

By way of introduction—Sonia Mills

I don't know the details of mervin's background and I don't want, or indeed, need to know... it was only after a couple of years of knowing and interacting with him that he alluded in my company to his bad boy past.

However, his insight into what makes people run (boys, in particular), his commitment to the Container concept, his day-to-day persistence, and his tolerance of things that don't happen when and as they should, are indeed the attributes of a convert... somebody born again to some new insights and understanding, and in mervin's case, I believe because of his own transformation, the CERTAINTY that transformation can take place.

Of course, chance is a factor. A great factor. It was in mervin's case. He was at the right place at the right time. And also, he may very well be THE one in a million. Those are the imponderables. It may very well not be possible to convert the life of one, or two, or three in ten... On an average. Or every time.

Because of mervin's overstated 'yardie' style of dress and presentation, and his understated style of personal communication (open, pleasant, speaking quietly and gently), it is necessary to enter his space to fully understand what the Container hopes to do, and this is not just to 'transfer technology' by teaching people computer skills. mervin's conversion from whatever he was to what he is now was obviously from within. A penny dropped and unlocked the alleyways to places in his right and left brain that he didn't know existed—sophisticated thought, intellectual longing, social action, stability... It is all of this that mervin wants to transfer to the people of Palmers Cross and Jamaica and he had hoped to do this by traveling around in a container and dispensing it! Interestingly, it obviously involved as well some aspects of 'social technology' which he must have observed in his society of adoption and chose to 'repatriate'. Aspects like cordiality, courtesy, honoring commitments—including time, respect, social responsibility...

The philosophy of the Container is encoded in the Container itself—the way it's built, the way it's run—and in mervin's writings and other artistic output. Much of it has to be received subliminally!

What is so charismatic about the case of the Container, and mervin himself, is that once inside the space—the physical and psychological space, that is—it is possible to feel the potential for change, and the power of faith.

This magnetism is obviously experienced by the clients of the Container, bad bwoy and girl alike. How to sustain this, and transfer it, is the problem. It is clear to see what can make it die... just neglect and lack of resources. But... what can make it live?

The truth is that Container space as conceived by mervin cannot function without mervin, or without *a* mervin. The external circumstances, the politics and economics and poverty of social capital, don't allow it. Whatever the faults of the UK or societies like that, you can usually find a space to incubate 'a container'. Until the political and economic powerbrokers join the struggle for transformation... Well... The search continues.



A peek inside the Container as John listens in on some digital ring tones for his mobile phone.

mongrelstreet: the culture of code—mervin Jarman

Codes are migratory property, often applied to make solutional changes. As mongrel, our existence is dependent on the application of the right set of codes. This sometimes means software codes, at other times it is a mixture of soft and hardware, but always there is a social code. Personality, attitude and response, all these have to be subliminally encoded into the work so that it can produce the required response, both in audience and participant.

Palmers Cross, though special to me, is certainly not unique to the world. Our corners are not dissimilar to other hang-out zones across the reach of poverty-stricken, marginalized communities world-wide, even some which are not so impoverished but lack directional energy, and where the applied code is not distinguished or channelled in a way that enables greater self-clarification.

If you understand how to read the codes, if you know when it's off or on, the binary becomes simple, like breathing in and out. The codes are not strict but are explicit—dyslexic programmers take responsibility for the delivery of the code that's driving the process.

The Container is a quasi self-sustained anomaly created out of Mongrel's attitude and response, driven by the codalisation of culture and technology. The Container exists on the margin of the mainstream but, however marginalized the global peripherals are, still subject to the basic binaries. As a community-based initiative the Container has had to make situational decisions that determine the kind of challenges that will affect the users and ultimately the community. Significant to this is how these codes are perceived by others and the ramification of its actions as it applies across the social demography.

At work or play the Container permeates a Family of happy boyz and girlz!! Community Without Borders Workshop.



Recently I was speaking with a friend about the exploits of Mongrel and why we are perceived to be so successful; this I explained was because we speak the language of the streets. Rich and I are 'in the streets' prodigy/progeny of a mongrelStreet culture! My friend wanted to know if I was talking about 'patois', a localised cultural language. Indeed I was referring to the codes of the street, the subliminal blips by which we analyse, assess and determine an identity. These are equated to and reasonably assigned as codes, digital codes, a subliminal codalisation of culture and ethics! The Container Project is representative of this mongrelized code, constantly changing, seeking new and more diverse ways to better serve its nucleus, the Mongrel X Factor.



Catching a sneak pre-view of Jim's Repair, Maintenance and Coding Workshop sponsored by UNESCO/IPDC.

