

CONNECTION
THEATER

Listening for Dialogue

sixteen monologues on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict
created and collected by Lee Fogel

an exploration of art for dialogue, understanding & healing
with artwork & performances by North Philadelphia youth

part of the Healing Art Project
of COSACOSA art at large, Inc.

2004-2005

Art as Dialogue

by Miriam Seidel

"I believe, despite all, that the peoples of this hour can enter into dialogue, into a genuine dialogue with each other. In a genuine dialogue each of the partners, even when he stands in opposition to the other, heeds, affirms, and confirms his opponent as an existing other."

-Martin Buber, *Genuine Dialogue and the Possibilities of Peace*

Art is usually seen as a form of personal expression. But it is also, and fundamentally, a means of communication. In a complex world, it can offer a virtual space where different, even conflicting perspectives can coexist, and where previously unimagined harmonies can emerge. Particularly since the 1960's, many artists have been moved to take art off its cultural pedestal, and to make work that engaged audiences in direct dialogue, through guerrilla theater and other provocative forms. Existing for more than personal expression, work like this was meant to bring people to new insights that would make social change possible.



New, open-ended art forms could combine searching dialogue and ritual-like public events. Suzanne Lacy, for example, has made large-scale works of public performance art, aimed at empowering disenfranchised people and bringing their concerns into the civic arena. An early work of hers, *Take Back the Night* (1978), culminated in a parade of women during a conference on pornography in San

Francisco. A number of Lacy's works have incorporated community dialogue events, including *The Turning Point/Under Construction* (1997-98), highlighting the voices of teenage girls, many of them immigrants, in Vancouver.

Another artist exemplifying this loosely-structured, communication-rich approach is choreographer Liz Lerman. Her *Shipyards Project* (1994-96) involved a wide spectrum of the New Hampshire community of Portsmouth. Group explorations through dance and talk sessions led to performance events that helped to air issues of unemployment, toxic waste and racism. In visual art, the pioneering Helen Mayer and Newton Harrison have created deeply-researched works that help communities see themselves and collectively contemplate major environmental issues.

In theater, Anna Deavere Smith created a powerful approach, listening to and then animating the voices of people on many sides of explosive situations, in her solo works *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and other Identities*, and *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*. In these works, equal voice was given to children and older people, black and white, Christian and Jewish. Artists like these have been recognized as making a special contribution to the larger culture. The Animating Democracy initiative (<http://ww3.artsusa.org/animatingdemocracy/about/>) aims to highlight and encourage such work, and analyze what can enhance its effectiveness.

Inspired by a production of Deavere Smith's *Fires in the Mirror*, COSACOSA Youth Council member Lee Fogel sought out and interviewed people on all sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in the U.S. and Israel. Each person was asked how they felt about the possibilities of dialogue in helping to move toward a resolution of this intractable impasse. The monologues she crafted from these interviews were first performed as a play at Fogel's high school. The piece allows us to hear the personal stories and concerns of people who might not speak as candidly were they in the same room.

In the past year, COSACOSA added another layer to this rich material: teens from the North Philadelphia worked with Fogel on a curriculum to explore similarities among interpersonal hostilities, gang violence, neighborhood strife, and racism in Philadelphia and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict abroad. Listening to voices talking about a faraway but intense conflict, and reworking the material themselves, COSACOSA youth initiated their own creative process about and activated by dialogue. As an introduction to the enclosed audio version of the piece, the teens distilled and recorded a collage of statements about dialogue taken from the monologues: a "conversation" further integrating the thoughts, emotions and ideals of the original speakers, past performers, and the North Philadelphia community.

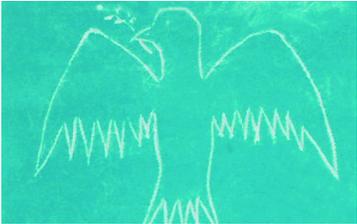


This work, *Listening for Dialogue*, now including the contributions of dozens of people of extremely varied backgrounds, can be seen as a kind of meta-artwork, both involving dialogue and taking dialogue as its subject. In this, it adds to and echoes not only related dialogue-based art, but the philosophical premises of this kind of work, which go back at least to the philosopher Martin Buber. In his pioneering book *I and Thou*, Buber affirmed the central importance of communion between two beings, based on authentic listening and acknowledgment of the other's living presence. Buber's writings have inspired approaches to aesthetic theory that attempt to place dialogue at the center of the artistic experience as well. Buber's personal engagement with these issues offers a strange parallel to *Listening for Dialogue*. In Israel, where he moved from Germany in 1938, Buber became a maverick who insisted on the rights of Arabs in the new state of Israel. He created an organization (Brit Shalom, *A Covenant for Peace*) advocating a bi-national state with full equality for Israelis and Palestinian Arabs, and continued to urge for genuine dialogue among them until his death.

