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**HOW NEW TECHNOLOGY INFLUENCES THE MEDIATING  
ROLE OF NONPROFIT ARTS ORGANIZATIONS:  
COMPARING A NEW TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM AT THE  
SPANISH COLONIAL ARTS SOCIETY AND THE  
SOUTHWESTERN ASSOCIATION FOR INDIAN ARTS**

Carole Rosenstein  
The Urban Institute

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**How New Technology Influences the Mediating Role of Nonprofit Arts  
Organizations:  
Comparing A New Technology Program at The Spanish Colonial Arts Society and  
The Southwestern Association for Indian Arts**

*Carole Rosenstein*

Nonprofit organizations are under increasing pressure to employ new technology in their programs and services as both demand and targeted funding in this area grow. This trend is important because new technology influences so directly the role nonprofit organizations have as mediators, and because this mediating role is so central to the place of nonprofit organizations within economies of social and cultural capital. Although the Internet often is viewed to create new Commons and new avenues of access to all such civic spaces, it remains the case that the attitudes, priorities and values of participants in these spaces are not always shared. People brought together through nonprofit programs, services and institutional structures — whether mediated through new technology or not — often systematically maintain their social and cultural differences, and when these social and cultural differences are reinforced by differences in access or in attitudes toward new technology, its application has the potential to complicate or even to disrupt relationships between nonprofit organizations and their constituencies.

A new technology project funded by the telecommunications company US West in Santa Fe, New Mexico illustrates some of the challenges raised by these developments, specifically as they relate to cultural differences.<sup>1</sup> The project was a 1997 collaboration between the Los Alamos National Laboratory, the Spanish Colonial Arts Society (SCAS), and the Southwestern Association for Indian Arts (SWAIA). Its objective was

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<sup>1</sup> Information presented here was gathered during 30 months of ethnographic fieldwork on arts organizations, events and markets in Santa Fe and northern New Mexico (1996-2000).

to compile a database of SCAS and SWAIA artists and to establish a web page for every artist that would be accessible through each organization's own web site. As a result of the project, the Spanish Colonial Arts Society has a content-filled, regularly updated, attractive, user-friendly web site and most of its member artists have web pages currently accessible there. The Southwestern Association for Indian Arts also has a web site, but it is meager and has no connections to artist web pages.

The histories and primary activities of these two organizations are remarkably similar. In their westward expansion at the turn of the century, railway companies developed tourism promotions based on a Romantic idea of Santa Fe as a merger of three cultures — the Pueblo, the Hispano and the Anglo. This vision of TriCultural Santa Fe was standardized during the early 1920's by resident Anglo patrons, community leaders, artists and scholars. Integral to this standardization process was the need for venues in which to house material objects representing the three cultures and to negotiate discourses about their authenticity. This led to the founding of a number of institutions that continue to ground cultural life in Santa Fe: the Museum of New Mexico, School of American Research and Laboratory of Anthropology, the Spanish Colonial Arts Society and Southwestern Association on Indian Affairs (later Southwestern Association for Indian Arts).

Today, the Spanish Colonial Arts Society and Southwestern Association for Indian Arts both produce major arts markets in Santa Fe: the Traditional Spanish Market and the Santa Fe Indian Market. Taking place annually in Santa Fe's central Plaza, the Markets are key festivals in the community's calendar and are among the city's major tourist attractions. Spanish Market includes about 400 artists and draws approximately

50,000 visitors. Indian Market includes about 1,500 artists and draws approximately 200,000 visitors. Both Markets are important sources of income for artists who sell there, as well as for their families, employees and communities. The Markets are considered essential to the preservation of the artistic traditions represented. Both include a series of awards intended to promote specific areas of tradition and innovation, and artists must be accepted through a jurying process in order to be included in either Market. The two organizations also share several Board members, prominent donors and influential volunteers.

Given that the histories and primary activities of these two organizations are so similar, why did they fare so differently within the US West project? By comparing the two in terms of the cultural attitudes their constituencies have toward the art objects included in these Markets and how these attitudes effect the mediating roles both of organizations, the insight emerges that a host organization's specific position as a culture broker can fundamentally influence both how new technology will be used and its value in that particular relation. Understanding this to be the case makes the already complex issue of a "digital divide" even more compelling.

