

PERFORMING OUR FUTURE

How to Spot a Free Space / Community Center of Power

Community centers of power (from civil rights strategist Bayard Rustin) are one type of **free space** (from feminist historian Sara Evans and civil rights organizer Harry Boyte). They are the basic building blocks of a future where we own *what we make*. They are *organizations of, by, and for the people in a place*—where (1) all are welcome, (2) everyone creates and leads together, and (3) communities speak and act for themselves: telling their own story instead of letting others speak for them, acting together across differences instead of succumbing to imposed divisions, and recognizing and working from their assets instead of getting immobilized by their deficits.

Community centers of power/free spaces look different in different communities. The key, to quote Evans and Boyte, is that they are a **“center of community life”**...



...rather than an administrative, service-delivery, or **“marketing operation.”**



How can you tell if you're in a community center of power/free space? Ask yourself:

- 1. When you walk in, do you feel like you belong? Does everyone else?**
- 2. Does the stuff on the walls show the key role the place plays in community life?**
- 3. Is everyone allowed to go everywhere? Including into the production areas?**
- 4. Do the people there, including the people in charge, reflect the full diversity of the community?**
- 5. Are the people there setting the agenda together, making things together, and keeping the value of what gets made?**
- 6. Can anyone in the community join in and take on a leadership role?**
- 7. When you walk out, are you in the community?**