As I Say, continued)

--Some \$15 million to the Asia Foundation to expand current activities, including publications, exchanges and special grants;

--\$1.8 million to improve English teaching in Africa;

--\$1.7 million to underwrite a large-scale campaign for a new constitution, voter education and a national referendum to assist Liberia's military rulers' return to civilian rule -- and another \$1.7 million for "symposia on the nature of democratic societies" for other military governments;

--\$3.2 million to create an organization to promote democracy in Central America and the Andes;

--\$1 million each to: establish a "Center for Free Enterprise" to study "the role of business in democratic systems"; and establish academic programs at two as yet unidentified foreign universities;

--\$450,000 for exchanging religious leaders between the U.S. and other countries; and

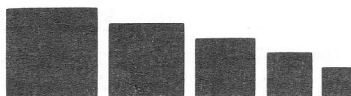
--\$500,000 for providing stipends and "organizational links and initial orientation" for new Soviet emigres, as well as maintaining a library and hosting an annual conference for them.

The lynchpin of Project Democracy will be a glossy newsmagazine called Communications Impact, published in English, Spanish and French with an \$850,000 budget; and a worldwide book publishing project costing \$5.4 million to provide a "core collection" of books about U.S. democratic institutions for subsidized sale abroad.

In his Parliament speech, Reagan outlined the objective of this crusade: "...to foster the infrastructure of democracy--the system of a free press, unions, political parties, universities--which allows a people to choose their own culture, to reconcile their own differences through peaceful means..."

We have tried repeatedly to write a fitting conclusion to this article, but keep coming up empty. The contrast between President Reagan's avowed love of democracy and his administration's practice have left us completely free speech-less.

DA/AG



HANDS

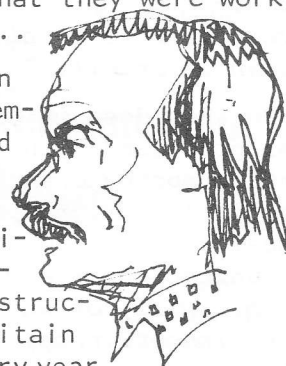
We had a special guest at NAPNOC's national conference in Omaha last October: Andrew Duncan, a British community artist who's a member of Free Form Arts Trust, Ltd. The London-Omaha culture shock must have been a little daunting -- the waitress at Kenny's called Andrew a "limey" and he responded by ordering scotch and ginger ale -- but Andrew didn't show it. His presentation on Free Form and the British community arts movement added a lot to the meeting, and as he said, there is no reason to make too much of the distance: "The world is shrinking; people all over the world are concerned with the same sort of things...Except for the fact that the Atlantic is there, I probably haven't come any farther than some of the other people in this room."

Andrew began his presentation with a brief history of the community arts movement, and continued with a lengthy slideshow of Free Form's recent work. We can't show you his slides but some of his commentary will be of special interest, even without the illustrations.

British Community Arts

"The community arts movement came from artists. It came out of the '60s, the public art movement, the happenings and things. Artists were beginning to look for other ways of working than the traditional gallery system, artists began to get together and collaborate. The more interaction that occurred through art, the more people realized that they were working along the same lines...."

"The artists who'd been working that way formed themselves into what was called the Association for Community Artists, and started to wage a campaign,...initially against the Arts Council of Great Britain. The structure of arts funding in Britain is that the government every year allocates a sum of money to the Arts Council, a nonpolitical body, its purpose, in brief, to administer arts funds...The Arts Council has a series of panels -- music, drama, film, for all the arts disciplines they can think of-- and allocates money. The sort of things that community artists were saying then are still true today--like 98% of the money was going to 2% of the population."



"Eventually, about 1975, all this pressure established within the Arts Council what is

ACROSS THE WATER

known as the Community Arts Panel,...assembled initially to look at community arts and say 'Is this a thing that public money should be going into, or is it not?' They decided, 'Let's experiment; let's give it seed money and see what happens.' And from that moment on, what we've been doing as artists is saying 'Hey, we've proved our case; we're doing amazing work, excellent work. It's no longer experimental, no longer seed money.'

'The Arts Council has effectively side-stepped that by 'devolution,' dividing the British Isles up into a series of Regional Art Associations (RAAs). What the central Arts Council does now is parcel out money to all the RAAs and then says, 'Okay, you decide how that money is going to be split up.' So they have just shifted the problem to the RAAs.

