Syracuse University

SURFACE

Imagining America | Scholarship in Action

2005

Homeland Insecurities: Teaching and the Intercultural Imagination

John Kuo Wei Tchen
New York University

Follow this and additional works at: https://surface.syr.edu/ia

 Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons

Recommended Citation

Tchen, John Kuo Wei, "Homeland Insecurities: Teaching and the Intercultural Imagination" (2005). *Imagining America*. 2.
https://surface.syr.edu/ia/2

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Scholarship in Action at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Imagining America by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.

Imagining America

Homeland Insecurities:

Teaching and the Intercultural Imagination

John Kuo Wei Tchen

Foreseeable Futures #5

Position Papers from:

Imagining America:
Artists and Scholars in Public Life

Foreseeable Futures

Dear Reader,

I am delighted to announce the publication of Foreseeable Futures #5, John Kuo Wei Tchen's *Homeland Insecurities: Teaching and the Intercultural Imagination.* It represents our ongoing commitment to intercultural teaching and scholarship, rooted in partnerships with diverse communities on and off campus. We urge you to share this provocative essay with faculty and staff colleagues, community partners, and students.

Tchen, co-founder of the Museum of Chinese in the Americas in lower Manhattan and a faculty member at New York University, builds directly on last year's Foreseeable Futures, George Sanchez's analysis of the challenges of campus engagement, educational access, and intercultural projects in Los Angeles.

In this paper, originally given as the keynote address for our 2005 conference at Rutgers University, Tchen brings three new strands to the Foreseeable Futures series:

• a passionate focus on undergraduate education and student mentoring, rooted in commitments to New York's immigrant communities;

• a keen sense of the challenge posed to higher education by the global importance of Asia (China in particular) and by non-Eurocentric forms of knowledge; and

• a deep wisdom about the power of dialogue and "co-naming," grounded in Tchen's career-long work with community museums, grassroots archives, and the public recovery of "underground" stories, places, and objects.

This essay brings to life three imagined students, who reflect the experiences of many individual students. On behalf of "Arlan," "Arlene," and "Alexandra," Tchen asks: "What must we be doing in our classrooms?" and "What must we be doing in our communities?"

From the dilemmas faced by these students, Tchen draws lessons for higher education. He envisions a university that adopts "an intercultural version of Ernest Boyer's recommended tenure reforms"; partners with communities "nearby and beyond"; supports projects that combine coursework, service-learning, and study abroad; and offers "language curricula enlivened by engagements with language speakers in living communities." Tchen challenges us to re-think our curricula and our institutional responsibilities to our students.

I hope that you will join the dialogic community that Jack Tchen honors here and take part in the work of Imagining America. Please visit our website at www.ia.umich.edu.

Julie Ellison
Director

Photo courtesy of New York University Gallatin School of Individualized Study

John Kuo Wei Tchen

John Kuo Wei (Jack) Tchen is the founding director of the A/P/A (Asian/Pacific/American) Studies Program and Institute at New York University. He is an Associate Professor of the Gallatin School for Individualized Study and the History Department of the Faculty of Arts & Sciences. His research and writings address identity, place, trans-local experience, and cultural citizenship. Dr. Tchen's most recent book is the award-winning **New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882** (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). He has also authored **Genthe's Photographs of San Francisco's Old Chinatown** (1984), and edited and introduced Paul C. P. Siu's classic study **The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation** (1987). He is currently working on multiple projects: a book recognizing the shared migrant and public culture of New York City; a multi-media website mapping Asians in NYC, designed by architect/sculptor Maya Lin; and curating the exhibit "Archivist of the 'Yellow Peril': Yoshio Kishi Collecting for a New America," which will form the core of a major research collection and community archive at the NYU Bobst Library.

In 1980, Tchen and Charles Lai co-founded the Museum of Chinese in the Americas, which has documented the 160-year-long history of Chinese New Yorkers. Tchen spearheaded the first Asian/Pacific American office at the Smithsonian Institution, and served on the Smithsonian Council, on the Blue Ribbon Commission at the National Museum of American History, and as chair of the Advisory Committee of the Center for Folklife and Cultural Studies. Dr. Tchen was awarded the Charles S. Frankel Prize from the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1991 and received the City of New York Mayor's Award of Honor for Arts and Culture in 1993. In 1999, Tchen was named one of A Magazine's "A 100 List" of the most influential Asian Americans in the past decade.

Future Actions

Homeland Insecurities: Teaching and the Intercultural Imagination

John Kuo Wei Tchen

We begin, as we can only do, with the present moment.

Just as I thought I was ready to return to what I was working on before 9/11, the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina hit and overwhelmed us all. Katrina exposed how, in fact and in spirit, we have become less secure since 9/11. The Cold War feels like ages ago. We are all aged and frayed by this new "War on Terror." We discover our State cannot afford both warfare and emergency-aid welfare. Our national debt is soaring, to be paid by our children and future generations. Suddenly, China is the world's economic superpower, not we, and Japan and China have become the bankers of the United States' economy. We could go on with our anxieties about outsourcing to India, starvation in Niger, and the devastating tsunami in the Indian Ocean rim, ice caps melting due to global warming and our increasingly hot summers…*ad infinitum.*

Of all of these events, what distracts us? What remains in the public eye? We live now in a moment of geo-political-economic-military brinksmanship, punctuated by man-made and natural disasters. Are "we the people" truly debating these issues and making meaningful decisions about our futures and our pocketbooks?

