

arts learning Xchange

BEN CAMERON'S REMARKS - Thursday, July 16th 2009

Thank you. I am so delighted to be back in a two-Senator MN! As many of you know, I miss this city every single day—and especially the chance to see your work on an ongoing basis. The six years I spent here were among the personally and artistically richest of my life—and I am forever indebted to you and your organizations.

Now that you know who I am, let's find out a bit more about who you are—the first of several times I'll ask you to reveal yourself to the group as a whole. Please stand if you are:

- Artistic Staff at a nonprofit
- Management/administrative staff at a nonprofit
- From a for-profit
- A funder
- Work in higher education
- A board member
- A representative of a service organization
- A member of the Canadian consulate
- If you haven't yet stood.

Thank you!

In these difficult times, local arts community are coming together more frequently—it has been a pleasure to be at comparable meetings in New York, Portland, Seattle, Boston, Chicago and now Minneapolis today--to share information and explore viable new strategies for the future—meetings in which all participants—me included—should strive to be at our best by embodying the pathway of creativity as described by Bill Moyers: “showing up—really showing up---listening deeply, speaking the truth, and letting go of predetermined results.”

Organizations I see everywhere are increasingly open to thinking about partnerships, collaborations, shared services, reduction of duplicated efforts, the possibilities of mergers—including potentially mergers across discipline lines or involving complementary organizations, e.g. a playwright development program with a producing theatre. Pricing structures, collaborative use of facilities, partnerships with those outside the arts—all are seriously on the table as we examine our future in new, expansive ways—and much of the richness of today may lie in beginning those conversations with others or striking up relationships that will culminate in new strategies in the future.

In a time when scarcity of resources heightens the competitive urge and can make it so easy to turn on one another, we should strive today and in the future to elevate our discourse to a vision of an arts ecology, realizing that praising theatre while disparaging dance or opera, arguing for the avant-garde while denigrating the mainstream, pleading the case of the smaller at the expense of the larger ultimately advantages no one and harms us all. We must bypass competing for a piece of a fixed or shrinking pie and seize the power of co-opetition, as Yale author Barry Nailbuff urges—cooperating to grow the pie for us all, even as we continue to inevitably compete for a piece of it. We must cooperate today, tomorrow and for years to come, whether through more meetings like this, through participation in the upcoming planned Free Night of Theatre (for those of you in the theatre community), or through other opportunities which have yet to be created or defined.

Events in Washington proved the power of this approach in the rescue of the \$50M earmarked for the arts in the economic recovery legislation--an earmark eliminated by the Senate but later restored as a result of focused advocacy, activism and a carefully articulated sense of our importance to our communities. Even

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while we recognize the paltry amount this figure represents—and the underlying message that in itself signals—we need to grab every valuable lesson from the rescue: the value of a strategic cross-disciplinary coordinated message, the value of data in building our case, the power of celebrity spokespeople on our behalf, and the dedication of our Boards and political allies. Indeed, in this time, we need to always approach lawmakers, not with palms outstretched prepared to articulate what we need the government to do for us, but proud and confident, ready to articulate what we will do for the world. We will employ significant numbers—of artists yes and carpenters and electricians, caterers and more, we will stimulate economies, as the lure for tourism we will fill hotel rooms and restaurants, we will promote the quest for social justice and community and more—plans of action designed to establish us, not as part of the need, but as a part of the solution.

Today, I want to talk to you about change—ever accelerating, ever confounding, often perplexing change. Just think: one year ago, Barak Obama and Hillary Clinton sat in the Senate, President George W Bush ruled from the White House, and the name Sarah Palin was largely unknown outside the frozen north. General Motors happily cranked out Hummers, Bernie Madoff was revered as an investor extraordinaire—and the Dow Jones (amid apologies for sluggish economic growth) stood at 11,496—one of the lower points for the year to date. My how much can change in just one year.

We gather this morning in the shadow of a global economic crisis—a crisis that, in the United States at least, has provoked wide spread unemployment, high home foreclosure rates, and a general social anxiety unprecedented in my own lifetime. So let's put our cards on the table for a moment as a prelude to the deeper discussions we want to have: where do our individual organizations stand in this moment? Let's get a quick declaration of where we are through physically standing when appropriate—an exercise not meant to embarrass—no names will be taken, and since EVERYTHING we do at Doris Duke is through intermediary peer panels and I therefore have no voice in determining a roster of grantees, you can be absolutely candid with me and indeed have the opportunity to abuse a funder without negative consequence. What better way to spend a morning?

