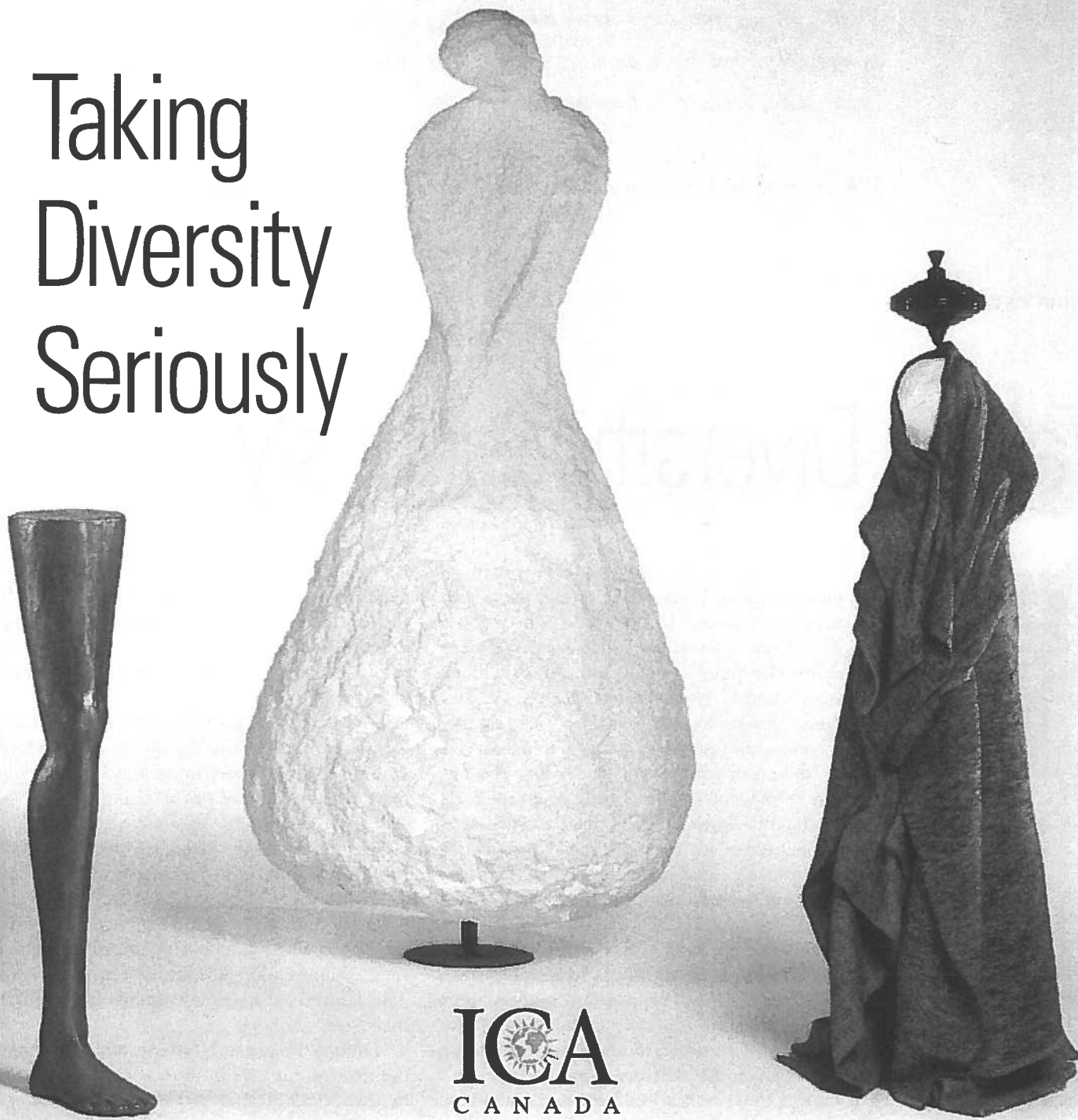


DECEMBER 2003 • VOL 16, No 1 \$3.95

# EDGES

NEW PLANETARY PATTERNS

## Taking Diversity Seriously



HENK VISCH, 'Nach Emma', 1990; 'Do not look at me', 1991; 'Idle thoughts for idle men', 1991

