

INVESTIGATE DISCOVER ACT



# **SYMPHONY OF A CITY**

A Public Cyberart Documentary  
Teachers' Guide



SYMPHONY OF  
A CITY

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## **Wearcam Participants and Nominating Organizations**

### **Community Builders:**

Kimberly Chacón nominated by Hyde Square Task Force  
Serene Wong nominated by the Asian Community Development Corporation  
Alan Solomont nominated by Northeast Action  
Chuck Turner nominated by the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative

### **Housing:**

Mike Murray nominated by the University of Massachusetts/Boston  
Jeff Purcell nominated by ABCD  
Barbara Ward and Howard Armstrong nominated by Greater Boston Legal Services  
John Coppola nominated by the Greater Boston Real Estate Board

Symphony of a City premiered at the Boston Cyberarts Festival on April 27 and May 4, 2001. A forum about community building and the housing crisis followed on May 5 at the Great Hall at Faneuil Hall.

**Symphony of a City is sponsored by** Visible Republic, a public art program in Boston administered by the New England Foundation for the Arts.

Visible Republic is a funding collaborative that includes LEF Foundation, Boston Foundation - Arts Fund, the Charles E. Culpeper Foundation and the Fund for the Arts. Additional funding for Symphony of a City is provided by Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities- a state program of the National Endowment, Tomfohrde Foundation and Boston Cultural Council and Hill & Barlow.

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## Overview

Symphony of a City, part of the 2001 Boston Cyberarts Festival, is a public art project by filmmaker Liz Canner, and muralist John Ewing that unites art and technology in order to explore housing issues and community building in Boston. People of diverse class, racial, and age backgrounds nominated by Boston neighborhood groups, will wear small camera headsets for a day. On April 27, four community builders, and on May 4, four people affected by the issue of housing will have their lives projected onto Boston City Hall with simultaneous streaming on the Symphony of a City website ([www.symphonyofacity.org](http://www.symphonyofacity.org)). The website provides an on-line bulletin board where viewers can discuss a variety of issues and also interact with the camera wearers.

The aim of this study guide is to facilitate use of the project in educational settings and to provide relevant background information and resources. Teachers and students in high school or college social science, media literacy, public art, current events, or urban studies courses may find some or all of the exercises and information relevant. The study guide can be used on the actual days of Symphony of a City, or afterwards, when an edited version of video footage will be available on the website. The study guide revolves around four themes: Vision & Visibility; Democracy & Technology; Housing Issues in Boston; and Community Building.

### 1. Vision & Visibility

Symphony of a City is a project about vision and visibility. The project makes it possible to simultaneously view the experiences of four diverse people in Boston –where they go, what they do, and whom they see from morning until night. In sharing their fields of vision for a day, the camera wearers not only provide viewers with information about housing and community building, the central issues explored in the project, but also create an intimate portrait of who they are. In contrast to the sound-bite portrayals of people, so common in mainstream media, Symphony of a City gives us time with people, and in that time poetry and a sense of connection can emerge.

What does the video footage reveal? While we see the viewpoints of the camera wearers, we do not see the camera wearers themselves (unless they look in the mirror.) The identity of each participant will only become apparent as the viewer watches. Does the footage reveal anything about how the camera wearers get treated and how they treat others? Is it easy to identify whether someone is a lawyer or a homeless person? A teenager or a middle-aged person?

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the racial and ethnic composition of Boston is: 49.5% white, 23.8% African-American, 14.4% Hispanic, 7.5% Asian or Pacific Islander, 3.1% multiracial, .3% Native American. What is the race and ethnicity of the people in the camera wearers' field of vision? What is the gender and age of the people they encounter? How do the video images compare to what and whom you see during your day?

We can get a sense of how the camera wearers (and others in their field of vision) move in different parts of the city –do they wander, rush, walk in a straight line? What are the rhythms of Boston neighborhoods? What is the ebb and flow of movement over the course of a day? Boston's population of 589,141, according to the U.S. Census, doubles during the day to almost 1.2 million. Does the footage reflect this change?

In addition to seeing the individual perspectives of the camera wearers, we can see the four viewpoints juxtaposed. The project makes room for chance –the simultaneously broadcast images and sounds will likely have moments of interesting coincidence and dissonance.