Please stand:

- If your expense budget has been reduced in the last 12 months from prior levels (which could mean the year that ended June 30)—and let me stand among you here—with a loss of \$800M in our portfolio, we have taken a 25% administrative (as well as budget) cut.
- If your budget has remained flat.
- If you've grown.
- If your staff has been reduced in size/taken cuts or furlough.
- If you're increased staff and held or increased compensation levels.
- If you finished the year with a deficit.
- Balanced.
- With a surplus.

Better than I had feared, frankly—and all of us are to be applauded and to applaud one another for surviving, regardless of how difficult our struggles may be. For the arts have suffered greatly in this moment: for the nation at large, individual donations to the arts trended southwards in 2008; government support—depending on where you live in this country—has followed suit in 2009, as has corporate giving, which is currently in a frightening free fall. Unfortunately, still to come is the fuller drop in foundation giving: even while many foundations have already pulled back significantly, the practice of others to base giving budgets on an average value of assets calculated over 24-36 months means the sector as a whole is still artificially buoyed by the robust economy of 07, and that the real “hit” in foundation budgets will be not be fully felt until late 2010 or 2011. Those groups fortunate enough to have endowments now find them “below water”—a decline that places current value below original

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invested corpus and (in some areas) makes it illegal to take any endowment earnings at all. On the earned revenue side, general consumer anxiety, coupled with declines in discretionary income, has led to a curious phenomenon in arts fields: while audience attendance numbers have fallen less than many had feared, a closer look reveals that holding attendance has gone hand in hand with drastic reductions in ticket prices or free events—meaning the number of bodies may be flat or even increasing, but that the aggregate earned income is significantly down. Galas are under-performing, and special events increasingly challenged to meet goals. These challenges to both earned and contributed revenues make for a perilous time: indeed, according to a national study from Americans for the Arts, 10,000 arts organizations and 260,000 jobs are at risk and may be lost by the end of the current calendar year.

Many organizations across the country as well as here implemented pre-emptive budget cuts in the 10-15% range for the 08-09 FY and are planning cuts at least as large again for the current or upcoming 09-10 one. The litany of strategies within these cuts is well known: downscaling or eliminating productions and exhibitions, reducing performance weeks and resorting more frequently to small cast or reduced scale work; hiring freezes, staff furloughs, layoffs, elimination of retirement or health benefits, emergency fundraising appeals and—in the worst case—closure. And for artists—all of whom this impacts dramatically by the reduced opportunities for their work—the downsizing in non-arts sectors is equally problematic: many artists obtain the lion's share of their financial income, access to health insurance and retirement benefits through such non-arts work. According to a recent study from our National Endowment for the Arts, the unemployment rate for artists is growing at twice the rate of the national average.

Feeling battered by economic change beyond our control, it can be sometimes difficult to recall that 2008 for the most part was a year in which we were excited by and sought change—indeed, a remarkable time in which (for the first time I can remember) BOTH political parties eschewed the past and jockeyed to be champions of change. The year culminated in an exhilarating way, despite the economy: it was a benchmark year in which who was elected, how elections were conducted, who was engaged by the process,—in numbers, in age, and in race— who was empowered to act, who led the way—all signaled a fundamental changing of the world order and produced a wave of energy dedicated to change, to possibility, to a hopeful future for us all.

What we did, who we engaged and how we engaged them, who was empowered to act, who led the way—key notions that I'd like us to consider as we gaze into our collective future and contemplate change in the arts together.

Our own drive towards change in the arts pre-dates 2008, however, as we have now for several years realized that changes in the world will require us to think anew.

At the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation where I work, our late benefactress charged us in her will with the care of “actors, singers, dancers and musicians in the presentation and performance of their work”—a directive that, in intersection with her lifelong passions, has led us to dedicate our resources to artists working in jazz, contemporary dance, and theatre, and the organizations who nurture, present and produce them.

As we entered our 10th year of grantmaking, we convened more than 700 artists, managers, administrators and board members in 22 meetings in 2006—two years before the economic collapse-- to explore the issues artists and organizations face in the new millennium.