ICA  
CANADA

*Vitality springs from diversity — which makes for real progress so long as there is mutual toleration, based on the recognition that worse may come from an attempt to suppress differences than from acceptance of them. — B.H. Liddell Hart*

*When was the last time you did something for the first time? — Ad line*

BRIAN STANFIELD

# Taking Diversity Seriously



Some time ago, I was sitting on our patio with my mother-in-law, Dottie Marks, who was visiting from Little Rock, Arkansas. We were watching the people go by on Victoria Park Avenue. There were Bangladeshis, veiled Muslims, Indian women in saris, Vietnamese, Blacks, and a few Caucasians. A turbaned Sikh taxi driver braked in front of us. Suddenly, she exclaimed, “Where on earth are these people coming from?” In Little Rock, she said, the Blacks tend to live on one side of the river, and the Whites on the other. Racism dies hard in the South. But actually it dies hard everywhere. In some places it is better disguised than others.

Dottie’s remark, I believe, was mainly a matter of curiosity. She was curious as to how all these people ended up in Toronto. I remarked that Canada has a generous immigration policy, allowing a quarter of a million migrants to enter every year, from up to 210 different countries. I explained that those walking by were citizens of possibly the most multi-cultural city in the world. I

could have gone on to say that Toronto is far past the level of diversity any European country would tolerate. Within the next two decades, one in every three Canadians will have an ethnicity other than European.

The United States is no different. As the 2000 Census showed, White Europeans, descendants of 18th and 19th century immigrants, are no longer the dominant culture in the United States. They are giving way to growing populations of Hispanics, Latinos, African-Americans, Asians, American Indians, or migrants from Somalia and other war-ravaged countries. The rise of cultural diversity during the past decade has transformed the American landscape. In California, for the first time, White Europeans are now in the minority. The United States now contains more Muslims than Episcopalians.

There are those in North America who imagine their turf as the sole bastion of Caucasian culture, in a world where five sixths of the population is non-Caucasian. But something shockingly new is



emerging. What it means to be a North American now is something far more borrowed and commingled than anything previous generations ever knew. In Europe, one common response to migrants is, "Learn the national language, buy a computer, or you're out!". But Europe's future also lies in embracing "the other cultures" as their future social and economic capital. And that's going to be some struggle.

#### **WORLDVIEW**

Most of us have mixed feelings about cultural diversity. We often behave as if it is something alien we must contend with in our communities and businesses. So people consider they handle the diversity issue well by getting along with a few people, supporting equal opportunity policies, or having some interesting tourism experience on African safari. But cultural diversity is part of something much larger — a shift in our worldview.

In the rural mindset of yesterday, awareness was flat, narrow, and parochial. Against overpowering and unpredictable foreigners, people built secure, closed relationships. Strangers of

different ethnic groups were suspect. The secure, closed relationships of rural settlement meant one-to-one mutuality and intimacy. Jemima baked me a cake. We baked one in return. Uncle Lance told me a few choice items of gossip; we told them to a few more at the local tavern. Now when we open our e-mail, we may find someone from East Timor, not broadcasting gossip, but discussing the issues of a globalized neighbourhood. Now, with the electronic gridding of the planet, a new global human being with a new mindset has been born.

Today, no culture exists in isolation, and no cultural tradition can shield its convictions or practices from the influence of other traditions and ways of life. To one degree or another, all cultures and individuals have been drawn into the maelstrom that constitutes world civilization — a civilization shaped by the assimilating dynamics of capitalism and the global market.

