

Pangea World Theater
Redefining Innovation: Ensemble in Everything We Do
A Case Study by Andrea Assaf
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Backstage: Mission, Structure and History of the Company

“We wanted to create a space where passports didn’t matter... where artists of color could talk to each other—mature artists, having political conversations, and working toward artistic excellence together... A space where arts, politics and human rights co-exist very consciously... Our lived experiences made our work very relevant: that became the pulsating breath of our collective.” - Dipankar Mukherjee

Pangea World Theater was founded in 1996, with their first production of *The Conference of the Birds*, the 12th century Persian poem by Farid Ud-Din Attar, which playwright and Pangea co-founder Meena Natarajan adapted for the stage. It seems fitting that this production should be the birth of an ensemble theater whose mission is to “illuminate the human condition, celebrate cultural differences, and promote human rights,” all themes that can be drawn from the rich symbolism of the text. Upon hearing the title, one may recall Peter Brook’s famous 1970s production of the same name which, to some, has become one of the penultimate examples of, not only remarkable ensemble work, but of Western appropriation and neocolonialism in the arts (especially as described in John Heilpern’s documentation of the process of creating it. The founders of Pangea World Theater may not have had a response to Brook’s production in mind, but inherent in the fact of their re-envisioning, and collaborative re-creation of the original text is a *reclamation*—and a declaration of the symbolic power of an international, multiracial, multicultural ensemble that is self-defined and firmly committed to coalition politics.

Co-directors Dipankar Mukherjee and Meena Natarajan write: “Pangea World Theater was conceived as a progressive space that would bring thinking artists from very diverse backgrounds and ethnicities together to create work for a multiracial audience... We are interested in journeying beyond representational politics to a place where there is a mutual respect for differences [among] artistic collaborators... This is a core value of our artistic vision.”

In addition to creating multidisciplinary adaptations of traditional texts, Pangea World Theater also creates and supports original contemporary work, focused on “new voices, new stories, and new ways of telling.” Their goals include supporting local, regional and international work; maintaining a constant commitment to collaborative process, including multiethnic, multilingual casting and audiences; hosting international exchanges with artists “who are masters in their field;” fostering dialogue on important contemporary issues; and building coalitions and partnerships across the arts and social services, and across cultural identities and economic realities.

At the time of writing, Pangea’s core ensemble includes seven artists: four performers plus Meena and Dipankar, and a stage manager. One core member, in addition to the co-founders, has

been with the company for more than 13 years. All of their casting is “multi-racial and includes individuals from immigrant, African American, Asian American, Latino and Native American communities as well as master artists from other countries.” Depending on the scope and community focus of the each production, Pangea may also audition additional cast members.

In the organizational structure of the company, all staff members are also artists and/or participants in the creative process. There are six staff members, in a combination of full- and part-time positions, in the following structure:

Dipankar Mukherjee, Artistic Director (also a director)
Meena Natarajan, Executive & Literary Director (also a playwright)
Katie Herron, Office Manager (also an actor in the ensemble)
David Emery, Marketing & Community Outreach (also a stage manager)
Diana Benjaafar, Development Director

All positions have benefits, which is very important to the company. Pangea World Theater has an annual budget that fluctuates from \$385,000 to \$450,000. The company has their own rehearsal studio and office space, but they do not have a theater of their own. At present, Pangea most often rents theaters and performance spaces; however, they can transform their studio into 50-70 seat space for smaller events, workshops and educational activities. The studio can also serve as a small source of revenue, as a rental space for local dancers. “When you don’t have your own theater,” the co-directors state, “the challenge of space is very consuming...Even the internet [becomes] our space...[we have to start] thinking of public spaces as ‘our space.’”

Pangea’s Board of Directors currently includes eighteen members, plus Meena and Dipankar. The board also reflects the company’s worldview: members are South Asian, Native American, African, Canadian, African American and Caucasian, and one is from the U.K. The board includes “new immigrants, human rights organizers, artists, arts advocates, educators, librarians, and students.” With all board members, the co-directors build a relationship over two to three years: “It evolves organically...What has realistically worked with us is having a relationship over time...seeing if they’re passionate human beings, and supportive of the arts.” The company considers it important to have artists on the board, as well as members of the communities they work with, such as recent immigrants and Native Americans.

Pangea’s directors are also conscious of the leadership development that is sometimes needed when an organization makes a commitment to intentional diversity. Dipankar states, “With recent immigrants, there’s an education process that is very important, of how to be on a board. It’s an informal process at Pangea, but it’s very important.” Similarly, the company is interested in including youth on the board next: “We really want to challenge ourselves,” they say, on the core value of participatory leadership.

In addition to the formal board, Pangea has formed various committees, some of which are ongoing, and some which work directly with initiatives and specific programs—such as the International Advisory Committee, which suggests relevant or contemporary literature or international artists from participants’ countries, or the Journey to Safety Task Force, which includes community advocates on issues of domestic violence in relation to the company’s *Journey to Safety* performance project.

Like most ensembles, artistic and physical training is an indispensable part of Pangea's work. The company offers training in Voice, Directing, Acting, and Martial Arts, particularly Kalari (a South Indian martial art, Kalaripayattu). Since 1996, Pangea has trained over 2,000 students. The company also facilitates community workshops for adults and youth, some theme or topic-based, and a high school summer program for youth, *Diverse Stages*. In addition, Pangea has mentored five smaller organizations in the last ten years, on how to start, how to write grants and so on; and has served as a fiscal agent for start-up organizations and independent artists.

Historia: Pangea's Story, History & Programs

"I never got up in the morning and felt that I'm a 'marginal voice,' or a 'marginal' director... The point is, you get up, and create your work with integrity and focus... These voices that were supposedly, in everybody's vocabulary, 'in the margins'—we wanted to bring them to the center." - Dipankar Mukherjee

All the artists Pangea with whom collaborates come from different places, literally and figuratively, and they all bring their histories, memories, stories, artistic traditions and styles of creating work with them. "Our timeline did not start with [the creation of] Pangea," Dipankar asserted. "As artists, as creative people, we started years ago, in different countries, and we're strongly influenced by the politics which have been going on in the world." Meena continued, "We worked as an ensemble in India, without even calling it that. When we came here, we brought that spirit."