We heard three kinds of issues in these conversations. We heard idiosyncratic issues—issues particular to one field but not to others—issues of career transition for dancers, who train in many cases foregoing college and other vocational training and at the age of 35 find themselves at the end of the careers with no

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clear alternatives about how now to spend their lives—a powerful, hugely challenging issue but one that does not resonate for jazz artists—artists who play often into their 70's, 80's and 90's but who now face the disintegration of the road and the collapse of the traditional recorded music industry—an issue that means little to the theatre artist, and so on.

We heard chronic issues—issues of under- undercapitalization for arts groups, only a fraction of whom have—or perhaps I should say had—ample reserves, significant fixed assets, and endowments—and issues of under-compensation, not only of artists, but of managers, administrators and technicians. Indeed, when we talk about the philanthropic support for the arts—the donations of individuals, corporations, government and foundations—too often we forget to cite the single largest philanthropic sector of all: the arts professionals on whose lives the work is made.

And while these issues are hugely critical—and indeed, we must continue to work to overcoming them—we called them chronic because, quite frankly, we heard the same issues in comparable conversations 10 years ago, 20 years ago, 30 years ago and more.

Four issues, however, emerged as especially powerful in all fields, and as especially particular to our 21st Century.

First, the increasing dysfunctionality of the 501(c)3 model—the breakdown of old fundraising strategies, the difficulties of managing boards, and the hunger for new models, as arts leaders, increasingly overwhelmed by the time and effort necessary for fundraising, board cultivation, advocacy and the like, asked “Isn't there another way for us to finance and support the work we are called to do?”

We heard concern about an impending generational transfer of leadership. While much of the conversation focused on where we might find these new leaders, especially given different expectations from young people around higher compensation, shorter hours—in essence less patience for the sacrificed lives of dignity and the financial masochism that were the givens for so many in my own generation—the conversation was revealing in a new way. “There are plenty of us eager to give ourselves to the arts, but we don't want to be the mere custodians of those institutions you have already made,” the young people in the room said. “Unless we are given the same authority to reinvent and reshape organizations as you yourselves were given, we are not interested”—a point of view that focuses the issue, not on the identities of heirs apparent, but on organizational capacity for flexibility and change.

We heard about the erosion of audiences in every field—declining subscription renewals, difficulties in attracting single ticket buyers, increased “churn”—a term reflecting the high percentage—typically 70-75%—of audience members who attend a single event in a season and do not return—the collapse in the window of social planning post 9/11, when seemingly overnight audiences shifted from committing, not two to four weeks in advance, but more typically purchasing on the day of or, if you're lucky, 24-48 hours in advance—a disorienting shift that continues to plague box office and marketing departments who struggle to understand the implications on a Tuesday for a sparsely sold Saturday performance. We face a populace characterized by over-scheduling and exhaustion—a time in which 42% of men and 55% of women say they are too tired to do the things they truly want to do, and where the #1 answer to the question of most eagerly anticipated use of a free evening is no longer dinner with friends or a movie or a performing arts event, but is instead “a good night's sleep.” After decades of growth, our audiences are shrinking and that our own financial needs, driven in many cases by escalating fixed costs of facilities, insurance, health care and more, in tandem with negative shifts in funding mean escalating ticket prices that threaten to place attendance beyond so many in our communities we wish to reach and serve.

Finally, we heard the struggle to understand more fully the impact of technology on the live performing arts. The potential of technology as a marketing device is, if anything, too effective: in trying to attract the

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attention of potential ticket buyers, we now compete with (depending on who you read) between 3-5,000 different marketing messages a typical American sees every single day. In fact, technology has emerged as our biggest competitor for leisure time: Gen X-ers spend 20.7 hours of leisure time every week on TV and online combined, the majority TC; Gen Y-ers spend even more—22.8 hours, the majority on line—and growing by leaps and bounds. By the time Net-geners reach their twenties, they will have spent more than 20,000 hours on the Internet and an additional 10,000 hours playing video games, a trend producing a radical redefinition of a cultural market in which computer games now outsell movie and music recordings combined.

