

# Introduction

**W**hen Josh Rosenthal proposed the title “Alone With Five Others” for this volume, it resonated immediately with the other Ethics Center Student Fellows. The phrase somehow captured a feeling familiar to all of them – a sense of isolation, being far away from friends and family, moderated by a sense of mutual support and common purpose among the six members of the group. Letters, journal entries, snippets of interviews and ideas – dozens of emails traveling thousands of miles transformed six individual experiences into a small but vital global community.

As much as their common experience meant to the Fellows, I believe that the title resonated for another reason as well: it speaks to something about the contemporary human condition. As these intrepid Brandeis undergraduates got to know men and women on four continents, they discovered and wrote about the ways in which so many people are simultaneously intensely connected and intensely isolated. Josh Rosenthal encountered democracy activists in Bulgaria who were finding common cause with others around Europe and around the world, but who still struggled with the depersonalizing nature of their country’s past. Dana Sawitz met women in Senegal who were part of an active, successful human rights community, yet who were often cut off from other women in their home country. Will Chalmus learned about the ways that the art of performance can create a powerful spirit of harmony, but he also discovered that this “love bubble” cannot protect the individual performer from darkness and solitude.

The narratives in this volume are the work of six Brandeis University undergraduates, the 2006 Ethics Center Student Fellows. Over the past nine years, more than 50 Brandeis students have served as fellows of the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life. They are chosen during the fall of their sophomore or junior years in a competitive process based on their academic achievement

and their previous experience in working for social change. As part of the application process, students identify and line up field placements for a summer experience supported by the Center.

The fellowship consists of three parts. First, students choose a course in their spring term that will prepare them intellectually for the work that they will be doing in the summer field project; they also participate in a series of meetings and retreats designed to prepare them for the challenges of living in unfamiliar and sometimes difficult environments. In the summer, students work for eight to ten weeks in a non-governmental organization (NGO), where they have the opportunity to learn “in the field” about how practitioners address issues of coexistence, development, democracy, education and other approaches to social change. Finally, in the fall term, students return to campus and enroll in a writing workshop where they have the opportunity to integrate their academic and practical learning.

Students produced these writings during this fall course, which I led, sharing their work with one another and exploring in our weekly meetings issues and problems of common concern. The students were far-flung geographically, with placements in Greece, South Africa, Australia, Bulgaria, Mexico and Senegal. Their areas of interest also

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varied widely. Naomi Safran-Hon and Will Chalmus are deeply committed artists, most comfortable in forms of creative expression. Kosmas Kaprinis and Josh Rosenthal brought to their work finely-honed political sensibilities. Daniel Duffy and Dana Sawitz, steeped in the study of anthropology, are attuned to the nuances of human society and the delicate position of outsiders. This variety of perspectives and skills fueled a set of animated discussions about such issues as the ownership of words and images, the costs of democracy and the complexities of the study of history.

The narratives in this volume oscillate between big ideas and detailed descriptions of small moments in the lives of the students and of the people whom they came to know over the course of the summer. They represent simultaneous commitments to the tools of scholarship, learning through experience and a passion for social justice.

Special thanks, as always, to Marci McPhee, associate director of the Center, who organizes the fellowship process and provides vital support for the students before, during and after their field experience. It is Marci, as much as anyone, who constructs the frame that allows a select group of Brandeis undergraduates to experience the special intensity of being “alone with others.”

# Perform for a Change

WILLIAM CHALMUS '07



**H**ow can performance art be used as a means of educating societies about culture, communities and conflict in a way that leads to long-lasting positive change within the communities in question? This has been a serious inquiry for me as a theater practitioner, hip-hop artist and playwright raised in some of the most under-resourced and compromised communities in the city of Boston, Massachusetts. I recently, as one of six Brandeis Ethics Center Student Fellows, had the chance to search for an answer to the question of how performance could be used to create a more positive community.

In the piece that follows I will explore the positive and negative issues that arise when you combine the theories raised in John Lederach's book *The Moral Imagination* with my practical experiences during the summer of 2006 at the International School of Playback in Poughkeepsie, New York, and the youth art program Contact Inc. in Brisbane, Australia. For five weeks, I worked as an intern at the School of Playback, helping organize the office and integrating the international students to their new surroundings. I also participated as a student in three of the Playback courses. I then traveled to Brisbane where I interned at Contact Inc. for three-and-a-half weeks in the month of August. My duties at Contact Inc. were to lead and help with the community workshops for various projects in addition to witnessing the processes used by Contact Inc. employees in order to achieve their mission statement goals. The organizations will be discussed in further detail later.

## Moral Imagination

The first thing to clarify is who John Lederach is, and what is the "moral imagination." John Lederach is a distinguished professor of international peacebuilding. According

to Lederach, the moral imagination is "the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist."<sup>1</sup> Morality provides a checks and balances system with imagination, where the morals keep the imagination locked in reality while the imagination leaves room for the individual to realize that his or her reality is not locked into a single pattern. The term "imagination" is used in order to "emphasize the necessity of the creative act."<sup>2</sup> Fulfilling the need for a creative act is more important than simply doing the creative act itself. The creative act stimulates the imagination to envision everyday life in a new way. This new perception of everyday life provides logic-driven opportunities for a reasoned exploration of which daily habits are beneficial and which are harmful. Lederach further develops his definition of the moral imagination by comparing multiple authors' meaning of the same subject. He states that the moral imagination "develops a capacity to perceive things beyond and at a deeper level than what initially meets the eye."<sup>3</sup> Lederach believes that the moral imagination comes with a quality of transcendence – the ability to surpass the ordinary range of perception. With this ability to transcend, people are

able to generate a more pleasant future for all members of society motivated by their transcendent revelations. Lederach points out four mandates for the moral imagination: the centrality of relationships, the practice of paradoxical curiosity, providing space for the creative act and willingness to risk.

The concept of the "Moral Imagination" plays heavily in reference to my summer internship experiences. Both organizations where I worked as a summer intern have performance as an end product, whether in live or recorded media. By making the art a performance for an audience, members of society who witness the act are drawn into the creative act often without knowing the "moral" themes they are expected to connect with. This latter statement will become more translucent as we move deeper into what the organizations aim for and the ways in which they attempt to achieve their aims.

Performance is a form that requires the audience to transcend, or, in theater terms, "suspend their disbelief" in order to empathize with the production and connect to its themes. Most performance productions deal with more than the aesthetic enjoyment that