Meena and Dipankar incorporated the organization as soon as they conceived it, even before the first production, in 1995. Other founding members included Kathy Haddad (also the founder of *Mizna*, the first Arab American literary magazine), musician Keith Lee, and others. "We applied for non-profit status very soon," Meena said, "and got it within a year... It was out of that first production of *Conference of the Birds*—at least five actors from that cast stayed with us consistently for the next seven or eight years ... They became core members of the ensemble ... and out of that core, a couple still remain."

"From the first season," she continued, "we had a sense of future. We knew we wanted to do projects over the next three years, but we also grabbed opportunities that presented themselves. For example, the Kerala community came to us at the same time that we were doing *Conference of the Birds*, and asked us if we wanted to present Kathakali. We said yes... [but] we can't do anything—the only thing we can do is to give you space (we had the Jeune Lune space at that time) and help you with the marketing it to the right people. But we can't give you money for fees for the artists... So they fundraised... Together, in the community, we raised the fees for the troupe from Kerala... Everything was so serendipitous, because we were talking about styles and traditions, about learning techniques... and two of the masters of the school of Kathakali that came (from India), they trained some of our actors. So right away, we started practicing some of the things we were talking about. It was just amazing to see the training happening, and the observation of their creative process. That's such a rigorous discipline, it takes so much technique; it totally affected the company of actors at that time ... And [the collaboration] also

helped us grow our budget. We were expecting an annual budget of \$36,000 at the end of the year; it became \$65,000, which also leveraged money for the next year. As we grew the company—we would do two plays every off year, and every other year we would do three—we kept building our budget little by little.”

Through the years, Pangea World Theater has actively been trying to, “not only cross audiences (which everybody is trying to do),” but also to cross artistic disciplines and genres, in ways that “engage people of color from different backgrounds in a very active and conscious manner.” For example, Meena explained, “We did something called *Freedom Songs* in our second year... We had different people talk about what freedom meant to them...” The collaborating team included African American, Cambodian, and South Asian artists, for example. The company also began experimenting with multiple languages on stage, such as original poetry performed (chanted) entirely in Khmer, and then performed in English by another actor.

Pangea began the series *Voices of Exile* in 1999, giving writers from new immigrant and refugee communities the forums to present interdisciplinary work. “Yes, because that was a time of Proposition 187,” Dipankar explained, “the Newt Gingrich manifesto on anti-immigration... At that time, we were strongly connected with Human Rights organizations. [We began the] *BIAS* project—*Building Immigrant Alliance & Support*—discussions of our immigrant lives, and all the things we were dealing with in the political environment as immigrants... We were the ‘new enemies.’ I remember still, there were 22 participants ... it was a huge cast. Meena wrote this piece called *Shadowlines* and we did it in the open air theater at The Native Arts Circle, you see... On this earth that belongs to the Native people, let us discuss immigration!... We had three Native panelists, and the whole conversation got turned on its head. They were not saying ‘do we call them legal or illegal?’ They were saying, ‘In our language, the closest translation to “foreigner” is “friends whom we have yet to meet.”’ Here we were, stuck in this conversation of whether we were legal citizens or ‘illegal aliens,’ and suddenly there was this bomb of inclusivity that happened in that room—*friends we have yet to meet...*”

The relationship with the Native Arts Circle grew, through dialogue over time, with Executive Director Juanita Espinoza, giving birth to Pangea’s *Indigenous Voices* series in 2001. The first presentation in this series was Diana Fuemana (whom New WORLD Theater had brought to the U.S.) from New Zealand. Dipankar explained, “We began *Indigenous Voices* when Juanita said, ‘There is funding for traditional arts, quilting, Native [crafts]... but Dipankar, there is nothing for contemporary performing artists.’” He went on to describe early impressions that led him to wanting to support Native American artists: “I remember, we were in the Mall of America. I remember these scenes, because at that time, Minneapolis was a new place to us and we were trying to make it our place... We were away from home for 8 years, we could not go home. So we were very, very sensitive about what was happening... this juxtaposition of images that were around us, and that we were a part of. During Thanksgiving, in this absolutely wealthy place called Mall of America, where we saw in the corner on the ground floor, there was this family—a father, mother and a grown child—playing the flute in their Native costume. Just stuck there. And I felt so sad. *This is their land! It is their country, everything is theirs!* And we’ve reduced them to this tiny moment of entertainment which nobody’s even listening to...” So Pangea created a presenting series focused on indigenous artists globally, and a space for Native

American artists to create contemporary work, rooted in their own aesthetics, each year during the month of November.

In the *Bridges* program, a community of immigrant and “minority” artists across cultures and disciplines are brought together to collaborate on specific projects. Artists of color from around the nation and world explore new collaborative approaches using Open Space Technology. In a unique process, relevant to their experiences and aesthetics, they investigate ways to “deepen the connection between creative dialogue and artistic creation.”

Over the past three years, Pangea has developed the *Journey to Safety* program, a stage performance and training program (in collaboration with The Advocates for Human Rights) created to impact the legislature, the judicial system and various domestic violence programs by giving lawyers, judges and advocates a better understanding of the barriers that immigrant and refugee domestic abuse victims face in the courtroom and in their communities. The performance features five women of color—Kenyan, Hmong, Latina, African American and a South Asian—who speak different languages but share similar experiences.

Other programs include *Latitudes*, which engages diverse poets, dancers, and DJs in co-producing, sometimes with contributed studio space or directing support from Pangea; *Diverse Stages*, which develops performances created by youth, based on their issues and interests, in collaboration with Southwest High School in Minneapolis; and the *Alternate Visions Series*, commissioning new works by artists of color that become part of Pangea’s season.

Pangea World Theater is now embarking on a new multi-year, site-specific series of performances, dialogues, panels and films on (im)migration and displacement. *Hyphe-NATIONS: Immigration Matters* intends to respond to the challenges faced by the growing immigrant populations in the Twin Cities through a multidisciplinary approach to community engagement.

Circle of Conscience: Partnerships

*Because **process** is such an important part of our creation...**relationships** that are created and the **dialogues** that occur around the work are as important as the art.*

- Pangea World Theater

In keeping with Pangea’s mission and vision of an integrated relationship between political awareness and ensemble artistic creation, the theme of their 2009 season is “Circle of Conscience.” It includes several on-going, multi-year programs and presentation series. Pangea has created extensive networks and alliances with various organizations, across sectors, that partner in their community-rooted programs. In keeping with this cross-disciplinary approach, their interns are mostly not from theater, although they often become involved in the creative process; they include students in human rights programs, law school, political science, and from the Institute of Global Studies at the University of Minnesota, as well as theater departments from local colleges.

