

**Artist Proof Studio:
A Journey of Reconciliation**

A working paper of Recasting Reconciliation through Culture and the Arts

**by
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Kim Berman

The students and their teachers began scratching around in the burnt rubble, prying and peeling the prints buried under the waste. Dust is released as each sheet is pulled out and shaken off. There are moments when the dust and ash clog the surrounding air, making it hard to breathe. Our coughing and choked stammering contrasts with the clarity and delight of uncovering a new layer and discovered treasure. We laugh and sing and then abruptly become silent in the shock of discovering something of Nhlanhla's. The artists gather fragments and lay it at the spot that Nhlanhla was found, with a sign traced in ash "I'll miss you bra." I uncover one of my prints from the State of Emergency '86 (a body lying in the rubble, assassinated by the apartheid regime). The irony is eerie, the pathos palpable.

Then we laid out all the fragments we had chosen and reflected on finding meaning in overwhelming chaos. The work begins with Stompie rolling out a very large sheet of white paper. He lies down on that paper, curling his body but reaching out with one arm. Someone takes a marker and does a body tracing. The discussion of healing through peeling off layers, unraveling of the bandages when the wounds start to mend, becomes the theme for one of the images. The group decides to look in the burnt books and papers for fragments and words that have to do with celebration and joy, growth and change, and begins to glue them over the wounds of the healing body.

Marjorie with her beautifully clear and resonant voice begins to sing a song and the group responds in chorus. It is spontaneous and rhythmic. There is harmony in both the song and work that begins. Prints are torn up. Each group gathers around a body tracing, others go back into the rubble to scavenge. The artists collage onto the paper, there is laughter and discussion, disagreement and debate. Everyone understands the purpose of the art form that is being created.

The resulting collage emerged three months after the fire, months of despair and mourning, months of displacement and anger, months of nightmares and trauma. The act of collaging is reconstructive. It is sticking bits and pieces of fragments to make a whole. It is finding beauty in damage and loss. It is a metaphor for reconciliation. (Kim Berman's journal entry, August 2003)

On March 9, 2003, ten years after its founding, Artist Proof Studio burned to the ground. The tragic fire took with it the life of Nhlanhla Xaba, the visionary Black South African who co-founded the studio with me. The fire was traced to an electrical fault in an appliance in the studio. It spread to the storage of chemicals, causing an explosion that destroyed the studio within hours. Nhlanhla, asleep on the couch, never woke up from the asphyxiating fumes.

The morning of the fire, people flocked to witness the devastation. There was a sense of shock and disbelief. We gathered in a circle on the grass across the street from the fire and shared stories about Nhlanhla. Emotions ranged from sadness and loss to anger and fear, as people began to absorb the loss of the space that had become their home. Spontaneously, Stompie Selibe brought out his *mbira* (African thumb piano) and played a mournful and soothing 'Healing Song.'

The tragedy was enormous. Over 120 artists lost not only all of their work, but a teacher, mentor, and friend. The period of mourning made it clear that we had to find a way to carry Nhlanhla's spirit into the future. The generation he inspired picked up his 'spear' and vowed to continue his struggle. The metaphor was one of a revolutionary hero in the struggle for freedom. His funeral catalyzed the South African art world in pledging support for rebuilding what was destroyed.

One week after the fire, we embarked on a series of art exercises, including art therapy support groups and a printmaking marathon, designed to help people acknowledge and cope with the losses and traumas of the fire. The art therapy sessions allowed studio members to experience their feelings, share common stories, and build support networks. There was recognition that one cannot build a new structure on shaky and broken ground.

A temporary studio rudimentarily equipped with borrowed etching presses was set up in a space allocated by the Johannesburg City Council to implement the training programs and 'out of the fire' projects toward exhibitions. A printmaking marathon attracted a number of artists to make works from fragments out of the fire that were then sold to raise money to rebuild the studio.

A generous donation by a prominent gallery owner purchased 120 "start-up" kits consisting of a portfolio, paper, tools, and drawing materials, which were handed to each APS member to begin again. Additional teachers were contracted to support the APS teachers who struggled to keep the students motivated.

Three weeks after the fire, Stompie and I left South Africa to participate in an international print conference in Boston where Stompie was an artist-in-residence at Brandeis University and I was a conference presenter. The conference organizers mobilized to gather support for the rebuilding of Artist Proof Studio, including an auction and event to express international solidarity and raise funds. While we were in Boston, we were invited to apply for the Brandeis International Fellowship program, Recasting Reconciliation through Culture and the Arts. Stompie and I saw in the fellowship program an opportunity to design a new paradigm of black leadership at APS. We were eager to enlist others' support and ideas about how to incorporate reconciliation into the structure and organization of the rebuilt studio.

This paper tells the story of our efforts to transform Artists Proof Studio from an organization marred by inequalities and adversarial power, the legacies of apartheid, to a democratic institution where power is shared. Within ourselves, among our students, and in the institution as a whole, we have discovered both resistances and willingness to change. Frustration, loss, and failure are necessary ingredients of the growth process, and in many ways are catalysts for change. However, we realize that people must genuinely want reconciliation and work towards it. They cannot be pressured to act as though reconciliation has already happened. These empty or partial gestures are seen as the pretenses that they are. While gratifying in the short term, they would ultimately be destructive and would prevent true reconciliation.

In order for change to be sustainable, transformation needs to happen at the deepest levels. It requires us to challenge our notions of power within ourselves, within our relationships, and in our institutions. We need to change our language, actions, and policies and link them to our

belief systems, cultural norms, and emotions. During the year of the fellowship program, we have realized that the work of reconciliation is relentless: each time a wound opens, it has to be healed before we can move forward. Paradoxically, the stronger the community we build, the deeper the wounds we invite to be opened. We have also discovered that reconciliation is fueled, inspired, and sustained by creativity. We will suggest in this paper that imagination is the key to deep transformation.

“The simultaneity of fantastic possibility and unfathomable tragedy makes South Africa an amazing place to be in.” (*Pieterse & Meintjies: 2004,11*)

Background of Artist Proof Studio

Political context

Shortly after my self-imposed seven year exile in the United States, I returned to South Africa with a dream of establishing a community-based printmaking studio for artists who had no access to these facilities. My wish was to base it on Artist Proof Studio in Boston where I had been working for several years. Fortuitously, I met Nhlanhla a teacher, printmaker, and painter who shared my vision and my passion for creating opportunities for talented young artists, many of whom he dragged off the street. He was a respected youth leader, educator, and artist, as well as a role model for the young financially and educationally disadvantaged artists at APS. He inspired them to imagine their own successes as emerging artists. Together we founded Artist Proof Studio in the heart of Johannesburg’s cultural district, with intentions to create a microcosm of the new democratic South Africa.

Artist Proof Studio opened its doors in 1992, two years before the first South African democratic elections in which Nelson Mandela’s vision of creating a rainbow nation of diversity and equality became a reality through his insistence on negotiated settlement.

The arts in South Africa have aided the struggle against apartheid for many years and have played a critical role in creating an identity for the new South Africa.¹ Artists have assumed a significant role in healing the nation, changing perceptions, influencing opinions, and imagining a better future for the people of the country. Art and culture, therefore, have contributed substantively to ensuring the fulfillment of South Africa’s constitution, a document acknowledged as one of the most enlightened in the Western world, whose principles at once express and guide the society’s commitment to reconciliation.

However, when Thabo Mbeki became president in 1999, the ‘honeymoon phase’ of the new South Africa settled into a harsher reality. Apartheid’s legacies of abuse of power, corruption and poverty remain with their corrosive presence. After the groundbreaking initiative and findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the country is still grappling with the need to move away from the politics of racial division and conflict to a peaceful coexistence that celebrates diversity and strives toward justice.

¹ As the first decade of democracy unfolded, new social problems such as crime, xenophobia, sexual abuse and HIV/AIDS had engulfed society. “The arts once again, now under democratic conditions, are beginning to focus in a context where the state is either reluctant or unable to provide leadership.” (Oeliphant, *A Decade of Democracy*, p. 18)

APS's role

Artist Proof Studio has strived to uphold the democratic principals of equal opportunity and access to learner-centered education. Like many innovative strategies, it has both flourished and failed. Its learning curve resembles that of the country as a whole, which is struggling to reinvent itself as it grows and develops. One of the studio's aims is to participate in the building of a new democratic South Africa that promotes reconciliation, cultural diversity, equality, and above all, a culture that celebrates human rights.

