

Cultural Production And Strategies For Conflict Mediation (Workshop Review)

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The last few years of the twentieth century witnessed several military forces on peace-keeping missions in the world's trouble spots with little or no success, and achieving worldwide media coverage. On the other hand, however, several cultural activists engaged in grassroots projects have achieved substantial local successes, mostly without media coverage. The conviction of the Institute for African Studies, University of Bayreuth, that participatory cultural activities could be an effective way to ease tensions on the local level, encouraged her to devote the 1999 Autumn School Intensive course to that subject. Between the 24th of October and 2nd November, 1999, the Institute held a workshop on "Cultural Production and Strategies for Conflict Mediation," for advanced graduate students in the Arts, Humanities and Development Studies. The objectives being, to familiarize participants with theoretical and practical aspects of project work, to offer a platform for graduate students to exchange ideas with experts and co-researchers, and to liaise participants with GOs and NGOs.

Conference Proceedings

The conference opened on an informal note, after the initial introductions, with exercises. This beginning was a strange phenomenon, but at the end, it became clear that it served a very important function/strategy, because it enabled participants to shed-off their various inhibitions, especially taking into consideration that most of them were meeting for the first time. This was followed by an open discussion (democratic), to agree on presentation format. The participants were then grouped into panels, using similar topic themes as the basis.

- a) Panel on Prison Work.
- b) Panel on Gender and Health.
- c) Panel on Land Use Conflicts.
- d) Panel on the Use of Music as a Medium.

Each panel was headed by an expert. The informal nature of the workshop proceedings gave an opportunity for every participant to contribute in the discussions. Outside the above arrangement, a session was scheduled to discuss the relationship with donor organizations, followed by strategies for resolving problems in this relationship. An excursion was arranged to visit The Rococo Opera House Bayreuth, Open Air Court Theatre Spanspareil and the Wagner Opera House.

Work-group reports and evaluation was scheduled at the end, in order to conveniently assess the conference/workshop.

Evaluation

After the workshop, it became expedient to evaluate it in order to have an insight into its successes, and possible limitations, and to provide a basis for addressing the limitations, if there were any, in any subsequent workshop/conferences. The issues discussed in the evaluatory processes were:

- a) The success in providing possible strategies for resolving problems of interference by Government/Donor agencies with project work. It was generally agreed that the resolve to concertedly make Government and Donor agencies aware of the potency of participation in any democratic process (an important element in empowering the people for development), was an important adrenalin for “cultural combatants.”
- b) From the point of view of Theatre for Development practice, using government functionaries, donor organizations where possible as target groups, served an important expository strategy for activists in the field. The work of Bole Butake in Cameroon “aimed at the Urbano-Politico-Bureacratic Elite,” recorded in *Theatre and Performance in Africa*, edited by Eckhard Breitingner, was used as a reference point.
- c) It was also noted that the participants needed a practical process to have a first-hand experience in trying-out and evolving participatory models that may serve as a guide when in the field. In spite of the possible contradiction—the absence of a target group, it was clarified that the participants could be one, and may also require conscientisation too. Consequently, provision was made to have a practical session.

One crucial factor that dominated the evaluatory process was the “thumbs-up” given to the host-participant, Dr. Eckhard Breitingner, for the energy he expended single-handedly in bringing together participants from all over the world and having a successful workshop without any hitch (a miraculous feat) was showered with encomiums. The host participant was asked to extend a word of gratitude to the Institute for African Studies, for a friendly and accomodating atmosphere experienced throughout the conference, that aided its successful completion, The University of Bayreuth and its support, and to DAAD, for sponsoring this culturally viable developmental discourse. It was indeed a

conference for “cultural combatants.”

In spite of the major successes that the workshop scored, one or two issues were not completely resolved. The one was the relationship between sponsor/donor organizations and project workers. The workshop participants pointed out the over-reliance for finances on sponsors/donors, which largely subordinates the set goals of the projects. The recommendations that were proffered for self-sustainability were not sufficient. The other was the fact that all the work done at Bayreuth remained essentially in the different minds of the participants because the proceedings were not documented in any visual or written form, for future use. The follow-up workshop on the same theme in South Africa 2000, hopes to be able to provide solutions to the unresolved issues raised in Bayreuth, and, as a matter of fact, will pick up from where the Bayreuth '99 workshop ended, be more accomodating, and more conflict resolving.

New From Cambridge

Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Philip C. Kolin

A Streetcar Named Desire revolutionized the modern stage and this book offers the first continuous history of the play in production from 1947 to 1998. Chapters survey major national premieres by the world's leading directors including Seki Sano, Luchino Visconti, Ingmar Bergman, Jean Cocteau and Laurence Olivier. Interpretations by Black and gay theater companies also receive analyses, and transformations into other media, such as ballet, film, television, and opera (premiered in 1998) form an important part of the overall study.

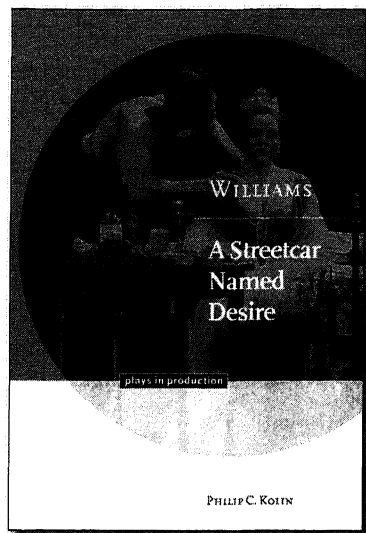


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