Listening for Dialogue reminds us that, in a world of intractable violence, listening and sharing views offers an antidote to despair. The project continues to grow past its initial intentions; who knows what the next elaboration of *Listening for Dialogue* will be? Who knows what new insights have been touched off in people's minds and hearts, that may point a way toward peace?

Miriam Seidel is a corresponding editor for *Art in America*.

Poems for Peace



What is Peace?

What is peace?

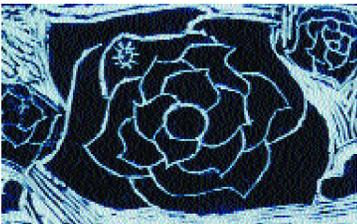
Peace is love,
no fighting,
no war,
feeling
the feelings of others
standing in unity
as we watch the sunset
as the warm beach breezes of air
wash across our faces.
That is what I call peace.

-Sara Mohamed, grade 5

Like a Flowing River

Peace,
like a flowing river,
rocks and stones fall to try to stop it,
but it continues to flow,
and you don't really take notice
in a flowing river
but when you finally sit down and
look at the river
then you realize
peace is still there
hidden,
waiting to be found.

-Juliet Stein, grade 8



What your people will become

Grant us the courage to speak.
Grant us eyes to see what blinds us.
Grant us minds to interpret
what we see.

Then You shall see
what we will become
when we see the darkness
which, we thought blindly, was light.
Grant us silence to listen
to what would be a screech
to us, but a language to them.
Grant us the virtue of tranquillity
to let the long fight rest.
You will see, You will see
what your people will become.

-Nathan Hopfinger, grade 7

All Right

Do not worry about war
if it not your fight
to win
Do not worry
The sun always
comes up
to a new day
to a new beginning
And soon
all will be calm
all will be safe.
And you will be all right
in the arms you love
in an embrace of peace.
And the stars above you
will shine in their place
twinkling around the moon
looking down on you
and it will be all right.

-Hennah Iqbal, grade 8

Poems for Peace were created as part
of the Interfaith Youth Poetry Project,
Dr. Cathleen Cohen, Founder & Director
www.interfaithpoetry.com

Listening for Dialogue TRACKS

- 1: Introduction
- 2: *A Conversation About Dialogue*
- 3: *Art Strikes Your Heart* Israeli atheist, Founder of Free Palestine Action Network (FPAN); Israeli agnostic, member of FPAN
- 4: *I Do Get Worked Up* Christian American, elementary school teacher
- 5: *Angles* Jewish American, high school student
- 6: *It's Not About That* Christian American, with the American Friends' Service Committee Israel-Palestine Program
- 7: *Myths and Truths* Christian Palestinian American, Founder of an international Palestinian solidarity organization working for human rights
- 8: *Since Then* Sephardic Israeli Jew, grandmother, born in Aden (South Yemen), fought for Israel's independence
- 9: *Just To Sit* Muslim Palestinian American (1st generation), Islamic school teacher
- 10: *What Would I Want* Christian American, high school teacher
- 11: *As An Other* Jewish American, Founder of the Interfaith Poetry Project
- 12: *Other Than the Weather* Israeli secular Jew, daughter of Holocaust survivors
- 13: *Obvious Conclusions* Jewish American, prominent Professor of Political Science in Middle Eastern Politics
- 14: *Among the Colonists* Sufi Muslim American, poet
- 15: *Maybe the Messiah* Orthodox Jewish Israeli, college student
- 16: *Hits Home* Muslim Palestinian, Arab-American Research Corps college student
- 17: *Like Opening and Awakening* Jewish American, prominent community leader active in Interfaith Dialogue

Some ways that you can use *Listening for Dialogue*:

- Groups can listen to the monologues as the prelude to facilitated dialogue or as part of a dialogue series.
- Students can listen to and examine each monologue as part of the Middle East unit of a History, Social Studies, or Political Science class.
- Individuals running workshops on conflict-resolution or interreligious/cultural/political dialogue facilitation training can use this CD as a springboard for activities.