Printmaking is a 'democratic' medium that is accessible, affordable, and can reach out to the wider community through sharing skills and collaborative practice. Our funding enables talented and financially disadvantaged artists to access the facilities. Our mission is to provide a non-racial resource centre and skills training for artists who, due to the inequities of the apartheid system, did not have access to such institutions. APS currently provides a "home studio" to more than 100 artists.

In its early years, APS established itself as a dynamic and creative enclave that proved that black and white artists and students could work together harmoniously. Studio members experienced a taste of Mandela's vision of an integrated society and the spirit of the 'rainbow nation.' White women students who attended classes at APS had previously interacted with black people in their capacity as 'madams' interacting with servants. Relating as students to black teachers and technical assistants required transformative shifts in relationships for both black and white participants. The joint vision and commitment to this new society produced a kind of magical energy in the studio, in the common belief that art could play its part in imagining and creating a better life for all of South Africa's citizens.

The talent and commitment of studio members, together with the quality of learning and creative activities, contributed to imagining a race-blind future. APS provided the space for artists to begin to give color, form, and texture to a new South Africa. It required new forms of expression to define an identity that was no longer dependent on a Western-defined aesthetic, but on something emerging from the taste of freedom from the oppressive apartheid history. The studio's programs actively promoted reconciliation in that they brought together people across race and class to work jointly on a variety of projects. In addition, corporate and government offices, committed to changing their image to brand themselves as part of the New South Africa, replaced imported posters of French Impressionist scenes or still-life studies with the work by local black South African artists, including many from APS.

Artist Proof Studio blazed a trail for new ways of engaging art processes in the participatory practices of framing democratic identity. We established partnerships and alliances with schools and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and worked with them on collective projects. The projects included public commissions such as panels for the Gauteng legislature and mural prints for an international conference called Urban Futures, teaching art in schools, international print and artist exchanges, and outreach programs such as 'Paper Prayers,' an HIV awareness campaign reaching thousands of people across South Africa. These programs created income-generating opportunities for hundreds of artists and helped establish a number of poverty-alleviation projects in rural communities.

After the Fire: Imagining a New Future

When Stompie and I returned to South Africa after our rejuvenating experiences in Boston, we found that the temporary studio that had been hastily set up for a fundraising print marathon had not changed. None of the staff members had taken the initiative to order chairs and tables for their classes or try to improve a very depressing basement workshop into an environment more conducive for learning. A depressed ‘victim of circumstance’ mentality had emerged. Survival was the most anyone could manage, coming daily into work and undermining each other to the extent that conflict spilled into the classroom, where teachers gossiped to students, pitting one against the other. We were very concerned about the demoralization that seemed to pervade the studio.

Two projects seemed to turn the tide and initiate work that was transformational: the first involved music, storytelling, video, and art-making; the second involved conversation and imagination.

The first project began when Stompie conducted workshops about reconciliation that used music and discussion, the sharing of common feelings, and telling stories. A student intern from Harvard was asked to film the process of “rebuilding after the fire.” The video documentation became an important tool in supporting studio members to articulate their feelings and to feel heard. The support work done with the Art Therapy Centre helped to initiate discussions about loss and regeneration. Many of the artists worked in teams to build collages from the remains of the burned prints as described in the opening paragraphs of this paper. Large scale panels were produced that were arguably some of the strongest work ever to emerge from APS.

One series of three panels were about past, present, and future, the other three reflected conflict, conversation, and reconciliation. These panels reflected the many layers of reconciliation that happened after the fire, repairing damage and bringing together disparate elements that seem not to belong together, but can nevertheless work in harmony. The process was one of mourning what had been lost, repairing what had been broken, piecing together fragments. The first series reflected the wounds and chains from the oppression of the *past*, the healing by unraveling the bandages in the *present*, and regeneration by leaping into the *future*. The reconciliation was about working together to create a new future out of the rubble of the past.

Another group of artists found scraps of metal that they welded together to create new sculptural pieces. These twisted metal remains, embracing elements of the burned space, were to be welded into the security fence of the new studio, providing a shield for the new venue.

The second project was a workshop that I conducted to spark studio artists to visualize the transformation of APS. A meeting of all active studio members was called in order for me to report back on fundraising efforts and rebuilding plans. We collectively imagined what we would want from a new studio. Each person expressed a dream, which was written down, and collectively the dreams became a visualization for the future. That act of imagining was, I believe, the catalyst that turned people around. Mobilizing the group’s imagination shifted the stagnant and self-destructive energy into creative action. Dreams that were expressed included:

- I see APS as the best printmaking center in South Africa
- I see myself as a teacher to the newcomers
- We have an APS minibus for transporting members
- We have a newsletter
- We are well known in the world
- Famous people come and work with us
- We offer qualifications in printmaking
- We have a bigger center than before
- We have a studio for drawing and a library for studying
- We can go overseas on exchange programs

One of our drawing teachers, Trevor Thebe, reflected on the importance of creativity in his own recovery from the fire. When the studio burned down, he said, “we ended up seeing ourselves as individuals rather than as a community or a family. Working on the collages as a group gave us a chance to come together and discuss things...Some of us used to believe that APS was just a building, and when you leave that building you’re on your own. But today I believe that the people inside make it what it is: a home and a family.” (Interview, Darnisa Amante, August 04)

Incorporating the Spirit of *Ubuntu* at APS

In November 2003, Stompie and I returned to Brandeis University (for the second of three trips) to attend the first institute of the Recasting Reconciliation through Culture and the Arts fellowship program. We left the institute with a set of questions about cultural work, the arts, and reconciliation. These questions helped Stompie and me design an action research project for APS that would allow us to explore the meanings of reconciliation in our context and how the arts and cultural work can contribute to the rebuilding of relationships.

Ubuntu as a Framework for Reconciliation at APS and in Society at Large

According to Dr. Hizkias Assefa, reconciliation is “a process where people who have been alienated from each other come together to build community again.” The term “again” implies that there once was a concept of community, so the question implies rediscovery, reclaiming, and reaffirming this common humanity.

At Artist Proof Studio, we have introduced the concept of *ubuntu* as an embodiment of the ethos and values of our common humanity. The meaning of *ubuntu* is best captured through the expression, “A person is only a person because of other people.” As Archbishop Desmond Tutu has said, “We believe that...my humanity is caught up, bound up, inextricably, with yours. When I dehumanise you, I inexorably dehumanise myself. The solitary human being is a contradiction in terms and therefore you seek to work for the common good because your humanity comes into its own in belonging.” (Archbishop D. Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 1999)

The term *ubuntu* was introduced within the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and has become a common frame of reference for the reestablishment of our common humanity as the core for building a new South Africa. This concept has become the engine for indigenous strategies to explore reconciliation and transformation. The heritage of the philosophy of *ubuntu* from traditional African roots is one of sharing and hospitality, of honesty and humility, and is the ethic and interaction that occurs in the extended family.

When we moved into the new APS, Stompie and I presented a challenge to all our members to regard this as “an *ubuntu* space.”

We identified *ubuntu* as a nonthreatening and indigenous concept that embraces the key principles of reconciliation, and designed collaborative projects to understand the concept better and to integrate it into the culture and practice surrounding our work. In February, we opened the studio to new learners. I talked about our vision for a new studio after the fire, and how the power of the imagination led us to this place. I talked about our dreams for establishing a center of excellence, and how that concept would have to be owned by all. I also mentioned that some of the problems that have plagued APS in the past have been disrespect, poor communication, gossiping, sloppy work habits, lack of responsibility with clean-up, wasting or abuse of materials and resources, undermining of colleagues and learners, mistrust, drinking or coming stoned to the studio, and theft.

I introduced the notion of *ubuntu* and asked for personal definitions. Responses included definitions such as respect, caring for one another, humanity, one’s behavior towards another, morality, and empathy. I asked questions about where people had learned the concept. Most said they got it from home, or parents, or “it was just around.” To the question about where it originated, some said the elders, or the ancestors, or “the root of our culture.”