The Spanish Colonial Arts Society was founded in 1925 by two Anglo artists as a means to foster a revival of Hispano folk art.<sup>2</sup> Throughout its history, this revival has been articulated around two related but distinguishable themes rooted in the Arts and Crafts Movement ideology that not only can traditional forms of *production* enable a genuine and full expression of the principles of an authentic folk culture, but that

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<sup>2</sup> The term "Hispano" refers to traditionally Spanish-speaking communities in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, and is the term commonly used in current scholarship about this community. The term "Mexicano" also has been used to refer to this community. The term "Chicano" is not frequently used to refer to this community.

*consumption* of such objects also can provide a way to avoid the corrupting influence of industrialization and mass production. Depression-era WPA and vocational education programs in New Mexico were developed upon the idea that the preservation of historically continuous methods of folk art production could provide a basis for protecting related economic, social and cultural forms in poor, rural communities. On the other hand, when the first “Native Market” opened in Santa Fe in 1924, its organizers emphasized consumption. The Market carried Spanish Colonial style domestic products that were targeted to the bourgeois home — carved trunks, rugs, furniture, draperies, Lazy Susans, record racks — and were meant to “recreate the glamorous tradition of the Hacienda [which] lives on in the highly skilled crafts of the Spanish-American” (1924 Native Market advertisement).<sup>3</sup>

Although the domestic objects prominent in the early period of the Hispano folk art revival are still produced, the focus at Spanish Market today is on *santos*. These carved and painted “images of saints” are physical embodiments of spiritual beings and, as such, they are powerful mediators not only between sacred and profane realms but also between socially and culturally differentiated people. For a *santo* to be a valid representation of a saint, its producer must be filled with faith and intend not to produce a commodity, but to worship the saint through the process of artistic creation. When that is the case, the *santo* produced holds the sacred power of the saint. This sacred power enables the object to determine its relation with a consumer; *santos* are even believed to quicken spiritual impulses in those who buy them.

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<sup>3</sup> In this model, Hispanos retain their folk culture by providing the means to preserve a traditional sphere which will be occupied by the *patron* of this modern Hacienda — a consumer of objects made by Hispanos, not a member of the contemporary Hispano population. WPA-influenced models considered revival forms to be expressions of the regional “genius” of a living people, rather than of some historical pinnacle in reference to which the contemporary population was a degenerate form.

While SCAS embraces a complex set of goals compiled as the Hispano folk art revival has developed — to preserve the Spanish Colonial style, maintain a stable, legitimate market for Hispano folk art and contribute to contemporary Hispano community life — they are not always easy to reconcile. Through its strictly enforced standards and guidelines for the style of work that can be shown and sold at Spanish Market, SCAS leverages the collectors' market. This has the consequence that Hispano artists sometimes have their work assessed by panels of judges that include Anglo members. Moreover, these standards of tradition are enforced by the organization's management and Board, who are historically predominantly Anglo (and were so in 1997). Anglo legitimacy to assess Hispano work is a consistent source of conflict.

Both in terms of Hispano beliefs about how the sacred versus commodity status of a *santo* is constituted and in terms of these negotiations about guidelines and standards for the production of authentically Spanish Colonial style objects, it is in the production process that intercultural tensions are accentuated. The consumption process is comparatively safe. Consequently, it is the mission of the Spanish Colonial Arts Society (SCAS) to maintain and enhance a legitimate and stable market for Hispano folk art objects that gains dominance among the organization's goals. In regard to this mission, the constituency of SCAS is both Hispano and Anglo — Hispano artists and the Hispano community benefit from a solid market, as do collectors (a group considered predominantly or typically Anglo). The primary benefits to collectors are financial and, by gaining expertise and personal connections to artists, these outsiders can affiliate with a genuinely local tradition. Of course, artists also benefit financially. More importantly, though, the lauding of *santos*-making artists as a group of specialized cultural experts and

the promotion of Hispano culture benefits the Hispano community in terms of the legitimacy and prestige gained from the preservation of its claims to a Spanish Colonial legacy.<sup>4</sup>