Current human rights and service organization partners, and the issues they focus on, include

Centro Legal, providing *pro bono* legal aid to the Latino community on issues of immigration; Advocates for Human Rights, bringing to life issues about child labor, diversity and human rights and domestic violence (Pangea's *Journey to Safety* is based on a report by The Advocates for Human Rights); and prominent advocacy and service organizations such as Asian Women United, St. Paul Intervention Center, Alexander House, Day One, Wellstone Center, Harriet Tubman Center, Chrysalis, Casa De Esperanza and Battered Women's Advocacy Project. In addition to providing community connections and advocacy for participants, services that the theater is not equipped to offer, human rights partners have sometimes also provided funding support, by raising money with Pangea as a partner.

Pangea World Theater also has many arts partners; since they do not yet own a performance space, they often co-present, and work in a variety of spaces. Past and current arts partners include the Indian Music Society of Minnesota, the Walker Arts Center, the Native Arts Circle, Ancient Traders Gallery, Intermedia Arts, the Arab American literary organization Mizna, and Mu Performing Arts (with whom Pangea co-hosted the 2008 National Asian American Theater Conference). Pangea is currently planning a five-year collaboration with Teatro del Pueblo, a theater with whom they have "shared a vision and organic bond over the last five years," to co-produce work by Latino artists.

Now that Pangea is a member theater of the National Performance Network (NPN), they are able to co-commission with other national arts partners, and present touring artists from around the U.S., in addition to their own projects and co-productions.

Setting the Scene: Context & Environment

Meena is cooking our dinner while we're doing the first interview, in preparation for the post-performance gathering, which will happen at their home later that evening. "I'm just trying to get the potatoes going," she says as we discuss the environment in which Pangea World Theater has grown. The kitchen and oven are full of enormous dishes, baking and simmering, and the wafting aroma of spices. "Look how much Dipankar wanted me to make... he's always trying to feed an army."

According to a paper titled *The Case for Diversity: A Role for the University of Minnesota* by Karen Zentner Bacig, published by the UMN Extension Service (2004), Minnesota has the fastest growing population in the Midwest:

The state of Minnesota, much like the nation, is experiencing sweeping demographic changes. The overall number of people in the state increased 12.4 percent between the 1990 and 2000 Census. Between the years 2000 and 2025, the state's population is projected to increase another 14.1 percent, reaching over five million in the next twenty-five years...According to U.S. Census data provided by the Minnesota State Demographer's Office (Peterson, Minneapolis Star Tribune, January 13, 2005), the projected population growth in the state for Black/African Americans is 115%, for Asian or Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders is 121%, for American Indian or Alaska natives is 59%, for Hispanic or Latinos is 185%, and for persons of two or more races, is 243%; growth

among those who identify as White is projected to grow just 17%. Clearly, much of our state's growth over the next 25 to 30 years will be among Minnesota's communities of color. www.extension.umn.edu/units/diversity/casefordiversity.html

In a national theater field where worn conversations persist at annual conferences of how to attract diverse audiences and fears of subscription-buyer populations dying-off, Pangea World Theater estimates that their audiences are approximately 40% people of color, and primarily from immigrant communities. They work directly and creatively with the growing Hmong, South Asian, Ethiopian, Somali, Tibetan, and Latino communities, as well as with Native American, African American and other Asian American artists and communities. In their literature, they proudly proclaim, "Our work addresses the various cultures that live and work here, and we work closely with communities to involve them in our programs (as writers, actors, curators, board members, task force members, liaisons) to ensure that diverse voices are heard."

Commenting in more detail on the socio-political and artistic environment, Meena explained that, while there has been a huge influx of immigrants in the last ten years, the Twin Cities are still majority white or European-American. "Minneapolis is an amazing theater town," she said, citing the Guthrie, Penumbra, Mixed Blood, and numerous arts organizations, companies and institutions, "... but still, most is 'formal,' 'traditional' or European theater; although there is more performance art than there used to be." She discussed the notable discrepancies in arts funding, often repeated, in which the most well-funded theaters continue to receive the most money for mostly "traditional" work by white people—most often by "dead white playwrights," and sometimes by black playwrights. "If they're doing a Pakistani play or an Indian play," she said, "they'll call us and ask us for casting...because they've simply not made those connections or relationships with the community. So we [are treated] like the service for providing actors...And for me, what is problematic, is that even if people of color are in the shows, there's no consciousness of how bodies are used...There's no consciousness of including people in the theater, and when they are included, there's no consciousness of who's inhabiting that body." She also expressed frustration at the "same old arguments" that attempt to maintain a false distinction between work seen as "social justice work" and work that's "aesthetically excellent" or considered important as "art for art's sake." She continued, "The minute you include people, inclusiveness or having diversity is seen as social justice work...We have many ethnic theaters in town, and there are theaters that really have completely multicultural casts—but actually there are very few theaters that [work in] the *COLLISION* of those cultures. And for us, it's as important to have collisions, not only of people from different backgrounds and ethnicities, but also to really consciously include immigrants in our mix, to include Native Americans in our mix. It's very consciously done."

On the significance of place in Pangea's work, Meena said, "Because we work with immigrant communities, we work with the issues that are in this town. [For example] the *Journey to Safety* project was built from a report from the Advocates for Human Rights... We have a multi-lingual cast of six women who've created this piece; a couple of the women have continued as our Domestic Violence Advocates. It's really about changing the systems here in Minnesota—judicial systems, medical systems, how lawyers do their work...We did our research by sitting [in courts] and observing judges, and many of the women went along with us to do this research...In that sense, place is very embedded in our [work]—it comes out of being here, in this place. And

at the same time, we're global citizens. We come from different traditions, we've watched different traditions as we grew up, so it's a meeting of both. And I think, when you're immigrants in a place, you are that—both local and global.”

In the same way, as a theater committed to being responsive to the issues affecting people's real lives, global events have a tremendous impact on Pangea World Theater's work. In 2009, when asked about how the environment has changed in recent years, and how those changes have affected their work, most arts leaders will first think of the economy. But for Pangea, the first thing that comes to mind is September 11, 2001. “For us,” Dipankar explained, “9/11 was a big shift...it made the work of the theater much more urgent...These landmark years, living in America—the first attack on Iraq with the senior Bush, and the second—shaped our psyche. The anti-immigrant mentality...It was like layers of profiling, being profiled as enemy...What was happening in the world had direct impact on what was happening in our personal lives, and that had direct impact on how Pangea was being shaped.” Meena continued, “One of the first things we did, when September 11th happened [was to collaborate with Mizna]...Kathy Haddad co-wrote a play called *With Love from Ramallah*, which Dipankar directed. And that really brought a huge number of Arab Americans in...which was wonderful. And we hired Khalidi as our Education Coordinator, and commissioned his play—he was still an undergrad, but there were so few Arab Americans writing.”