I asked if *ubuntu* still existed, and if we in South Africa still have it. Many said no: there is crime, abuse, and disregard for people’s health and well-being...and apartheid caused our loss of it. Others said yes, it is around when we care for each other.

I asked if we could do anything about it. Answers included accounts of how many times they had been mugged or had experienced violence, and questions of how they can change what’s out there. I then put a challenge to everyone in the room, and asked if we could create an *ubuntu* space inside APS. Can we find *ubuntu* for ourselves and try and use it here? I asked if people thought that was possible and what it would mean. Most indicated that we could all take up the challenge and try. I asked people to write down in their journals what *ubuntu* meant to them, and we would meet again in two weeks time.

Researching Ubuntu and Bringing It into the Studio

The following day, Stompie and I met to discuss our action research project on reconciliation. We both agreed that it would not work to introduce “research” or pick out “researchers” in the group: these outsider concepts would be treated with suspicion. We both felt excited that the concept of *ubuntu* could be a much more successful and integrated approach to the challenge of building a sense of belonging and ownership in the new space at APS. We agreed that Stompie would ask the second year students to go out and collect *ubuntu* stories. They could interview members of their family, elders, or *tsotsis* (gangsters) on the street, and ask each for their understanding or experience of *ubuntu*. These stories could then be shared with each other, then they could make a selection of the stories to compile into a group book.

Students worked in groups of four to develop images that expressed the concepts they gleaned from the stories. They were challenged to reinvent or reinterpret dominant symbols of South African culture and to communicate ideas that express an alternative vision to violence and oppression. The task was not to depict an imagined utopia, but to recognize the dark sides and myths within the community and themselves.

Weeks of discussion, sketches, and collaboration resulted in six panels that expressed symbols and metaphors for *ubuntu*. These included footprints of a journey, washing the feet of another, a tree of humanity with strong roots that allowed it to flourish and bear fruit, and a nest with eggs held up with an artist's hand. Each image explored concepts of respect, negotiation, identity, tradition, and imagination.

While the collective process led to a deeper understanding of self and other in relationship to the group, it was not an easy path. It required participants to integrate respect within their own relationships and in the art-making itself. Individual spontaneity had to be constrained to achieve compromise with the group. Often, individuals expressed resentment and anger when a member of their team started carving over "his" area of drawing. Some objected to the style of mark making when it did not recognize the synergy of the rest. Some participants lost enthusiasm when their sketch was not selected to represent the final idea voted on by the group. Conflict was expressed, and the discussions that followed evoked the common experience of dysfunction within family dynamics.

Stompie used a variety of approaches such as drumming circles and group activities to facilitate these discussions. The need for negotiation and compromise explored one of the key principles of reconciliation, as articulated by Cindy Cohen, director of the Brandeis Institute, "... having people find each other's humanity can strengthen them to also deal with those parts of their identity that are in conflict."

Later, Stompie reflected on the *ubuntu* research project: "The sharing of *ubuntu* stories helped put the ideas into perspective. There was some resistance. A lot of them come from very difficult circumstances where there is no *ubuntu* at home; some individuals really struggled to share. One day I came into class with some apples. I cut them up into small pieces and shared them with the group. Some were very surprised and moved. We talked about how sharing brings people together. That was the lesson that made a big difference in my class. People started talking about their families. There is no negotiation, no checking in at their homes. They are told how things are. There is no space to have a sense of yourself and your needs. I had to help people with boundaries. We check in with each other before every class; that was important in giving people an idea of appropriate behaviour."

Stompie developed another way to address conflict and tensions that arose as his students worked on collaborative visual art works. Each class member was given a different instrument. Each had to use his or her "voice;" each had to play in rhythm and harmony. Each part was important to the whole. They were asked to stop and notice communication, respect, and internal rhythm. After jamming together, the students were sent back to carve their blocks, and rediscover the sense of reconciliation in their art practice.

As Stompie put it, "People now feel part of the vision. There is a lot of energy in working together. People appreciate communication. They feel the combination of linking the vision of the new studio to giving something back. Bringing music into the studio brings a connection. It reconciles."

Launching the new studio

On March 9, 2004, the new APS was launched. We hoped that the celebration would express our collective vision. A *sangoma* (traditional healer) brought prophetic blessings through rituals for protection of our new beginnings. The launch was a powerful testimony affirming

the power of art in social transformation. It was participatory, symbolic, and inspirational. A year earlier, just after the fire, we observed a disconnectedness, a sense of loss of belonging, a multiple trauma that recalled feelings of displacement, disempowerment, and oppression. This was transformed through the connectedness people clearly felt at the launch. The change was powerfully expressed through music and dance, poetry, and collective participation in defining the identity of the new APS. The attendance was overwhelming and the mood was celebratory and energized.

Stompie and I felt great pride at the launch as it was a testament to the effectiveness of the process. We were aware that the students had absorbed the notion of *ubuntu*, which they were reflecting through the music and dances they had composed on the theme. We presented *ubuntu* to integrate the principles that “recast reconciliation” as artistic expression. It was not just the opening of a beautiful building that took hard work and extensive funding to be realized. It was the opening of a new chapter, with a beautiful space to house a reimagined, reconstructed “soul” of the APS.

Using Ubuntu to Create a New Organizational Structure

The generosity of our donors and members of the community provided the resources that enabled APS not only to rebuild our studio, but to redefine our organizational structure. The resources provided the opportunity for us to imagine ways to integrate transformative principles deeply within our structure and practice. I asked myself the following questions:

- How do we, as a collective, live up to and deliver on the challenges inherent in the support we’ve received?
- How can we learn from the past not to repeat the same mistakes?
- How can we not carry the heavy baggage of inequality and racialized power dynamics into the future?
- How do we create a model of African-centered learning and leadership that is appropriate to a new South Africa?
- How can the new APS promote reconciliation, healing, and empowerment, and reflect the spirit of a healthy democracy?
- How can we change the image of another white-run cultural organization without letting go of the vision to create a center of excellence?
- Can the center be non-racial? Not black or white run?
- How do we reach below the surface to dissolve the bitterness and hurt that stem from decades of injustice?
- Can we sustain a creative and healthy work environment?
- What steps have to be taken to sustain this vision for the future?

The APS board explored some of these questions in order to develop new policies and organizational structures. We decided that our priority was the challenge of creating a model of “African centered learning and leadership.” The Management Board recognized the need for a long-term strategy of empowering black leadership at APS. We asked ourselves whether the artists should be supported to develop administrative skills or whether we should bring in new black leadership, and decided to pursue both tracks.

The board’s management team proposed an organizational organogram (or chart) that replaced the classical hierarchical pyramid with a circle. The outside ring is an advisory council, the inside core are the students and artist members. The middle ring is the management board, coordinated by the studio manager. The circle is divided up into slices of a pie, with each slice

representing a unit of the studio activities (such as financial management, marketing, education and curriculum development, outreach and development, professional studio practice, etc.). Each unit has a mentor from the management team or an outside expert, a staff member as a mentee, and where possible, student representatives or interns coordinating management activities as part of their senior year of professional practice. This model incorporates the spirit of *ubuntu* in that it functions effectively with full participation (*I am because of you...*) and requires the transfer of leadership skills across a range of levels. For example, a member of an advisory council would be a mentor for a staff person, who in turn, would be the mentor for students. This model promotes the transfer of leadership from the predominantly white mentor group to the predominantly black teacher and student constituencies. This structure requires all parties to address racial power dynamics in the process of skills transfer.

The aim of this organizational structure is to strive toward excellence in professional practice and leadership development. Some of the units are functioning well and have already transferred leadership to members of the staff. Others are still finding their way, struggling with power relations, professional practice, and questions of standards. A range of team-building workshops has assisted people in these sensitive interactions.

Participation in decision making processes empowers people, and more importantly it leads toward democracy. The involvement of teachers and mentees in strategic planning has led to an increased sense of confidence and personal esteem as well as collective commitment to the direction and decisions that are being taken for the organizational development of APS.²

Reconciliation in Action: How Deep Can We Go?

