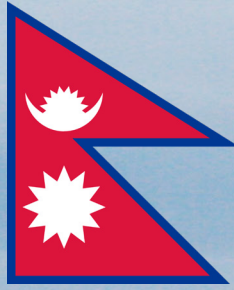


Rituals in the Field:

Nepal



Action Research in Cultural Transformation #1

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revised 14 Sept '21

Action Research in Cultural Transformation

An invitation to share experience and knowledge that inspires creative civic engagement

The first pictures of Earth—a small cloudy planet suspended in nothingness—caused a profound shift in human consciousness. The earthrise became the iconic image that provided a new sense of ourselves as human beings. Perhaps for the first time, we began to think of ourselves as part of a global ecosystem unified as inhabitants of one planet, which we could now see clearly.



This wonderful image in our time is catalyzing global understanding and culture change. Insight into the genius of our cultures can help us design new communities and nations that are resilient and adaptable to change.

Rituals in the Field: Nepal is an experiment in creative story telling about intentional cultural processes that support the resiliency and adaptability needed to ensure a sustainable future for our planet.

In the pages that follow, we describe aspects of Jan Sanders' work with the Institute of Cultural Affairs Nepal as a practitioner of socio-spirit artistry. In collaboration with ICA Nepal, Jan worked with a new generation of Nepali leaders who helped halt the spread of HIV/AIDS in the early 2000s. This work catalyzed a self-sustaining grassroots movement for health and wellbeing across Nepal and demonstrated the possibility and promise of cultural transformation.

We prepared this report as an interactive, online *zine*—a *born-digital* document that can include text, graphics, photos, videos and links to relevant resources. Because this evolving document “lives” online, it can be easily updated and shared electronically; the latest version will

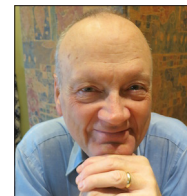
always be available for download. Click [here](#).

Consider this document a possible template for presenting your own formal or informal *action learning* experiences. Our aims called for:

- A title page
- An introduction to our subject, methodology and practical work
- A story about and reflections on a signal transformative event
- An invitation to readers to share their experience
- Related publications, resources & connections

We hope that you've been encouraged to share stories and resources related to your own work and learnings. We invite your feedback on this first version of *Rituals in the Field: Nepal*.

Note. Except where specifically attributed to others, Jan Sanders is the author of this publication. We thank Cynthia Elizabeth Hanifin for sharing her passion for zines.



David Dunn and Janet Sanders
3 September 2021

Richard Sims, Jan's Sander's husband, died on April 27, 2021, as Jan and I met over Zoom for a final review of *Rituals in the Field: Nepal*. Colleagues have remarked on Richard's quiet, attentive presence as a social artist in every seminar. We acknowledge his silent presence between the lines and in the white space of every page of this publication as well. *dmd*

The Roots of ICA Nepal's Social Artistry Work

I first arrived in Nepal in 2002, just as local governments were being dissolved. My work then was under the auspices of Robertson Work, UNDP Principal Policy Adviser on Decentralized Governance and Development, and Monica Sharma, Global Director of the HIV/AIDS programme of UNDP. They were initiating a joint project focused on decentralized governance and eradicating HIV and AIDS. I was the international consultant on the project and Dr. Tatwa Timsina and ICA Nepal were the national consultants. Our assignment was to convene 20 people for an initial Facilitation Training Program. These new facilitators would then be the team that facilitated another seminar of one hundred participants.

We led three of these two-week intensives, each one building upon the previous one. During these seminars we wove together the work of ICA, Ken Wilber's work on Integral Theory and Systems Thinking and Dr. Jean Houston's practices on creativity and commitment, which later became known as *Social Artistry*. In the morning, we worked on the inner dimensions of leadership. In the afternoon, we worked on the outer dimensions of leadership including ICA's Technology of Participation® and Imaginal Education® methods. These were critical seminars to begin to shape a new curriculum for Innovative Leaders. The book *Changing Lives Changing Societies* contains a chapter on our project and other ICA research.*

Following these initial seminars, we formally introduced Dr. Houston's work to Nepal through a five-day workshop we called "Introduction to Social Artistry." Dr. Timsina also participated in



Nepal is located between India to the E, S, & W, and the Tibet Autonomous Region of China to the north

seminars in the US to deepen his skills in the curriculum. We developed two *Social Artist's Field Books* to introduce participants to the inner and outer dimensions of personal capacities and innovative leadership. See Resources, page 12.