The viewpoints we see projected onto City Hall and streamed onto the Symphony of a City website may challenge or reinforce images we commonly see in mass media. Mainstream movies, songs, newspapers, journals, radio, television, and advertisements offer a homogenized and limited range of viewpoints related to important social issues. What happens when four people who have been nominated by a range of civic organizations get to choose the images and perspectives we see? Does Symphony of a City make visible people and places that are typically invisible in Boston's mainstream media? Does it challenge stereotypes? What kinds of news do you get about Boston and where do you get your information? Do you get access to a wide range of viewpoints?

Sociologist Martin Gilens underscores the ways that mass media warps our sense of reality. He offers a striking example, based on his research of how mainstream newspapers and magazines portray poverty: "For most Americans the most powerful images of poverty are undoubtedly the black urban ghetto...Yet they...represent a minuscule portion of all American poor. Only 6% of all poor Americans are blacks living in urban ghettos" (Gilens, 1999, p.132). Gilens also finds that news coverage about poverty plays into negative stereotypes of African-Americans. When mainstream media covers the lives of poor people, whites are typically described as worthy, hard-working poor trying to make ends meet, while poor blacks are consistently depicted as lazy, irresponsible, and unworthy of assistance.

For media to create a more realistic description of social issues, Gilens recommends that journalists become aware of their own stereotypes and misperceptions. He also recommends that

news agencies hire more journalists of color, so that people of color will be depicted more accurately. A group called Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), which keeps close watch on the influence on journalism of corporate ownership, advertisers, telecommunications policy, and the public relations industry on journalism, believes that media will be improved only when there is structural reform of the media industry. As FAIR writes on its website:

Independent, aggressive and critical media are essential to an informed democracy. But mainstream media are increasingly cozy with economic and political powers that it should be watchdogging. Ultimately, FAIR believes that structural reform is needed to break up the dominant media conglomerates, establish independent public broadcasting, and promote strong non-profit alternative sources of information.

FAIR, as well as other scholars and activists, are concerned that media ownership is concentrated in very few hands. The U.S. media currently is dominated by ten companies: Disney, AOL-Time Warner, News Corporation, Viacom, Seagram (Universal), Sony, Liberty (AT&T), Bertelsmann, and General Electric (NBC).

*Some camera wearers may show a carefully planned sequence of activities; others may involve friends, family, and neighbors in carrying out a project; still others may decide to go about their day as if the camera weren't present*



*Camera wearers were nominated by community organizations around Boston. This postcard was sent to 50 groups asking them to nominate someone in their neighborhood for the project.*

The 1996 Telecommunications Act, which reduced restrictions on how many media outlets one company could own, facilitated this concentration of the media industry. (Since the 1996 Act, 1/2 of radio stations in the U.S. have been sold, primarily to large corporations.) Such concentration of the media is a problem because it accentuates "hyper-commercialism and denigration of public service," according to John Nichols and Robert McChesney (Nichols and McChesney, 2000, p. 30).

## A MEDIA LITERACY EXERCISE:

To do the following media literacy exercise, find a recent newspaper or magazine article related to housing in Boston, a central theme explored in *Symphony of a City*.

Consider these questions about the articles' information sources: Who is interviewed? Who is not interviewed? Who is quoted most often in the story? Did any of the information come from official reports or documents? What biases might there be in these official reports/ documents? What kinds of information or facts or sources are relevant to the article but were not included?

Ask questions about the articles' layout: Where is the article located in the paper? How large is the article? Are there any accompanying photographs? Lawyer and media analyst Lucy Williams emphasizes the powerful impact images have on public consciousness, creating a "belief system more deeply held than rational thought" (Williams, 1995, p.1171). If there are photographs, what stories do they convey? Is there anything interesting about the photo captions? Is the headline accurate or in any way misleading? What advertisements border the story?