Over time, APS adopted a culture of *ubuntu* and developed an organizational structure and leadership development policies that are consistent with *ubuntu*. But implementing these principle is continually challenging because the South African legacy of unequal power relations sometimes disrupts progress. The stories that follow reflect some of the ongoing ruptures, contradictions, and difficulties that we face in our attempts to build a cohesive organization and realize a culture of *ubuntu*.

Example 1: Kim's Visit to Stompie's Class

Although in March, when we opened the studio, we shared a sense of accomplishment and pride in the students' celebration of *ubuntu*, by May I was frustrated by what I perceived to be a lack of follow through and old behavior patterns. In my journal I wrote:

Frustrations at APS; the process has to be reinvented at every turn. The second year students, our pilot group, revert back to old behaviors. They lose the drive of the kind of teamwork they achieved only weeks ago. Their class performance is full of conflict and arrogance, maybe boredom. Perhaps because of the praise and support they have received, they feel special/chosen and drop the drive to reach higher. They are not challenging themselves. They are obstructive with other teachers and students. They are stuck in the apathy of a static comfort zone. They revert to conflict, competitiveness, individual egos pitted against each

² Since introducing this program at the start of the year, we have met with success. The mentees, particularly the black women, have thrived on added responsibility. At the start of 2005, Pontsho is successfully managing the professional studio, Lerato has been promoted to financial administrator, Margery is coordinating sales and marketing, and the teachers have started designing their own learning programs.

other. They produce mediocrity. They are trying to get away with as little as possible. They seem to have lost their inspiration and stimulation.

How does one sustain the level of motivation to be something more? Are they motivated by approval? Is that why it is so short lived? Where is their inner drive to be more than their circumstances? They respond to my feedback and can rise to the challenge when pushed. Is that always going to be necessary? What about their moments of experiencing ubuntu? Is that what we should keep looking for?

My role is to identify mediocrity and facilitate the imagining of potential. How do we pass that on? That becomes the key question for this process.

Is the process flawed in its idealism? Are we hopelessly trying to compensate for the disadvantage in their lives? Is wanting this a white thing? Is it a sense of my own power, an inability to accept mediocrity?

Whose vision is this ideal of excellence? What is collective dreaming? Is my vision for the studio wrong/flawed/manipulative?

What is the role for a change agent? What would happen if I left APS tomorrow?

A few days later, several teachers reported to me that Stompie's class was not delivering. The students had not submitted work and learners were arriving late. Students were hung-over or drunk on a Monday morning and had been aggressive or uncooperative with the new drawing teacher.

Stompie was not present due to another commitment, so I marched into the class and proceeded to deliver a very stern lecture. I demanded better quality and commitment. I expressed my profound disappointment that our attempts to research and engender ubuntu had failed. I also expressed my fear that this class of Stompie's, which was dedicated to an experimental curriculum of research, mixed media, and life skills, would be cancelled and replaced with skills-based learning such as silk-screening or lithography. We were not meeting the learnership's required levels of outcomes-based learning. The group was clearly stunned, as they had no response. I marched out, feeling "justified anger."

A week later, Stompie called me back into the class because the group had requested to talk with me directly about their concerns. Stompie had helped them process and articulate their feelings of betrayal, concern, injustice, insecurity, and fear. They felt I had been judgmental and accusatory. For the very first time for most of them, the members of the group succeeded in voicing their feelings to a person who represented authority or the parent (I am viewed by many as "mother").

I expressed immense pride at their courage and emotional maturity as well as their efforts to practice, challenge, and implement an ubuntu culture within the APS family. They taught me a valuable lesson, and I thanked them. The sense of empowerment was remarkable. I also congratulated Stompie for creating an environment where it is safe to challenge authority with reason and democratic principles. I also apologized to Stompie and the group for not consulting or getting permission from the facilitator to address the group and for not giving them the space to present the issues before I accepted and transferred accusations and criticisms. Finally, I apologized for threatening to cancel this class, which the group had committed to so deeply.

Later, Stompie told the story of this series of events from his perspective.

When you [Kim] came into the space the students took it personally, they were quite upset. So I did an exercise and I told them, "I am Kim. Let's do a role-play. Be honest with your feeling. Express what you want."

They don't have this space at home to express their own needs and feelings.

They felt I am there for them. I am on their side. They had a space to be listened to. They expressed many fears and issues in their families. One of their fears is writing. I divided them in groups and asked them to write down something and share it with each other. We talked about presenting in the group some of the issues that block them. This was a big breakthrough.

I asked them to appreciate each other. It was amazing how the group shifted from one space to another. After Floyd Thungu heard how the group appreciated him, he was able to come out more as a leader. It gave him a voice. Later I gave him the opportunity to assist me in facilitating the Saturday class. He loved that. It made him feel stronger.

After the exercise, people felt more confident and decided to call you. They chose leaders to speak for them – Elton, Floyd, and Nelson – and they all decided that I must break the ice and tell you first what was happening. This gave them confidence.

The way you responded boosted them. They felt their achievement of sharing.

We all felt that ubuntu and reconciliation were growing deeper at APS.

Example 2: The Holding Vessel Cracked Open

The students in Stompie's class continued their collaborative carvings of images of *ubuntu* on large panels. It appeared that they were creating a strong vessel for their own transformation into a group that could support all of the member's healing from the scars left by the legacy of apartheid as well as their development as artists.

But in the midst of their process, Floyd committed suicide. The new vessel, more delicate than we realized, was cracked open.

In my journal that day I wrote:

Today we heard that Floyd Thungu killed himself on Sunday.

No one can make sense of it.

A family thread is broken.

He managed to convince us all that he was on his journey to reach his dreams.

His classmates are his brothers. They held him up along their collective path.

He was one of their leaders, pushing them to achieve more.

What a terrible waste.

How do we convert his death into a positive lesson?

What kind of pain are we masking or cello-taping over?

We cannot let this boat spring leaks and sink.

We must find a way to rebuild, repair, and heal this gash.

Again, and again, and again.

The following day was June 16, a day of historical commemoration throughout South Africa. I continued to write in my journal, documenting responses to the tragedy of Floyd's death, and trying to make sense of it for myself.

Floyd's funeral was held a few days later, on June 20, at Avelon Cemetery in Soweto. It was a cold and awkward event. Floyd's studio 'brothers' looked so awkward in their jackets and smart trousers, like schoolboys trapped in uniforms. They huddled together in groups clutching photocopies of a song one of them had written, waiting for the opportunity to sing it to open up during the service. It didn't.

Frans, Floyd's best friend, was listed in the program but was nowhere to be seen. He was one of those who had run out of the support group at APS when the pain was too great to hold. Periodically, we all craned our necks, hoping he would show up to bid farewell to his best friend. He didn't.

The family sat in a row, dry-eyed and stiff, no arms around the mourners to comfort them. There were no flowers until we arrived with the big bouquet from APS. Toward the end of the service another friend of the family brought a small arrangement. But no flowers were dropped on the casket before burial, as is the tradition. None of the women went near the gravesite. Even in death, the ritual felt subverted, somber, and misplaced.

Minutes after we arrived and I was spotted, the preacher called the "white person" to come up and speak. I mourned Floyd's death. But inside, I mourned his life, as I imagined it surrounded by icy austere silence. I imagined that there was no warmth in his home that could receive his soul's burning passion for life and for art. I feared that his suicide would be a source of shame for his family, and they would rub out the memory of his life with coldness. I stood there in the hot sun and shuddered at the empty, cold, unexpressed silences that were in his life and death. The very loud cheerful clapping from a Baptist service at a gravesite a few meters away drowned out Floyd's service. The only source of emotive expression came from the silent fierceness and determination by the young men shoveling sand over his grave. They were impatient to grapple the spade out of each other's tight hands. They were dry-eyed and defiant, angry at being abandoned by a fellow comrade.

One of Floyd's friends told me that I had been listed on the program as a "motivational speaker" at the memorial service for Floyd the following Friday at APS. . How would I possibly express what I felt?

Members of Stompie's class worked intensively and collaboratively on the ubuntu panels, so they could exhibit them at Floyd's memorial service. This proved to be precisely what the group needed. They shifted from a state of alienation – from themselves and from each other - - to feelings of interdependence, connection, trust and comfort. They worked with intensity and harmony, focused on an objective that was separate from and, outside of, each person's ego.