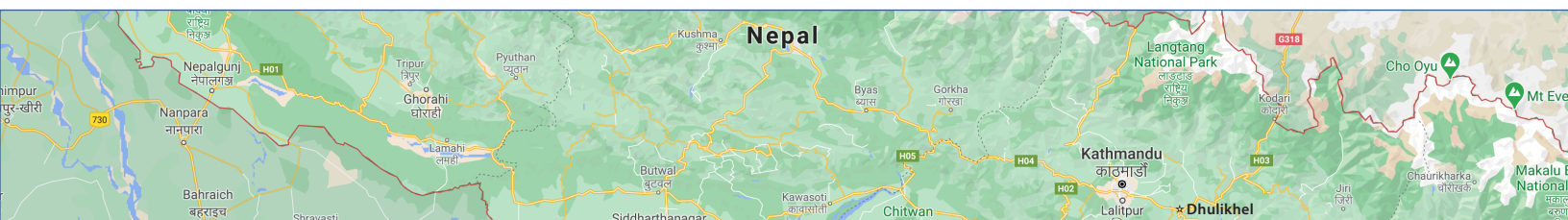
In 2008, the Jean Houston Foundation and ICA Nepal sponsored a train-the-trainer program for people who had been introduced to Social Artistry and the Technology of Participation. See the timeline, page 5. Most were already strong facilitators or adult educators. We had



Developing Leaders for a New World, July 16–24, 2008, Dhulikhel, Kavre, Nepal

participants from eight countries and four languages. (See Reflections on the Elements of Ritual, page 8.) We wanted people to take new practices from the train-the-trainer program

* Sanders, Jan. (2012). Decentralised* Transformative Approaches to HIV and AIDS. In Dr. Tatwa P. Timsina and Dasareth Neupane (Eds.), *Changing Lives Changing Societies*, ICA's Experience in Nepal and in the World (pp. 105–122). Kathmandu, Nepal.



back to their own professions and training programs. Even 13 years on, many remain part of an active *teaching-learning community* (TLC). They continue to stand in what we called the “circle of possibility” and have kept up many of their diverse personal and professional linkages.

Following the 2008 seminars, Jan and Evelyn Philbrook returned annually to support the Nepali team through 2016. Jan, with a core of Nepali trainers, including Tatwa Timsina, Atma Timsina, Amba Datta Bhatta and Pramila KC continue to offer the two-day program.

This team was foundational to the continual development of the skills of Social Artistry. Additional work focused on facilitating a Culture Lab to deepen participants’ understanding of the culture they are working in, a small grants program for Social Artistry and two-day Introductions to Social Artistry that have reached as many as 5,000 Nepalis in their communities, organizations and businesses. In 2012, Nepali Social Artists contributed to the ICA International Conference on Human Development hosted by ICA Nepal in Kathmandu.*

In 2021, we began an online Social Artistry training program for youth as a memorial to Richard Sims.

Social Artistry Faculty

Nepal

Tatwa Timsina
Sabita Koirala Paudyal
Atma Ram Timsina,
Madan Bista
Amba Datta Bhatta

International

Janet Sanders, Canada
Evelyn Philbrook, ICA Taiwan
Martin Louis Cahnbley,
South Africa
Dr. Lisa Nelson, USA
Chief Lorraine McRae,
Rama First Nation, Canada

* In 2017, Robertson Work published *A Compassionate Civilization*, with his reflections and recommendations on the approaches we were experimenting with in Nepal.



