

Please discuss your activities.

Clay Rockefeller (Monohasset Mill; The Steel Yard)



I worked with three other artists to purchase the old Monohasset Mill in the Valley district of Providence. The mill buildings across the street were turned into a shopping center, but we pursued an alternative model of regeneration, and created artist live/work spaces with a community-centered, affordable, and sustainable approach <www.millproject.org>. I am also a founder of The Steel Yard <www.thesteelyard.org>, a non-profit organization that provides arts and technical training programs designed to increase opportunities for cultural and artistic expression, career-oriented training, and small business incubation in a revitalized steel yard next door to the Monohasset property.

Yayoi Yoshizawa (regional culture information and projects (recip))

I read with interest Clay's description of The Steel Yard. [recip <www.recip.jp>](http://www.recip.jp) (founded 2004) has a similar mission, though not so much career-oriented training as daily practice. Our activity consists of three sections: Project, Information, and Research & Development (R&D).

The Project section draws up plans and manages projects, including both independent actions and cultural programs with local governments and businesses. The Information section publishes an information magazine aiming at revitalizing local cultures. The R&D section approaches problems in contemporary society and cultures.

Activities include:

Designing and producing a cable TV program (ConnectorTV) on cultural information (in conjunction with Osaka City Promotion Association; broadcast over the community channel of Cable West, J:Com Kansai).

Designing and producing a cultural information website (log osaka web magazine <www.log-osaka.jp>).

Documenting projects in the Namura Art Meeting '04-'34, vol.00 and vol.01. From this opportunity, [recip](http://www.recip.jp) established the Project Scanner Program [psp], which consists of researchers, designers, programmers, working people, and students. This unit executes documentation, research, and reporting on how various cultural movements came into operation.

Julio Castro (Tercerunquinto)

Tercerunquinto started in 1996 at the Visual Arts School of Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León. Since 1998, the group has had three permanent members: Julio Castro, Gabriel Cázares, and Rolando Flores. Under this scheme Tercerunquinto has developed works that insert themselves in both private and public spaces; the projects not only question the very limits of these categories, but also disarticulate all of the elements that support these systems, and dismantle the logical order of their relations. Tercerunquinto also seeks to discuss the boundaries that surround the constitution of any system—architectonic or urban—and explore its personal, social, cultural, or political implications and effects.

In Bf15+Pared (1999), the wall that divided the gallery from the neighbor's property was extended beyond the property's limits, invading both sidewalk and street. Casas-Habitación (2000–2002) is a series of interventions of simple execution, in which the main motivation is to explore concepts of neighborhood, coexistence, and property, among other concepts that relate to the domestic space, while thinking in the social dimension in which the piece is inscribed.

In Escultura pública en la periferia urbana de Monterrey (2003-2005), we built a fifty square meters concrete slab in the outskirts of Monterrey, at a place occupied by squatters. Such areas usually lack any kind of public services, street paving, or even concrete floors in the homes. This architectonic insertion erected itself as a foreign element that highlighted the shortcomings and needs of the space, and generated a participatory dynamic through encouraging collective appropriation.



Discuss the process and value of collaboration.

Clay Rockefeller

Collaboration facilitates, energizes, and enables individuals to move beyond their own capacity. In order to effectively collaborate, I believe it is first necessary to understand and accept one's limitations as an individual. At an early age, I was forced to face my weaknesses within traditional schooling. I repeated third grade, and while this was an incredibly painful experience, I think that having an intimate understanding of my personal limitations has become one of my greatest assets. It was a gradual learning process, but I now know when I need to look to others for assistance.

However, with that said, I do not believe that I live in a country that truly values collaboration. The slogan of the US army is "An Army of One"; we can do better and deserve better. It is necessary to maintain diversity of thought and background with inclusive collaboration.

Questions are another critical ingredient. Yesterday I was speaking to a friend about the tools of collaboration, and he reminded me about the need to listen. One will not know what questions to ask if one does not listen to what is going on around them; furthermore, one will not feel comfortable asking questions in the first place if they think that nobody is going to listen.

Yayoi mentioned that [recip](http://www.recip.jp) focuses on arts as a daily practice. The Steel Yard's desire is to engage people first and foremost in the creative process, and for that to be a vehicle for individuals to explore their creative potential or gain applicable skills that could expand their employment opportunities. We provide the facilities, course curriculum, instructors, and teaching philosophy, but it is up to the participant as to what they walk out with at the end of the program. Hopefully when the class ends they have an expanded sense of what is possible and what they could be capable of, within their professional field or as a creative individual.