“The other thing that has impacted us,” Meena continued, “is our work in India and South Africa—Gujarat, and Truth & Reconciliation in South Africa...We went right after the attacks on African immigrants...Coming back after that really committed us to working with immigrant communities and immigrant youth. The youth are so important.”

Of course, it is a difficult time for the arts, and Pangea is not immune to the economic crisis. The theater has been affected by very important funders changing priorities or withdrawing funding. Pangea staff expressed concern about foundations changing their focus away from arts and more toward “social service,” within a construct that does not necessarily include cultural work. While the early part of 2009 saw audiences as strong and eager as ever for Pangea's performances, Meena explained, “we still are very dependent on grants; we can't survive on ticket sales because our audiences can't afford higher prices.” They also expressed concern about the state climate, with the Minnesota governor saying publicly that he wanted to turn the state arts board into a private non-profit. Meena and Dipankar observed that there are also fewer individual artist fellowships than there used to be. “But we're still better off than other states in the country,” Meena noted, with the Jerome and Bush Foundations in Minnesota, leadership grants, and other opportunities.

In these dire economic times, Pangea is contributing to the local cultural economy by offering studio space, office space and resources to smaller organizations and individual artists who are in danger of losing their resources; they've also participated in and hosted discussions to strengthen cross-sector collaborations.

“I've got to get the potatoes!” Meena declares, suddenly realizing how much time has passed. At the end of our first day's interview, we stop amidst deep conversation to prepare for the evening's event: Pangea's presentation of Wong Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, the latest work

by Kristina Wong, supported in part by the National Performance Network. The show, held at Intermedia Arts, has a full house of a remarkably diverse crowd. The piece is sharply conceived and beautifully performed, and the majority of the audience stays for the post-performance dialogue... which I'm moderating. Meena had asked me to moderate shortly before I arrived in Minneapolis. Inclusivity indeed! Not only is one welcomed, with tremendous warmth and hospitality, but invited into situations of leadership almost immediately... The discussion is rich, challenging at times, yet generous and fully engaged. As soon as the dialogue concludes, I leave with Meena, who returns home to prepare for the post-show reception, while Dipankar oversees the strike at the theater. The feeling of the gathering is familial, relaxed, and jovial ...

Cultural Aesthetics: Community in Everything We Do

The next morning, when I join Meena and Dipankar for breakfast, they are hosting two community supporters in their home. Meena cooks a delicious South Indian meal which she describes as "very traditional," and afterwards, Dipankar leads us on a walk along the banks of the Mississippi River—all while conducting a meeting with their supporters to ask them about leading a table at the upcoming Benefit for Pangea World Theater. By the end of the walk, the two guests have committed to heading, not one, but two tables.

SPACE, TIME, RELATIONSHIP

The core of what we're trying to say is...our relationship does not start with a 'project.'
First we have a relationship, then we create work together. That is why it sustains.
- Dipankar Mukherjee

Once a colleague from another theater was visiting Pangea's studio during rehearsals and meetings. There was a delivery, and Dipankar stopped what he was doing to greet the young man from Federal Express, and offer him a glass of water. The colleague was surprised that Dipankar took the time for this interaction. Dipankar responded, "But wouldn't you do that when someone comes to your space?" He reflected on this later, "Only when people comment on it do we recognize that we're doing something [different]...When somebody's in the room, they are a part of the work, no matter who they are."

Theater artists, especially directors, generally understand the space-time relationship, awareness of who's in the space, and relationships between human beings (real or fictional), as critical elements of developing an aesthetic, or a world on stage. But how often is that aesthetic understanding extended to the world of the organization off-stage? It may be less common that an organization commits to daily awareness of who's in the space, and considers the quality of interaction with everyone in it a part of their aesthetic and mission.

Pangea World Theater leaders believe in "relationship outside of function...It's a cultural issue," Dipankar said. "Welcoming people into the space is a conscious creation process. And we support each other in our personal lives. When we engage with community members, we're trying to figure how to sustain the relationships over time."

The question of space, both literal and figurative, and the conscious effort to *create a space*, is a theme that runs through discussions with Pangea members, and their writing about the theater. “As immigrants,” Dipankar explained, “the sense of not having a space was so present...” For years, the ensemble worked in community and alternative spaces before getting their own studio, and they still are an itinerant theater in terms of performances. They developed ways of making spaces theirs, through shared practices and created rituals. For example, the ensemble always has a table of personally important objects, to which each member contributes. “We all felt the need for a root,” Dipankar continued. “The Sacred Table was the only thing we had... this wooden circle of four feet ... it moved with us. When we did our rituals, it became our space.”

Pangea World Theater’s sense of time in developing relationships and programs is also quite extended, usually multi-year, and on-going. Pangea staff members value this longevity of relationship. Speaking of the company’s Office Manager, Katie Herron, who is also an actor in the ensemble, Dipankar said, “She came to us through an internship, and then she got hired as a part-time person, and now she’s full-time. That’s seven years of relationship...Sustained relationship with people really lays the foundation...We’ve never really created work as a ‘project’ or an event. For example, we are very close to the Hmong community. We saw that they do not have access to professional support, stage managers, lights—so they were always doing their work at the Hmong New Year. We created *Voices of Exile* [as] a space for fourteen Hmong artists to create their work. From there, we found somebody who created a wonderful piece. We immediately called him and gave him a commission to write a full-length play. And we ended up developing his play. And then later, he came into our Board of Directors. So the relationships get deepened over a period of time.”

Meena added that, when relationships are developed in this way, “then individuals from that community, they come back to see the work. Even if they haven’t got training, they come and participate in a play.” And that leads to long-term support.

Inclusiveness, or intentional diversity on-stage and off, requires different strategies, and even different material. In addition to familiar strategies such as organizational partnerships and post-performance dialogues, community engagement at Pangea is a completely integrated process. Pangea believes that the audience develops because of the material chosen, and that communities will come to the theater if it’s relevant to them.