'Just to give you an example: In the last financial year, the Council had about 72 million pounds to distribute. Twenty-one went to the 'national clients' (there are very few of those but they might be the Royal Shakespeare Company, the National Theatre, and so on); 7 million went to the RAAs; and so on...Now, of all that money, something less than a million pounds finally found its way through to community artists....The vast majority of the Arts Council's money goes into bricks and mortar; it doesn't actually go to people, and the community arts movement is full of people. It's not capital; it is people.

'In the last Arts Council bulletin they mention something in the region of 306 community arts projects and say that not all of these are actually funded with public money through the Council. So that's quite a number of projects working within the British Isles with quite a small amount of money.

'The community arts movement is strong. It is pretty well organized. We have no paid staff doing the sort of job that NAPNOC does; we have what's called the Shelton Trust, the product of a battle the Association of Community Artists waged with the Arts Council. It's an educational charity--not allowed to take political stances--basically to disseminate information about community arts, and to help organize conferences and so on.' (More about the Shelton Trust at the end of this article.)

Free Form

'Free Form has been very much part of that campaign, part of the establishment of the

community arts movement. Free Form was started in about 1969 by two artists...They were interested, as were a number of other artists at that time, in looking at ways of relating their art to society. They weren't interested in the gallery system. They did a number of small projects....One thing they organized was called the Harrogate Festival, which was entitled 'Artism and Lifeism,' seen by about 10,000 people who participated in this event, which was really just a gathering together of artists of many, many different disciplines, working with people, just seeing what happened....

'So they moved on from doing these odd bits and pieces and by 1974 got revenue funding from the Arts Council. From then on we have expanded. That is, I suppose, what we are about as artists: we are about expansion.

'Free Form itself has grown to a stage where it's now 20 people strong; 15 of those are professional artists like myself and 5 are administrators. We're based in Hackney, which is the east end of London, and have a couple of dilapidated shops which we've knocked together and that is our base. We work throughout the country and occasionally abroad. We are a multi-discipline company--we call ourselves multi-media--and come predominantly from two backgrounds. My background is fine art college; other people come from a drama background. We've always tried to combine those 2 skills when we're working. We do not split ourselves off and say 'I'm a fine artist; I can only work in that way' or 'I'm a drama person.' We're interested in the fusion of the two....

'The first area I'm going to talk about is what we call 'environmental projects.' When I talk about projects I'm not really talking about something that's contained within a specific bit of time, like 'a 4-day project.' ...A lot of our work is about development, with people and their community, and it takes years of work. The actual project--the visual bit of it--might take 3 days to execute, but the setting up and the follow-up work could be quite extensive...."

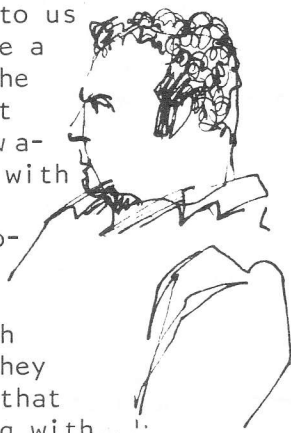


(HANDS ACROSS THE WATER, continued)

Free Form frequently uses other media to make plans for mural projects; Andrew talked about a mural which covers the outside of a building called Caribbean House, run by a group called West Indian Concern:

"We worked with them using video to work out the ideas. We didn't know anything about them and they didn't know anything about us, so we ran a few sessions with them using video, getting them to interview each other, to find out what the building was about, what their activities were about, and to come to some understanding of what sort of image they wanted to present to the outside world.

"That project really made substantial inroads to the local planners. London is broken into boroughs...each having its own local authority responsible for housing, leisure, recreation, arts activities--a whole range....So we made inroads with the planners and they came back to us and said 'Okay, there are a number of sites around the borough (of Hackney) that are sort of derelict; how about you doing something with them?'...We said we were not interested in just doing sites. We're interested in actually developing a relationship with people, then seeing if they want to identify a site that they want to do something with..."



Creating Community

"Let me talk about some of the processes we go through doing environmental projects with people...We are about developing partnerships with people....We will go through a series of meetings actually establishing a community to work with. There may not be a community, there may not even be an established residents' association or tenants' association. So the initial work is actually beginning to establish a sense of community--identifying a group of people, bringing them together, and with them, identifying their concerns and what they actually want to try and achieve. Then, in the case of environmental projects, working out with them the design for the project."

