

Play with Purpose: Relational and Performative Practices in Everyday Living

Our Seminar at Sea – A Shining Success, February 5-10, 2011

We worried about a hurricane when we dared to host a Taos Institute conference in Sarasota, Florida in September, 2008. The weather turned out to be a beautiful dream. This time, we didn't worry about the weather in Galveston, TX and the Gulf of Mexico, and it snowed and iced in Texas on the day before we embarked on our cruise. We had to improvise as travel difficulties ensued for many.



Fortunately between that day and the day we returned it was smooth sailing for our 'seminar-at-sea', **Play with Purpose**. This gathering was dedicated to discovering ways that playful and creative endeavors can facilitate new practices and possibilities in all of our work and lives. We chose a cruise ship to enhance the theme of our program, and we 60 playful souls gave in to the glitzy glitter of our Carnival ship, *Ecstasy*. By day, we held seminars and workshops in quiet restaurants, bars and night spots, which totally changed their character by night.

We share with you here several highlights from our gathering.

A Highlight:

*Participating with the world renowned jazz pianist and OD professor/consultant, Frank Barrett, as he challenged us to think about new ways to envision improvisation in our work and lives, and he challenged himself to create a jazz performance before us, with the help of Jeff Abrams, one of the participants, on flute.





KEYNOTES:

- Ken Gergen - Theories and Thoughts on Play
- Sheila McNamee and Saliha Bava - Performing Life: A Serious Play
- Frank Barrett - Human Activity as Improvisation: Relationships and Responsiveness
- Margi Brown Ash, Saliha Bava, Sylvia London and Sara London - Generative Performative Reflections
- Mary Gergen and Edgardo Morales - The Hidden Fact: How Playing with Metaphors Reframes our World

A Special Highlight:

*Sailing to Progreso, Mexico, where we were escorted to the Instituto Tecnológico Superior de Progreso and welcomed by the Mayor of Progreso, the President of the University, and other dignitaries. Under beautifully decorated big white tents, we engaged in a group “play with purpose” encounter with the students, who had been preparing for months, with the help of our colleagues at the Kanankil Institute, a family therapy center in Merida, Mexico. Some of the students had never left their town of Progreso, and some had never met anyone from out of their town. The multi-cultural, and multi-age interactions, relationships, awarenesses and learnings that happened that day will surely change lives. A delicious Mayan-inspired lunch, local music provided by a student group, and warm, engaging conversations concluded this day which became a highlight for many participants.



Special Moments:

*Creative classes for those interested in or in painting silk fans or a quickie/performative course in Danish.



*A day of rest, reflection, resort, and restoration on Cozumel – a play day, with no other purpose.



*The final day was full of insightful, engaging and challenging ‘playshops’ presented by some of the most creative and innovative people we have met.

PLAYSHOPS:

- Rocio Chaveste - Ancestral Knowledges/Collaborative Practices
- Sally St. George & Dan Wulff - On the Dance Floor
- Dian Marie Hosking - (re)enchanted constructionism: unfolding processes, learning presence, making sacred worlds
- Danielle P. Zandee and Marijke Broekhuijsen - Igniting Change through Artistic Fire
- Tomomi Mikawa - Now I See a Person institute: Community engagement, home on the range with a community of animal co-therapists
- Gertina J van Schalkwyk - Dialogic Possibilities of Person-Music Interactive Systems: A Performative and Experiential Playshop
- Yvonne Sliet - Fear and Courage in the Limelight
- Sue Levin and Diana Carleton- Games for Building Relationships
- Deborah Harbinson - The HA! HA! Spa Laughter Circle

- JP Harris and Sheila Peters - The Implication of Dance
- Ken and Mary Gergen – Relationships as Improvisation
- Margi Ash Brown and Leah Mercer - Home
- W. Ellen Raboin - An inquiry into the meaning of health using human sculpturing
- Anne-Mette Korczynski - Boost Your Danish with Performance
- Sara London - Resident Artist on Board - Explore your creativity and imagination - Painting on Silk

***And at the end, we came together for a final reflections and appreciation circle. It was truly an amazing experience.**



***In the words of some of our participants:**

“The cruise allowed us to take risks, be experimental, and develop skills and relationships in ways, other than words.”

“Reminding us to dare, to try, to enjoy, to consider, to be”

“A very meaningful experience creating a space between strong theory, serious performance, play/joy and leisure. A space of transformation. This conference reminds me of what is important to me. Returning to my job, I talk stronger from this position.”

“A true living example of the name of the conference (Playing with Purpose) and a wonderful expression of social construction lived out on a cruise ship.”

“The day in Progreso was magical. None of us really knew what to expect or how our plans would play out, but it was truly a lived experience of the power of improvisation and presence. The day emerged conversation by conversation and was simply what it was supposed to be. Perfect.”

‘It was a great experience to connect again with like-minded colleagues and to be able to explore the possibilities of play in an alternative environment. Play with purpose has many possibilities, particularly when looking at the personal and interpersonal changes ensuing from engaging in purposeful collaborative interaction. This experience made me retrace my steps a little and I discovered again some of the earlier work I have done. It also encouraged me to work again on the ideas I previously started with. On the other hand, the play concept

fits in well with the work/research I am doing now and I will definitely pursue this some more in future.”

“It is nice to know there is a community with similar thinking to my own that I can be a part of.”

‘I became re-couraged with the idea of play in serious work (and as serious work). It made me re-think my own practices with people.’”

Two of our participants, Dorothy Lander & John Graham-Pole, created a blog about their experience. Take a look:

<http://womenmakingwaves.wordpress.com/2011/02/20/mundo-mejor-making-a-better-place-in-the-yucatan/>

We thank all of our participants for their part in making this Play with Purpose, seminar at sea a meaningful, purposeful, and wonderful experience.