Most profoundly, perhaps, technology is altering the very assumptions of consumption: thanks to the internet, we believe we can get anything we want, whenever we want it, customized to our own personal specifications. We can shop at three in the morning or ten o'clock at night, expectations of convenience and personalization that live performing arts organizations—organizations who depend on set curtain times, specific geographic venues, attendant inconveniences of parking, travel and the like—simply cannot meet. And in an age where young people especially access culture on demand through YouTube and iTunes any time they want it and for little or no apparent cost, what will it mean in the future when we ask a potential audience member to pay \$100 for a symphony, opera or dance ticket, when that consumer has been accustomed to downloading on the internet for .99 a song or for free?

However particular these issues feel to us in the arts, we are not alone: we are essentially in the midst of a realignment of cultural expression and communication—a realignment that is shaking the newspaper and television industries, the publishing and book industries, and (in an indication of what may be yet to come) has left the recorded music and music distribution industries in disarray. Indeed, the crisis the arts face today is not financial. The crisis we face is one of urgency and relevance: the financial merely redefines the resources we bring to bear in confronting the crisis.

Surely we see ourselves in the words of poet Adrienne Rich in *The Dream of a Common Language XIII*: “We’re out in a country that has no language, no laws...Whatever we do together is pure invention. The maps they gave us were out of date by years...”

And aren't you glad you invited me here to brighten your day?

In looking to the future, I find inspiration in the words of two different thinkers: our 19th Century American President Abraham Lincoln, who in his second inaugural address said, “The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. As our case is new, so must we think anew and act anew.”

And Wayne Gretzky, the Canadian ice hockey player, who when asked to account for his greatness said simply, “I skate to where the puck will be.”

In a time when the world economy is hitting the reset button and the mantra in economic circles now is less “economic recovery” than “economic reinvention,” how do we see the present as an invitation in the arts to fundamentally reinvent what we do and how we operate? How do we think differently and reconceive as we learned last year what we will do, whom we will engage, how we will engage them, who will be empowered to act, who will lead the way? How do we in the arts skate to where the proverbial puck will be?

But where will that puck be? Let's take a moment to try to see the future together. On a sheet of paper, jot down quickly three answers to the following questions:

- Ten years from now, the world will have/be less....
- Ten years from now, the world will have/be more...

[Share answers from the audience]

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In the world you've just described together, the groups that are most likely to survive are those who are committed to the new future while becoming rigorously clear about their values, committing to absolute pursuit of mission and absolute irreverence in examining past behavior.

In this spirit, we must ask, why must we exist today? Because we have a building is not enough. Because we have a history and awards and a reputation is not enough. What is it in the world—in an external world—that mandates the flourishing of live arts and culture in our communities today?

Groups that wish to survive need to be able to answer three questions:

- 1) What is the value my organization brings to my community?
- 2) Harder: What is the value my organization alone brings or brings better than anyone else? Second rate or duplicated value will not stand for long in this economy.
- 3) Hardest: How would my community be damaged if we closed our doors and went away tomorrow?

If we cannot answer these questions, the only supporters we are likely to find already sit in our seats.

That said, these questions are a potential trap, asking us to interpret the world through the filter of our organizations as we have known them to date. How often do we contemplate the value of our orchestras without considering the value of symphonic music, or try to fix our theatre companies without examining the larger potential value of live dramatic narrative to our communities? In order to reinvent and adapt to the changing conditions in the world today, we need to answer four very different questions. To use a dance company as an example, to ask:

- 1) What is the value of dance (not of my dance company) for my community?
- 2) What is the value dance alone has or that dance fulfills better than anything else?
- 3) How would my community be damaged if it were abandoned by dance tomorrow?
- 4) And how might my organization be optimally structured, poised and focused to be my community's best conduit to dance?—a question that invites us not to jettison all we do, but to keep what is most central and viable, to expand to embrace the new possibilities we may not have seen, and to discard past behaviors that do not and will not serve us in the future.

Indeed, fantastic opportunities exist everywhere around us. Chris Anderson, editor of wired magazine and author of a book entitled The Long Tail, sees in technology the unleashing of a veritable tsunami of creative energy. With the invention and now affordability of cell phones, mini cams, computer software and more, he notes, the means of artistic production have been democratized for the first time in human history. In the 1930's, people who wished to make a movie had to work for Warner Brothers or RKO, for who could afford cameras, lighting equipment, editing equipment and more? Now who among us does not know a 14 year old hard at work on her second, third or fourth film?

Furthermore, the means of artistic distribution have been democratized. Again, in the 30's, the major studios played that role; now upload your film onto YouTube or Facebook, and you have instant world-wide distribution with the click of a button.