The role of the Southwestern Association for Indian Arts (SWAIA) has been quite different. The organization, originally called the Southwestern Association on Indian Affairs, was founded in 1922 to mobilize opposition to the Bursam Bill, which would have transferred land and water rights from Pueblo Indians to settlers. The Association served as a liaison between Anglo civil society and the Pueblo community, providing advocacy, legal, medical and technical services and the promotion of traditional arts. In 1936, the organization revitalized the Museum of New Mexico's Southwest Indian Fair and began using this "Indian Market" to counter what administrators saw as the corrupting influence on Indian art of tourist and trader's styles.

The elite, Anglo and mainly female patrons who promoted Indian art in this period emphasized its status as a Fine Art. These patrons saw an aesthetic sophistication expressed in Indian ceramics in particular and associated this sensibility with a universalized notion of Civilization. The poverty and "backwardness" of Native American communities in New Mexico and Arizona were abhorred in contrast with this image of a refined Indian culture. Standards imposed by Indian Market guidelines and promoted by Indian Market awards were established in order to strip away such defiling influences and get back to forms that could express this timeless culture. The models used to develop such forms often were taken from objects uncovered during

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<sup>4</sup> Such matters have important consequences: Hispano claims to land granted properties draw on this discourse about the current population's legitimate connection with the Spanish Colonial past and Hispanos see themselves as significantly disadvantaged because such claims appear less legitimate than those of local Native Americans.

archaeological excavations throughout the region.<sup>5</sup> Patrons argued that these rediscovered forms should appropriately be displayed and sold in contexts like art museums and galleries, rather than ethnographic museums and Trading Posts.

Competing rhetoric about the social service versus patronage missions of the Southwestern Association for Indian Arts (SWAIA) persist throughout its history. In 1997, SWAIA had its first Indian President, a religious official from San Ildefonso Pueblo and former employee of the Institute of American Indian Arts Museum. The organization had a majority Native American staff and the Board had the highest number of Indian members in its history. During his tenure, the President's program concentrated on shifting away from the image of Indian Market as an antidote to Indian poverty, and toward that of Indian Market as an international showcase for Indian high culture. This focus on the Fine Art status of objects exhibited at Indian Market was informed by the contemporary concern with repatriation of Indian artifacts and the reclamation of art styles and objects by indigenous people around the world.

At a SWAIA Board meeting held to hear disputes over an increase in the fees artists pay for a booth at Indian Market, a spokesman for the Governor of Santo Domingo Pueblo said: "I support Indian Market because it is our culture. Indian Market is not a White Man. ... Some of you want to be classy, get ahead of others. But, we won't follow you." During this highly contentious meeting — a moment that proved pivotal in a long struggle to expel SWAIA's President — the degree to which Indian Market is perceived by Pueblo people as a Native American form became clear. Throughout the meeting,

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<sup>5</sup> The most celebrated styles of Pueblo pottery — Hopi, Santa Clara and San Ildefonso — all originated out of collaborations between Anglo archaeologists and Pueblo potters. In the earliest case, a collaboration was initiated when archaeologist J. Walter Fewkes asked Hopi potter Nampeyo to make intact reproductions of artifacts.

Indian Market was characterized as a distinctive time when members of various regional groups -- Navajos, Apaches, different Pueblos -- come together as a cohesive community, and when stratification in income and influence among these communities and between generations may be leveled through cooperation and redistribution. Although member artists did view SWAIA as responsible to them for maintaining and enhancing a market for their work, it was when the organization appeared to adopt criteria that might exclude Native American people historically included within the community of Indian Market exhibitors that demands came for the President's resignation.<sup>6</sup>

SWAIA's mission is to maintain the "Indian-ness" of Indian Market and to maintain as its constituency those Native American and indigenous people who are brought together at the Market. In this vision of SWAIA's role, the organization acts as a mediator between Anglos and Indian people in order to secure Anglo financial support for that Indian constituency, but must clearly bound off Anglo influence on the evaluation of objects. Disputes about the authenticity of objects in regard to their production is a matter over which the Native American community claims exclusive authority. At the same time, the fact that the values of these objects as *art* objects are constituted within the Anglo contexts of museums and collections is recognized. Although Indian Market brings Anglos and Indian people together in this exchange context, ultimately the differences between them are reasserted rather than overcome.