Andrew explained that they use techniques that will not be discouraging to people without experience as art-makers: "We do quite a bit of what's called indirect mosaic:

you work out a design on a piece of paper,... and then with a flour-and-water glue you just stick your mosaics on the pattern the wrong way 'round,...and then put the section onto the wall in one go...A lot of our time is spent thinking of ways of allowing people access to creative processes, because we believe very firmly that through those processes people can achieve the confidence to make real decisions about their own circumstances and their own future....Stencilling is another technique that we use, because it gets over people's inhibitions about not being able to paint. But anyone can get a leaf and trace around it, or do a tracing from a book...and in a very simple way, create an effective result."

Free Form also works in social institutions such as Leytonstone House, a mentally-handicapped hospital: We do quite a bit of work with an organization called One to One... creating a one-to-one relationship between residents in mental institutions and volunteers...It's largely through using drama games, a series of arts activities so people can meet and develop a friendship....We did a project of that nature in Leytonstone House and this in turn generated the interest of the staff to say 'Why don't we have an area within the hospital that is effectively the residents'?' It wasn't a therapy room, but really the residents' own room to do whatever they wanted in...So that's what we did: an old laundry, converted with residents, staff and volunteers into an activity room.

"The Action Space is a group similar to Free Form; they do much more work in mental institutions, and organized the Action Space Season, a season of workshops, films, all about the mentally handicapped. We made a tape/slide show with some mentally handicapped residents and volunteers. We used Polaroid cameras because of the immediate results: they'd take photos which would then be rephotographed onto slide film. They went out--it was like a trail--into a particular part of London for about two hours and collected things. They could collect through either taking photographs or recording the sound."

Artists Help Organize

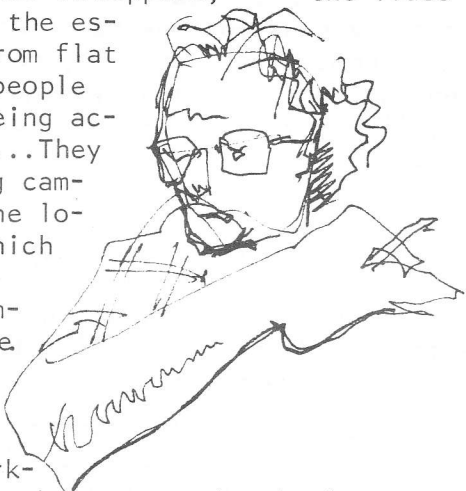
"Media is an area of our work--using film, video, photography as the means of expression. Leaview is a rundown housing estate in the east end of London where we worked for a number of years with tenants. Initially about 5 tenants came to us and said 'Look, we want to try and generate a sense of community on our estate; there's nothing going on here, all

people want to do is move off the estate. It's really in a terrible state of repair,...no maintenance money, very little interest in the tenants' association.' So we went along and worked with these 5 people and put on an estate festival.

"The festival was about what is going on on the estate...and that in turn led to making a film, then a video which was very much again looking at the estate, at what it could potentially be, what resources were there already--like a disused community center...This all built up to a major campaign. The tenants' association gained in support, the video was used around the estate; it went from flat to flat to get people interested in being actively involved...They waged an amazing campaign against the local authority which resulted in a 5 million pound improvement package. It established a group of architects in one of the flats, working closely with the tenants in the improvements, how the houses should be redesigned, and also working out how people were going to move off the estate and then move back on again after the renovations...

"What we did is help them have the confidence--they achieved it, we didn't achieve it. We helped them achieve the confidence to actually go on marches to the Town Hall, disrupt chamber sessions...The first day the builders moved in the tenants arranged a breakfast party and all the Councillors were there--they got wind that all the media was going to be there--saying 'What a great day this is.' Yet a year ago, they had been the ones blocking their ears, not listening to the tenants' demands."