This double impact is occasioning a massive redefinition of authorship and the cultural market. Today everyone is a potential author—and the market paradigm is shifting from one of traditional consumption to one of participation. In the future, value will not be consumed: value will be co-created. Let me say that again: in the future, value will no longer be consumed—value will be co-created.

We already see the power of consumer participation in other industries. The monolithic power of the restaurant critic has been shattered in the United States by Zagat, a restaurant guide where the collective consumer passes judgment and defines a restaurant value. iPod cornered the MP3 market—indeed, we default to the brand instantly although it has more than 11,000 competitor models-- by going beyond

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“downloading” as a sales point to emphasize co-creation—the ability to create a personally curated playlist, to create or download podcasts—essentially to enter a world where you the consumer became you the creator as well. “Dancing with the Stars,” “So You Think You Can Dance,” “American Idol”—all are predicated on the active involvement of the consumer.

We are witnessing the emergence of a class of amateurs doing work at a professional level—a group dubbed elsewhere as the Pro-Ams—a group whose work populates YouTube, Film festivals, dance competitions and more, a group who are expanding our aesthetic vocabulary. But they also assault our traditional notions of cultural authority and undermine the assumed ability of traditional arts organizations to set the cultural agenda.

In thinking about the future, how do we think, not only about presentation, but about engagement—about interacting with this growing tsunami of creative energy that typically exists beyond the purview of our classrooms, our buildings and our performing arts centers? How do we engage audiences in the creative process, not merely in the finished work? How do we expand our vision beyond producing to be the orchestrators of social interaction—interaction in which a performance is a piece but only a piece of what we are called to do?

Changes in what we do, who we engage and how we engage them, who is empowered to act, who leads the way.

New technology affords us extraordinary new power to communicate and live our values with new, affordable creative and distribution media—media that are leveling a certain playing field. They give us unparalleled power to let audiences see the work itself: Thirty seconds of Morgan Thorsen or Matthew whose last name I can’t pronounce dancing on video have far more power to express personality, emotional tone, style, aesthetic and more than any print ad could every do-and indeed the most immediate power of technology at present lies in our ability to let an audience member sample the work she or he might choose to see.

I’ve never used clips in a presentation before—so let’s see how these go. These next few clips are all ones I discovered after hearing Sydney Skybetter at the Dance USA Conference—a young choreographer and self-professed internet geek, who led us through a fantastic presentation about web technologies and the companies whose communications he called “awesome.” According to Sydney, weaning themselves from traditional print advertising, dance company Larry Kegwin and Company (as reported at the recent Dance USA Conference), now establish an agreement with dancers that they will participate in creating media materials that “will kick ass.” They now create 1 minute video clips—clips that capture the energy, the quirkiness, the compelling aesthetic and distinctive movement vocabulary that still photos and captions cannot convey. Let’s look:

[Show Kegwin and Company Joyce gala benefit video]

Isn’t that a gala you’d want to go to?

Kegwin and Company, Skybetter reports, do not pay for media placement, regardless of how great their commercial is. They email the clips to a select circle of supporters—supporters who in turn push the media clips out into the general population through social network channels like YouTube and Facebook, and who have helped garner the company their largest audiences in history—a strategy so successful that they have reportedly eliminated their traditional marketing staff altogether—a development likely to strike fear and terror into the marketing directors in the room.

But internet video also allows us new power to talk about the work--to explore and dissect both the work and the creative process with a larger public. Cedar Lake Ballet has produced a series of 52 one-minute

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videos—a new one released every week—showing how work is made over time and all of the participants—stage hands, designers, electricians and more—who participate in bringing a work to fruition.

[Show Cedar Lake Ballet Project 52 Video Segment: Episode 46 “Jim”]

In this series and in the great majority of successful sites and blogs, the leading artist—not a staffer representing the artist—is a direct presence, and the organization frequently empowers its fullest range of practitioners as well—the dancers, for example—to blog on their experiences, to share their frustrations and yes anger at times with a larger general public—an openness to sharing experiences both good and bad that distinguish a promotional website from an authentic one—and that well may be integral to the conception of the project, not merely its marketing strategy, as is clearly the case with William Forsythe’s SYNCHRONOUS OBJECTS project—a piece that already lists more than 2,000 postings when googled.