All too often we get to a point at which we think we know exactly what is possible or what we are capable of as individuals and stop pushing ourselves further. This is a result of being presented with limited options, most of which seem to be predetermined for the citizens of the US by the socioeconomic class strata as it plays out in our educational systems. We should be teaching the youth not to accept or settle with "enough" when it comes to knowledge, potential, and what they are capable of achieving. A focus on creativity and imagining, as a daily practice, should, as you say, be central to whatever system is developed next.

Yayoi Yoshizawa

We increasingly feel the need for alternative systems for the production and consumption of regional culture and information. These are not public initiatives or private interests, but systems that are needed, explored, discussed, and developed by regional people. We wanted to develop these systems in Osaka (not Osaka-centrism), and formed [recip](http://www.recip.jp).

Clay, your phrases, "creative potential" and "employment opportunities" are also important for us. We would like to produce regional media and projects that in different ways include the processes and possibilities necessary for individuals to develop.

Julio, I think we share your social and material interests.

Julio Castro

For Tercerunquinto, collaboration is about the experience of realizing our projects and the way in which relationships with other people are present in the work. For us, it is important to discuss the materialization of process in relation to the contexts in which the projects are realized. Interaction with people comes as a consequence of developing the projects.

With the concrete slab project, an evangelical church group used the slab as a dining-room for children; every Saturday they had food, medicines, and evangelic messages. A political party sporadically used the slab as a platform from which to make proselytizing speeches; they promised the construction of new institutions and urban infrastructure in exchange for votes. Our thinking is that everyone is taking advantage of the slab. The evangelical group wants a church so they use the slab, and the political party wants votes so uses the slab. For us it is an art project and we take the position of observers but at the same time we are also taking something from that. So there is another kind of language and relationship created between all of us.

Hirofumi Utsumi (recip)

The word collaboration is very simple, but it has a huge variety of meanings. All of us live and act in different local places, so the forms of collaboration with others are also different. But we each use marvelously similar words to express our activities.

Firstly, what is collaboration in our activities? Clay describes it as the need to "maintain diversity of thought and background with inclusive collaboration." Julio describes collaboration as "interactions with people," and Yayoi describes collaboration as "composed of a variety of people." All of us describe collaboration as a network of otherness. I also strongly agree that the charm of culture is in the connections within heterogeneity.

Secondly, what is the aim of such collaboration? In this point too, we use similar terms. For example, Clay said the aim is for individuals to "move beyond their own capacity," that it is a "gradual learning process," and it brings for individuals "an expanded sense of what is possible and what they could be capable of." Julio described the motivation to "explore concepts of neighborhood, coexistence, and property." Stated differently, the value of collaboration is in the "change" produced in the collaborative process.

Thirdly, what is "art" in this collaborative or changing process? Clay described the creative process as "a vehicle for individuals to explore their creative potential," and Julio talked of "another kind of language and relation between all of us." In other words, art is a sort of tool designed for producing our own changes.

I share a very close opinion with all of you. I wrote a paper on cultural rights in which I insisted that a diversity of experience is one of our rights.

As Yayoi said, [recip](http://www.recip.jp) is very new. We face a lot of difficulties: our relationship with the local government, money, and so on. What are the difficulties involved in collaboration within your activities?

Clay Rockefeller

Difficulties include financial limitations and the need to simply, accurately, and succinctly articulate our mission so that it is easily digestible by others (government, business, funders, etc). Another difficulty is trying to work in an organization where the decision-making is horizontal and inclusionary, rather than having a pyramidal organizational hierarchy. Participatory democracy is worth pursuing, but it is a hell of a thing to achieve.

Julio, for a short period of time I ran a space that I tried to keep "neutral" or "common," where anyone from the community could access and use the space as their own. Similarly to the concrete stage that your group facilitated, I did my best to keep the space very basic so that it could easily be transformed. I did not act as a curator of the space, and I did not say what could or could not happen. It was a fairly difficult, laborious, and thankless task, but endlessly educational. This experience helped me to realize that open, free, common, accessible space is the physical embodiment of collaboration and community.

Julio, how is the concrete stage organized, maintained, or facilitated?

Discuss the political imperatives or outcomes of collaboration.

Yayoi Yoshizawa

This is a difficult question, especially regarding the "political." For example, in Japan the influence of mass media is so strong that alternative media or indymedia—such as our cable TV programs or website—is regrettably minor. To be connected with the production of alternative media immediately equates with: "They are politically radical activists." However, at this time, the posture that one is non-critically consuming information through mass media is itself political. But this is not necessarily recognized. In Japan, where so many people think of themselves as "non-political," I think it is scarce for people to recognize their own political intentions or implications. So, I think the individual experience necessarily relates to the political implication, but I hardly experience this process.