Andrew described a media project with a group of "young West Indians who were taken on for a research project funded through the MSC scheme (similar to CETA)...one of a number of schemes employing young people on a temporary basis for about a year. This was a project to do research into problems that young West Indians had in the east end of London. We worked with them using a variety of media--live presentation, video, tape/slide--to look at the issues and concerns they had



and to find other ways of presenting them. They developed a stereotyped West Indian daughter that they created (a lifesize doll), took around and placed in lots of different situations and confronted people with this stereotype...They were looking for either confirmation or rejection of that stereotype. Actually, they started out with a stereotype family, developed characteristics for the whole family. One of the first things we did--we worked with them for a period of about 12 weeks--was role-play a family situation, videotape it, and draw 3 different issues from it. Then 3 different groups each took an issue and produced a slide/tape program about that issue," and finally each was reduced to a single image, one of which Andrew presented in his slide-show at Omaha.

Facilities and Fireshow

A good deal of Free Form's work is focused on community facilities. "In Crewe (in northwest England), we developed a strong relationship with the community development officer in the local authority. He told us about a factory which an amateur athletics association had got urban aid money to purchase and develop. The top part was for a gym, but the application included developing the bottom part as a community center. So that's how we got involved.

"We started with a 2-day thing, using video with about a dozen people, talking about the building--'How do you see the building in 1984, what are your dreams, your fantasies?' Out of that we built toward a second project, two weeks long. It was amazing the response that was generated. We were working toward an evening--the first activity in the building--to bring people in and say 'Hey, look, this is your building, it's full of potential, there are some of the ideas we saw, what are other ideas you've got?' By the end of the two weeks we were running workshops with 40 people...creating environmental things, the dramatic content of the evening.

"About 200 people came to the evening itself...They went through a kind of maze, first a tape/slide history of the building, then booths of activities that could be going on in the future, then out into the main area for the evening's program. They dreamed up a theater piece about a family bemoaning its boring daily life, then cut to fantasies of a dance hall or whatever. The family became the link for the whole evening, get-

(HANDS ACROSS THE WATER, continued)

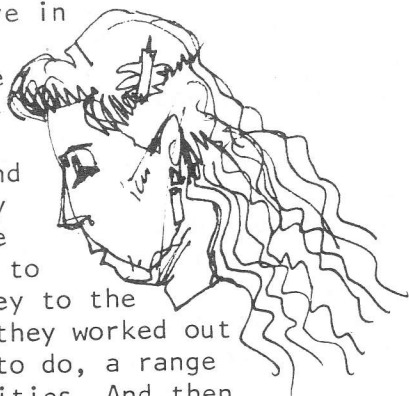
ting across in an entertaining and amusing way the different ideas people had."

Andrew explained that fireshows--spectacles that involve the creation and burning of large symbolic structures--are also a big part of Free Form's work. Fireshows began as part of the Guy Fawkes' Day celebration on November 5, with the burning of a mock-up of the Houses of Parliament, but they are now part of many festivals and other large-scale events. Andrew described a recent fireshow:

"Fireshows...they can be very special occasions....The community arts movement is very much allied with the working class movement. Labour came back to power, took control of the Greater London Council (GLC) quite recently. One of the first things they did was say 'We're going to put money into May Day celebrations.' May Day's a traditional sort of labor day celebration, and they were going to put money into activities in parks around London, one of them Victoria Park in the east end.

"Free Form, together with a number of other community activists, got together and called a public meeting. The outcome was to say to the GLC, 'Fantastic idea that you should put all this money into May Day celebrations. But instead of you deciding what we're going to have in the way of entertainment, you give us the money and we'll work it out for ourselves.' And that's effectively what happened--the GLC was persuaded to hand over the money to the local people and they worked out what they wanted to do, a range of festival activities. And then Free Form did a fireshow.

"We worked with a number of groups from all over the east end over a period of about 5 weeks producing processional pieces. It was quite a spectacular evenings' entertainment--more than an evenings' entertainment, it was a very moving experience, probably witnessed by something in the region of 10,000-12,000 people. The whole thing was about oppression and idea of the central structure was that it would represent the oppressive nature of inner urban areas. Each group that took part in the performance was



encouraged to make a presentation about what they felt oppressed by; they had their image of oppression which they'd processed, paraded with, then attached to the central structure. There were various other aspects of the performance that took place, and symbolic of riding themselves of oppression was the burning of the structure."