In ancient times it may have been natural for individuals to closely identify with their culture of origin. People accepted the views and ways of their respective ancestors, and spontaneously considered these as their special heritage. Egyptians used to look down on other cultures as alien and inferior. Classical Greeks pitied or despised non-Greeks as culturally deprived "Barbarians." Now we can recognize that deliberate or inadvertent confinement to a single culture is not salvation, but injurious provincialism. The proprietary discourse of "my" culture versus "theirs" is in principle obsolete.

There are many who still assume that their culture is superior — claiming it is more rational, or its technology is unrivalled, etc. And this is so not only among Caucasians. People working in the midst of other cultures have to school themselves to affirm the greatness of another culture. Assuming that the way we do it back home is automatically superior to the way another culture does it will not make good friends. Recently an Australian team doing facilitation in a developing nation was told in the evaluation: "For five days, no one said, 'This is how we do it in Australia'". That kind of cultural detachment is appreciated.

We know the other cultures have come to stay, but nevertheless, we are continually surprised, even shocked, by their ubiquity. Climb onto a subway

train in Toronto, and we experience babel in the form of twenty different languages in our ear. We find ourselves asking Dottie Marks' question, "Where do all these people come from?". I recently had occasion to walk through the grounds of the University of Toronto on a Sunday afternoon. Students were sitting in the sun all over the place, and most of them looked quite different from me. I found myself thinking, "Where are all the ordinary people?", followed by a great big "Whoops!". I had to remind myself, "This is the way the world really is". All of us have to face that living in the 21st Century means being surrounded by people who talk, look, dress, eat differently from us.

One of the effects of all this is the way we are all borrowing from everybody else — ethnic traits, perspectives, values. It's patently obvious when we look at the assimilation of immigrants. Assimilation used to mean giving up everything that came from somewhere else. Now it means having access to all the world's creativity, sometimes even down to the



family level. A Chinese-Jewish married couple in Hawaii may seamlessly weave Jewish, Chinese, and Hawaiian cultures into their home.

Business is realizing that a multicultural workforce is not a problem, and not another fad, but an opportunity. "To succeed internationally," says Ernest Thompson of Procter and Gamble, "we need to understand the cultures of the world; and we have all the cultures of the world represented right here — a tremendous competitive advantage". According to Professor Harvey Millar, of the University of the West Indies, "Racial diversification of the workforce is not a social program! It is a business strategy that must be adopted if companies are to gain and maintain a competitive edge in changing domestic and global markets". In the words of Soichiro Honda, "If we hire only those people we understand, the company will never get people better than we are".

The respect due to people of other cultures has many ramifications. The ICA office in Toronto, over the past few years, has employed a Jamaican, a Malaysian Chinese, two South Asians, a Mauritian Muslim, an Ojibway Native. We found we had to accommodate those who fast during Ramadan as well as those who party during Christmas, those who celebrate Chinese New Year, and those who do it on 31 December.

In 1997, Samuel Huntington wrote a book that aroused a great deal of comment in political and international circles. *The Clash of Civilization* said that in the coming era, clashes between civilizations would be the greatest threat to world peace. In 2002, Jonathan Sacks wrote a counterpoint to that: *The Dignity of Difference; How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*. He pointed out that unless everyone learns to confer dignity upon difference and treat all cultures with respect, there will indeed be a "clash". Jonathan Sacks defines what he means by the dignity of difference:

*... the glory of the created world in its astonishing multiplicity, the thousands of different languages spoken by mankind; the hundreds of faiths, the proliferation of cultures, the sheer variety of the imaginative expressions of the human spirit. that is what I mean by the dignity of difference.*

Not only do we have to deal with diversity: we have to deal with this multi-

licity, the sheer multiplication of difference. Just go into a good music shop, and we see difference: Western classical, country, rock, and several varieties of jazz — New Orleans, Chicago, bebop, and fusion. Add to that: rap, blues, hip hop, soul, salsa, ska. Then there is the blending of reggae-ska-calypso-Gregorian chant with folk, rock, rap, and Tapa (Tahitian); on and on and on. This is the post-modern world — endless variety and all of it so good. Everywhere we look we see this creative multiplicity, whether we look at beer, sports, books, clothes, on and on. And then there is biodiversity — but that's another topic.