Training for Transformation in Nepal

This training was my first solo assignment to train trainers in the practices of Social Artistry. I worked for several weeks with help from Richard Sims, my husband, to hammer out an enhanced training structure for Nepal's situation. Dr. Tatwa Timsina, Director of ICA Nepal, had personally recruited people—mostly from training backgrounds—who had experienced a basic Social Artistry workshop or ICA's Technology of Participation training. We were experimenting with gathering people of multiple nationalities with training skills and familiarity with adult education strategies. The program was designed to refresh the basic understandings of the four levels of awareness* at a personal experiential level and then train them in processes and practices they could use to introduce new participants to these levels of awareness.

International Event

Participants

Bangladesh
India
Nepal
Tibet

Faculty

Canada
New Zealand
Taiwan
USA

In the years leading up to the training program, Nepal had gone through an incredibly painful civil war between the local Maoists and the Kingdom of Nepal. Our Social Artistry workshop was scheduled for the end of this period, when Nepalis had begun organizing a governing group to draft a new constitution.

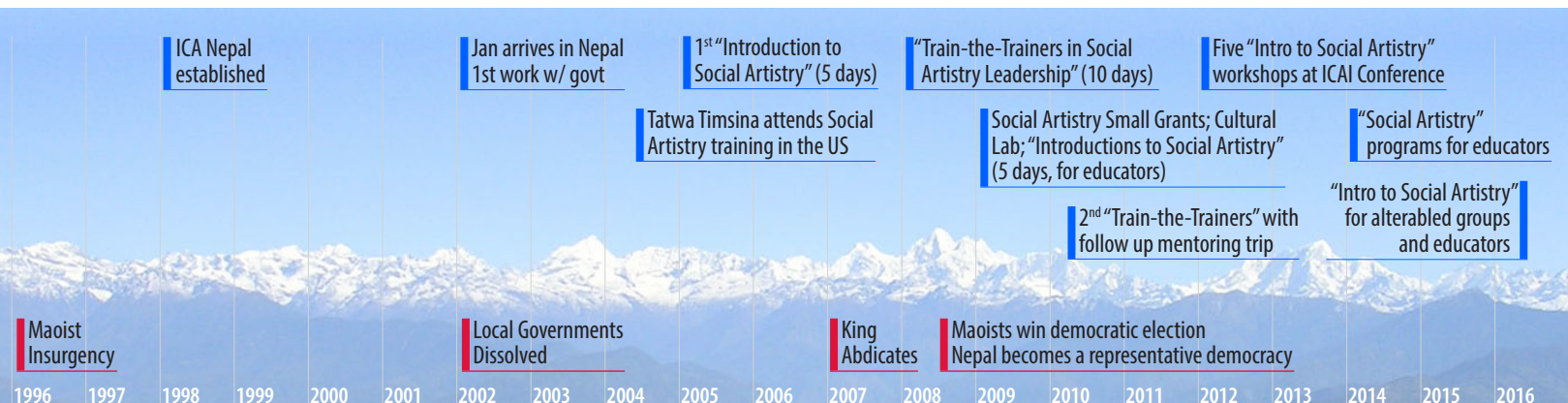
The training was held outside Kathmandu in Dhulikhel, in a valley with a view of the Himalayas. When it was clear or when the clouds parted we saw the majestic outline of the mountains and were enveloped in awe.

Opening to the possibility of ritual

As the workshop began, Nepal was caught up in naming its first prime minister and the key representatives who would take the country forward. People were equally fascinated with our program and the historic time they were living through. Our participants were aware that a vast amount of healing was needed and that people like themselves could become leaders in their newly forming country.

Richard was particularly sensitive to this historic period and wanted to incorporate that

* From Dr. Jean Houston: Sensory/physical, psychological/historical, mythic/symbolic and unitive/integral.



context into the daily schedule. He had set up a role play with participants playing the various national roles and rehearsing events from the news or personal phone calls. The mood was electric; each day brought a new drama. Near the end of the program, when Nepal's leaders had finally picked a new prime minister, Richard and I wondered how we could possibly mark such a momentous event.

The events we heard about daily during the training signaled the establishment of the first representative government in Nepal. The Kingdom was established around 237 years ago.