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<sup>6</sup> The eventual resignation was seen to have been orchestrated by The Council of Artists, a body separate from the administration whose task it is to represent artists' concerns to the SWAIA Board. In a number of contentious Board meetings, presenters alluded to the idea that the Council of Artists — made up entirely of Indian Market artists and, therefore, entirely of Federally registered members of recognized Indian "tribes" — has greater legitimacy as a representative body than do the SWAIA administration or Board, with its mix of Anglos and Indians.

The situations of the Spanish Colonial Arts Society (SCAS) and the Southwestern Association for Indian Arts (SWAIA) are, then, quite different. A *santo* is already merely a physical representation of a sacred being, and the value of the object itself can be threatened neither by reproducing an image of it nor by facilitating its exchange. Moreover, because the SCAS constituency is composed of both Hispanos and Anglos, and because the organization is primarily associated with Spanish Market, it is completely appropriate as a mediator of intercultural exchange relations. Because the potency and authenticity of these objects is established during their production, the use of the Internet to increase consumer access to *santos* and other Hispano folk art objects is culturally safe.

On the other hand, a Pueblo ceramic, for example, may be kept for ceremonial use, collected as a souvenir or as a precious commodity, exhibited in an art museum or in an ethnographic museum. Unless retained within an Indian consumption context, the object is subject to alternate evaluations; that is one reason why repatriation becomes so important. Moreover, because the SWAIA constituency is composed of Native American and other indigenous people, yet the organization remains primarily associated with Indian Market, it is problematic as a mediator of intercultural exchange relations. Because the potency and authenticity of Indian objects is established during their consumption, the use of the Internet to increase consumer access to Indian art objects is culturally dangerous. This is not to claim that individual SWAIA member artists would reject a web page where they might advertise their work. Rather, it is to reinforce that if the organization sponsoring and implementing a given new technology program can't

articulate how the project fits its mission and benefits its constituents, the project is endangered.

In the US West project, the Internet was primarily employed as a marketing tool. Along with this marketing priority comes an ideology about a common constituency, an ideology based on a fundamentally neo-liberal conception of the democratic and “blind” character of “the market” and “the marketplace.” In the case of Indian Market and Indian art, “the market” and “the marketplace” are decidedly Anglo and typically opposed with SWAIA’s Indian constituency; that is one reason why the Indian character of Indian Market must be so carefully protected. Had this project focused on Native American community building, SWAIA might have been able to use the opportunity more effectively.

During the period when the US West project was implemented, SWAIA lacked organizational and financial stability relative to SCAS. This, along with cultural and social differences between SWAIA staff and the technical experts at Los Alamos National Laboratory, undoubtedly contributed to SWAIA’s relative failure in the project. However, rather than view the cultural factors discussed here as secondary, we should consider that the vector of causality may move in the other direction. SWAIA’s relatively unstable role as a culture broker between Native Americans and Anglos creates a wide range of difficulties impacting the organization’s effectiveness, and this case is a symptom of that deeper disorder.

This discussion raises some issues for further thinking and research about how new technology programs can be effectively and appropriately implemented: How is a nonprofit organization’s constituency defined? Do constituents agree about whether they

are well served by new technology? Does the organization have the technical expertise needed to develop and maintain a new technology program? Is funding available for this technical assistance? It also raises some questions about the impact of new technology on the roles of nonprofit organizations: Who may be left out of the developing system? Are these emerging marginalizations or do they replicate those already existing? Whose interests, values and demands are being served by new technology services and programs? To what degree might new technology actually replace, enhance or expand some of the traditional functions of nonprofit organizations, particularly in regard to services? Are these trends desirable?