When media and public attention turn elsewhere, I try to return to what I imagine are my primary responsibilities. Just as we hope to return to the core of our work as educators and activists, creators and critics, crisis erupts and distracts us again. As engaged scholars and artists, we must respond in the spaces we make in the classroom, in our communities, and in public.

I have now worked as both an academic and public scholar. My heart is not with academia but rather with community-based scholarship. American academia up until the 1950s Civil Rights movement barely recognized the importance of the stories of the majority

of its people—let alone groups that have been marginalized and excluded. Most of us, for example, did not learn and still do not know that Chinese immigrants were effectively excluded from entering the U.S. until 1968. This fact shocks most Americans. Surely it is not true of the land of the free and the brave. Perhaps it is not true for the imagined U.S. nation, but it is true in our actual history. To redress these egregious absences of knowledge, I have sought to build the foundations of a field of study and to change public awareness of who we are as Americans. Although I frame the following comments in autobiographical terms, I do so in the same spirit as my esteemed colleague George Sanchez of the University of Southern California in his contribution to Imagining America's Foreseeable Futures, "Crossing Figueroa: The Tangled Web of Diversity and Democracy" (2005). Indeed, I build on his comments about the promise and disappointments of our academic institutions—and the difference that university-community collaborations can make.

Back in 1979-1980, I co-founded with Charles Lai what is now called the Museum of Chinese in the Americas based in lower Manhattan. Each radio docudrama, each exhibit, each publication that we produced and continue to produce required our cultivating a trusting relationship with the people who lived and survived the experiences we sought to document. Trust is the operative word here. Why should a laundry operator, for example, trust outsiders who have made Chinese New Yorkers forever the "other" and on the margins of the life of the city? The stories we recorded, the photographs and objects they gave us, combined with historical research, have formed an archive and a history of a community previously not considered important (Tchen, 1990). Building collections and archives that tell the neglected, forgotten, and underground stories has been critical to creating a presence for subjugated experiences (Tchen, 2002). Much of my time in the past few decades has been spent fighting for the funding needed to create spaces for such archival presences—and building archives that provide the affirmative evidence that these lives and stories matter.

And yet, there is still a curious disconnect. While university presidents and politicians claim support for diversity in a globalizing world, outdated paradigms of knowledge

severely limited by Eurocentric biases persistently dominate institutional structures and life. Our work, therefore, necessarily must also work "along the grain" of institutional histories and practices. How have practices of exclusion and marginalization been perpetrated in the bone and sinew of our institutions of higher learning, both the most elite and the most populist? For example, China and New York Chinatown, have been fixtures, constituting a formative and familiar place, in the imagination of all New Yorkers and visitors since Gotham's founding fathers and mothers. "China" has been crucial to the very formulation of America's political culture, as has slavery, historically intertwined with Lockean values of citizenship and property. Yet, how these "others" also form the core identity of being American has not been a part of our core curriculum.

In the 1990s, I thought we were making progress on formulating this more complex and accurate story of American national identity. For the previous twenty years, I had been working with the extraordinary filmmaker Andrea Simon, as part of the National Endowment for the Humanities'"National Conversation" initiative of Chairman Sheldon Hackney. Our goal was to create multiple local dialogues exploring the deep memories and honest feelings of the promise and realities of being Americans. Caught in the crosshairs of the neoconservative assaults, NEH and our film project "Talk to Me: Americans in Conversation" (1996) became part of "the culture wars." Our strategy was to create a tool for engaged local conversations about experience, memory, and regionalism in the making of Americans. The excellent organizations, Study Circles, working in grassroots adult education, and Facing History and Ourselves, working with K-12 teachers, widely disseminated the 60-minute documentary, and it is still used locally today. But this effort at "honest talk" was soon eclipsed by the attacks against President Clinton, George W. Bush's election, and the permanent shifting of public dialogues caused by the events of 9/11.

My passion and intellectual roots are grounded in the public cultures of the city, working with independent grassroots writers, musicians, poets, curators, filmmakers, activists, and regular people. I've been listening

to, documenting, and theorizing the ways in which collaborative dialogues and analysis between community-based organizations and major institutions, such as museums and universities, can work for social justice and greater freedoms. I also bridle against forms of normative correctness—especially from the mainstream—that get in the way of addressing human needs and problems. Learning from the expertise of lived experience necessitates our engaging, especially with minoritized and marginalized knowledges. To me, the key to being collaborative is to be dialogue-driven, to earn trust and sustain engagements.

The word dialogue is now used everywhere. We have university presidents dialoguing with students, dialoguing with staff, dialoguing with unions, and dialoguing with faculty. But to what actual effect? Engagement and dialogue, for us, must be something deeper, sustained, and systemic. It cannot simply be authoritarianism from on high, below, or even sideways. It must be a mutual meaning-making process that feeds the soul and clarifies choices we must make. It must be short-term, long-term, and medium-term. It must be both individual and collective. It must be resonant and "true" for the moment.

Dialogue is about the core meaning of self-ownership. It's not about owning others or material goods. It is about owning the capacity to “know thyself” in relation to the worlds around us. It is about telling and retelling, performing and re-performing our own stories in the deepest storytelling traditions of our cultures, new and old.

What roles do we play as engaged, intercultural scholars and artists privileged to work in the space between universities and publics? How can we create trusted spaces for inspiring visions and practices of intercultural equity, justice, and freedom? How can we foster liberatory education?