This whole experience reminded me of a discussion about art and reconciliation we'd had at Brandeis six months earlier. Cindy Cohen presented the idea that in contexts of trauma, when people can become shut down, engaging with the arts can "enliven people's capacity to be present." She compared the process of making art with the process of rebuilding a community after violence: "Both in creating art and in facilitating reconciliation, we are seeking to create

forms that can hold tensions and conflicts in ways that allow life to move forward, forms that can be generative and even beautiful.”

Two weeks after the funeral, Floyd’s memorial service was held at Artist Proof Studio. It was most moving, filled with singing and choked tributes from his friends and family. One of the students brought his twenty-person gospel choir to the service; their voices transported us, allowing us to touch his departing spirit. Stompie’s class played with wet eyes and with determination to direct the gift of their music and their solidarity to the mourners.

I directed my contribution to Floyd’s peers, his classmates. Repeating words he himself had written, I shared his dream: “I see myself having a steady job as a graphic designer, and also teaching printmaking part-time, owning a minibus that is going to transport the schoolchildren, owning a four-room house for now, with my daughter, running workshops for art in the rural areas, and exhibiting my artwork.”

I told the group that Floyd had ended his life because he didn’t believe that he was enough of a contribution to the world. I challenged them to think of themselves as pebbles in a pond, sending ripples beyond the horizon. As artists, we can choose practices that express our selves. Our voices are our unique contributions to our communities. We must believe in this and share it. We hold the possibility to make a difference.

At the memorial service, Floyd’s classmates exhibited and sold his artwork to raise money for his daughter. They were able to pay tribute to their friend, honour his life, and transform meaning from his death. Subsequently, both in workshops and through their own artwork, they grappled with fatherhood and redefining gender roles for themselves.

Another layer of reconciliation had been uncovered.

Example 3: How Deep Can We Go?

The night after the memorial service, I received a call from Cara to say Jabulani was arrested for stealing a fax machine and cameras from our neighbours. The week before, the APS fax machine had been stolen. He admitted to the three consecutive break-ins.

Jabu was a 17-year-old member of the Saturday youth class who was in his final year of high school. He had been a member of APS for two and a half years. He was not a newcomer, and was part of our struggle to rebuild after the fire. He was a holder of the collective vision. He participated in the ubuntu art processes and participated in the reconstruction collages from burnt fragments after the fire. He made a linocut about reconciliation between whites and blacks, presented in the form of parents caring for a child. He expressed his wish to me that one day he wants to go overseas like his classmate Thabang who had left two nights before to attend a leadership camp in the United States. Jabu was a member of the APS family.

He was caught by the security guards, together with his 16-year-old cousin, carrying a box out of the building. They were taken to the Johannesburg prison to be charged. They are both in a “place of safety” for juvenile offenders awaiting trial.

What meaning do we read into this? Is the provision of an alternative vision and choice not enough? Does one equate this to a crack in the family structure? Do we take a hard line and

make an example of him? Do we set a precedent and take him back because he is so young and vulnerable? Do we even make it our problem?

Jabulani's actions were a crime against our community. They are yet another challenge for reconciliation!

How should we address issues of drug and alcohol abuse at APS? This studio cannot be a cure for all the problems faced by its members. We cannot attempt to fix people's wounds. Should we be supporting people to find moral values if that is not taught at home?

Many of our students find their way through learning on the street. We are giving tools for youth to make different choices. It is hard not to take on the failures as our responsibility. How does teaching art provide the tools for an alternative choice? How far can these tools recover ubuntu?

As we peel one layer away toward healing, the next reveals itself; a continual process of becoming, paradoxically reinventing itself.

How deep can we go?

“Reconciliation remains fleeting. It must be imagined and worked toward and hoped for constantly. It is a seemingly impossible goal that paradoxically creates itself in moments of its becoming.”

– Cynthia Cohen

Staying in Relationship and Addressing Issues of Power

The process of incorporating the spirit of ubuntu into APS compelled Stompie and me to continuously reach for new depths in our understandings of ourselves and our relationship with each other. We have struggled to stay in relationship while acknowledging tensions between our partnership as part of the Brandeis International Fellowship Program and the different roles we play within APS. Also, we have had to grapple with the legacy of the historic imbalance of privilege, skills, education, race, and gender that are part of the apartheid's legacy. The transformations within us and between us are crucial aspects of the changes taking place at APS. At various points, we have reflected on these dynamics and discussed them directly:

Stompie: When I used to assist Kim and Nhlanhla, we spent many hours printing in the studio on weekends. I was inspired to change my life. I was inspired by how my two teachers, Kim and Nhlanhla, black and white, worked together. Nhlanhla always used to tell us, “guys, it's your time to deliver, I have done my part!” He opened up spaces and possibilities for me. He gave me one of his latest prints, and inscribed a message, which still inspires me, about his motivation for making a difference and the importance of sharing with those who don't have.

I have grown from those experiences, and the experience after the fire helped me enter into very challenging situations. I think it was the trust and confidence that Nhlanhla and Kim had in me, that allowed me to start believing in myself.

I recognised that I can be a powerful facilitator. When I get introduced as Stompie in a workshop³, I present myself with a strong voice. I make eye contact, I establish my presence, and stand tall. I think being powerful means being a good listener, supporting and staying with a group until they can trust you.

Kim: Initially, my relationship with Stompie was teacher/student or mentor/mentee. At times, in terms of interpersonal dynamics, we have met on a relatively equal basis, the challenge remains with regard to the unequal power balance of the employer/employee relationship. While I am not the line manager for Stompie's role as teacher, I am the executive director of APS and he is one of the artists assigned to me as a mentee for the transfer of leadership roles within the APS structure. In addition, we have had to acknowledge and engage with the historic imbalance of privilege, skills, education, race, and gender, all issues of potential conflict within a South African context.

Within the framework we established for rebuilding capacity at APS, Stompie conducts all of the practical workshops. I no longer teach classes; my function has been to provide reflective feedback to both teachers and students and to periodically chart and monitor direction from a wider perspective. My challenge has been to know when to step back and allow a non-interfering space for processes to develop.

Stompie: I see my mission as working with people in diverse races to help change perceptions.... There are racial divisions in the studio. People don't see the same attitude being applied to the white facilitators who come into the space [as are applied to black teachers]. When the teachers complain about the kinds of expectations imposed, I try to explain Kim's attitudes. I think I understand the vision and try and help people take responsibility.

In the old space, there was a lot of poison around. The older artists who were bitter about not getting jobs would say things like, "You know Kim, she's a controlling person. She thinks she can fix your life. She makes a lot of money." My challenge is to break that mentality. I have fought with people over these issues.

My work with Osiah is an example. In the old studio, Osiah felt threatened by the new people coming up. He used to be Kim's assistant, and was very close to Nhlanhla. When he felt pushed out, he expressed anger and started spreading poison in the studio. He started saying bad things about APS and racism. He was suspended for stealing materials, and then he became very angry. He was hurt. He felt pushed out. He kept talking about the old times when he was close to Kim and Nhlanhla.

After the fire, Osiah came back. He wanted to fill Nhlanhla's space. He belongs here. I speak to him and push him to take responsibility. He is still crying inside, but something has shifted. He has created a space for himself and has found a way to reconcile his anger with Cara, the manager. They are working together. So this is where a reconciliation has taken place. I feel proud of that.

But some of my colleagues are jealous of me. They see me in different ways; some see me as Kim's 'child.' They want to know why Kim chose me for the Brandeis fellowship. Why not

³ *Stompie* is an Afrikaans word that in South Africa means "a cigarette butt," and is also an affectionate term for something small.

them? They try to prove themselves, but Kim doesn't always see it. Sometimes Kim come into a room and talks only to me. They get jealous. Sometimes I feel like screaming.

Sometimes Cara walks into my class and puts me down in front of my students. When I feel disempowered in these situations, I hold my breath. I think about it. Students notice that. We discuss issues of reconciliation, and it becomes a challenge for me. So I went to Cara and said that I did not like how she came into my class and put me down. I apologized after the conversation, and then she apologized. Now she knows that she can't walk into my class. The Brandeis program has helped me to practice reconciliation in this way.