Where could we go to honor this long history even as our trainees were beginning to see a dramatically new future? Could we mark this historic transformation somewhere with historic significance in its own right? We asked participants if they knew of historic sites near the retreat center. It turned out that there was a

"Whoa! Okay! Well, we had better go there."

nearby site of unparalleled historic significance: the mountain, where, 237

years before, the king had proclaimed the founding of the Kingdom of Nepal. We were stunned by the opportunity.

The trek up the mountain

"The 1,000 Steps" would take about 45 minutes. We envisioned a version of a sense walk and asked everyone to walk in silence with all their senses open to this moment. The participants had been working with the four levels of awareness in Social Artistry and were well prepared. We walked through Dhulikhel and made our way up the mountainside. There were statues at the side of the walk where you could stop to pay homage to the pantheon of gods and goddesses.

At the top, we gathered silently in a circle. One-by-one, the participants proclaimed their



The gateway to the one thousands steps to the summit

hopes and dreams for their new country. In over 237 years, *The Kingdom* had been the only model. There had never been this much openness in governance, life or thought. Everyone knew that they were calling forth a new time and understood that they were going to be part of a new formation. As we went around the group, everyone listened intently, standing in total silence, savoring the historic moment.

The Return...the Poet Appears

Flags fluttered in the wind as we walked down the mountain. We arrived at the retreat center and gathered in silence in our training room. The participants were lost in their own thoughts and aspirations, considering their fears and hopes. In this transformative time, following such a mountain-top experience, Richard and I pondered what needed to come next.

Richard asked everyone to begin a poem with the prompt, "In the silence..." and write a short poem or paragraph.* They wrote so intently we were fascinated watching them.

When there was a pause in the writing, Richard asked who was the key poet of Nepal. To a person, they all shouted out Laxmi Prasad Devkota. Richard invited one of them to stand and *become* that poet. There was a very long,



* Appreciation to Pat Webb, Director of the Silence Foundation, for this prompt and her deep work with silence.



worrisome pause. I was thinking “Whoa, Richard, what have you done?”

Suddenly, at the back of the room, a man stood up, not as his own local self, but quite palpably as Laxmi Prasad Devkota. It was as though the poet had entered the room. This young man had become Nepal’s great poet and everyone in the room could feel it. He walked to the front and read his new poem to the gathered crowd. A moment of deep silence followed, after which Richard asked others to come up and read their poems. They were reluctant at first, but one by one, everyone in the room stood and came to the front to read. Just like that, the poet muse had moved through them and they simply had to read their poems for the future.

This single, long moment of reading their poems into the silence was done with the deepest reverence for Possibility. They spun out new images, they explored new healing and they imagined new roles. What had happened to them as they walked up the path to the historic mountaintop? It seemed that their deepest hopes and dreams had been rekindled and in those few minutes we had transcended time and space.

The Wonder

When the hotel attendant announced tea, everyone filed quietly out onto the balcony,

absorbed in their own thoughts. Just then, quite unexpectedly, the clouds lifted and everyone could see the Himalayas in the distance. At the sight, utter joy broke out with joking and laughter. Here, in an instant—as if to put an exclamation point on the day—everyone had again been touched by Possibility. They had experienced not only their own desires for something new, but also the hopes of their parents, grandparents and great grandparents over many generations.

It had been a magical time. An intentional ritual—aware of the arc of history, sensitive to the trainees’ journeys and concluding with a creative challenge—released energies and commitments that buoyed everyone by a spirit of freedom, possibility and personal courage.



Richard Sims is standing behind Jan in this photo

Reflections on the Elements of Ritual

This was a community ritual, framed by standing at attention before the past 237 years, the future, and the present moment. It brought into focus the existential question: how will we shape the future?

These trainees had spent the last seven years in the midst of a civil war, unable to even travel to various parts of Nepal. They had experienced the fear and agony of an unknown future. They knew that they were standing at a turning point when the Nepali people had to turn from their past in order to create a new and different future for Nepal. Each of them faced the life and death question: Will I take on this historic task?

One of Richard Sim's real gifts in the training was sensing the presence of just such a moment. He had an intuitive knack for reaching into peoples' hearts and souls to see just what was needed. He didn't always follow procedure, but in this historical context, when he added the archetype of the *poet* to the ritual, his invitation to write and recite poems enabled everyone to deepen their reflective process.