I want to tell some New York City stories that for me, address the meanings of this present moment. Stories that suggest how dialogue can be deepened with collaborative partnerships of meaning-making. Stories that help us clarify and think between crises.

We begin, as we must, with the present.

What do we do with our students?
In 1980, the feminist philosopher Naomi Scheman wrote about the figure of "Alice," and how women’s emotions, particularly anger, were not an isolated, individual or gendered “problem” but an important source of critical social knowledge. "The personal is political" was and still is a powerful, compact statement. We can still use personal emotion and knowledge as a way of thinking about our experience, as a socially-engaged process of story-telling. The following individual profiles, which we might think of as Alice’s children, are composites of students I've worked with at CUNY, NYU, and in Chinatown.

New York, 2006. Alice, now divorced and living in Montclair, New Jersey, has raised a son, Arlan. Alice is joined here by Alicia, from the Dominican Republic, and Ai Ling, from Guangzhou via Hong Kong and Vancouver, and their daughters. They each occupy distinctive standpoints and embody distinctive knowledges (Tchen, 2006).

Alicia can be labeled Afro-Caribbean. She lives in my neighborhood, Sunset Park, Brooklyn (pan-Latino, Spanish-Caribbean, Arab, Cantonese, and ethnically white) and struggles with part-time hospital work, attending Hunter College's School of Social Work. She’s also trying to get her daughter Arlene into college. Younger than Alice, Alicia works out her issues by talking with her sisters and her colleagues at the Lutheran Hospital. I know it can be a stereotype, but Alicia also loves to cool out by dancing. "Mad Hot Ballroom" (2005) is her favorite film.

Ai Ling lives in an apartment in Jackson Heights, Queens. She got laid off from her Chinatown sewing factory job after 9/11, and is now a home attendant taking care of an elderly Jewish man. He speaks Yiddish-accented English to her, and she speaks Cantonese-inflected New Yorkese. Ai Ling also takes care of her elderly mother and father who are living with her, her husband, and their children. Ai Ling talks about her

Personal/Political

stresses when she can, but she doesn't see her garment factory friends much anymore. Alexandra, Ai Ling's beloved daughter, is studying economics at SUNY Binghamton, and although she is interested in creative writing, feels pressure from her mother to attend a good business school.

These women and their children represent the new demographic realities of New York. In the current mix of over eight million New Yorkers, white flight has been outweighed by immigrants from what can be still called the "Third World"—especially those places of U.S. investment and involvement. In the calcified white and black politics of New York, despite the growing plurality of Latinos and Asians and the neighborhoods they live in, these “new” Americans do not yet count. And too many universities don't yet recognize this shift in their curriculum or in their description of being "a private university in the public interest." For example, it took the City College of New York, decades of fights to change a curriculum centered on Western Civilization and Christian traditions (Gorelick, 1981). Again, the questions I pose take off from those of George Sanchez:

• What must we be doing in our classrooms?
• What must we be doing in these communities?
• How can we build a coalition of shared meanings across positional difference?
• How can universities and communities cobble together spaces to prepare our youth for the new New York, in this particular moment of national insecurity and anxiety?

Short answer. We do our best. We work with limited time and limited resources. We do what we can.

Long answer. Within limited parameters, we try to push the possibilities and limits ofAlice’s, Alicia’s, and Ai Ling’s children. As educators, artists, and activists, we work with them to theorize their own experiences in ways that help them to empower themselves through constructive action. I offer this challenge also as a means for us to theorize our own practices and to find a language to talk about what we do, its possibilities and limits. These three children, now students in our universities and colleges, exemplify the potential of an intercultural imagination and intellect, a potential we must teach ourselves to address.

How have practices of exclusion and marginalization been perpetrated in the bone and sinew of our institutions of higher learning?

Arlan, Alice’s son, now attends NYU's Gallatin School for Individualized Study. His dad worked in the World Trade Center but just made it out before the first building collapsed. The dad is traumatized and refuses to return to lower Manhattan. His mom, Alice, became one of the New Jersey women pushing for the establishment of the 9/11 Commission to investigate the attacks, including the extent of relevant information possessed by law enforcement and government agencies. Feeling alone and a bit lost, Arlan rejects Jersey suburban culture and takes every course he can at NYU, in order to become part of something larger. He lives in a run-down closet of an apartment in the Lower East Side, for which his parents pay $1,500 per month. He's getting a few tattoos and starting to make late night forays tagging buildings with graffiti.

Arlene, Alicia’s daughter, has begun her studies at Hunter College and is reading Anzaldua's *Borderlands.* She admits to loving Ricky Martin, especially his Spanish songs. Like her mom, Arlene’s favorite film is "Mad Hot Ballroom," where the winning team consists of Dominicans dancing the meringue. She goes "back" to the Dominican Republic every summer. Almost left behind in eighth grade because of the high stakes testing of "No Child Left Behind," she's become very aware of her vulnerability. She doesn't believe written tests quite capture what she understands about the world. She lives at home and works part-time to contribute to the skyrocketing rents that even affect Sunset Park. Her sister and mother both have asthma, and she recently joined UPROSE (United Puerto Rican Organization of Sunset Park), a Puerto Rican social service agency's youth group researching and protesting environmental racism. They are investigating the pollution from the thousands of rubber tire particles floating down into their apartments from cars, SUVs, and trucks traversing the 1940s Gowanus Expressway, built by Robert Moses, which takes city commuters out to the suburbs.