A Sense of Movement

In the discussion period, someone asked Andrew whether the British Arts Council's concept of "quality" put pressure on community arts groups as its counterpart does in the U.S. "Well, the Arts Council, for example, have criticized us for making things like slide/tape shows. They say, 'Why don't you just concentrate on the things you're really excellent at, like environmental projects and these big fireshows...and forget about all these little things that you do?'....We would maintain that the video at Leaview Tenants' is just as relevant as doing the big MayDay fireshow and that we will always maintain that sort of balance within our work. Most of that does come from established art bodies like the Arts Council, they are always very much into product."

Free Form is also concerned with helping to establish local community arts programs where none exist. Andrew told a story about Free Form's work in the northwest of England, around Liverpool and Manchester; when it seemed they were doing quite a bit of work in the region, people said " 'Well, it's great, but why do you have to keep coming up from London? Why can't we have a local group of artists who can work with us in this way?' " So they helped to set up a training program in conjunction with the Manchester Polytechnic and "through that program (and with money that was committed from the RAA) we set up what is now a sister company called Community Arts Workshop, a much smaller company than Free Form, but they work solely within that region."

From what Andrew showed us of Free Form's work, there are great similarities with our situation in the U.S., and equally great differences as well. Money is one of the latter. Andrew explained that Free Form receives "Something in the region of 40-45% of our running costs for the year from the Arts Council of Great Britain. We are the largest community arts client. We are not devolved (to an RAA) because we do not work within a single region; we work all over the place. At the moment, the Arts Council is trying to decide what to do with us. They want to shove us somewhere..."

He explained that the rest of Free Form's money comes from a variety of sources--project grants ("We've got a grant from the Gulbenkian Foundation to do media work"); and "if we're doing a specific project project, we'd work with whoever we're working with--tenants' association, community group--to achieve the money for the project. It may be a case of applying to local authorities, RAAs, maybe local industry, a number of different sources..."

Listening to Andrew's presentation we couldn't help but remark on the difficulty we would expect to encounter in the U.S. trying to raise money to build processional pieces to be burned in a Labor Day parade or to buy Polaroid cameras and tape recorders for work with institutionalized people, let alone to pay the artists involved in these projects for their work.

A related difference is the apparent willingness of local government in Britain--and various social institutions-- to support community arts work. Few housing departments in this country currently support community development officers who in turn are able to hire community artists for local projects; few community colleges would currently open their doors to a training program for community artists.

These differences have made it more difficult for community artists in the U.S. to carry out what Andrew called "developmental work": "It's actually the business of creating the confidence within a group of people to have some kind of communal identity, to actually start making decisions that can radically affect their circumstances and their lives, and that is where it's a developing thing. It's pointless just going on doing one environmental project in Leicester and then that's it. It's got to be a developing thing."

Shelton Trust

Despite these practical differences, our movements in Britain and the U.S. have a strong commonality of values and vision. On both sides of the Atlantic, our work is predicated on a commitment to cultural democracy.

To further international cooperation NAPNOC has begun to exchange correspondence and publications with the Shelton Trust--NAPNOC's British equivalent--which publishes a quarterly called Another Standard (subtitled "Community, Art, Culture and Politics"). The Summer '82 issue focused on Manpower Services Commission (MSC) funding--the equivalent of CETA in its fatter days--and its impact on the movement; the Autumn '82 issue was concerned with

"The Politics of Celebration"--festivals, spectacles and their role in the movement; Winter '82, the most recent issue, covers "The Way We Were" -- it features a number of articles on the historical development of Britain's movement, including a piece on Free Form's history that adds to the account Andrew offered in Omaha.

Another Standard will be publishing material from Cultural Democracy from time to time, and vice versa. NAPNOC is also collaborating with the Shelton Trust and the British-American Arts Association to develop an exchange program for community artists in our two countries. If you want to subscribe to AS, we advise you to write for overseas rates; the British subscription price is £3.50 per year.

The Shelton Trust also publishes a "Community Arts Information Pack" and several other special publications. The "Information Pack" is a folder-full of project descriptions and other background information on the British movement, intended especially for people who are not already involved. It describes nearly 30 projects encompassing a wide range of work with an equally wide variety of constituencies.

For more information write to The Shelton Trust, The Old Tin School, Collyhurst Road, Manchester M10 7RQ, England. To reach Andrew Duncan write to Free Form Arts Trust, 38 Dalston Lane, London E8 3AZ, England.

DA/AG

Many thanks to NAPNOC member Mike Mosher of San Francisco for the line drawings that accompany this article. Mike made the drawings during odd moments at the Omaha conference.