When things like this used to happen, we didn't deal with it, and it became a problem. The staff didn't deal with it, and things would break into pieces. Now I am taking risks, pushing some issues.

Sometimes I feel that I don't get enough support. When I blow up, I am able to explore the tension, but I can't do this sensitive work on reconciliation alone. Sometimes I feel that Kim is not around when I need her support.

Kim: I see part of my role as motivating quality and facilitating the conditions for teachers and learners to stretch towards their potential. I am committed to releasing dependency on my leadership at APS in order to provide the space for new growth. I am trying to find the balance of letting go of some control, but maintaining a presence that will secure confidence and manage a process of change. Stompie helps me to negotiate that balance by providing feedback, and acting as a kind of barometer with APS that indicates the levels of stability and measures the emotional temperature within a changing organization. In response to his input, I have identified interventions such as a team-building retreat for staff members, a weekly workshop, art therapy support groups, short interventions (such as a Men as Partners series), and bi-weekly groups for the staff as a whole.

Last year, before the new space was built, the morale of the APS staff was very low. We initiated a weekly team-building session for all members of the staff for an hour and a half each week. The purpose of these sessions was to come together in a studio space and make art again. This proved to be a valuable strategy to find our common ground. Most of us had not been able to make any new artwork since the fire.

More recently, in the new space, we started meeting around a table to do group work, share frustrations, and identify, clarify, and communicate roles and responsibilities to each other. These sessions have helped us identify problems and frustrations that had previously not been heard. It was important that these sessions were separate from our weekly staff meetings that adhere to an agenda, and are focused on implementing programs and

“It is still such an exhausting struggle to make life appear ordinary today, a pretty good excuse why many of us bail out of even thinking about it. This widespread pretence, this unacknowledged effort, which is held in place by force, is one of the reasons we are injuring ourselves and hurting those around us. The truth is that some of us may still be waiting, in an important sense, for a miracle of sorts. On the other hand, maybe we need to do some work in the meantime to find other ways to hook up with one another or recover new forms of relating to ourselves differently.” (Kopano Ratele, *Recovering the Ordinary*, in Pieterse & Meintjies, 2004: 195)

discussing learner concerns.

We recently hired a new manager who was tasked with mentoring and implementing systems to promote professionalism and excellence within the teaching and printing units at APS. I had the fear that some members of the staff would relinquish their own responsibilities and leadership roles to this new manager. My fear proved to have a realistic basis, when, in the first meeting, members of the staff reported on colleagues refusing to do certain tasks such as carrying supplies, rearranging furniture, and helping with stock taking, which they felt were not included in their job descriptions. There were also reports of unauthorized use of the studio by staff members, disappearance of keys and stockrooms, and the failure of teachers to return or account for borrowed tools and supplies.

The ethos that reflected the lack of teamwork, negativity, lack of accountability, and good will was filtering through the studio. It could be seen in the drop in performance and sloppy output by some of the learners and the artists. I felt that we were back to square one. I was concerned that the vision for a shared leadership was not sustainable. I found myself laying down the law, demanding accountability, and threatening the staff with warning letters if they did not meet their minimum job requirements. In general, I felt a sense of intolerance for their unprofessional conduct.

Stompie: When Kim shouts at people, it intimidates and disempowers. The other day when Kim was talking to me in the staff room, I cried. I was so frustrated. I wanted to shout. I didn't have the space. She couldn't hear me. I was asking myself, What is the meaning of this? And I decided to try to use my feelings to further the process of reconciliation. I stayed with what I was feeling. I was able to confront her and tell her how I felt.

Kim: After this hard conversation with Stompie, when his frustration and anger pushed him to tears, I thanked him for his continual ability to forgive me and to move beyond the disappointment that he feels with my lack of availability to support him. This led to an important conversation that broke through a barrier. It allowed me to recognize that creative imagining and dreaming can help us move quickly out of the feelings of hopelessness and frustration. I realized that most of the explorations of ubuntu at APS had been undertaken by students in the context of Stompie's class. The spurts of growth had therefore stayed in pockets of the organization, and the participatory methods of ubuntu had not been incorporated into the practice and ethos of the facilitators and teachers.

Stompie: What we need at APS is to enjoy one another more, like when a group is on the stage playing music. Each player respects and enjoys the other. There is harmony and respect. That is how we will start to enjoy each other. That is what it is like playing in a band on stage.

Ubuntu and Appreciative Inquiry

“As people in organizations inquire into their weaknesses and deficiencies, they gain an expert knowledge of what is wrong with their organizations, and they even become proficient problem solvers, but they do not strengthen their collective capacity to imagine and to build better futures. The ability to foster constructive change relies on the capability of the group or organization to see and produce alternative realities through language.” (Ludema et al, in *Reason and Bradbury*, 2001, 191)

As I reflected on events and conversations at APS, I questioned my own attempts to implement systems of excellence at the studio. The disempowerment that arises from hierarchical critiques and my attempt to command and control professional behaviour seem to be counter to the objectives of reconciliation and ubuntu. I realized that it is the power of possibility that drives enthusiasm and energy in the studio. Leadership by positive example has worked for us more than the forced assertion of authority.

For instance, in the beginning of the year, with the launch of the new building, we focused on our achievements, assets, values, traditions, wisdom, and inspired emotions. We invented our “positive core” or organizational “soul,” which we defined as *ubuntu*. This core unleashed a power of identity and strength. It can be drawn upon to mobilize imagination and motivate creative actions.

The staff’s spontaneous and joint decision to gather together is due to the intuitive recognition of the importance of designing the way forward together. We all share the vision. Our challenge continues to be reversing the polarizing splits that exist among us: distinctions and divisions between groups such as educated and not, black and white, full-time and part-time, rich and poor. These become reinforced and expressed as polarities: right and wrong, good and bad.

I believe that the framework of appreciative inquiry can be of use to us in this process. By asking positive questions, appreciative inquiry draws out and highlights hopeful and empowering stories, metaphors, dreams, and wishes that embrace a spirit of vitality and potency. It shifts away from vocabularies of deficit to conversations of possibility. These conversations can prefigure the future we want to create at APS. The image of the future should be guiding the current behaviour of the organization.

In its capacity to help us enact now the future we hope to create, appreciative inquiry has interesting parallels to the role of the creative imagination and the arts in recasting reconciliation. The challenge as I see it is for APS to embrace ubuntu as a strategy for organizational development. Our members need to help co-create a system that nurtures enthusiasm and directs positive guiding images of the future such as a democratic, participative center of excellence. We need to work toward having interactive leadership that can construct the future through innovation and action. Imagining the future is part of that process. I believe that embracing the concept of ubuntu – exploring it, giving it expression, contextualizing it, personalizing it, owning it, applying it – has been a catalyst. Like reconciliation, it can be a journey toward a seemingly impossible goal, but one in which there are moments of becoming along the way.

“Perhaps the finest achievement of a true team is when one also becomes a community. A wonderfully complete description of this is found in the Zulu word for community—*umphakati*—which means “We are all together on the inside.” (Boon, 1996, p. 74)

Conclusions: The ongoing collage of APS

After the fire that destroyed the first Artist Proof Studio, we discovered that the act of collage-making was reconstructive. We were able to reorganize the burned fragments, bits of the damage and the loss, into objects of beauty and meaning.