Inviting the trainees to become poets together expanded their context. Reciting their poems revealed the wonder of the new images that emerged in poem after poem. Their poetry opened them to the dread and fascination of a time of transition.

The participants loved their own cultures, but they all knew that something new had to happen across Nepal. They had to learn to how step out of their culture in order to appreciate the many gifts of each other's cultures. Such appreciation makes cross-cultural work possible.

The Ritual Process

Dr. Nancy Grow

Ritual comes out of a depth life experience in which we stand before the awe and the mystery of life.

The late Dr. Nancy Grow, long time ICA colleague and student of ritual practices, asserts that we are now in a time when we have to create new rituals—rituals that...dramatize the new reality that we are stepping into. This booklet highlights such a ritual created in one of our Social Artistry training programs in Nepal. In this brief excerpt, Dr. Grow explores the ritual process and describes its three basic elements: the Past, the Future and the Existential Moment. See the diagram on the next page. Dr. Grow wrote:*

We take all of this—the pictures, the sound, the feeling, the articulation—and we put them together in an acting out, a drama...that [creates] the possibility of the wonder and the power. The drama allows us to bring the “happening” into this very moment. This is the ritual, the enactment that involves all of our powers, all of our senses and all of time and space. [The ICA community] has done a superb job in this arena, but we must not forget the scope of the ritual process lest we become traitors to life itself. We must not cling to what we have done in the past, but we must cling to the wisdom of the past. We dare not slip into any notion that just reciting a few words is doing the ritual.

The first element of ritual is ***anamnesis***, which simply means *against forgetting*, the intentional recollecting of those things and those events that life has taught us are crucial. In every ritual we have to self-consciously ask what is it that we have to remember. What is it that we dare not forget? What are the mysterious

* This excerpt from Dr. Grow's paper “The Ritual Process,” has been lightly edited for appropriateness in an interspiritual context. Click here to read the full original text in the Inner Life Collection on the icaglobalarchives.org website.

intrusions of power and wonder into our lives that are necessary for our lives—those without which we would be destroyed or taken out of existence?

When we welcome a newborn baby, we remember the pain and the joy of birth. When we celebrate a wedding, we require

a marriage vow to embrace both darkness and light. When we acknowledge a death, we remember the loss and the gift of a life. Rituals help us remember the way life is—broken and yet whole, spilled out and yet full. All of life is this way. That is what we are saying we have to remember.

The second element of ritual is **prolepsis**—the ability to leap into the future. For any ritual that only holds onto the past, which only remembers the past, is unhealthily attached to the obsolete. What good does it do to remember the Holocaust except for the sake of seeing that it never happens again? What good does it do to remember the mistreatment and the pain that minorities and women have suffered unless it is

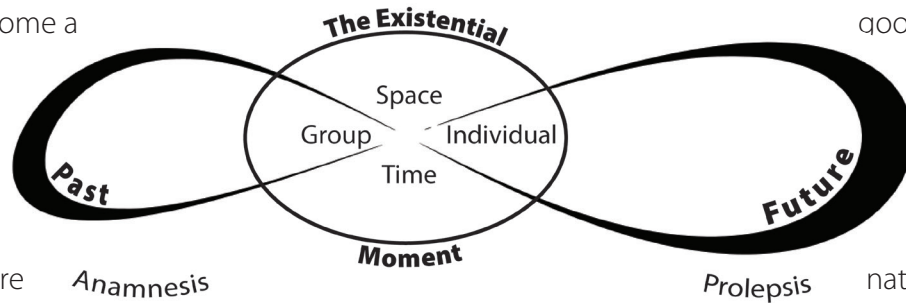
linked with a will to transcend the past, to break through into a new relatedness that uses those agonies to produce sensitive concern for all human life and all cultural manifestations. What

good does it do to remember all of the gifts we have received in the past as a nation if it is not for the sake of the

future and for envisioning what it could mean for all people to live free and to live with the goods that they need in this world as human beings.