Alexandra, Ai Ling’s daughter, desperately wants more freedom from her mom and less stress and responsibility. She's majoring in economics and reading assigned books that anger her. Proud of being Chinese and loving Canto-pop and Wong Kar Wai, she absolutely disagrees with Samuel P. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*

(1996). She's also worried about how hard her mother works and about her getting sick without health insurance. Ideally, she wants to get a high-paying job so she can contribute to the household in Queens and start paying off some loans. More than anything, however, her private passion is to write a coming-of-age story about a Hong Kong girl growing up in several different countries—a composite of her own experiences and those of her friends. Eating and cooking are her favorite pastimes.

Each has a different reaction to this moment of national insecurity:

Alexandra followed *Business Week's* coverage of "The China Price." She's very concerned about the U.S. government construing China as an economic rival and a military opponent.

Arlene is reminded of the hurricane that she survived. It was late August when Hugo swept through the Dominican Republic, and she saw a child of a poor family on the next block not getting medical treatment and dying. Watching Katrina has brought it all back.

Arlan is still dealing with his family's feeling of betrayal by the failure of the FBI and CIA. And he wants to find something about New York City's past that he feels relates to his family's past, a past before the suburbs he grew up in.

As mentors to Alexandra, Arlene, and Arlan, what would you do? How would you help to sort out their thoughts, experiences, and dilemmas? What is your way to help them feel less cognitively alienated? How would you help them help themselves and the communities they most identify with?

Traditional academics might perceive these questions as the domain of student services. Alienation? Cognitive floundering? Certainly these are not things academics usually concern themselves with. But for me they are at the heart of our dialogues with students. If we take their experiences and insights seriously, we must engage with them in fuller ways. The future of progressive higher

education lies with such questions. We each have our own ideas about how we might engage more fully with our students. Here are my thoughts for these young adults.

Arlan, in my analysis, is spatially and temporally disoriented. The Katrina crisis reminded him and his family all the more of the 9/11 crisis. The family's trauma with the collapse of the World Trade Center only added to his feeling of being displaced in suburbia. He desperately wants to find a meaningful connection with some concrete location in Manhattan, but the family's past has been effectively deracinated. Refusing the traditional roles of her Jewish and Italian mother and grandmothers, Alice actively rejected the family stories and has not been able to answer Arlan's questions about where the family once lived in the Lower East Side. The questions he asks at The Gallatin School have to do with finding a sense of "home." One professor recommends Karen Brodkin Sach's book *How Jews Became White Folks* (1998), exploring the post-WWII entré of returning Jewish-American GIs into a changed racialized terrain. As veterans they could take advantage of the GI Bill and FHA loans. They had the option to move, via Robert Moses' highways, indeed the one Arlene lives under, out to the suburbs and become "white." The California Newsreel 2004 documentary "Race: The Power of an Illusion" furthermore helped him see how his experience had been tied to federal policies and banks'"redlining." Part of Arlan's response to these discoveries is to dive headlong into Jewish Lower East Side writers in order to connect to this past.

At Hunter College, Arlene has become very aware of growing up in what is seen as a poor, immigrant, Spanish-speaking, Catholic neighborhood. The media rumors about New Orleans "looters" and shootings angered her deeply. She has nightmares of her home in Sunset Park flooding and how the City's "evacuation plan" requires escaping from Brooklyn, the southern tip of Long Island, over the Verrazano Bridge to Staten Island and over the Goethals' bridge to New Jersey. The family doesn't have a car and what good will it do anyways? One regularly-occurring nightmare looks like the scene in George Romero's classic zombie flick "Land of the Dead" (2005), in which the survivors must swim

across a huge body of dirty water. Would she get across? Where was her mom? Was she a survivor, or was she one of the living dead?

At UPROSE, Arlene talks to friends about her nightmare. They all decide they are the zombies who want to take back the city from Trump-like mogul Dennis Hopper, who has created a luxury high-rise only for those with enough money. After Anzaldua's *Borderlands*, she reads Robert Caro's *The Power Broker* about Robert Moses' arrogant insistence on building the Gowanus Expressway over the heart of Sunset Park's former commercial district, Third Avenue. She also sees Stephanie Black's "Life and Debt" (2001, based on Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*) about the "Free Economic Zone" created in the island of Jamaica, promising to hire local women to work in the garment factories and then replacing them with Chinese women. She thinks about her neighborhood and the Chinese friends she grew up with. Were their mothers taking Latinas' jobs? What about the proposed Wal-Mart in the Sunset Park Industrial Park? What about those millions of Chinese women working in giant factories producing goods for Wal-Mart?

Alexandra is also concerned about Wal-Mart, Chinese women seamstresses, and poverty but from a different angle. She's concerned about the scapegoating Americans have been indulging in towards China. She doesn't like the top-down power of the Chinese Communist Party government. But simultaneously, she is proud, as her family is, of how China has finally become a strong country. The humiliation of British-imposed opium and the Opium Wars over 160 years ago is still a matter her father talks about. She doesn't like how the cities are being developed and the problems that still exist in the countryside, especially the small village her family comes from. She doesn't like how China is creating an automobile-oriented and oil-dependent industrialization strategy. But at the same time, she sees that the city of Canton is bustling and speeding into the 21st century. Suddenly New York City feels slow and decaying.