There is a growing borrowing from different cultures in our daily lives. Just look at any food court in major shopping malls. The sampling of food is matched by the sampling of cultures. Greek gyros, Italian spaghetti, Japanese sushi, Chinese egg rolls, German knockwurst, and Mexican burritos are offered side by side as typical foods of choice. Many who go out to dinner have for some time discovered the benefits of dining Thai, Mexican, Japanese, Moroccan, Polynesian, or Vietnamese. But then, they get stuck in the food of one culture. I confess personally that I like Indian dishes like chicken shahi korma so much, that it is difficult for me to get beyond Indian restaurants when I want to "dine ethnic". The challenge is to keep going wider and more different. This takes a little courage and a little research.

In the world of spirituality and personal development, we don't have to confine ourselves to saying our traditional prayers, though there's nothing outdated about that. There is meditation and contemplation, solitary worship, spiritual reading, chakra development, meridians, energy flows, biorhythms, archetypes, myth writing, and many kinds of retreats or study groups. For healing we have acupuncture/pressure, biorhythm work, nutritional therapy, reflexology, iridology, and many others. We are encountering what Sachs calls "the sheer variety of multiple expressions of the human spirit".

How do we bring all these ideas down to earth, closer to home, and into our own lives? Perhaps Jonathan Sacks' words are the key. When we think of "the glory of the created world in its as-

tonishing multiplicity", it is odd how we cut ourselves off from that multiplicity and those differences. It is a kind of estrangement we experience. The only way our feelings of estrangement or opposition will change is by going out of our way to relate to the multiplicity. And we need structural ways to help that happen. It seems that if human beings are going to live well, they will have to move through a variety of institutions and environments. Young people, for example, need a rite of passage that would take them out of their narrow neighbourhood segment and thrust them in with other people unlike themselves. Some form of national service may be called for, or international volunteering in another culture. Finally, it's probably important for adults to get out of their own familiar circles.

#### **PUSHING OUR BOUNDARIES**

The truth is that we find ourselves estranged from much of the created world. It is almost as if we have limits on levels of diversity we can accept. We may not be bigoted or impolite, but neither do we actively push our boundaries with the unusual, and so we don't know how to deal with differences. When we holiday overseas, perhaps it is invariably to a European country, or to the string of Europeanized tourist enclaves in the tropics, antiseptically cut off from the surrounding local culture. In that case we miss the life of the street and the experience of buying street fare hot off the fire. We miss out on direct exchanges with the local people.

At home, so many of us are homebodies, happy in the cocoon of the electronic cottage, with our TV, videos, DVDs, music CDs, and computer games. The world of the theatre, the art exhibit, the nightclub, the big sports game, is commonly ignored — "costs too much, too much trouble". "The created world, in its astonishing multiplicity" passes us by.

This betokens a separation from much of life, the kind of separation that Paul Tillich lamented in his theological writings. It is a kind of deliberate divorce from much of the created world. When young Jack's rap music gets loud, along comes mom and snaps the radio off. She could have just asked Jack to turn it down a bit, but no, she rejects it, so off it goes. Anne-Marie will listen only to the European music classics;

“Everything after them is kitsch”, says she. These kind of cultural blinders are unfortunate — where Rachmaninoff is considered good, and Antonio Carlos Jobim bad. Of course some people simply reverse their prejudices, and assume that Marion Makeeba (African) or Susan Aglukark (Inuit) are superior to Shania Twain or Jewel, because they come from more “indigenous” and “authentic” cultures. Being more comprehensive in our tastes helps prevent this absurd bias. It keeps putting us in touch with the astonishing multiplicity of life.