So too, ask questions about the articles' overall message: Who/ what is seen as the source of the problem, if there is a problem? Who/ what is seen as the solution to the problem? Pay attention to adjectives and adverbs used. Does the language of the article play into or challenge class, gender, age, or race stereotypes? Consider how else the story might have been framed. Charlotte Ryan, author of *Prime Time Activism*, offers three versions of a hypothetical news story about an infant bitten by a rat. One version describes an infant who was attacked by a rat as her sixteen-year-old mother ran out to cash a welfare check. In a second version of the same story, tenants complain about a landlords failure to exterminate the apartment while the landlord complains about the tenants trash in the back alley. A third version describes an epidemic of rat bites following a public sanitation budget cut (Ryan, 1991, p.57). Each of these versions creates its own images and a story line, emphasizing different issues, sources of responsibility, and solutions.

It is also important to ask who owns the newspaper or magazine responsible for this news story. Is that information easy to find? Does the same company own other media outlets and/or other companies, and is that information easily accessible? Are there any apparent (economic or otherwise) conflicts of interest related to how the news story was framed?

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Symphony of a City also touches on the relationship between vision and reality, between what one imagines and what one creates. Democracy needs creative visions to flourish - it needs playful, outlandish ideas, a broad spectrum of debate. While mainstream media narrows public dialogue, successful activists, artists, spiritual leaders, and educators broaden discussion by generating and giving life to a variety of visions for the city.

Finally, for those who are able to see the live projections onto Boston City Hall, Symphony of a City makes visible an idealized city government. The juxtaposed projections will transform City Hall into a temporary, speaking monument, alive with the conflicting perspectives and sounds so vital for democracy.

**For further information on Boston demographics:**

Boston Redevelopment Authority: [www.ci.boston.ma.us/bra](http://www.ci.boston.ma.us/bra)

**For further information on vision & visibility:**

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin Books, 1972.

Wodiczko, Krzysztof. *Critical Vehicles: Writings, Projects, Interviews*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999.

**For further information on the media:**

Gilens, Martin. *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Johnson, Kirk. "Black and White in Boston," in *Columbia Journalism Review* May/June 1987, pp. 50-51.

Nichols, John and Robert McChesney. *It's the Media Stupid*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2000.

Ryan, Charlotte. *Prime Time Activism: Media Strategies for Grassroots Organizing*. Boston: South End Press, 1991

Williams, Lucy. "Race, Rat Bites and Unfit Mothers: How Media Discourse Informs Welfare Legislation Debate," in *Fordham Urban Law Journal*, Vol. XXII, 1995, pp. 1159-1196.

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting: [www.FAIR.org](http://www.FAIR.org)

Mediachannel: [www.mediachannel.org](http://www.mediachannel.org)



*Photoshopped simulation of the Real-Time video projection on City Hall.*

## 2. Democracy and Technology

Another general aim of Symphony of a City is to explore the democratic potential of new technologies. The project utilizes a range of technological equipment, including portable cameras and microphones; projection equipment; computer software and hardware for video streaming; and personal computers with internet access.

**These combined technologies create a space where:**

- *Video is generated by four people from diverse social locations.*
- *The four streams of video can be viewed simultaneously on the web (and during the evenings of April 27 and May 4, 2001, on Boston City Hall.)*
- *Web participants can have conversations and share information related to the streams on an on-line bulletin board.*
- *Web participants can interact on-line with the camera wearers.*
- *The Symphony of a City website will serve, for at least one year, as a centralized location where Bostonians can share resources and initiatives related to housing and community building.*

From an historical perspective, democracy meant that meaning was no longer to be determined by the monarch or feudal lord, but was to be negotiated by the people. In true democracy, nothing is held more sacred than this negotiating process. Democracy is undermined when groups silence or ignore conflicting interpretations.

Do we need technology for democracy? Some argue that all we need for democracy is people, accessible, relevant information, and a meeting place – town halls or plazas will do. Still, in what ways might technology facilitate democracy? Telephones, personal computers and computer networks, photocopiers, fax machines, televisions, and radios, can facilitate democracy by making information accessible and creating innovative ways for people to share ideas and interact. Symphony of a City uses technology to help people engage in discussions about housing and community building and to connect with other Bostonians. Technologies such as personal computers, the internet, and video cameras can create bridges, expanding our awareness by linking us to those outside our familiar worlds.