[Show Synchronous Objects home page]

These presentations are predictably powerful with arts devotees. The surprise we’re learning is that they are equally successful with the uninitiated who feel potentially intimidated and under-informed about a work they may be preparing to see. These clips are less a lecture from a dramaturg about what things mean and more an invitation for the viewer to find the joy of personal participation in the work, as seen in the following:

[Show MOMA “I See Taxi” ad]

But broadcasting is only one function of the internet—and real power lies in open space co-creation and in social networking and organizing. Choreographer Chris Elam of Misnomer Dance in the United States company is at the forefront of thinking creatively in more expansive terms about this new energy. Yes, he engages his audience through streaming performances—performances that included an audience just a month ago of 80 live audience members at the Joyce Soho and an additional 1500 on line—an online audience that blogged and chatted with one another throughout the performance, sharing ideas, even asking the cameraman to switch focus or follow specific dances—and whose 1500 numbers probably under-represent the true audience, since several of the log-ons were actually parties of watchers or projected on coffee house walls, the results of a pre-event strategy that had organized audiences over the course of weeks leading up to the performance.

That said, Chris is also interested in engaging audiences in creation. He holds competitions for costume designs, films dancers against green screens and encourages web visitors to download the footage, add their own animation and soundtrack, etc.—a strategy now adopted by Yo Yo Ma, who has recorded single tracks for others to upload and play along with. Moreover, Chris is acutely connected to the social organizing potential of the internet: he polls his website visitors about their interest in seeing the work live—a question that prepares him to contact a Chicago presenter, for example, able to say “3000 people have already said they would come to see our work were we in your city, 25% would bring an additional friend, and 5 are willing to cosponsor an opening night party”—an approach that allows Chris to book his tour schedule based on where his audience already is, rather than booking a tour of cities and then trying to find someone in those cities to show up. In sum, strategies that see in technology the power of more than advertising per se, but that see the internet as a portal for broadcast and social networking and open source co-creation.

In the future, it’s arts engagement, not arts education; it’s media management, not marketing direction.

It is too early, frankly, to know how well these strategies will succeed and in what way: while consumers wishing to sample the work vastly outnumber those interested in artistic co-creation, the future may well bring dramatic growth in these deeper engagers, produce a deeply dedicated group of passionate adherents more likely to become donors, or both. And while the list of websites and platforms can be

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overwhelming—Facebook, Twitter, Yelp, Flavor Pill, new sites appearing day by day and fading—as MySpace has done—with astonishing speed,—the lesson here is less about particular platform than about the larger trend. In this new age, every artist is a media artist and every organization a media organization, whether they know it or not. The new emphasis on social media, on aggregation of energy, and on deeper access, openness and participation is here to stay. Communicating is likely to be less and less about advertising and broadcasting and sales per se than about brokering personalized creative engagement and deeper interaction through multiple points of potential contact—a shift that will require loosening of control, even placing raw materials into the hands of others to let them generate your marketing materials for you—as Oregon Children’s Theatre decided to do in a campaign where 8 year olds were given cameras, access to rehearsal and performance spaces, and charged with creating marketing materials. Indeed, the future is about listening that is less about call and response, than listening that involves active participation, creative expression, a level of involvement and input that—for a generation who are used to hacking into computer game software and fundamentally changing the game—will inevitably invite us to listen, change and alter in profound, unexpected and unprecedented ways.

The future will only bring more and more of media penetration into our lives. Two weeks ago at the Australia Council Marketing Summit in Sydney—where I found the next string of ads, thanks largely to a presentation from Peter Biggs of Elmenger BBDO (who showed the MOMA ad as well as an upcoming Boone Oakley ad) and youth media strategist Ashley Farr—I found myself amazed by two major trends: the repeated emphasis on authenticity, as embodied in simplicity, disclosure, accountability, narrative and especially humor

[Show Mother Energy Drink ad]

And the sense that the ground has shifted from most money to best idea:

[Show BBDO Home Page]

This ad, shown by the Managing Director of Clemenger BBDO, one of the major agencies in Australia, internal branch offices and multi-million dollar clients, and focused on a small start up in Charlotte, NC—and described as the single most terrifying image he had found in the last year.

[Show Boone Oakley home page]

The newly leveling playing field. No longer the biggest budget. The best idea.