But a willingness to try new methodologies, and to invest time and resources in the professional or artistic development of community participants, is also needed. For example: “If you require a headshot and a resume,” Dipankar said, “you’ll keep working with white people. We had to search for new methodologies for auditions. With the cast of seventeen Arab Americans—what technique? We had to train them... You find one or two people who really get it, and leverage them.”

Dipankar stated that for Pangea, “Audience is an *arrival*—the starting point is a pro-active desire to connect. Even with one artist. Take a step back: first identify whose story needs to be told. Then invite community, and create a community council. Then scholars, student associations, families. They all talk with the artists. All these methodologies are right in your household.”

“Digging deeper,” Meena added, “getting to know what’s in your own back yard, getting to mine that... When we do an event with 300-500 people, we know each and every one of them. It’s built one person at a time...It’s about how you engender ownership in the project. Because then people will do the world for it.”

On an organizational level, Pangea World Theater holds the same philosophy with partnerships. They take pride in “evaluating the historicity and depth of relationship with our consortium partners. We have never created ‘sudden’ partnerships,” they assert, “solely due to ‘project money’ made available through foundations. Our experience has shown us that these ‘sudden love affairs’...do not last and are at best dysfunctional and disingenuous, lacking integrity and sustainability.” Pangea has created deep relationships with artists, opinion leaders and cultural organizers for over a decade. In their planning, programming, execution and assessment, they are committed to continually asking themselves “whose voices are missing from the table?” They feel that large institutions tend to work with communities in a one-off way. “We commit general operating money to this work,” Meena said, “It’s that important to us.” Pangea asserts that their partnerships evolve “organically and with a desire in our hearts to craft an alternate, inclusive and interactive community.”

Ensemble Process & Participatory Leadership

*Our creative cosmology can be represented by a **circle** where the participating artists inhabit an indispensable space in the circumference and only the ‘work’ lies at the center. Our aesthetic is enriched by the journey of exploration to and from that center.*

- Pangea World Theater

From the time that Pangea began working as an ensemble, they took a very collaborative approach to creation and decision-making. Meena recalled, “We wanted a process that was much more inclusive [than the ‘traditional’ Euro-American theaters]... We didn’t call it ensemble at the time, but that’s what we were doing.” Some of the practices they developed for their group included sitting in a circle, having two minutes of silence, sharing breath together, creating the Sacred Table, and regularly having dialogues about race and culture. These practices became a part of their office culture as well as their creative work.

At Pangea, everyone participates in the training and acting exercises: staff, stage managers, even musicians. “It’s crucial to involve everyone in the creative process as much as possible,” Meena said, “It makes a huge difference...Anybody who’s there participates, nobody sits out (unless there’s a specific request to watch).”

With an ensemble, the casting process changes, since the group of actors is either already present when the text or project, or collaborating community group, is chosen. Dipankar and Meena explained, “When we’re creating a play (at least for a pre-written piece), half way through the process, no one knows what role they’re playing. The casting is not given first; everyone reads, and people are encouraged to interpret different characters, differently. It’s not an audition, everyone is already in the play. We ask, ok, what is this about? We divide into groups, pick one

of those topics, and present it in a physical image—from textual narrative, creating a visual narrative. As a group, we create a gestural language... We keep collecting, and see who is a good mover, a good speaker, etc. THEN we do the casting... It's one way of creating a democratic space. Because we have searched the depths of the ocean together... It's consciously creating community, re-creating the ensemble, at every rehearsal.”

In 2009, Pangea World Theater returned to their origins, recreating their first production, *The Conference of the Birds*. This time, they had ensemble members who'd been with the theater for more than a decade, together with performers who were experiencing Pangea's process for the first time. The company began with the text, and then created a shared movement vocabulary, drawing from their martial arts training, and using ensemble exercises such as Flocking—an improvisational structure for unison movement in which the group follows the movement of a leader; but each time the direction of the group shifts, the leader changes. As one ensemble member described, “We informed each other's ways of moving. One day you might... see something in one of the other people that was new, that was exciting, and that would spark an idea... Supporting each other just became integrated into *who you are* when you enter the space to do the performance.” Another ensemble member explained, “We'd challenge each other to do the opposite of what we normally do, the opposite of what was comfortable to us.” In that way, the choreography of the piece was not super-imposed by the director, but evolved organically from the group, creating a shared sense of ownership, and then was edited. Meena Natarajan, working as the playwright, would listen to the actors, and make adjustments according to whether the lines “sit right on their tongues,” or how they might incorporate their first language, and would gather feedback from the actors in updating the script; for Meena, the voice and speech *sounds* affect the development of the text. Meanwhile, the musicians improvised in response to the actors, finding the rhythms of the piece and discovering how the music could support the text. The musicians stated, “What you heard was because of the energy from the group... It was a continual process of bouncing off each other—a give-and-take, really. We felt like we were all in this together.”

In the post-show discussion, an audience member who saw the 2009 production commented, “It's that sense of community, how you carry each other... Where one would stumble, another would save... You didn't all question or struggle in the same way. That's the richness of who you are, your diversity... but you all stayed in the dance, you stayed together. And that piece of community was very striking.”

Dipankar added, “And that's also what the piece is about, isn't it? [In the text, the poet] says, *this is a journey I can't take alone. I need you all*. Everyone has to participate in order to realize something. We can't just have that philosophy unless we practice it here.”

Similarly, *Journey to Safety*, a multi-year, multi-lingual project, evolved over time. The ensemble of women from different communities of color researched the issues of domestic violence with Pangea, and participated collectively in the development of the script. “We had all of them read the report [by Advocates for Human Rights],” Meena said, “and we created it together... Every time a new person joins the group, the piece changes, because they bring their own language to it.”

“Even before we encounter the work...,” Dipankar added, “we come in as individual people, and every time we look at [the work], it’s something new. When people say, I want a space of respect, I ask what does respect mean to you?...We let the conversation happen, *every time*. So we can arrive at a common agreement at what the room will become. And that is EVERYBODY, whether you’re a stage manager, or an intern, or an actor who’s been with us for ten years...We sit in a circle, and that circle is diverse as ever, people who can’t get along with each other, but that’s okay. We will argue, we will fight, but our only requirement of our ensemble is that *we will not leave the room with residue in our hearts*. That’s something that we keep repeating. How we create an ensemble is that we create it with them.”

In this way, whether Pangea is working with their resident ensemble, or performers based in collaborating communities for a specific project, the creative process necessarily includes cross-cultural dialogue.