It is important to recognize that technology also has the potential to hamper or curtail democracy. In a stratified society like ours, where there are extreme differences in wealth and access to resources, technology can serve to reinforce and even exacerbate inequalities. The phrase "digital divide" refers to the disparity in computer access between various racial and economic groups. In order for a project like Symphony of a City to be successful in promoting open and inclusive dialogue, the technologies must be available to all. Thanks to the work of community computing centers, who make computer equipment publicly available, Symphony of a City will be accessible to a wide range of people. Designated terminals to view Symphony of a City will be available at the BNN Multimedia Center, Roxbury, Codman Square Community Health Center Technology Center, Dorchester, MA, the CPCS Computer Lab at the University of Massachusetts/Boston, The Copley Society of Boston, Boston and Newland Media Education Center, Malden, MA.

## EXERCISE ON THE DEMOCRATIC POTENTIAL OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Use the same article on housing issues you selected for the first Media Literacy exercise. Spend some time interacting with the four streams of video provided on the website and reading postings on the on-line bulletin board. Then consider the following questions:

Compare the information presented in the newspaper article and the information presented on the "Symphony of a City" website. Unlike conventional documentary work, where a director edits footage, patching a relatively coherent storyline together, this project allows for viewers on April 27 and May 4 to see and compare four unedited perspectives in real time. (An edited version of the footage will be posted on the website after May 4.) In contrast to the sound-bite quality of much mainstream media, Symphony of a City lets viewers spend a long time with individuals. What is it like to view this type of video? What is it like to make your own edits and decide which of the four participants to whom you watch and listen?

In most forms of journalism and documentary making, a writer or director chooses what viewpoints will be included. In contrast, Symphony of a City allows four people with varying perspectives on an issue to select the images and information presented. Does this arrangement provide the viewer with a better understanding of the issues?

Significantly, the "experts" in Symphony of a City, those wearing the cameras and providing information, are different from most "experts" interviewed in mainstream media. The four people wearing the head cameras were nominated for this position by Boston community organizations. What are the implications of selecting "experts" in this way? The camera wearers also will be interacting on the internet with viewers. What are the implications of being able to communicate directly with the "experts" as they convey their perspectives? To what extent does this transform the viewer's role from a passive receiver to an active collaborator?

In his book *The Consciousness Industry*, Hans Magnus Enzensberger writes, "In its present form, equipment like television or film does not serve communication but prevents it. It allows no reciprocal action between transmitter and receiver; technically speaking, it reduces feedback to the lowest point compatible with the system."

For technology to serve democratic aims, must it incorporate room for interaction and dialogue? What is it like to have various kinds of spaces for viewer interaction?

Does Symphony of a City provide a viable media format for the future? What are the benefits and limitations of this format? How might this kind of interactive, multiple perspective format be affected if it were owned by a business hoping to make a profit (rather than, as it currently is, funded by philanthropic and public foundations)?

There are many past and present examples of people using technologies, such as cable television, radio, camcorders, and the internet, for democratic purposes –that is, to make available a wide variety of perspectives, especially those overlooked in mainstream media. Using these technologies has helped groups to challenge established viewpoints and to hold powerful institutions more accountable.

**Central Square Conversations** is a web site devoted to conversations about the revitalization of Central Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

**Black Liberation Radio** Operated by African-American activist M'banna Kantakoot of a housing project in Springfield, Illinois, this low watt radio station is famous for its political analysis.

**George Holiday** used his camcorder to record Los Angeles police attacking Rodney King, leading to, among other things, a greater popular awareness of police brutality in that city.

**Paper Tiger TV** Started in New York City in 1981, this cable community access show produced innovative critiques of mainstream newspapers and magazines. The Paper Tiger Collective has continued to create inexpensive and informative video coverage of social issues overlooked by mainstream media.

**Zapatistas** An indigenous Mexican grassroots social movement for self determination has used the internet to create worldwide awareness of their struggles.

#### For further reading on the democratic potential of technology:

Drew, Jessie. "Media Activism and Radical Democracy," in *Resisting the Virtual Life: The Culture and Politics of Information*, ed. James Brook and Iain Boal, San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1995, pp. 71-84.