Anamnesis and prolepsis are the two bookends of ritual. Both are easy, in one sense, to deal with intellectually.

The third element of ritual—the present **existential moment**, between the past and the future—is the crucial *here and now* when we define who we are and what we are doing. Our feelings and intuitions, our particular experiences of the heat and the cold, the task before us, and the pain and the struggle of that task are all dimensions of that moment.



Social Artistry and the Institute of Cultural Affairs

Karen E. Johnson

Social Artistry is an eclectic approach to social transformation/social change that is rooted in developmental and dynamic understandings of human and social capacities. The deepening of our individual consciousness enables us to create caring, productive and empathetic societies that can meet the physical and spiritual needs of all members of the human community and can balance our needs with those of the planet and all living creatures.

Social Artistry has drawn on the wisdom and experience of numerous organizations and individuals in articulating our model of social transformation. Dr. Jean Houston's work with human capacities and global cultural awareness as articulated in her numerous writings and teachings is the bedrock of Social Artistry. Peggy Rubin has taught us to be active players on the sacred stage of life, introducing and nurturing personal and interpersonal qualities and skills.

Honed over many years in many cultures, the Institute of Cultural Affairs' (ICA) concept of the Social Pioneer as one who works at the point of history between "that which is no longer" and "that which is not yet" to help create a caring future, has contributed to and been integrated into Social Artistry by Robertson Work and Janet Sanders, providing us with its symbolic power and teaching us many practical skills. One of the key concepts of Social Artistry is the commitment to life-long learning and openness to the wisdom of others. We are open to the experience and knowledge of those who share our goal of a world that works for all.

Dr. Jean Houston and Social Artistry

Dr. Jean Houston—scholar, philosopher, teacher and researcher in Human Capacities—has long been regarded as one of the principal founders of the Human Potential Movement. Jean is a longtime friend of the Institute of Cultural Affairs, noted for her ability to combine a deep knowledge of history, culture, new science, spirituality and human development into her teaching. She is known for her interdisciplinary perspective delivered in inspirational and humorous keynote addresses. Together with other international agencies and companies,

Social Artists are committed to social justice, social equity, peace, the elimination of poverty, addressing the root causes of climate change, respect for cultural diversity...[and] universal human dignity. They promote participation in governance, decision-making and ongoing evaluation, learning and growth.

Note. Karen is an artist-teacher. She was a co-creator and trainer of "Reimagining Education: The Teacher as Social Artist," held at Horace Mann School, New York City, in 2012.

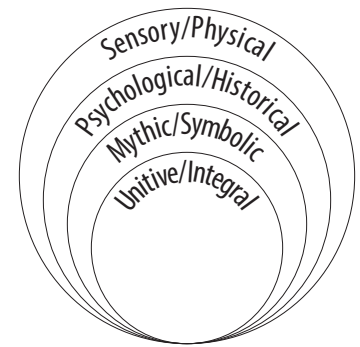
over the last 45 years, Dr. Houston has worked in over 100 countries.

Jean and her co-teacher, Peggy Rubin, began working with Robertson Work and Jan Sanders, through the United Nations Development Program in 2001 to localize the Millennium Development Goals. The work involved training leaders in cultural development using a Social Artistry approach that we created. We worked together in Nepal, Albania, The Caribbean, Kenya, The Philippines and the U.S.A.

The Four Levels of Awareness in Social Artistry

Dr. Jean Houston

As we explore our work in Social Artistry, we'll be taking a learning journey through four levels of awareness and experience. Our goal is to expand our human capacities in each of these areas. These four levels are not unique to our work in Social Artistry. Once you start paying attention, you'll find them embedded everywhere in your life.



The Sensory/Physical Level consists of everything we can perceive through our senses. This is a vital place to begin our quest of the Possible Human and Possible Society. It is through our bodies that we come to know the world. As we explore the physical and sensory level of awareness, we'll focus on developing our capacities for bodily awareness and tapping into the wisdom of the body, then applying that wisdom directly to our work as Social Artists. The social artist then, is one who develops the art of heightened sensitivity and physical awareness, for with these come compassion, wisdom and the courage to help make a difference.