At Binghamton, she rejects Huntington's *Clash* ideas and finds the work of Italian political economist Giovanni Arrighi, a faculty member at Binghamton, far more interesting. He writes about the rise of China, Japan, and Southeast Asia in relation to the U.S. in a far more complex way. Looking at the long cycles of seven centuries of capitalist development in Holland, Great Britain, the U.S., and now East Asia, this author poses the dilemma of the current moment for her in far more convincing ways.

These composites of my former students are also a part of me; in them is a bit of my background and some of the books that have been important for my scholarship and activist work. I ask again, "What would you have done with these young adults? What could 'public engagement and intercultural practice'entail in your classroom?"

A Pedagogy for the Future

To engage truly with these students, we must cultivate a reflexive pedagogy of process, of content, and of action. Each of these contributes to formulating the individual's standpoint and generative thematics.

Process: We need to create trusted dialogic spaces. The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire is foundational here. Students searching for what we can still call "progressive" solutions to their own lives and for justice and freedom need what Sara Evans and Harry Boyte conceptualized as "free spaces." Within such social "rooms of their own," they need to have support in order to generate their own personal/political questions and projects. They need to "name" their own questions and be as free as possible to experiment with different formulations and different pathways. They need to "own" their meaning-making process and develop the skills to pursue this activity. Our job as mentors, in or out of the academy, is to curate the environment, to curate the space that maximizes this self-discovery process. Here it is not about content, it is about the process. It is also about listening and understanding intercultural diversity. And, as performance studies scholars understand, this is not simply about words—it is carving out free spaces to perform one's urgent, passionate questions. Rather than thinking that some of our mentees are simply not articulate nor deserving of our attention, I would reverse this formulation. Are we capable enough participant observers and

engaged mentors to pick up what they are communicating? Can we understand their performative and embodied intelligences?

Content: Once they are generating questions, we need to work with them in finding the best analytical frames that can further deepen and challenge their understandings. This typically happens through their personal efforts and through happenstance. Those feeling comfortable with a strictly academic environment probably need less help in their search. But why should Alexandra's intellectual path be determined by whether she happens to find Arrighi's book? Why should Arlene's Dominican Republic background not also be part of what she can read about and study? Arlan has the most supportive opportunities to explore and evaluate where to go next, but The Gallatin School of Individualized Study is heavily based on the “Great Books” and other texts. He's looking for something far more than the printed page. Ideally, he also wants his classes or his advisor to help him navigate his experiences in Manhattan. Here, class, gender, ethnicity, racialization, and issues of sufficient resources are critical. For many minoritized groups, the archives and materials for them to work with are simply absent or underdeveloped. Finding a mentor is hit or miss. Students need deeply informed and committed scholars and mentors who have access to a wide range of resources and who can help students find what they need. Perhaps the pedagogy of content is not as important as the pedagogy of problem-solving and accessing the right resources. But ultimately, we all know, the correct framing of an issue and links to substantive content can make all the difference.

Leaving Alexandra unresolved about Huntington's "clash of civilizations" or Arlan about memory and place can easily be permanent blocks to knowledge. Perhaps most important for them is to learn how boundaries and relationships between “us” and “them” are constructed and how they shift over time. Such identifications operate deeply and use all our senses and sensibilities. Configurations of looking, sounding, and smelling right are all locally, regionally, and nationally organized to help us detect who is not quite "us." Arlene and

Alexandra especially have to struggle with these identifications because they speak English with New York immigrant accents and come from families who have limited access to full cultural and political citizenship in the U.S. national project (a concept we owe to Renato Rosaldo). Though technically citizens, most dominant culture-identified U.S. citizens would not consider them "Americans."

This is far more than a matter of acculturating and "passing." It is a foundational matter of whether we can truly understand and communicate across historical and cultural differences. Or is our "openness" overly intellectualized? What foods we think taste and smell "disgusting" is perhaps one telltale indicator of intercultural flexibility and insight, what we might call the “durian test.” If we cannot recognize these judgments as being linked to cultural differences, then we cannot begin to recognize different cultural performative intelligences. The homespun Cantonese dishes that Alexandra loves reveal centuries-long folk intelligence about a way of life. The design of the wok; the heat of the stove; democratic access to fresh, high quality food. The dishes tell stories about a people and their intellectual traditions.

In contrast, the deracination process that Arlan's family has gone through has acculturated him to a mainstream corporate-inflected "American" foodway. Or, as one of my Malaysian-Chinese students, whose father owns a restaurant, says: "They eat broccoli with cheese sauce! Not that there is anything wrong with that." How do we teach respect and recognition of multiple intelligences and multiple cultural expressions? And while acknowledging these multiple embodied knowledges, how can we make good and politically-wise, everyday judgments?

From my vantage point, Eurocentrism is one of the central causes of our lack of insight. The organization and frames of knowledge, the methods and the classification systems of the “Atlantic World” are very real. Industrialism, modernity, colonialism, and enslavement need to continue to be studied. But are our universities prepared to deal with Asian/Pacific world differences? Are we preparing our students? Just as new models of advanced learning had to emerge in revolutionary

The refinement of human agency in a world full of injustice and servitude should be a central subject for us to explore systematically and rigorously. This is the pedagogy of human praxis.

America after 1776, so new institutions of knowledge must emerge with the rise of the Asia/Pacific. Are we ready? No. Are we close to ready? No. Teaching a critical mass of competent Asian/Pacific language speakers, for example, takes decades. And in order to do so, we must have the vision and will to foster, hire, and sustain a critical mass of faculty with the requisite expertise.