The Loka Institute, a nonprofit "dedicated to making research, science, and technology responsive to democratically decided social and environmental concerns" is on the web: [www.loka.org](http://www.loka.org)

Central Square Conversations is located at: [web.mit.edu/gsb/www](http://web.mit.edu/gsb/www)

Zapatistas and the Internet:

[www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/cleaver/zapsincyber.html](http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/cleaver/zapsincyber.html)

MIT's Center for Reflective Community Practices explores the relationship between technology and community building: [web.mit.edu/crcp](http://web.mit.edu/crcp)

#### For information on the history of technology:

Winston, Brian. *Media Technology and Society. A History: From the Telegraph to the Internet*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

### 3. Housing Issues in Boston

Boston is facing a severe housing crisis, according to local activists, academics, and religious leaders. The housing crisis affects the poorest Bostonians, as well as working class and lower-middle income residents.

On May 4th, Symphony of a City camera wearers will focus on the theme of housing in Boston. In addition to presenting the varied images, Symphony of a City's website will provide background information about housing concerns in Boston, contact information for organizations involved in this issue, and connections to current initiatives, such as the Boston Tenant Coalition's "Plan to Create 10,000 Affordable Homes in Boston by 2005," and to reports, such as "A New Paradigm for Housing in Greater Boston," published by Northeastern University's Center for Urban and Regional Policy.

Symphony of a City's website also has an on-line bulletin board that will provide a forum for ongoing discussions about housing issues. All are invited to participate with questions, comments, and personal experiences of housing-related struggles and successes. In addition to creating a community forum for people within Boston, this on-line bulletin board can be a place where Bostonians share ideas with people who live in other cities experiencing a housing crisis –for example San Francisco and New York.

What are the sources of Boston's housing crisis? Given the exceptionally strong labor market and low unemployment in Greater Boston for the past few years, many people have moved into the region. This influx has created a low vacancy rate which has driven up home and rental prices faster than most household incomes have risen. As a recent Northeastern University report on housing states, "the goal should be to provide enough new housing to keep prices and rents rising no faster, or even slower, than the rise in family incomes" ("A New Paradigm for Housing in Greater Boston," Executive Summary, p.ii). The authors call for a concerted effort by local government, civic organizations, universities, and the private sector to increase the affordable housing supply in Boston. The housing crisis reveals that even when an economy is growing, there can be negative consequences for some. Not all share equally in the benefits of a strong economy, and some may actually experience increased hardship as the cost of living rises.

The Boston Tenant Coalition report, "Turning New Growth into Affordable Housing: A Plan to Create 10,000 Affordable Homes in Boston by 2005," provides stark facts and figures about housing in Boston, also underscoring the need for more affordable housing.

*In 1994, despite the fact that the majority of voters in Boston voted to retain rent control, local rent regulations that protected a significant stock of housing were eliminated by narrow passage of a statewide ballot initiative sponsored by the real estate industry." (p.20)*

*"Since the elimination of rent regulation in 1995-96, the City has lost more than 80,000 units of rent-controlled and vacancy-decontrolled housing." (p.3)*

*The City of Boston's Emergency Shelter Commission's one-night homeless census in December 1999 found 5,820 homeless men, women, and children in the shelters and streets of Boston, a 10% increase over the previous year." (p. 13)*

*The City has estimated that there are 26,300 elders, families, and individuals in Boston at risk of becoming homeless because of the high percentage of income they are forced to spend on housing." (p.3)*

*"Between 1991 and 1999, the median advertised rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Boston skyrocketed from \$875 to \$1,550, a 77% increase." (p.9)*

*"To afford the median advertised rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Boston, a household must have a yearly income of \$62,000 --yet two-thirds of Boston renters earn less than \$40,000 per year." (p.3)*

*Upwards of 20,000 households are on the waiting lists for public and Section 8 housing assistance." (p.3)*

*"Housing is generally considered affordable if its cost plus utilities is not more than 30% of the occupant's income." (p.14)*

*Rents are so high that half of the Section 8 vouchers issued by Boston Housing Authority are returned because people are unable to find an apartment, even with their subsidies." (p.3)*

*[In 1998] the City estimated that the number of units needed to address high-priority needs in Boston was 37,560. This number, according to the City a 'very conservative estimate,' included all households (both renters and homeowners) paying over half of their income for housing." (p.8)*