Hirofumi Utsumi

Clay, your "space project" is, like Julio's project, interesting as a "common" place where anyone from the community could use the space as their "own." You also said it was a fairly laborious and thankless task. Nevertheless, you felt it was "endlessly educational." This project is rather like the third Osaka Kaleidoscope (2005); the theme is "do art yourself" and the image is "(temporary and ideal) art center." I agree that "open, free, common, accessible space is the physical embodiment of collaboration and community." Materiality is indispensable for our collaborative communication. I would like to know the "practical ways in which individuals in communities can become producers."

Julio Castro

Clay, the concrete slab was a space designed to be public in relation to several contextual circumstances. To work with people in this case was a little bit different from your experience with the space you managed, because we remain as observers. We built it and went away, and return to see what has happened, to avoid interfering with the uses and the activities of the space. Now, the man who owns the slab is in contact with the municipality and has the responsibility of being spokesman of the community. They have since raised several issues. For instance, two months ago they finally got a common water dispenser and this put them in a position where they can use a legal loophole to ask for the ownership of the land. But I don't like to think that the slab caused this change, because they did many things before and after we met them. But a space of gathering made a special circumstance from which he decided to become a spokesman, and in a way a "producer" in terms of social activities.

When we made this project we declared that it was to "invade a state of invasion." Therefore, in our case, it is not only the practices related to art or the social activities of the particular situation, but also the synergy of relating different circumstances to create space and time for dialog.

I have just finished a project that involves education and dialog according to different contextual and local issues. Learning Group includes four people: Rikke Luther & Cecilia Wendt, formerly of N55; Brett Bloom, from Temporary Services; and me, Julio Castro from Tercerunquinto. For over a year we worked in cities in Japan, Sweden, Germany, and US, using garbage and knowledge to make constructions and strategies that can be reproduced by other people and applied within their own local contexts. <www.learning-site.info>

In relation to the issue of producing, I can tell you that the concrete slab project was illegal under city laws. And the project I made with Learning Group is also illegal, since the posters are like a manual to make illegal constructions. But the idea in both of them is not about transgression, it is about dialog.

Clay Rockefeller

As Julio mentioned, it is necessary to be sensitive and acutely aware of the "local." At a very basic level it is necessary to be aware of your terrain and all possible variables throughout the process of "producing." These variables are constantly changing depending on your interactions with all spheres of the community (public and private as well as individual or organization/system).

Production can be motivated by a specific idea or project, or can be a semi-directionless, but simultaneously intense and restless, desire to do something or create change. In the case of the latter, it can be incredibly frustrating because without the idea or the "how" one can feel helpless, but in such cases one must trust that the form of the product will develop as the dialogue continues and evolves.

Through dialogue, new ideas evolve and reveal themselves, as well as new questions regarding the desired outcome and the strategy or process. The desired outcome or product is unique and specific to the surrounding context—the individuals involved, the community, and the environment—and can only be identified by those with an intimate knowledge and understanding of their context.

Julio Castro

Regarding Hirofumi's essay on cultural rights, I can relate the issues to the lack of knowledge of these rights in almost all of Latin America due to economical and social problems (such as poverty and access to education). These rights can also be masked in a demagogical way through massive events.

In Mexico, apart from the major cities, the lack of these types of basic civic rights is implicit in the way that education is directed at other topics. For instance, here in Ciudad Juarez a high school can't be built in an occupied area because the state profiles those people as factory workers.

I understand the sense of the essay, and to discuss the meaning of it is a good way to put it in perspective. But I can't say that these ideas are shared by the people who surround me, because the majority of people seldom think about these issues. And I consider it a risk to leave cultural issues in the hands of the state because that will lead us nowhere and everything will have the character of officialdom.

Hirofumi Utsumi

I would like to conclude by describing [recip](http://www.recip.jp)'s view of the future of our activities: to meet something unfamiliar, to undergo a change in my own sensibility, to produce something new. In other words, not to contest goals in established games but to rethink our current, contingent, and often involuntary life and to open up alternative options for life through communication with otherness. The circumstance in which we can experience such change by producing and enjoying arts is a cultural liberty in local places. In this respect, art NPOs are interesting in that they give us chances to experience our own changes. It may be important to constitute an institution in which NPOs do not have to depend on the excess efforts of individuals and become independent from political grants and economic profit. In the future, we hope that art NPOs will become unexceptional beings in Osaka.

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cultural rights