And it isn’t always easy. “For example, when we did *Tales from Ovid*, from the *Metamorphosis*,” Meena recalled, “we had Alberto, who’s got a completely Spanish accent in English. There was a really interesting conversation around the question of accent, because Liz who was playing the part of Midas [wanted to] put on a British accent. Dipankar spent days with her, talking to her saying, ‘no, listen, you have a *choice* to put on a British accent. My friend Alberto doesn’t have a choice, this is his accent’... And you don’t have to in that role. There are many roles in which you have to, but not that role...So it’s about, how do you arrive at that truth? The point was also, how do you include accents, and include the bodies of the actors in the show—that becomes a very political place to be...This last piece was very confrontational for a couple of the white actors who were in the group...[In the dressing room, two people of color in the cast were talking about how good it felt to be with an audience that was mostly people of color; a white cast member overheard and got very upset]...The cast has to think about equity, social issues, our environment...even if the play or project doesn’t address it, the cast has to [confront it] in the process.”

Ensemble member Katie Herron explained, “The way that Pangea is, you see the demographics of the U.S. on stage—you hear the languages, you see the bodies on stage as equals. We try to break down hierarchy as much as possible...and that just empowers each and every one of us. We are the storytellers on stage, and each and every one of us is empowered to our greatest potential.”

Pangea’s organizational structure and decision-making processes are deeply influenced by their ensemble practice. In their words, “Pangea World Theater *arrives* at decisions. The journey between conception, execution, realization and assessment includes agreements, disagreements, democratic dialogue, and discussion to arrive at programmatic and organizational decisions. We are aware that this process requires time and sensitivity, but we prefer this method to a hierarchical, patriarchal mode that we have experienced in other spaces. It is also reflective of the multiple communities and backgrounds that the staff, board and the associated artists belong to...As we create both art and organizational practices within Pangea, we are deeply committed to democratic values, engaging in dialogue that reinforces and empowers partners, participants and community members, and to including voices that are not heard and acknowledged.”

To this end, Pangea has a number of community advisory committees connected to specific projects. These include an International Advisory Committee that helps suggest relevant, contemporary literature from their countries, and introduces them to artists; a *Journey to Safety* Task Force of advocates who make directional decisions regarding places to take the performance and individualized trainings; and what they describe as their most effective ally, the Community Advisory Committee for community-based programs and presentations. They also employ other methodologies of involving community in decision-making, such as hiring a curator from a community to work closely with Pangea staff, as in the *Voices of Exile* program; or inviting articles, or evaluation comments via email, or interviewing artists during the process, as in the *Bridges* project. Pangea contends that they “arrive at programmatic decisions based on discussions with our core group of artists and advisors through a process of consensus.”

Now some would say that “art by consensus” is never a good idea. A common Euro-centric or U.S.-American assumption about art-making is that individualism, directorial leadership and decision-making, and professionalized expertise lead to “high quality” art—and by contrast, collectivism does not. First, this assumption lacks a basic understanding of the history of theatrical creation, even in Europe prior to the Enlightenment, let alone the rest of the world. Moreover, it raises the question of the true nature of ensemble process.

Long-time Pangea company member Alberto Panelli reflected on ensemble work, saying “It’s never the same, and I don’t think you can have a formula to arrive there. You have to sense and react, and grow—organically...I think it’s probably one of the achievements [of Pangea], connection and greeting each other at another level...We all come from different backgrounds, and we’ll probably never be together again as a group, the chances are...And that’s amazing.”

“It’s the hardest thing to do,” Katie added, “Several of us have been on many journeys together...Even though we break down hierarchy, we all have our separate roles to play, so it’s this dance...The goal is to completely respect everyone else at every single moment possible...and allow the other person to be the greatest performer, or whatever, they can be. It’s a difficult task, especially as artists...you have your own ego, you have your own background, you have what you want, and you have a strong voice, and that’s why we’re artists. But at the same time, you have to make sure that every other strong voice is completely present at all times. Yeah, it’s the hardest thing to do, but it’s the only way I want to make work.”

Hierarchy is not to be confused with leadership. While artistic participation and co-creation do not necessarily require previous or professional experience, community-based arts practitioners generally acknowledge the importance of having professional, skilled artists crafting, structuring or facilitating the creative process, and/or editing the final production. Co-creators in an ensemble may have very specific roles, and each role may have specific areas of focus, technique or craft; but what Pangea is presumably seeking is an organizational and artistic process by which the company can practice an *equitable distribution of the power of representation*—especially for artists and communities of color.

“For many companies,” Dipankar commented, “the people of color are in the Education department. Or ‘Outreach.’ Then they have a very articulated differentiation from the ‘Main Stage’... Those words do not exist in Pangea. If we create those divisions, then psychologically,

philosophically, racially, gender-wise, sexuality—it does not make sense. If we have fought these words like ‘margin’ because that’s where the mainstream supposedly places us, then when we create our own space, we cannot have center and sides. In the center is only our work, in the center is that lamp.”

(Note: For a more in-depth discussion of the ensemble process of Conference of the Birds, see Appendix 1.)

Re-defining Innovation

Pangea is a fluid space with a clear vision of parallel cultural streams, intersecting at times and independent at other times, defining and redefining our cultural aesthetic.

- Pangea World Theater

*We’ve embraced the idea of Total Theater, which is nothing new.
There is a whole world outside the U.S. that does it.*

- Dipankar Mukherjee

To some extent, Pangea views aesthetics as process, and process as aesthetic—or at least believes that the two cannot be separated. Pangea is interested in multiple ways of developing original work, and in redefining who is central to the artistic process. By providing access to contemporary theater and empowering communities who often do not have access to making theater, they are shifting who defines the aesthetics, and the standards by which quality is evaluated.

For the co-directors, the experiential reality of being recent immigrants in the United States has created the “pathway that is the artistic vision” of Pangea World Theater. “Part of this consciousness,” they state, “comes from the cultural memory that we carry in our bodies and minds.” The memories and experiences that artists bring with them, as well as different styles and traditions of creating work, inform an aesthetic which “is not fixed; it includes the artistic visions of multiple voices and realities.” Pangea World Theater is acutely aware of the frequent “misrepresentation and exoticification of Native and immigrant communities by the mainstream,” and is therefore “determined to search for and articulate a new nomenclature for an alternate aesthetic.”

At the same time, as Artistic Director of Pangea, Dipankar is insistent about the importance of the *quality* of the art that they make. He asserted that a community-based, politically-conscious, and equitable process of creating work “in no way means that the quality of the production is any less. The work is never an apology; it’s not an either-or.” As artists, they remain open to meaningful critique, and in training and rehearsing, they insist that the ensemble cannot be “lazy” in their productions, or “hide behind ‘community’ as a reason to have lower-quality work.”