*"The government-subsidized housing stock -both privately and publicly owned - is being eroded...resulting in the loss of almost 3,000 apartments." (p.3)*



As some of these quotations indicate, Boston's housing crisis has been exacerbated by the loss of rent regulation in 1994. 53% of Central Boston's housing stock was affected by the removal of rent control and vacancy decontrol. 46% of the housing stock in Allston/ Brighton and 33% of The housing stock in Dorchester were also affected. Rent control protected tenants "against unlawful increases and evictions. Landlords could increase rents, but only with the advance approval of the Boston Rent Equity Board...Evictions for the purpose of renovating apartments and turning them into high-rent units were not permitted." Vacancy decontrol offered rent protection to elderly, disabled, and low or moderate income tenants and also protected tenants from eviction, in the event that the landlord wanted to convert the property to higher-rent housing. With the removal of rent control and vacancy decontrol, "more than half of the city's total rental stock was returned to the unregulated market." (p.20-21)

How do these facts about housing in Boston resonate with the video streams selected by the four camera wearers? What else do we learn about Boston housing from the video and homelessness from the video streams? Do we learn anything about the racial or ethnic groups most affected by evictions? Do we see any middle class people affected by the housing crisis? Do we hear people speaking about change in their neighborhoods? How do these facts about housing play out in your own life? How do they affect your neighborhood or your concerns about housing and living in Boston? What are the values underlying the Boston housing crisis? What are Boston's priorities? Who is welcome here? What does it mean to create a livable city? Should housing costs be determined solely by the unregulated market? Is it vital for Bostonians, whether or not they are directly affected by the housing crisis, to engage with these questions?



**For further information on housing:**

The Boston Tenant Coalition's manual, "Turning New Growth into Affordable Housing: **A Plan to Create 10,000 Affordable Homes in Boston by 2005** is available from Kathy Brown at the Boston Tenant Coalition, c/o Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, 288 A Street, Boston, MA 02210. The phone number is: 617-439-3887. A copy of the report is also available on the Symphony of a City website.

**The Urban Artist Alliance** is working to create affordable housing and studio space for artists throughout Boston. For more information, contact Shannon: 617-423-3651

"**A New Paradigm for Housing in Greater Boston**" is posted on the website of Northeastern University's Center for Regional and Urban Policy: [www.curp.neu.edu](http://www.curp.neu.edu)

For assistance with housing problems in Boston, contact

**Greater Boston Legal Services:** 617-371-1234

**ABCD:** 617-357-6000

**Harvard Legal Advocacy Center:** 617-495-4394

**City Life/ Vida Urbana:** 617-524- 3541

For a discussion of the housing crisis in San Francisco, see "The Housing Project": [sf.indymedia.org](http://sf.indymedia.org)

For more information about an art project addressing housing in New York City, see:

*If You Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory, and Social Activism. A Project by Martha Rosler.* ed. Brian Wallis. Seattle: Bay Press, 1991.



## 4. Community Building

Another core theme addressed by Symphony of a City is community building. On April 27th, four Bostonians will wear head cameras, offering various perspectives on what it means to be a community builder. In addition to presenting these varied images, Symphony of a City's website will provide background information about the projects and organizations in which the community builders are involved. The website also will provide an on-line bulletin board for viewers to discuss their own ideas and experiences of community building and to interact with the camera wearers.

### What are some definitions of a community builder?

- *Someone who builds bridges across race, gender, and/or class lines*
- *Someone who works in a neighborhood to make it a healthy, vital place*
- *Someone who is passionate and has a deep understanding about an issue*
- *Someone who has articulated an inclusive vision of a future*
- *Someone who is receptive, good at listening and able to facilitate potentially divisive conversations*
- *Someone who enhances or creates a sense of connection*
- *Someone who values people over economic gain*
- *Someone who inspires people to overcome their fears*



photo by John Ewing

*Community builder, City Councilor **Chuck Turner**.*

While viewing the footage generated by the four community builders, consider whether or not these definitions are accurate. What else does community building entail? How do the four community builders navigate this role differently? Do the community builders seem to be working alone or with others? Are they collaborators?

In the book, *Leading Minds: Anatomy of Leadership*, Harvard University educator Howard Gardner defines leaders as "individuals who significantly influence the thoughts, behaviors, and/or feelings of others" (Gardner, p. 6). In what ways is leadership, according to this definition, the same as and/or different from community building?