Lee Fogel, COSACOSA artist in residence and former Youth Council member, believes it is important to use the arts, and not only intellectual means, to address issues of anti-racism, conflict-resolution, and political reconciliation. She writes, "When people interact through the arts we are often more receptive to one another and can transcend our differences. *Listening for Dialogue* is based on interviews with individuals of varying religious, political, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. I hope to give audiences a broad and varied base of voices from which they can learn, and begin to have more balanced and sensitive discussions -- creating new venues of understanding and conversation between people with differing viewpoints. I ask people to listen openly to all of the monologues while remaining sensitive to the reactions each listener or speaker might have. Some of the voices represented may be difficult to digest emotionally and ideologically, but it is my belief that listening fully to all voices is an essential ingredient to understanding, to dialogue, and to peace."

Healing, Peace & Unity, linoleum prints on rice paper, 90" x 48", 2005. Created by North Philadelphia youth and pediatric hospital patients for the Healing Art Project.

Connection Theater
Community Artists
Vanity Arroyo
Jack Briggs
Cathy Cohen
Dit Wah Deng
Michael Dreyfuss
Liza Ewen
Lee Fogel
Andy Fussner
Kate Fussner
Damaso Gallman
Marian Grove
Yusef Mercan
Joyce Miller
Kimberly Montes
Bronwen Mullin
Sari Nussbaum
Chris Ramsey
Sandra Rodriguez
Eitan Tzipori

Healing Art Project
Community Artists
Sommir Alston
Brian Alvarez
Anala Ancrum
Beverly Bannister
Raelynn Caabrera
Jonathan Chavert
Teona Lashay Council
Calvin Dennis
Dit Wah Deng
Ghum Deng
Taniesha Ebo
Terrell Fields
Lindsey Glottfely
Maya Haley
Pamela Harris
Lawanda Hughes
Daman Jenkins
Christopher Lamp
Isaiah Lites
Michael Luzader
Stantislau Majchrzak
Sharnae Mask
Brooke Mays
Victor McBeth
Alicia McGougan
Jabria Norton
Keishon Norton
Rajai Norton
Jasmyn Price
Marc Riley
Ashley Romano
Natalie Romero
Elliot Stache
Grace Tang
Johmir Truitt
Shawn White
Michael Williams



This production of *Listening for Dialogue* and COSACOSA's Connection Theater initiative were supported by The Dolfinger-McMahon Foundation; Jadestone, Inc.; The Valentine Foundation; and individual donors.

COSACOSA's Healing Art Project is supported by The Cricket Island Foundation; The Douty Foundation; Grasshopper, Inc.; The National Endowment for the Arts; The Pennsylvania Council on the Arts; The Philadelphia Cultural Fund; The Philadelphia Foundation; The Seybert Institution; and VSA, an international, non-profit organization dedicated to providing educational opportunities through the arts for children and adults with disabilities.



Founded in 1990, COSACOSA art at large, Inc. creates new art specific to Philadelphia neighborhoods and public spaces. Through collaborative art workshops, neighborhood-based artist residencies, and media projects, we enable dialogues among our city's disparate communities and cultures. COSACOSA projects assure a sense of equality among people of diverse backgrounds and differing abilities, while building their participation in local communities as well as in society at large.

COSACOSA designs and applies new models to deliver innovative and interactive "dialogues through art" directly into Philadelphia neighborhoods. For more information about COSACOSA, and to learn how to participate in our programs, please visit our website, www.cosacosa.org.



COSACOSA Project Staff
Kimberly Niemela, Director
Philip Tang, Technical Director
Victoria Fenton, Program Associate
James Branch, Community Coordinator
Sharnae Mask, Youth Coordinator
Alicia McGougan, Youth Coordinator
Marc Riley, Youth Coordinator

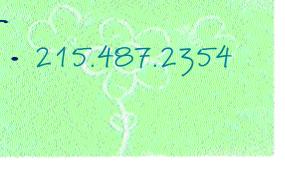
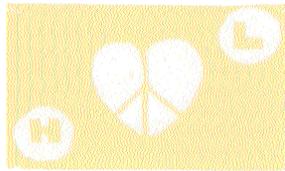
Lee Fogel, Theater Artist in Residence
Corey Antis, Healing Art Project Artist
Pedro Ospina, Healing Art Project Artist
Tameka Johnson, Child Life Liaison
Jennifer Lemisch, Child Life Liaison
Candy Nyce, Child Life Liaison
Kate Stier, Public Relations Liaison
Smart Cookie Design, Publication Designer



COSACOSA

Art creates cultural change

art at large



www.cosacosa.org

4427 Main Street Philadelphia PA 19127 • 215.487.2354