When I suggested the collaboration that became known as the "Mongrel Collective" this was our first advance towards the street codalisation as we began to apply it to our cultural identity. 0101 (codes) began its journey of reclassification as culture. Rich Pierre-Davis and I are authentic 'STREET'. We recognized the codes although we were from very different cultural backgrounds and geo-location, Identification, however, was instant. We appreciated the empathy which this new technology had to offer, the mode of representation as prescribed under the Artec umbrella. We knew immediately that, to the youth on the corners, this would be a welcoming alternative

and we subsequently used our influence to get as many youths enrolled at Artec as we could.

We have continued through our work to use the Mongrel collective as an instrument of this intervention, working with international communities of marginalized youths and other artist groups to foster this emerging culture. We will continue to develop street art-technology (arTec) initiatives, so as to ignite the curiosity, imagination and emerging energy of young mongrels on the street corners.

The Container has enjoyed marginal success. Unfortunately we still require stake funding for us to implement sustainability plans. This would enable us to encourage more young people to participate. It is commonly suggested that when you bring something like this (the Container Project) to a community the youths, especially those hard to reach youths, should find the incentive to come and participate. The reality is that these youths often have no parental safety net, so they have to secure for themselves food, clothing and shelter, basic necessities on a day-to-day basis. It therefore means that a day spent at the Container is a day essentially without food, a day that they could have been begging, hustling, or robbing someone. Thus, is the reality, as much as they desire to come, the facts of their lives determine that, though most in need, they have to give it a miss.

Sometimes I feel like the walls are closing in: it feels so depressing, as it seems there is no one to remedy their situation. This



Interactive screen with mervin Jarman pointing out the way to computer competence and its legacy. Community Without Borders Workshop.

is a heavy personal burden; I often wonder if it is always like this for others, or is there a select bunch of individuals that are prescribed this pill!!! With regards to the 'repatriation of technology', sometimes it is pleasing to acknowledge the achievement/contributions that the initiative has made to the Palmers Cross and to other communities. On several occasions individuals and organizations from around the world have benefited from insight into the concept and functionality of the Container **philosophy**.

On other occasions it can be rather dismaying, as we struggle to maintain the project as a viable entity.

In the UK the project raised a lot of eyebrows. It was hailed as a rather powerful statement of action "**repatriating technology**", which may also be one of the factors in the lack of a political support and resulting lack of support from funding establishments. Was it seen as diminishing their power—'this likkle bugeyaga bway talking bout repatriating technology! A who him tink him is??' Although widely hailed as the height of genius in its conception and extreme bravado, not much more than lip service has been paid to the project by most. Could it be that giving full-on support to the project would mean acknowledging that the system has failed us 'the bugeyaga ragamuffins' in the street.



A group of participants at the Container's Community Without Borders Workshop sponsored by ICT4D Jamaica.

April 2006 marked the third year of the Container Project implementation in Jamaica, land we love! We have managed to get an evaluation commissioned by UNESCO, a Project grant for purchasing equipment and workshop productions from IPDC UNESCO, the Canada Council and ICT4D Jamaica. We have also managed to get broadband connectivity via the Cable and Wireless Jamaica Foundation, and Training Courses accreditation by Heart Trust NTA. Outside of this no other corporate entity has responded in a manner reflective of the responsibility that the project has adopted. But we have hope and in the belief that others will come to see and believe/invest in this leap of faith for our own salvation.



Container posse cooling out after a long day's work—Digital Storytelling.

The aim of the project is to try tame some of the street's hardcore! To give to the young men and women of our street corners an alternative to their seemingly endless spiral of drugs, unwanted pregnancy, crime and violence! Many initiatives speak to this, but none so localized as us, and not a lot with the street cred and insight of the Container Project. As a progeny of the street I may not be the best face to represent the project. It is my opinion that institutions/organizations exhibit a certain level of discomfort when faced with elements that are either unknown or unstable. My quantities are not known, there is no quantifiable definition for mervin (the mongrelStreet) Jarman. And that may well be the biggest discriminatory factor of all.



Audre Tulloch, Melesiea Miller and Novalyn Kelly teaming up to produce a group story.

I do what I do because no one else will do it for us. It is ok to use sports to attract the idle youth, it is cool and encouraging to work with youths who are "safe". This means that there are no risks, a fail-safe programme for corporate Jamaica (and for the world) to invest in. Success is assured and all elements of difficulty eliminated. This is a subliminal code. This is the margin within which codalisation is bound, the margins that still leaves the cadre of real bad boys and girls who don't come with any security or assurances but who need as much or even more attention and motivation to achieve the change. I know this because I am one of them, one of the rejected, and sidelined, those relegated to the sidewalks and street corner of our time...

[Link](#)

The Container Project
<www.container-project.net>



Camille Turner working with the participants, sharing the info unselfishly, always with a smile.



The Container Project



Jennifer LaFontaine and her team before they head out to discover Palmers Cross under the cameras.



Local schoolgirls having a look inside the Container

All images courtesy mervin Jarman.