## EXERCISE ABOUT COMMUNITY BUILDERS

- What traits should a community builder have?
- Who do you know that is a community builder?
- Do you know any community builders you would want to nominate to be camera wearers for Symphony of a City?
- How have you been affected by community builders in your life?
- Is there an issue you feel strongly about?
- What kind of work would you like to do (or have you done) related to that issue?

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Community builders, like artists, are indebted to their imaginations. They work from a particular vision or sensibility. They need to believe in this vision or sensibility, seek support for it, commit to it, and realize it, amidst great challenges. Community building, like art-making, also requires a leap of faith. And both community builders and artists inspire others to notice their own visions, however outlandish they may seem, and try to make them real.

To what extent is Symphony of a City a model of community building? Through the use of new technologies, the artists, Liz Canner and John Ewing, hope to create bridges across race, gender, and/or class lines and to enhance a sense of connection in Boston. How do we know whether Symphony of a City is successful in these regards? More generally, how do we evaluate an interdisciplinary, interactive art project like Symphony of a City? Do we evaluate it according to formal, aesthetic standards as we would a painting? Or according to the quality of the interchange, connection, and dialogue that occurs between viewers and creators? Or according to its impact on a particular political or social issue?

***"Activism requires the harmonics of a full orchestra rather than the singularity of a solo performance."***     --Patricia Phillips, writer

Collaboration is an integral part of the creation and meaning of Symphony of a City: the project's directors, Liz Canner, a videomaker and John Ewing, a muralist, want to raise awareness and create dialogue about issues such as housing and community leadership in Boston. This collaboration has led to an innovative mix of documentary-making and mural painting -- a sort of video projection mural. To pull this idea off, the creators have sought out the expertise and resources of technophiles, a physicist, web and graphic designers, scholars, a range of community organizers, government administrators, journalists, arts funders, and publicists. The project will come to life when the camera wearers, audience, and website visitors interact. As in a symphony, the whole of this project is greater than its parts.

***We must dialogue and collaborate with artists...as well as with political activists, educators, lawyers, journalists, cultural critics, and social scientists. The old schism between artists and academics must be resolved once and for all....Artists need the intellectual rigor of academics and [academics] need [artists] skills to popularize issues***  
(Gomez-Pena, 1995, p.103- 104).

Collaboration is essential to most community building efforts, as we see in Symphony of a City. An effective community builder draws on the skills and resources of others. Some community builders inspire collaborators to transcend professional and bureaucratic barriers, inviting them to move in uncommon ways, outside hierarchies and specializations. This involves risk but also allows for surprising innovations and solutions. Is interdisciplinary collaboration -- a confusion and harmonizing of specific roles and talents—a good way to respond to a city's challenges?



photo by Ben Ball

***Community builder; Alan Solomont***  
*going about his day as a wearcam operator.*

**For further reading about community building:**

Gardner, Howard. *Leading Minds: Anatomy of Leadership*. New York: Basic Books, 1995.

Garland, Anne Witte. *Women Activists: Challenging the Abuse of Power*. New York: The Feminist Press, 1988.

Medoff, Peter, and Holly Sklar. *Streets of Hope: The Fall and Rise of an Urban Neighborhood*. Boston: South End Press, 1994.

Shaw, Randy. *The Activist's Handbook: A Primer for the 1990's and Beyond*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

**For further reading about collaborative work and art:**

Felshin, Nina, ed. *But Is It Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1995

Gomez-Pena, Guillermo. "From Art-Mageddon to Gringostroika: A Manifesto Against Censorship," in Suzanne Lacy, ed. *Mapping the New Terrain: New Genre Public Art*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1995.



*Community builders, **Serene Wong** and **Kimberly Chacón***

## **producers and directors**

Liz Canner is an award-winning media artist and independent filmmaker who has created multiple video art installations and produced and directed six documentaries such as "State of Emergency: Inside the Los Angeles Police Department" and "Deadly Embrace: Nicaragua, The World Bank and The IMF". She has been the recipient of 20 grants for her work, from foundations such as the LEF foundation and The Paul Robeson Fund for Independent Media. Her work has been broadcast on television nationally on PBS stations, Deep Dish TV and internationally in England, Haiti, Canada, Nicaragua, New Zealand, Italy and Germany and screened at museums, galleries and film festivals. She has served on the Board of Directors of The Boston Film and Video Foundation and The Boston Cyberarts Festival.

