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Recreating Imbalance

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The hoarding of wealth and power, results in the gross inability of American society to efficiently allocate its abundant resources to generate social capital or well-being for its citizenry. Pretty funny, for a country that deifies the free market. USA, " richest, greatest, country on the planet - the envy of the world." This would be laughable, (and much of the world is laughing), if it weren't so tragic. This mantra repeated endlessly in futile attempt to divert citizenry from experiencing inadequacy of basic, essential services, public health, public transportation, etc. Many of the conditions we find deplorable in other countries, can be found right here. Incarceration rate right up there with China's. Highest infant mortality rate among "developed nations". You don't have to go to Mexico to "not drink the water", (though you could go there for ubiquitous public transportation, affordable medical care or democratic elections). For contaminated water just go to Appalachia, where sewerage in rural areas goes through straight pipes, from toilet, direct to stream. But, then, Appalachia has long been an "extractive economy" where the bountiful natural resources, and the money from their sale, are removed from the region by outside ownership. Same set up as the colonial experience. Don't leave home without it.

Responding to current conditions, I'm creating work that reflects the social imbalance. By recreating it. Recreating it meticulously,

but with one important difference - that the power relations are revealed. This is achieved by producing a seamless recreation of reality, but with normal people playing the elite. An important effect of this participatory recreation of an exclusive reality is that the experience of normal (and in our society normal = disenfranchised) individuals is connected to social experience, without the introduction of personal testimony. Their familiar experiences, feelings and thoughts are put in a larger context of social forces which allows them to be understood in a new way. These insights, and the energy released through them are employed by the performers in navigating the text. The constraints of the text limit them to the words and deeds of the elite that they are playing, which generates a strong subtextual tension. The tension is the manifestation of the cast's felt experience of our societal imbalances. The performance ends with this tension unresolved - hanging palpably in the air. The tension is unresolved - because the political situation that gave rise to it is unresolved.

I'm working on two projects that explore this form. Each project includes a theatrical production and concurrent public symposia on the issues raised by the production. The first project, produced by Los Angeles Poverty Department last January, and to tour in fall '02 is entitled, "Agents and Assets". The text is a hearing transcript from the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, the committee charged with the oversight of the government's intelligence agencies. The allegations in question were made in a 1996 series of articles by journalist Gary Webb in the San Jose Mercury News, that alleged CIA involvement in crack cocaine trafficking into the Los Angeles area. The subject of the March 18, 1998 hearing we use as script, is the CIA Inspector General's report regarding the articles' charges. The Inspector General's findings are that the news allegations were entirely unwarranted. The transcript

of the hearing is the entire script. NOTHING added. (O.k., some subtractions, because edited for time - but with an effort to not change anyone's intent.) Congressmen/women and CIA Inspector General, are played by on the ground veterans of the crack epidemic. The lives of the cast members have been radically impacted by crack, either because formerly addicted or simply because they live in an area, downtown, skid row LA, where crack and the behaviors of crack addicts and dealers is a reality to be reckoned with daily for anyone entering the area.

Project 2 (in development), is the recreation of a "War on poverty" tour through Appalachia. This peripatetic production will retrace the route and reenact the encounters, speeches, site visits etc. of a nationally visible politician and his entourage, from a speech on arrival at the airport of the state capital, to the coal towns and strip mines of Appalachia. Local people will play the public figures. From 60's on, genuinely concerned outsiders have toured the area, making promises, and initiating studies. Meanwhile, the economic situation of Appalachia has deteriorated. The legacy? Bitterness strongly felt in the region now, today. In the performance, these frustrations will be contained and expressed sub-textually in the attitudes of the players. The recreation of a poverty tour provides an opportunity to galvanize discussion and focus attention on the entrenched sources of power that have kept problems from being remedied.

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We are planning to tour "Agents & Assets" beginning fall of 2002. The touring is being structured so that the show be staged just

prior to election days (beginning with the November '02 elections), in states that are expected to have ballot initiatives offering treatment as an alternative to incarceration for non-violent drug offenders. Our intention is to insert the performance, and symposia surrounding the performance, into the calendar so that they directly contribute to the public education effort surrounding the ballot initiatives. The production will be developed as a residency project in each state: traveling with 5 LAPD performers we will recuit the balance of the cast (8) from local people / groups, so that in building the show we will also be building a constituency of concerned citizens / groups for the public symposia. Similarly, as the Appalachian project develops, I will be looking to align public discussions (held in conjunction with the performances) with specific issues and campaigns designed to change the current situation.