The same principle extends to our friendships. It is still common these days to have friends that are all of our own ethnic background. Check how many birthday cards we send to friends who are Chinese, African, Latin, Indian or Native. We tend to stick to our own, and so we lose a wonderful opportunity of being enriched by the culture and style of other people, each with their own particular gifts.

So what does it mean to push our boundaries, and attempt not just to humour diversity, but to take it seriously — even embrace it wholeheartedly?

When the war in Afghanistan was in progress, a good friend invited my wife and I out to dinner. Knowing our proclivity for Indian food, he took us to an Afghani restaurant. One look around, and we knew this was not The Hen and Egg. I had thought the menu might be close to North Indian. But though the food was good, it was quite different from anything I’d tried before. The experience of the food, and of talking to the Afghan proprietor, put the war in a different perspective—made it closer to home.

A Latin friend of mind makes a point every summer of going to four or five places in the city he has not been to before. So last Friday he went to the Lulu Lounge where a funk jazz group was playing. He likes jazz, and had heard about Lulu’s, but had never been there. The guy at the door took one look at him, assumed he came for Latin music and told him that Latin was not on till Saturday evening. My friend said he knew that, but he would still like to get in. He paid his cover charge, and had a great time, so much so that he stayed for the singer’s second set. That’s one of his ways of pushing diversity in his life.

A Chinese friend of mine is determined that prejudices will have no place

## **Institute of Cultural Affairs International Board Announces New Secretary General/CEO**

The Board of Directors of the Institute of Cultural Affairs International (ICAI), the Brussels-based international non-governmental organisation, announced today that following a six-month global search, Tina Choi has been appointed as the new Secretary General/CEO.

Ms. Choi most recently held a prestigious White House Fellowship as Special Advisor to the United States Trade Representative in the Executive Office of the President. She previously served the United Nations as Director of the Global Teaching and Learning Project (Cyberschool) and Do Something Inc., as Program Manager of the “Kindness and Justice Challenge”.

“We are very excited and honoured to appoint Tina Choi as our new Secretary General/CEO”, said Board President Judith Harvie. “Her remarkable leadership abilities and achievements in the non-profit sector, the UN, government and academia have uniquely prepared her to lead our global network in meeting its many complex challenges”.

The Institute of Cultural Affairs was founded in the United States in 1962. ICAI serves as the Secretariat for ICA member institutes in 28 countries and on every continent, which create and implement community development and training programs, as well as engage in policy research. The new Secretary General takes over at a critical time of development, growth, and transition at the organisation. The previous Secretary General, Richard Alton, stepped down in August 2002 after serving 16 years.

Born in South Korea, Ms. Choi moved to the United States as a child. She is known as a skilled partnership builder and dedicated global citizen. Her references describe her as particularly “adept at forming and nurturing intra-sector and cross-sector relationships and alliances”, “a truly international expert,” and “able to move people to the next level in their performance and thinking”. Ms. Choi has previously been an Echoing Green Fellow, a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar, and a delegate to the International Academy of Achievement, the U.S. Japan Leadership Program, and the State of the World Forum. She holds degrees from Oxford, Harvard, and Wellesley College and is fluent in four languages. ❖

in her family. So, every year, she takes her children to view the Gay Pride Day procession in Toronto. Some of her friends call her into question, asking her what effect this will have on her children. She pushes back: “I will not allow my children to grow up prejudiced against any part of society”.

How can we push diversity in our life more often? Maybe it means taking up the challenge of pursuing the different — what we haven’t tried before. That doesn’t mean we don’t have preferences. It means intentionally trying something new. Whenever we notice that we’re in a rut, it’s time to try something different.

Some time ago, my wife called me into question about my liking for action

videos. After reflection, I felt impelled to try murder mysteries, comedies, romances, even horror. I, in turn, questioned my wife’s predilection for romantic comedies. Now, she will watch a murder mystery, unless it gets too scary.