John Ewing is a muralist and video artist with a B.F.A. from Cornell University. He has 11 years of experience creating public art with an emphasis on community participation. He was selected from an international group of candidates to work for two years in El Salvador, using the arts to organize and inspire dialogue about human rights. He is bilingual (English and Spanish) and in addition to El Salvador has worked on projects in Chicago, IL; Ithaca, NY; Salem, MA; Nicaragua, Uruguay and Cuba. His strong background in community organizing, in addition to visual and media arts, enhance his ability to facilitate a wide spectrum of participation and to reach a broad audience.

## **teachers' guide author and advising scholar**

Karen Werner is a Sociology PhD candidate at Brandeis University. Her dissertation, entitled "Sociological Perspectives on Contemporary Activist Art", explores the pedagogical and activist contributions of artists such as Mierle Laderman Ukeles and art collectives such as Gran Fury, Platform, Critical Art Ensemble, and Repohistory. Werner taught an undergraduate seminar at Brandeis University called Art, Culture, and Politics (for which she was awarded a University Prize Instructorship) and has been a guest lecturer at Harvard and Hampshire Colleges. She has also presented papers on contemporary and historical activist art movements at sociological conferences. Werner has an M.Ed from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a BA from Brown University.

## **technical director**

Dr. Alex Barnett recently completed his PhD in theoretical physics at Harvard, concentrating in the field of quantum chaos. Since then he has consulted for Truwind Solutions LLC, applying neural networks to wind power prediction problems. He is currently Head Teaching Fellow and creator of the laboratory component for a new Harvard course on the physics of music. He came over from the UK on a Kennedy Scholarship, and has received several teaching awards from Harvard. For most of his life he has built electronic gadgets. He has also collaborated with Liz Canner on experimental video pieces.

## **associate producer**

Lila Kanner is currently the Director of Artist Services at The Copley Society of Boston, America's Oldest Nonprofit Art Association. Lila graduated from Wellesley College with a B.A. in Art History and French Literature. Her studies and current work focus on ways of creating community through the arts. She has worked with several cultural institutions in the United States and abroad including the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, the Davis Museum and Cultural Center and Chateau des Pommiers at Saint-Felix de Foncaude, France.

## **webmaster**

Jeffery Kozera is a multimedia artist and developer. For over 10 years, he has been creating unique interactive experiences on the web and CD-ROM, involving digital audio, video, photography, graphics, design, programming, and streaming technologies. Jeff first put his creative and technical skills to work for The Voyager Company, one of the first multimedia CD-ROM publishers, where he helped develop projects for Laurie Anderson, Ron Mann, Betye Saar, DIA Center for the Arts, and others. Currently, he is consulting for the web technology firm Viant.

## **website design and development**

mediumbold ([www.mediumbold.com](http://www.mediumbold.com)) is a boston-based design studio focused on providing digital solutions for a range of clients. mediumbold's expertise is in identity design, brand extension, information architecture, interaction and interface design, and front-end development. mediumbold's founders, oriana anholt ([oanholt@mediumbold.com](mailto:oanholt@mediumbold.com)) and michael brandt ([mbrandt@mediumbold.com](mailto:mbrandt@mediumbold.com)), have designed interactive products and web sites for clients such as 3M, Rhode Island School of Design Boston Alumni, and Estée Lauder Companies.

## **advising scholar**

Dr. Tim Sieber is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Massachusetts/Boston, where he also teaches in the American Studies, Latino Studies and Applied Linguistics programs. His research and teaching specializations include Urban Public Culture; Social Class, Race and Ethnicity; Immigrant Education; and Multiculturalism in the United States, Venezuela, and Portugal. He served in 1998 as Fulbright Senior Scholar in the Department of Human & Social Sciences, American Studies Program, at the Universidade Aberta in Lisbon, Portugal, and is a former director of the Urban Studies Program at UMass/Boston