Over the course of the year, we have been creating a spirit of ubuntu within the structures and cultures of APS. Our efforts at reconciliation have been similarly collage-like, layering symbols and rituals, reorganizing fragments of the old to construct something vibrant, generative, and empowering. The elements of our collage in reconstructing a new APS include the following:

- Elements of the past framing the future (expressed through collaged fragments of burnt rubble in the art and the new building)
- Traditional rituals, such as the healer or *sangoma* restoring balance, blessing the new space and paying respect to Nhlanhla's spirit
- Artmaking as both therapy and growth
- The collective participation of artist-members in branding the studio and making their mark
- The workshop processes, including the discussion of relevant themes in the curriculum, the demarcating of professional and learning boundaries in the space
- The workshoping, research, and sharing of concepts
- Music and dance, and the expression of feeling
- The gathering and telling of stories
- Performance, public display, exhibitions
- Collective and creative designing of a new curriculum and applying it in the learning programs
- Collaborative and team teaching across race, gender, culture, and tradition
- Autonomy and independence of program leaders to find their voices
- Implementation of processes to promote accountability and responsibility
- The redefinition of management structures, including the dissolving of the existing board, designing a new governance structure, defining roles and responsibilities for leadership, and implementing the mentorship process
- Setting up sustainable mentorship relationships with definable goals for students and teachers
- Partnerships and interfacing with organizations that provide new opportunities for capacity building
- Creating forums for listening and sharing
- Respecting the space needed to explore and make mistakes
- Adhering to democratic practices in the organization
- Passing the torch

This past year has been filled with paradox: highs and lows, joy and pain, healing and despair, destruction and growth. Floyd's death took place in the midst the ubuntu project and exposed the rawness of healing. These processes of researching the spirit of ubuntu revealed that life and art are inexorably intertwined. The emotional and spiritual poisons that infected Floyd were locked inside him, closed off and therefore inaccessible to the processes we were engaged in. He did not perforate the barrier, allowing the poison to spill or be revealed. His fear and shame kept the poison locked inside him, and he killed himself.

This notion of perforating the barrier of fear, shame, and anger inside can be used in a creative process. "Perforation" is something that needs to happen in order to link the surface and deep transformations, but it has to be done carefully, as Floyd's story illustrates.

The metaphor of the reconstruction collages was apt: we pulled the fragments out of the rubble of the burnt remains, the dust had to be released into the air just as infected wounds have to be drained to prevent septic poisoning. The patches or fragments that were stuck onto the surface of the collages represent a façade of recovery. It is an outside layer. But the damage is deep and it is toxic. The pain has to be transformed into positive healing through another art making activity, and then we are only one step further in the ongoing journey. The process is one of becoming and has no end.

Over the past year, we have found an increasing need to hold art therapy groups, music circles, “men as partners,” and support group workshops. These groups have had the effect of punching holes in the reconstruction collages, the surface layer of our recovery. We had to create the spaces to release the silences, to listen, to be heard, to tell individual and collective narratives, and to translate those stories into creative practice. More recently, the team of 16 APS staff members participated in a “healing from racism” workshop in which we shared stories of our heritage and childhood experiences of growing up with apartheid. We felt our commonality more than our differences.

The exploration of ubuntu at APS explored many of the questions that were identified at the conclusion of the first Brandeis institute. We witnessed how cultural work and the arts can be crafted to contribute to the rebuilding of relationships. We saw how artistic processes can contribute to understanding self and other, and how they can nourish the capacities required for reconciliation. We experienced how they can help us recover from trauma and how they can be useful in transferring our lessons toward transformation of society at large.

However, we are still grappling with many unanswered questions. For instance, we need to keep asking ourselves about the implications of white authority for APS, and whether we can create a model of non-racial leadership. How do we grow and sustain the vision of using ubuntu as a strategy of management in creating a culture of excellence in learning at APS. But by asking these questions, we are opening doors that have not been opened before and offering them to our members as openings to help us resolve some of the difficulties we have encountered. It has become important for all of us as leaders within APS to honour a space in our schedules to meet monthly for a forum for communication and sharing. The trust that is being built in the team has started translating into confidence and shared pride, and we feel ourselves moving toward our vision for APS as a center of African-centered learning and leadership.

Some Reflections

The year is almost at an end as I conclude this chapter. The second institute at Brandeis has taken place, which has allowed me to view APS from a distance. The visit to Boston provided me the privilege of sharing my concerns.

In a personal conversation I had with Dr. Hizkias Assefa, whom we met at Brandeis, he said, “Reconciliation requires awareness and humility on the side of the powerful party in the equation, and confidence and courage on the side of the disempowered. The ability to re-imagine self and other in the processes of reconciliation is a key to understanding the role of leadership in the process. Understanding helps us leverage small moments to create change.”

Hizkias also presented the view that sometimes “war itself creates a space for change, a readiness for peace.” The burning down of APS, the destruction that brought about suffering, loss, and trauma, was a moment that created a space for change. It required us to develop a new vision of what could be.

At Brandeis, we met Jane Sapp, an artist and cultural worker, who suggested the idea of the cultural worker as “a curator of the community.” If one accepts this definition, one can reconcile the dichotomies that the apartheid legacies bring to the equation of white/black, African/Western, outsider/insider, skilled/emerging leadership practices at APS.

Ubuntu exists as an indigenous knowledge and cultural system in Africa. We have found that rediscovering and reclaiming this concept as a strategy to create organizational change has been integral to the process of reconciliation. As organizations like APS are microcosms of our nation, they can be synergized with the national vision of nation building. Perhaps part of our approach to leadership will determine the degree of achievement.

There is a garden
where our hearts converse
at ease
besides clear waters
dreaming:
a whole and perfect future
for yourself, myself
our children and our friends.
- Theo Dorgan (quoted
by S Dikene)

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to interview Sandile Dikene, a journalist, poet, and survivor of “the lost generation.” He talked about an understanding of reconciliation that has to do with remembering.

“Re-member: members or parts rediscovered and replaced. A political definition of reconciliation wants to put humanity back in its place. The TRC was about the seeking of limbs, digging up body parts, the painful and harrowing search for a finger, and the celebration of recovering in pieces.”

“Healing takes you back to where the wound is, it’s a kind of macabre dance. A part heals and then you go backwards with the next opening of wounds. The national agenda of reconciliation is like an overarching blanket, but the process is a painstaking picking up of the pieces. It is hectic, sore stuff, psychological and biological, it’s not a political notion.”

This is what we discovered in our collage-making processes of healing and reconciliation. “There are layers and layers of paradox; to deal with it sensitively you have to unravel bits piecemeal. There can be no quick fix. The impossible is the juice. The dream is where you begin. When I was in a place of justified anger, which is the most destructive kind, I go back to remembering what the dream is, and tend to the garden” (Interview Sandile Dikene by KB, April 2004)

Recasting Reconciliation posed a question about whether imagination and dreaming can heal us. Our answer is that it can. I believe that imagining and dreaming a better future are key to the transformation process at APS and in South Africa as a whole. There is a power in closing our eyes and dreaming the impossible.

Background Notes

Trevor's Experience

Trevor Thebe joined the youth group of the studio in 1997 when he was 17 and is now one of APS's drawing teachers. He reflected on our the importance of creativity for his own recovery from the fire.

To me, APS is a home. APS opened a lot of doors and it carried me. That's why it was so hard losing it in the fire. When it burned down, I felt that my dream had been destroyed. I believed that my life had become a dead end and I believed that I wasn't going to be able to carry on. I saw myself as not having a dream because I felt like it had been taken away. At APS, I had finally felt that I was with people that understood how I felt and who understood me. The thought of not being able to see them or talk to them felt like a bad dream.

I never recovered until I made a print. I had to deal with the fire the best way I could, and the only way I could was to come up with an art piece that would take away my rage. I had to come to peace about the whole situation and I dedicated the artwork to Nhlanhla. It was about the journey from the beginning: when I first came here, the journey I took everyday, the journey from when I was born to now, the financial struggles I went through, and it was about everything he taught me and how he was always pushing me to do better. It was about the thought of one's culture, where life starts. It was about growth in a way. And inside it, it had all the questions that I had.

The whole burning down of the studio separated us. We ended up seeing ourselves as individuals rather than as a community or a family. Working on the collages as a group gave us a chance to come back together and discuss things. We had to work with something positive from something dead. Some of us used to believe that APS was just a building and when you leave that building you're on your own. But today I believe that the people inside make it what is: a home and a family.

(Interview, Darnisa Amante, Aug 04) (see fig 13)

Extracts from the Students' Ubuntu Stories

Sipho Mzekandaba

The question is, if someone poor comes to you and asks for a pair of shoes, which shoes are you going to give that person? Is it the best shoes or the worst shoes that you have? That is the challenge of ubuntu that you face every day.

Nelson Makamo

This is my story, not just a story, but a way of life. This is my interview with my grandpa. It was the first week of March. I had to travel from Johannesburg to Limpopo to a large village called Avon. It had been a year since I visited my grandparents and I had only three days, after which I had to go back to Gauteng. I went for one reason: My assignment of ubuntu, because I knew that my grandfather was the person to talk to. I knew his point of view made a difference to me, as well as to others. He had understanding for so many things that involve social issues. He knows how to turn a boy into a man.