The Psychological/Historical Level considers our own history and psyche and our connection to the historical and collective memory of our communities. The Possible Human needs to learn to consciously orchestrate her own thoughts, internal images, talents and gifts. In this level we can explore the many different ways of knowing and tap into more of our brain's capacity to vision and problem solve in new ways. We can access our memories and sense the interconnections between the events in our lives. Attention to the inner workings of our psyche can help us make creativity central to our lives.

The Mythic/Symbolic Level takes us into the realm of great archetypes and story. Here we develop the skills and awareness to find the patterns woven by humanity that have brought our culture and us as individuals to our present situation. We also learn to create the patterns we'll need to weave a new story for our Possible Society. At the Mythic/Symbolic level we consider our mythic structures, symbols, and archetypes. Seeing our life as a great story can fill us with passion for the possible. The process of rethinking our stories gives us access to a whole new range of possibilities. As social artists, learning to work with stories in a positive and energizing manner can have a powerful effect on the people and cultures with whom we work.

The Unitive/Integral Level [also known as the spiritual or wisdom level] is the deepest level of our awareness. We engage our own deepest knowing, a clearer understanding of the great mystery from which we all emerge. The recommended practices to grow this awareness vary from culture to culture and from person to person. Such practices include poetry, meditation, contemplative prayer, mindfulness, dancing and being in nature, among many others. Growth in this level brings recognition that all human beings have within [themselves] capacities for knowing and participating in a deep, expansive sense of reality and life that can manifest in acts of compassion and service.

Invitation to Collaborative, Creative Story Telling

Stories to tell and knowledge to share

David Dunn

Chances are good that if you've gotten this far, you have experience to share and stories to tell related to transforming culture. This little multimedia piece is an invitation to do both.

Jan Sanders and I began our collaboration in late 2020, intent on creatively sharing Jan's experience as a Social Artist with a young member of her extended family. Jan's life and work have been a deep dive into the lives of people who care about the world and the practices of personal transformation and social engagement that shape and humanize cultures. My life and work have followed the prompts of history and personal interests from seminary and church, to community facilitation and organizational development, to desktop publishing and creative companionship.

Our complementary experiences and roles support a common mission: sharing an energizing look into practices and projects that help people and cultures heal and evolve.

Collaborating on this online publication—a *zine*—has been both energizing and great fun. We hope you'll find a partner who gives you courage to invent something new and with whom you can have as much fun as we have.

We started with "What do we want most to tell our family and friends," but our concept and vision evolved from there. We'd like to spark a vast collection of engaging stories that live online, offer practical wisdom about culture change and provide links to other practitioners and story tellers with something to say and share.

The people, projects and organizations to the right are just a beginning.

Publications, Resources, Connections

Publications

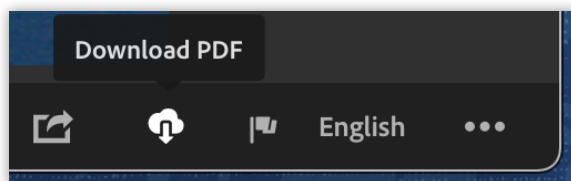
The Social Artist's Fieldbook One: Developing your Inner Capacities. Jean Houston, Ph.D. assisted by Janet Sanders, M.Ed. Prepared for the United Nations Development Programme

The Social Artist's Fieldbook Two: Decentralising the MDGs through Innovative Leadership (DMIL) June 2008 Edited by Robertson Work and Jan Sanders with the assistance of Tricia Webster.

Resources

Connections

Click [here](#) to open the latest online version of this PDF in your web browser. The revision date is below the Contents box on the cover. To download the latest PDF, hover your cursor over the bottom right corner of your *browser window* and click on the **Download PDF** button (a cloud & arrow icon) that appears.



-Or- Click on or copy this short URL into your browser window: <https://tinyurl.com/yezngu85>

This is a work in progress. What *stories*, *resources* and *connections* would you add that are related to the practice of cultural transformation—the broad focus of this living document?

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Jan Sanders (jansanders5@gmail.com)