Can Arlan, Arlene, and Alexandra access non-Eurocentric learning? Yes, in fragments here and there, especially if they read books, see films, and immerse themselves in a range of performances from other countries. Can the curriculum be reoriented? Yes, of course. Can we make informed judgments across historical-cultural differences without being unjust? Yes, of course.

What we need now is a clear, singular vision of a post-Eurocentric world of knowing and meaning-making—a vision that African-American anthropologist John Gwaltney referred to as a poly-ocular perspective (Gwaltney, 1981). I believe that the Western Enlightenment was and is important. But so have been the movements for enlightenment—not only defined as books, but as embodied and performative intelligences—in other cultures at other times. Not knowing about them impoverishes our ability to engage honestly and fairly with global publics. We need to decolonize our knowledge, and here are some suggestions about how to do that.

Action: A pedagogy that explores the relationship between theory and practice is sorely needed. Book learning within six institutional walls, floors, and ceilings has its place but is also confining, especially when you have New York City surrounding your university. What judgments and decisions do we make between knowing and acting upon our knowledge? How are practices theorized in everyday life? How do minoritized groups also develop a DuBoisean "double consciousness" about how they view the world from their cultural perspective and an awareness of how they are viewed by the dominant culture? What are the more effective and strategic actions to take? What did people facing similar situations in the past do? What does one do with unresolved longings or anger? Is action out of anger effective? If

Action

so, how so, and in what circumstances? Having taken actions, what can be learned and improved? The refinement of human agency in a world full of injustice and servitude should be a central subject for us to explore systematically and rigorously. This is the pedagogy of human praxis.

I present process, content, and action linearly, but all along recognize that they are necessarily intertwined, pedagogic processes. The first “free spaces” to feel, talk, and rethink may have to give way to other spaces that are more hospitable to the actions our young adults want to take. Actions often lead to dead ends and more questions. Questions lead to more readings, more thinking, more analysis. This active learning process, what John Dewey called “learning by doing,” was, in his mind, foundational to a democracy (Dewey, 1938).

The more we become aware of our particular standpoints, the better able we are to recognize and perceive the intelligence of another standpoint. All our examinations are marked by where we are at this moment and how we define that moment, how we infuse it with informed meanings. This meaning-infused moment affects how we view certain parts of “the past” and project into some future time and place. The “best and the brightest” intercultural intelligentsia will be more likely to address local issues in the here and now, linked with other local issues, in other heres and nows. This intercultural imagination is a combination of the historical imagination and the cultural geographic imagination. Yet this intelligence of poly-cultural historical comparison is not yet valued in our narrowly-bound curricula and imaginations.

Clearly, our colleges and universities can and do play a major role in maximizing the possibilities for our trio of “the best and the brightest.” Colleges and universities serve both as social places where they might meet and interact as well as intercultural and cross-cultural sites in which learning communities and individual growth can flourish. And by partnering with community-based organizations, universities can engage with the diversity of their new locations and extension sites. If they truly respect their partners, they will not view themselves as

The "best and the brightest" intercultural intelligentsia will be more likely to address local issues in the here and now, linked with other local issues, in other heres and nows.

missionaries, but as collaborators both dialoguing about and analyzing mutual needs and possibilities. Can our colleges and universities do better? Certainly. Can they reinvent themselves to be future oriented? Theoretically, of course. But let's think concretely.

Central to transforming our universities is our way of thinking about assets and resources. Rather than placing the most value on national rankings, star faculty, and fancy facilities, the core of cultivating intercultural imaginations and knowledges is the ongoing engaged relationships among faculty, students, and community members. How can we tap into the energy and insights of Arlan, Arlene, and Alexandra before, during, and after undergraduate work? Their engagements with the local, the national, and the global via their families, lives, and work is a keystone for building future-oriented collaborations. What spaces within universities must we create to maximize the chances for them to become active knowledge-makers in their own education?

Ideally, we work in an enlightened future-oriented university where the administrative and intellectual leadership team adopts an intercultural version of Ernest Boyer's recommended tenure reforms, and the campus is interlinked with a network of communities nearby and beyond. Staff, faculty, student, and community-learning teams collaborate on short-term, medium-term, and long-range projects that integrate core coursework, service-learning, and study abroad. The immense resources of universities and colleges are opened up in a variety of ways for networks of these collaborators from nearby communities and afar. Language curricula are enlivened by engagements with language speakers in living communities and networks. In a place like lower Manhattan, the basics of wellness/health, immigrant/working class education, and legal/immigration services become *loci* in which the arts, humanities, social sciences, sciences come together. Community-based museums, social services, arts organizations, houses of worship, and more become partners with the university. The Deweyian ideal of learning by doing and the Freirian ideal of situated knowledges anchors the theory and practice processes.

What do we need for this? Great libraries, studios, and labs are a must. But do we need as much as our development offices dream up to attract wealthy donors? Incessant growth is a non-productive, obsessive/compulsive disorder. The most important asset is the drive to maximize enriched, collaborative-learning relationships. Let's build organizations that keep this mission as its heart, soul, and mind.

But of course, most of us are saddled with far less responsive institutional arrangements. What do we do? What can be described as "working the margins" (the less-controlled spaces of the institution) is a long and respectable strategy. The core vision of what is most important stays the same. Isolated, individual faculty members need to find others who share in those values; even one other co-conspirator can make all the difference. We need to reach out beyond our own institutions to find other faculty collaborators.