Everywhere we look, phenomena are multiplied in swarms. It seems ridiculous to limit oneself to certain things and categories, because dad liked them, or our favourite Aunt Ethel liked them. A visit to a bookstore, with its multiplicity of choices, often means that we look things over for something new, and finish up buying our accustomed mystery novel, or Tom Clancy’s latest. What about dramas? What about poetry? Have we ever read a Japanese novel? A

Russian novel? An African novel? We have a favourite English poet: great. But how about trying Tagore (India)? Rumi (Turkish)? Neruda (Chilean)?

Holidays. Instead of racking our brains for a different kind of experience, we opt for going to see Auntie Maisie, or the same old seaside resort. The really simple way out is "the cottage". We really have to ask, what kind of holiday will refresh us, given the experiences of the past year? What will give us a quite different experience, while being within our means? It's good that more people are holidaying in Cuba. Some even try out Antarctica. Some go canoeing in Arctic waters. How far we go is not the point. We can try something different 50 miles from home. How daring we are is not the point. Trying something we've never tried before is. "Same-old" is out.

For getting to work, the car remains

the favoured choice, for its convenience, and privacy, but not speed. I recently took a trip downtown with a relative who had never used public transit. The train took 17 minutes to the heart of downtown. She made several comments afterwards: "It takes me 50 minutes to do that by car. And I was astonished that people were so friendly, whether they were Chinese and African, or whatever. I felt very safe, even though I was surrounded by other races". A few biases had been shifted there.

Embracing diversity is not something that happens overnight. There are stages and phases to it. But the final phase must have to do with bringing diversity right into our everyday behaviour — into the choices we make, our respect for difference, and daring to open ourselves up to the vast multidiversity of life. Why not try it out? ❖

## "Grow where you are Planted"

- a note from Barbara Miles

It is difficult to write about oneself, however I have been requested to introduce myself personally to *Edges* readers. I have not met you all personally, and in fact look forward to meeting everyone of you at some time or other in the future, hopefully, you will reciprocate after reading about me.

My work in the community has been extensive throughout my adult life. In my home country Jamaica I worked as a volunteer administrator and teacher in Literacy, and President of my local Rotary-Ann organization. We operated programs in difficult political and economic times, programs to feed indigent old people throughout the city of Kingston, as well as purchase uniforms and books to enable children who would be unable to do so, to remain in school.

Migrating to Canada in 1980 with my husband and four children was quite an upheaval. However I do believe in the axiom "grow where you are planted." So my growth progressed through education and being a social pioneer for disenfranchised people who live within our society. Many of them fall through the cracks in our system. This work grew to include refugees and displaced populations internationally.

It is this experience and love for humanity that I bring to ICA Canada, also the firm belief that everyone can make a difference. Our world may never become a perfect one, but with a positive outlook, desire for change and the willingness to become a leader in this process, we can influence the outcome of people's lives by contributing towards the assurance of a safe and prosperous future for those who may never otherwise experience this opportunity. ❖

## Volunteer Opportunities

*There are volunteer opportunities in the following areas:*

**Archivist:** ICA Canada has an active archive and related database that serves its ongoing writing and research work. We are looking for a volunteer who can incorporate newly acquired material into the archives and continue the ongoing maintenance of our archives and database. Experience with archives is helpful but not required. Please contact Barbara Miles at [bmiles@icacan.ca](mailto:bmiles@icacan.ca) if you are interested.

**Volunteer Coordinator:** ICA Canada is beginning to expand its use of volunteers to enhance its ongoing work. We are looking for a volunteer who can establish and coordinate an active volunteer program. Our intent is to involve members in contributing to the organization both within the GTA and through the rest of Canada. Experience with volunteer programs is helpful. Please contact Barbara Miles at [bmiles@icacan.ca](mailto:bmiles@icacan.ca) if you are interested.