The question then becomes, who defines quality? Innovation? Meena engaged in an in-depth discussion of these complexities: “Innovation is such an interesting term... What does ‘aesthetic’ really mean? What is a NEW artistic aesthetic?... You have to redefine what innovation is when rooted in tradition... For example, in a traditional form, to move your arm to a different place

instead of moving it to the same place again is innovation.” She argued that to really embrace aesthetics from various communities, you have to have some knowledge of the artistic values of the forms. If you know nothing about them, you can’t actually see the innovation.

Meena discussed how Pangea’s Indigenous Voices series has really helped the company talk about aesthetics in different ways. “There are certain works,” she said, “that are made very much in the Western mode...[The artists have] worked with a Western director, in a certain structure, and so forth. But Native American work, when it comes from them, has a completely different aesthetic. And usually only the Native people in the audience are laughing or appreciating the jokes. It has a whole different structure, a different [sense of] time...The point is, how do you learn to appreciate that aesthetic? And to really look at it, and say that it is a *different* aesthetic.” In order to create a space for contemporary Native artists to explore and define their own aesthetic needs, Pangea’s approach is to let the guest artists lead. “It is their space,” Dipankar said. “With Native writers, or Native choreographers—they articulate what they want, how they want to treat their work...We’re conscious of really providing the space and stepping out. Philosophically, artistically, consciously and with integrity, we believe—at the least, we can provide a 1700 square foot studio, and only come in when we’re requested.”

In addition to letting artists from specific communities work within their own cultural trajectory of aesthetic development, Pangea World Theater also seeks to bring artists from different communities and cultural practices together, to explore that creative collision they speak of, and to examine what newness might be discovered in the sparks. The Bridges project (funded by the Nathan Cummings and Ford foundations) brings together fifteen different artists, to create work using Open Space Technology.

“So it’s a collective creating work,” Meena explained. “Maybe they should have had a director, but...They were exploring a different *process*...The *process was innovative*. This Open Space Technology had immigrant artists, it had African American artists, Native Americans—and they created work together...It was something you would never see on stage, right?...They used media, Native American flute—Armando who is from Mexico and also indigenous, he brought in his own instruments—and the work looks like nothing you expect it to look like, because it was a collaboration between people of color. For me, that’s truly innovative, because where do you actually see collaborations happening between multiple people of color, especially between immigrants and non-immigrants? That is a new aesthetic!... I think [theater] is not truly going to change, and ideas are not truly going to shift, unless you have immigrant communities working alongside, let’s say, an African American community—having two communities work together—because *that’s when our aesthetic ideas will truly shift*. That work looks different, because it comes from different bodies.”

“It’s not that the work is new,” in that case, said Dipankar. “It’s just that it’s been invisible, and *you* [mainstream American theater professional or critic] have not seen it.”

“But at the same time,” Meena responded, “it *is* new, because it’s developing ways to create work with people in multiple languages, that truly reflect what our contemporary experiences are... You have to be thoughtful about who the work is serving, and who is doing the actual work. Sometimes they’re the same, and sometimes they’re completely different.”

Meena also stressed the importance of cross-cultural collaborations between communities of color that are defined, programmed and led by people of color. “I think that’s what’s not happening still, in the larger context,” she continued. “Even if there are cross-cultural collaborations, they tend to be within majority—I mean, it’s black and white, usually, or white and somebody—but it’s always kind of contextualized by the majority white community... We have Caucasians on our staff, we have very mixed race people, like our development director who is half Filipino-American, half Anglo-Indian, and married to a Tunisian... The “majority” looks very different in that room, than outside [in Minnesota]... It is about creating our own alternative world... To create an alternate space, and really to educate people about alternate aesthetics, is very important to us.”

Dipankar joined in, “We’ve got to learn how to define and articulate the complexity of these alternative aesthetics.” He recalled that even in the early days of the company, there were artists who recognized the importance of what Pangea was trying to create. “In 1996, we asked our senior set designer why he stayed with us, when he could make so much more money working with larger companies,” Dipankar said, smiling at the memory. “He answered, ‘because you’re 50 years ahead of your time.’”

The Drama Off-Stage: Survival of Ensemble Theaters

*To create an ensemble, we need artists. To create work, we needed a sustained commitment over a period of time. Once we have Artists and Time, we require a space to create the work in. So identifiably, we need funding for **artists** to have **time** in a **space** to create **work!***

- Meena Natarajan

Pangea World Theater has many ways of defining **success**. Of course, success is in the quality of the art they create. But they insist that the success of the organization is not only to produce. “Success is also,” Dipankar said, “whether the demographics on our stage are also the demographics on our staff, and on our board... Success is also the doctor who is a patron, who helps an artist find health care because of his connection to the theater.” Success, as defined by Pangea, is relationships sustained with a community; consciously created structures; equity maintained in the methodology of creating the work; everyone in the room, regardless of role, being treated with respect; everyone feeling like they have been heard, and their ideas have been tried, even if they don’t get to the stage. Success is everybody knowing they are an important part of the process. “What we’re trying to develop is collaborative politics, and that becomes the context of the work,” Meena said. “This idea of the ocean,” Dipankar continued, “of the context in which we create—the project is just the boat; but the ocean has to be consistently present.”

Pangea leaders also have countless **dreams and visions** for the future of their work. Such as touring more. Developing a truly international training institute, that perhaps has training locations in Minneapolis, in India, and maybe Mexico. Creating a fully diverse theater, where all the technicians also reflect the diversity of the cast. Sustaining the ensemble financially, so that artists of color don’t have to work three jobs. Creating collaborative commitments over five

years. Media art becoming a strong feature of their work, and discovering how media can truly interact as an essential part of the live performance. Hosting conferences and coming together with like-minded colleagues to really impact the field. Creating the capacity to develop a rotating leadership structure, that changes these hierarchical terms. Archiving their work. Influencing public policy, in human rights and other sectors. Creating a society in which a poet can be elected president, and artists are called to be part of policy discussions. Learning, growing, embodying...Having space to fail sometimes, and to take meaningful risks.