Naming what we do and sharing that naming process with our collaborators is crucial. The title for our MoCA exhibition of 1984, for example, "The Eight Pound Livelihood" came from Chinese hand-laundry workers themselves and captured the experience best (MacFadyen, 1983). After decades of staging the annual American Folklife Festival on the Washington D.C. Mall, Smithsonian's Richard Kurin used the term "cultural broker" to delineate the role scholar-festival organizers played between cultural practitioners and festival attendees (Kurin, 1997). Robin Bernstein, dynamic eight-year Executive Director of the 117 year-old Educational Alliance in the lower east side, is developing a new strategy of "co-locationality" where young professional gentrifiers will be intermingled into their programs with traditional constituents of immigrants and the poor. Deacon Edgar Hopper's "Slave Galleries" Project at St. Augustine's Church has sought to "bridge" the legacy of African-American enslavement in NYC with the growing Chinese community living nearby. How, Deacon Hopper wonders, can we get the Chinese community to care about the living history of African-American New Yorkers and vice-versa (Atlas and Korza, 2005)? Public and academic scholar Michael Frisch coined the term "shared authority" to describe the two-way process oral

Network

historians and other culture workers necessarily engage in (Frisch, 1990). We need to place the collaborative dialogic process at the center of our intercultural work with all its messiness and difficulty. We cannot mistake the academic writing about that work as the work itself.

This creative co-naming activity is central to the reflexive-thinking process all community activists and organizations go through. It needs to be central to the university-community collaborative intellectual mission. What are the ways this co-naming process can happen? Projects responding to core needs of communities and networks are best worked out with deep, collaborative relationships. At NYU's A/P/A (Asian/Pacific/American) Institute, a number of such projects have been generated over our first ten years—each involving an Arlan, Arlene, and Alexandra, their mothers, and their social networks. I'll offer a few examples, but these are only meant to offer a way of reflecting on and conceptualizing your own projects for your time and your place.

• Guided by the vision of Angel Velasco Shaw, we collaborated for three years with a network of Filipina/o and Filipina/o American writers, activists, filmmakers, artists, and scholars, culminating in the reader *Vestiges of War: The Philippine-American War and the Aftermath of an Imperial Dream, 1899-1999* (2003). The reader co-edited by Luis Francia and Shaw commemorates the ongoing significance of the U.S. occupation of the Philippines one hundred years later. It was designed and written for Filipina/o thinkers and doers in the Philippines and in the diaspora, and for all those concerned about the erasure of the Philippines and the war from U.S. history and public awareness. The war in Vietnam and the occupation of Iraq, our systemic misunderstandings, anti-imperialist Americans, and much more are provided in a historical context Americans and Filipino/as are mostly unaware of.

• APAYA (Asian Pacific American Youth in Action) is a program run by and for youth in the metro region. Including both public and independent school students, it sponsors an annual spring conference organized by a leadership group that meets year-round. Led by Sheelagh Cabalda and Risa Morimoto, and moving into its fourteenth year, former APAYA youth have becoming leading practitioners and activists in the region and in the U.S.

We need to place the collaborative dialogic process at the center of our intercultural work with all its messiness and difficulty. We cannot mistake the academic writing about that work as the work itself.

• My "Chinatown and the American Imagination" students of Fall 2005 created a website expressly designed for immigrant youth who often do not have access to stories about applying to college. After reading, interviewing, and discussing the legacy of the Chinese Exclusion Act on Chinatown today, students worked in teams to create both a practical advice section and a historical context section. Their strengths were matched with the knowledge of the community interviewee collaborators to co-author the site. Focus groups with Chinatown youth organizations are currently being conducted. "Getting In" will be online in late Fall 2006 and accessible via the A/P/A NYU website.

• We've raised funds to bring a major collection of over ten thousand "Asian Americana" works to the NYU's rare books library. Yoshio Kishi, film editor and Japanese New Yorker, painstakingly assembled this collection over forty years. Included are books, pamphlets, sheet music, pulps, trade cards, toys, and films that have typified the ways Asians and Asian/Pacific Americans have been represented in the dominant culture. Also included are flyers, chapbooks, magazines, poems, artwork, and other counter-images challenging systemic misrepresentations.

Learning from these projects, we have tried to give voice to an archive of experience honed by an analytic examination typically ignored and marginalized in mainstream American academia, culture, and political life. Within each project are larger Asian/Pacific contexts, connections, and challenges. We are all too aware of how much infrastructural building is still needed, but the most severe limitation to our work is the Eurocentrism of universities. We continue battling to keep our hard-won gains and to improve our community-cultural development work, and we stress the variety of ways in which student and community knowledges, in collaboration with academic scholars, can create sustainable and powerful learning communities that make progressive social change. Visions of a better, more participatory democratic future are nurtured in such dialogic spaces. This is the best chance of our turning homeland insecurities into intercultural mutuality.

Sources

Cited Sources:

Adams, Don and Arlene Goldbard. 2001. *Creative Communities: The Art of Cultural Development.* New York: The Rockefeller Foundation.

_____, eds. 2002. *Community, Culture and Globalization.* New York: The Rockefeller Foundation.

Arrighi, Giovanni. 1994. *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times.* London: Verso.

