

THE CHARLESTON RHIZOME COLLECTIVE and US Department of Arts & Culture
by Gwylene Gallimard

I had an intimate, pleasurable relationship with [USDAC: Reflections + Resources from an Act of Collective Imagination](#) sent by Adam Horowitz at the occasion of his transitioning from the leadership of the USDAC, the US Department of Arts & Culture (not a government agency). Here I want to thank Adam and the former Chief Policy Wonk Arlene Goldbard for the support we received from this performative project; how the USDAC, their writing and proposals were important for a small heterogeneous group like [The Charleston Rhizome Collective](#) feeling isolated in a small town with very different values and little respect for arts & culture outside of their market or entertainment value.

The USDAC [Statement of Values](#) starts with *We hold these truths to be self-evident:*

- *Culture is a human right.....*
- *Culture is created by everyone.....*
- *Cultural pluralism is a social good and the wellspring of free expression.....*
- *Culture is the sum-total of public, private, individual and collective action.....*
- *The work of artists is a powerful resource for community development, education, healthcare, protection of our commonwealth, and other democratic public purposes.....*

Among USDAC [Founding Cultural Agents](#) or [National Cabinet](#) I see familiar [Alternate ROOTS](#) figures with whom I may have worked on other projects ([Conversations With Time](#) in Baltimore MD; [The Future is on the Table #4](#) in Jackson MS...), ROOTS workgroups and specially [Resources for Social Change](#), conferences or as a [ILLI](#) fellow. Adam had been a [ILLI](#) fellow the year before I was.

All along the text sent by Adam I find words and tips that we have enriched with our practice: *Imaginings, Belonging, Intergenerational collaboration...*

*“Tip 2: Go the rout of **intergenerational collaboration**. At the early stages of conducting interviews for the USDAC, I spoke with Baraka Sele who said, “I don’t want to be a part of any movement that doesn’t have at least four generations involved.” Amen! It’s not easy, but intergenerational collaboration helps make sure you’re neither reinventing the wheel nor getting stuck in old ways. If the team designing a project spans generations, the participants you attract will too.”*

The Charleston Rhizome Collective became a [USDAC Outpost https://usdac.us/charleston](https://usdac.us/charleston). We received a [small grant](#) from the USDAC at the time of [conNECKted: Imaginings for Truth & Reconciliation](#). We initiated a petition and had a public video exchange about a potential [Cultural Impact Study](#) facilitated by Arlene Goldbard.

*“**Adopt a Cultural Impact Study**. Community development policy is marred by a widespread proclivity to see communities of color and low-income communities as disposable in the face of economic “progress.” Longstanding neighborhoods and cultural and social fabric are demolished to make way for new freeways or sports stadiums. Longtime residents are displaced by gentrification. The disturbing fact is that culture has no legal standing in such decisions, no grounds for protection. We call on all agencies and organizations with public planning responsibility to adopt a Cultural Impact Study (CIS) for every project with potential negative cultural impact, assessing impact on cultural fabric just as do Environmental Impact Studies with respect to the natural environment.”*

I met the work of Arlene Goldbard in the late 80’s I believe, through her writings on creative communities and culture. It was at the time I was discovering [High Performance Magazine](#), then [Art in Public Interest](#), the [Community Arts Network](#) created by Linda Burnham

and Steven Durland. At the time I was deeply missing the Paris-based artists cooperative [CAIRN](#) I had co-created and these writings had warmed and nourished my spirits.

The Charleston Rhizome Collective's participation in the [People's State of the Union](#) and [DareToImagine](#), once on King St in front of Food Lion, another time at the newly open [Cannon St Art Center](#), allowed us to add handmade Imagination tables to our series of movable carts. Two of the tables now belong to the City of Charleston and another one to SIPP Culture (the Mississippi Center for Cultural Production).

Theron Snype, Jean-Marie Mauclet and I presented a workshop at [CULTURE/SHIFT 2018](#), on Tiwa Land in Albuquerque NM.

"It was all ages, cultures, faiths, genders, abilities, all learning, all belonging, all engaging, all the time... deep connection and listening, and raw honesty about both the grief and fear and the hope and possibility of these times.

"It's extraordinary to feel that you're part of a national, maybe international group of insiders, rather than being an outsider, and to feel that you are resonating with the room in so many different ways"
wrote visual artist Beverly Naidus

And **TINY is POWERFUL** isn't it?

Tip 5: Being nimble and responsive beats big and bulky. You don't need to be a large institution to shift things at large institutions. You need good partnerships and an agile group of collaborators that can create timely resources to meet the moment. By inviting value-aligned partners to join in shared learning and action, you can spark new relationships and collaborations—and provide cover, connection, and courage for people looking to make change at much larger institutions.

Tip 7: Escalate your dreams! Times of heightened crisis call for heightened imagination. As Aurora Levins-Morales puts it in this powerful poetic call for radical imagination, "escalate your dreams!"

And in this/our moment of transformation, **conNECKtedTOO—>TINYisPOWERFUL**, I feel I could say the same:

"I am deeply grateful to everyone who has been a part of this co-creation—and am delighted to pass the baton to my brilliant and dedicated colleagues... I had some of the chutzpah, ideas, relationships, and—let's be honest—white privilege (including access to good education, healthcare with no questions as a right, stimulations to travel), to help get the USDAC (conNECKtedTOO)* off the ground. I believe that there are others who have the organizing chops, visions, and lived experience needed to bring it to the next level of impact—and I'm excited to see and support futures that I'd never even imagined."*

Thank you Adam and the USDAC.

PS: The blue color highlights links that give meaning to the story with pictures, historical or archived materials. The brown color highlights words in the letter from Adam Horowitz.

* added by me