The first thing I asked him was, what is ubuntu? He answered with a smile, "The quality of being kind to people and making sure they do not suffer more than is necessary." He continued, "My son, our world is crammed full of words, images, and sounds from our foremothers. What is happening today is too much for us, we cannot breathe. We are always seeking to capture and to understand the contradictions of this diverse continent. Many people are caught between the mistakes of the past and the possible calamities of tomorrow. I was brought up by respect and caring, and also to transfer that to my children, who were brought up with love and respect and caring.

"Do you really want to know what is happening today? There is no respect at all. We are putting material things first. That love for one another is gone. No one to blame but ourselves. We did let things get out of hand, step by step. We were supposed to act from the very first. But if we can plant that seed into someone's heart to let grow bigger and stronger, making sure that we take good care of it, I'm telling you, it will attract others from the whole world who will be touched.

"We had enough of the past. That is gone. Yes, it is gone. Are we still going to build a nation, to erect a new civilization, which can lay claim to its existence, because it is humane? We shall try to employ not only enlightened reason, but also dynamic imagination.

"If there can be love, respect to us, the elders, and pass that on to children, the future will be full of dynamic opportunity, and every child will be proud to be part of this universe." (Interview, Darnisa Amante, August 2004)

Frans Khobokwani

Ubuntu at Artist Proof Studio means working together as a family. I saw ubuntu in action at the opening of the new APS. When the class received their assignment to research ubuntu and continue exploring the relationships that they had formed while preparing for the opening, it was like a calling. I changed...I can handle things positively now, but before I was very angry, out-of control. The journey of discovering ubuntu has given me hope for a better future. (Interview, Amy Schiller, July 2004)

Journal Thoughts on Floyd's Funeral and Memorial Service

Today is Youth Day. It's a day to remember the youth uprising in 1976 that led to freedom and democracy in South Africa.

It also seems that the pain and struggle of black youth today, 28 years later, has been replaced by another kind of struggle for empowerment.

At a support group session led by my sister [art therapist Hayley Berman], Floyd's friends described him as a warrior who lost the battle with life.

They described him as a person filled with ambition and dreams.

He was serious and always pushed others to work harder, to achieve more.

He shared his dream with me to be a drawing teacher at APS.

He believed in his calling as an artist and teacher, and wanted to share his skills with others.

He assumed that role among his group.

He wanted to study graphic design in order to make a good living to support his family.

He shared similar struggles and dreams with his peers.

They felt a bond in their common ground.

Now his "brothers" are feeling abandoned and guilty; they feel that a part of themselves has died.

They are confused about the reality that their problems can destroy a life.

Elton described Floyd (and himself) as a beautiful apple that looks perfect on the outside, but is rotting inside. They fear that spreading the rot can poison others, so they need to keep it inside.

Stompie shared his feelings about not knowing how to hold the group. He described the group as a container that had been broken. He expressed a fear of personal failure in not seeing the signs of Floyd's depression.

Stompie had taken the group on a journey to discover ubuntu within themselves as well as in their lives. They learned how to communicate, share feelings, be held, and share in their own pain, joy, and discovery.

Floyd's group was learning to be the researchers of their own destiny.

They were learning tools of creative responses to struggle.

They learned how to identify and find appropriate ways to respond to behaviour that was not conciliatory, and that perpetuated difference and division.

They found a safe vehicle to challenge authority and hold it accountable to their process.

They were learning how to recast reconciliation through art and culture.

They were researching their own visual expression of cultural identity and finding expression through ritual and music.

They worked on a project to identify their own cultural objects or totems, urban and contemporary, or their personal nostalgia for traditional roots.

All these processes are part of rebuilding self worth, digging the deep foundations for reconstruction and transformation.

They are the preparation of the ground to sow the seeds for new growth.

They are the nutrients to provide healthy germination.

They are the tools to begin to implement the dream of a new future.

Floyd's suicide somehow seemed to subvert these processes.

Yesterday sitting inside the pain of the group, I had the urge to run away.

I felt exhausted at the thought of again scratching in the rubble to extract pieces in order to rebuild creative collages.

I looked at Stompie holding back the tears in his eyes, fighting his own feelings so that he could be there in his role as the mentor and guide for the group.

The trauma of the fire that left this same group feeling so lost, dislocated, and homeless came flooding back.

At different times, three different members of the group, got up and ran shaking and inconsolable from the room.

I shared Floyd's dream with the group that he wanted to teach and guide people in drawing at APS. It was an extraordinary strength of his. I asked the class how they thought we could honour that dream. When we were discussing ways to honour Floyd's spirit and find ways to provide comfort and strength to reduce the feelings of loss, despair, alienation, the group chose to return to their work on the ubuntu panels.

Kim's Story

As a visual artist and printmaker, I attempt through my work to respond to the social and political texture of South Africa. I grew up in Johannesburg in a Jewish family in the 1960s with a consciousness of the Holocaust. My experience of anti-Semitism in school aligned my understanding of the racist policies in South Africa with injustice and oppression and I became a politically active student at university. After completing my undergraduate fine art degree at Wits University, a liberal institution, I realized that I could not give free expression to what I was feeling and thinking or to my life choice as an anti-apartheid activist and lesbian in South Africa.

I moved to Boston in 1983 and received a scholarship to study for my masters at the Museum School of Fine Arts and Tufts University. I joined the anti-apartheid organization in exile and was active in distributing video and photographic materials to highlight the reign of terror during the seven years of the State of Emergency of apartheid South Africa. During this time, my role as an artist was to bear witness.

In 1990, after Nelson Mandela's release from 27 years of imprisonment, I returned home in answer to the call to participate in building a just and democratic South Africa. I founded Artist Proof Studio in Johannesburg. To support this venture, I became involved in development work with rural women's groups, which enabled me to travel to remote and impoverished rural villages where I explored the idea "to rediscover the ordinary." This inspired a series of work based on the landscape as a metaphor for a country in the process of defining itself.

The powerful and courageous work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a watershed in my career as an artist, and its influence was manifest in the range of artworks I produced subsequently. One series, entitled "The Fires of the Truth Commission," were large-scale monotypes of the familiar highveld fires representing the burning and purging of the winter grass to make way for new growth. Each of the series of works that followed enabled me to grapple with issues of post-apartheid reconciliation through an artistic process.

Stompie's Story

Stompie is a young visual and musical artist with extraordinary talent. His father was a musician and alcoholic who died when Stompie was 20 years old. His mother died two years later. He inherited their house with his older brother. He started attending music and art classes in 1987 at the Progress Youth Club in Soweto, as he wanted to play the penny whistle, his father's instrument. He discovered a natural talent for music and plays a range of indigenous African instruments. He recorded a CD, "Ambient African Instruments," in 2002, which has received acclaim. He performs publicly, but primarily uses music as a tool of healing in giving workshops to groups and communities all over South Africa. Stompie has been supporting himself and his brothers since leaving school by the income earned as a printmaker and facilitator.

Stompie was introduced to APS as a participant in a workshop at the time of the 1995 Biennale. He joined as a Saturday part-time student in 1997, and a full-time student in 1998. The same year, he traveled to Cuba and Belgium as an installation assistant with Memorius Intimus Marcus, an exhibition exploring the effects of war by artists from Cuba, Angola and Namibia.

Stompie expressed a dream at the time of furthering his qualifications. His high school was incomplete. Overcoming huge gaps in his apartheid education, he registered to study his missing credits in languages and passed his matric (high-school leaving certificate).

Stompie attended a teachers training course at Wits Technikon, and APS provided him with an additional bursary to attend a two-year foundation course in community art therapy. He went on to the advanced training, which he completed in 2003. Stompie still dreams of getting a formal degree and qualifying as a music and art therapist.

After completing his teachers training course, Stompie was contracted by APS as a teaching facilitator for the youth development classes on Saturdays and a teaching and printing assistant to Nhlanhla and myself. He also assisted and then became a facilitator for the Paper Prayers campaign. Supervised by the Art Therapy Centre, he provided workshops and support groups for CARE workers at an HIV/AIDS support Centre in Tsakane and other groups linked to the APS Paper Prayers campaign.

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