**ICA Associates Inc. is pleased to announce the translation of the book,**

***The Art of Focused Conversation: 100 Ways to Access Group Wisdom in the Workplace***

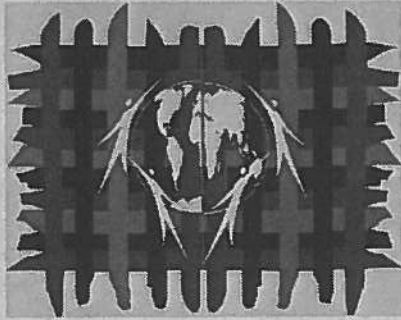
**L'Art de la Discussion Structurée** is now available through ICA Associates Inc. It has been completely translated by our French team of Renaud and Marie-Noëlle. The book contains a new forward specific to the French edition as well.

The book is available through the ICA Associates Inc. web site at [HTTP://ICA-ASSOCIATES.CA](http://ICA-ASSOCIATES.CA)

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*Edges* is now available to members and subscribers on our web site and as an e-mail. If you wish to receive *Edges* electronically, please ensure that you fill in the form on the back of the accompanying letter, or contact us at [ica@icacan.ca](mailto:ica@icacan.ca).

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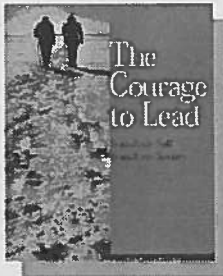
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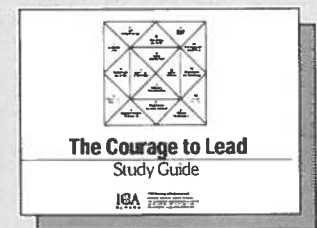
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**ICA**  
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ICA Canada is pleased to announce that the work on translating both *The Art of Focused Conversation* and *The Workshop Book* into Simple Chinese and Traditional Chinese is progressing. We are starting negotiations to print and publish the books with some publishers in China. We anticipate that the books will be available for the Chinese market in the spring of 2004.

## ICA-USA CELEBRATES 30 YEARS

On Nov. 7-8th ICA-USA celebrated its 30th anniversary at the ICA Conference Offices in the Kemper Building in Chicago. Judy Harvie, ICA Canada chair, was one of over 1,000 people to walk through the front door of the Kemper Building that week. The Kemper Building is home to 24 social agencies serving hundreds every day, and providing facilities for people in recovery, battered women, young people seeking work, daycare, and a health centre for the homeless.

The celebration honoured people with important connections to ICA Chicago. It also included a research symposium on Leadership in Social Innovation. The symposium looked at social trends demanding new styles of leadership. These trends and issues included the rise of militant youth in Africa (who see guns as power in leadership after watching TV), the rise of women in the church who have relational styles of leadership, and society's short attention span.

Judy also attended the ICA-USA Board meeting. She noticed a similarity in issues to those existing at the board level in Canada and in ICA: International. Organisational transitions bring many challenges and some mistakes, but also many victories. We can all learn from each other. Sharing Board Governance experience can reduce reinventing board practices and enhance board effectiveness. To enable this, ICA Canada has invited the USA Board to our AGM in May of 2004.

ICA Canada would like to sincerely thank our supporters over this past year for helping us to fulfill our mission to empower positive social change. To correct any errors or omissions to this list, contact Christine at (416) 691-2316, ext. 222.

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ICA Canada develops the capacity of individuals, organizations, and communities to transform society. It does this through action learning, applied research, community and organizational consulting, and creation or sharing of knowledge. ICA Canada intends to be known as the leading proponent of models and practical methods for transformational change in Canada.

## Statement of Purpose for Edges

Edges highlights new cultural patterns and fresh approaches to participation and social change.

The opinions in Edges articles do not necessarily represent the policies or views of ICA Canada.

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