Atlas, Caron and Pam Korza. 2005. *Critical Perspectives: Writings on Art and Civic Dialogue*. Washington D.C.: Americans for the Arts.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination.* Edited by Michael Holquist. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Benjamin, Walter. 1969. "Thesis on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations.* Translated by Harry Zorn. New York: Shocken.

Combahee River Collective. 1979. "A Black Feminist Statement" *in Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Social Feminism.* Edited by Zillah R. Eisenstein. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Dewey, John. 1997 (1938). *Experience and Education.* New York, Touchstone Edition.

Evans, Sara and Harry Boyte. 1986. *Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America.* New York: Harper & Row.

Freire, Paulo. 1968. *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York: Continuum Books.

Frisch, Michael. 1990. *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Gorelick, Sherry. 1981. *City College and the Jewish Poor: Education in New York, 1880-1924*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.

Gwaltney, John Langston. 1981. *Drylongso: A Self Portrait of Black America.* New York: Vintage.

Halttunen, Karen. "Groundwork: American Studies in Place—Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 4, 2005." *American Quarterly* 58:1 (2006). Accessed via Project Muse.

Hayden, Dolores. 1995. *The Power of Place:* Urban Landscapes as Public History. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Holquist, Michael. 1990. *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World.* London: Routledge.

Hum, Tarry. 2002. *Redistricting and the New Demographics: Defining "Communities of Interest" in NYC.* New York: An A/P/A Institute Publication, NYU.

Kearney, Richard. 2002. *On Stories.* London: Routledge.

Kurin, Richard. 1997. *Reflections of a Cultural Broker: A View from the Smithsonian.* Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.

MacFadyen, J. Teyvere. January 1983. "Exploring a Past Long Locked in Myth and Mystery: The New York Chinatown History Project has launched a cultural rescue mission to save a little-known immigrant heritage" in *Smithsonian Magazine.*

Mohanty, Satya. 1997. *Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics.* Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

Sachs, Karen Brodkin. 1998. *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.

Sanchez, George. 2005. "Crossing Figuerora: The Tangled Web of Diversity and Democracy." *Foreseeable Futures #4:* Position Papers from Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life.

Sources

Shaw, Angel Velasco and Luis Francia, eds. 2003. *Vestiges of War: The Philippine-American War and the Aftermath of an Imperial Dream, 1899-1999.* New York: An A/P/A Institute Publication, New York University Press.

Simon, Andrea. 1996. "Talk to Me: Conversation documentary, Americans in Conversation Project." "A More Perfect Union: Americans in Conversation Project." Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Rosaldo, Renato. 1997. "Cultural Citizenship, Inequity, and Multiculturalism" in *Latino Cultural Citizenship.* Edited by William Flores and Rina Benmayor. Boston: Beacon.

Tchen, John Kuo Wei. 1990. "Towards a Dialogic Museum" in *Museums and Communities.* Edited by Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.

_____. 1999. *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism & the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

_____. 2002. "The Secret Archives" in *Vestiges of War: The Philippine-American War and the Aftermath of an Imperial Dream, 1899-1999.* NY: NYU Press & A/P/A Studies.

_____. 2006. "On Forming Dialogic-Analytic Collaborations: Curating Spaces within/between Universities and Communities" in *Redefining Identity Politics.* Edited by Michael Hames Garcia and Paula Moya. Hampshire GB: Palgrave MacMillan.

"What roles do we play as engaged, intercultural scholars and artists privileged to work in the space between universities and publics? How can we create trusted spaces for inspiring visions and practices of intercultural equity, justice, and freedom?"

This essay, originally given as the keynote address for Imagining America's 2005 national conference at Rutgers University, brings to life three imagined students, who reflect the experiences of many individual students. On behalf of "Arlan," "Arlene," and "Alexandra," John Kuo Wei Tchen asks, "What must we be doing in our classrooms?" and "What must we be doing in our communities?"

From the dilemmas faced by these students, Tchen draws lessons for higher education. He envisions a university that adopts "an intercultural version of Ernest Boyer's recommended tenure reforms"; partners with communities "nearby and beyond"; supports projects that combine coursework, service-learning, and study abroad; and offers "language curricula enlivened by engagements with language speakers in living communities." With a passionate focus on undergraduate education and student mentoring, a keen sense of the challenge posed to higher education by the global importance of Asia and by non-Eurocentric forms of knowledge, and wisdom about the power of dialogue, Tchen challenges us to re-think our curricula and our institutional responsibilities to our students.

John Kuo Wei (Jack) Tchen is the founding director of the A/P/A (Asian/Pacific/American) Studies Program and Institute at New York University. He is an Associate Professor of the Gallatin School for Individualized Study and the History Department of the Faculty of Arts & Sciences. In 1980, Tchen and Charles Lai co-founded the Museum of Chinese in the Americas, which documents the 160-year-long history of Chinese New Yorkers.

Also Available from Imagining America:

Harlem: Parable of Promise or Peril, **by Mary Schmidt Campbell, Dean, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University (Foreseeable Futures #2).**
Transforming America: The University as Public Good, **by Nancy Cantor, President and Chancellor, Syracuse University (Foreseeable Futures #3)**
Crossing Figueroa: The Tangled Web Of Diversity And Democracy **by George Sanchez, Professor of History, American Studies and Ethnicity, University of Southern California (Foreseeable Futures #4).**

As with all our publications, these reports can be ordered for distribution at conferences and meetings. Please contact the Imagining America office by emailing ImaginingAmerica@umich.edu.