Archiving is one area of current interest that Pangea has begun creating structures for, particularly in relation to their Indigenous Voices series. They've invited two prominent archivists—Native American curator Renee Reed, and Roy Woodstrom who specializes in archiving oral community narratives, from the local Minneapolis Public Library and Hosmer community library—to be a part of the Board of Directors. The archivists are aiding in Pangea's documentation of artists from oral cultures, especially among recent immigrant communities. These rare interviews and field conversations will be made available to high school and college students who are studying non-western theater and oral history methodologies.

Inherent in the articulation of dreams, however, is the implication of **challenges** to reaching them. The list of challenges facing Pangea World Theater, and ensembles at large, often seems longer than the trail, and path, of visions. For artists of color and their companies, systemic inequity is a challenge that has yet to be overcome. Meena and Dipankar listed, "Inequity in communities. Inequity in economic distribution of resources. Persistent inequities in funding for organizations of color. Inequity in skin color representation. Inequity of space. Inequity of media coverage...And the amount of time that it takes to disassemble the structured patriarchy of western institutions." They also cited the frustration of feeling that some discussions in the national arts field are not changing—that the "same old" question of "artistic excellence" vs. "community" or "social justice work" continues to be played out in national networks. Dipankar gave an example of being part of a six-month "field-wide" conversation in which he was distinctly in the minority as a person of color, and feeling that the issues that the majority of colleagues considered important were not relevant to the communities Pangea works with. "I could not relate to their issues the entire time," he said. "The question of *whose* issues, and the way [some people are] silenced...to me, that's a persistent issue!"

Elaborating on the issue of media coverage, Dipankar explained, "Reviewers do not know how to assess and critique this kind of work. They don't even come, they don't show up. And when they do ... We work with visual artists for our set, but if you bring a visual art reviewer, they say 'Does anyone move? Then contact a dance reviewer.' And the dance reviewer says, 'Does anyone speak? Then talk to the theater reviewer.' And the theater reviewer thinks interdisciplinary work is not theater."

Another challenge is, of course, the economy. "We spend so much time fundraising," Meena said. "In the last year, we've become obsessed with raising money just to survive." Dipankar added, "The people we want to represent do not have political or financial clout...Colleagues say they will introduce us to foundations that you can't apply to...How do we become a 'pre-eminent' organization, so that we'll be seen? If you can't get that money, you stay at a certain budget size, even though you have a vision for growth that is much bigger, even though you have

shown for thirteen years that you can handle growth.” Economic realities such as not having a theater space is a challenge for the company, while the lack of health insurance is a real challenge for the artists they work with.

Related to fundraising is “doing so much administration. We’d love to be able to spend more of our time being artists. We have to keep practicing our art,” Meena said, “If we only do administration, it dries up the artistic part of your brain. You’re looking at life through a different lens [as an artist]—a more compassionate, creative space, and you can handle challenges more creatively.”

A much more nuanced challenge that Dipankar cited is the lack of solidarity among people of color. “As immigrants, people of color,” he said, “there has to be a time when we stop being outsiders in our own minds.”

Needed Support

So what kind of support is needed for ensembles such as Pangea to survive, and thrive? What kind of support could make those visions possible?

Pangea World Theater sees themselves at a turning point. They’ve just completed their second five-year plan, and they are laying the groundwork for planning the next five-year cycle. They feel very clear about their role, in the community and in the national field. And they know they need a space to perform and present their work. “One of our goals in our strategic plan is to have our own space,” Meena explained. “We would love to partner with other like-minded, mission-driven organizations—whether in the arts or human rights organizations—to obtain a space.”

“Everything has developed organically within the company,” Meena said. “These needs arise out of conversations with our ensemble, who often have to work several jobs before they can undertake any acting jobs. Also, we attempt to support as many of our artists financially as we can through employment in administration, as project directors and curators, stage managers or video documenters, based on their skills and interest...But we have always desired to provide a stipend to our primary ensemble members, for them to train physically and vocally in a consistent manner throughout the year. This would not only heighten the consciousness of body / vocal work, and their understanding of each other by training together over a period of time, but also provide additional money to augment their salary when they are doing a production.”

Pangea sees the opportunity to continue learning about the national arts field as very important, through conversations with peers locally and nationally, from small to mid-size to much larger organizations. They would like to learn from peers about what having a space really means, with concrete examples of challenges and growth. They’d like to see more exchanges between arts organizations—to learn skills, to grow and share opportunities—especially “exchanges among ensembles, of fully realized productions. Maybe exchanges between three organizations that commit to doing a production in their city as part of their season. We would love to be a part of or initiate something like that.”

Also, in many ensembles, the leadership and administrative staff go to conferences or seminars, and are engaged in the work on a daily basis; but Meena raised the questions, “How does the knowledge of the ensemble as a whole grow laterally? How does one transmit that knowledge back to the ensemble, given time constraints, and especially when it’s experiential?” Pangea would like to see artists, actors, designers, and tech crew members—who are not on staff but are members of the ensembles—have the opportunity to travel and learn as well. “This [would] open up possibilities of exploration in a new [part of the] community.” They’d also like to see more cross-sector exchanges.

Pangea sees support in documentation and critical writing as crucial. “Especially as we are developing or speaking of alternate aesthetics,” they said. “We run across reviewers who view themselves more in a marketing role than they do in exploring these ideas critically. We would like to have writers who are interested in these issues writing about Pangea and the work, to help us articulate the framing of our work better. Sometimes, we are so deep within our own work—academics and artists like May Joseph who have come in to view our work helped us to contextualize it in a new way, and also made us realize the continuum of the work we are doing, as well as its value. We would like to see more artists writing about the work of other artists.”

One suggestion Pangea offered for how ensembles can support each other, apart from presentations and producing, is through mentorship. For example, Pangea has “mentored many beginning dance and theater organizations / artists as they created their own structures, and served as fiscal agents for at least five organizations as they found their legs in the Twin Cities; we have facilitated strategic plans for a couple organizations here.” Perhaps funders could support peer mentorship more, as it takes staff time and capacity for follow-up, in order for the mentor work to be more effective.

Lastly, when asked what kind of support is most appropriate to doing theater and human rights work specifically, Pangea answered: “We don’t know how to answer that last question. Human rights are the lens through which we see the work. Our art is not outside of social equity, justice, gender or class consciousness—no matter what the artistic expression is. It is a way of viewing the world.”

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Contact to be an artist-in-residence with Mujeres en Ritual in Mexico. Andrea serves on the National Steering Committee of the CAATA (Consortium of Asian American Theaters and Artists), and is a member of Alternate ROOTS and RAWI (Radius of Arab American Writers).