Moreover, Australians are no longer interested in websites and computers, but have moved their focus on to the cell phone, or as they called it, the mobile. Presenter after presenter reminded us of the mobile’s nascent power—how, according to a survey conducted by Mercedes Benz, the mobile has now eclipsed the automobile as the single most important product conveyer of social status (and you’d better believe that Mercedes is scared beyond belief on this one); that, according to a study of consumer behavior, 90% will take their cell to the toilet; 13% see it as their best friend; 22% regularly interrupt sex to take a call; and that the single greatest usage time and place is in the home after 9:00 pm—that we don’t go home and log onto our computers any longer, we go home and turn on our smart phones—and woe to us if we continue to plan our materials for the 17” monitor rather than the PDA screen.

This new constant social interfacing can be word of mouth on steroids—a power that can elevate us or, if ignored, kill us. In a time when 71% of consumers believe a peer and word of mouth and only 39% believe newspapers; when 87% trust a friend over a critic and 84% trust any user over a critic; when a recent analysis of ticket 1000 ticket buyers at a major NY presenter showed that only 4 people had bought a ticket because of a review—the ground has clearly shifted—while all too often we continue to focus our media on newspapers and, in gatherings like these, wail about the power of the critics.

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We must engage in this emerging world. If we have any prayer of skating to where the puck will be, we must require every staff member and ourselves, regardless of generation, to spend at least three hours each week on line, exploring new websites, investigating blogs, joining social networks, learning in our bones how the world works, mastering critical tools on-line to draw participants to the core tools on site.

This clearly involves planning and strategic execution. The new generation gap is indeed not about age but is about the gap between digital natives, as they are called—natives who expect and demand interactivity, participation, access and engagement—and digital immigrants—many of whom want to consume, not to participate and who form the bulk of many of our current audiences. Indeed, your audience may be dominated by people who simply want to show up for a performance, listen and go home. They may love the concert format as we have known it—the purity and simplicity of the stage adorned only by a cluster of musicians, engaged in collaborative expression. Your donors may resent the intrusion of technology into the performance space or resist even the notions of talking from the podium—but for every devotee dedicated to the darkened concert hall, there are dozens of young people—young people who expect freedom of choice, customization, collaboration and interactivity—who would say, “sitting in the dark for two hours, unable to communicate with my friends through speech or through technology, is not my idea of a good time.”

In light of their growing numbers and recognizing that even those of us in our mid-50's and older now shop on line, rely on Facebook before email, and struggle with our own shortening attention spans, we can no longer take our traditional ways of behavior for granted: what we play, exhibit or produce, where, how, with whom, what we do or do not do besides play, exhibit or produce—these are our decisions that must be strategically chosen for every engagement and leveraged to embody our deepest values. To ignore these shifting external conditions and to avoid making hard new changes in response is to surrender our artistic destinies and to become victims, rather than masters, of our own futures.

Indeed, the single biggest challenge lies in how to balance an increasingly perilous equation: managing short term survival, while pursuing long term transformation.

At this point, let's take a 10 minute break—and let's keep it to 10—and we'll return to an exercise on your feet and talk a bit more about change.

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Welcome back.

Everything I have said to you thus far invites significant change—enormous change. As I round third and head for home (as we say in baseball), let me share my experience at Target Stores in the 1990's, which taught me invaluable lessons about change and change management.

Target uses a simple exercise to help create a first-hand “sense memory” experience around change.

The exercise begins with finding a partner. “Look deeply at your partner in silence for 60 seconds,” the exercise begins. Tension in the room escalates instantly: there's a smattering of giggling, usually, some under the breath comments, a real sense of embarrassment and self-consciousness as well. “Now turn your back to your partner and change five things about your appearance.” Typically, men loosen their ties, women remove an earring, people move wristwatches to different arms or remove shoes. “Now turn back and find the five things your partner changed.” Most folks are pretty successful on finding at least three or four, and a few astute folks spot all five.

“Now turn your backs again and change 10 more” (and you can't undo a change from before and count it a new change). A sense of alarm in the room, some more laughter, inevitably someone saying, “I didn't dress for this; do you want me to strip?” Not everyone even finds 10 things, but once again, you're instructed to turn back to your partner and identify the changes—with a lower success rate over all.

“Now turn your backs and change 20 more.” Instantly the room revolts: we can't do this, there aren't 20, you're kidding me, etc. (and this happens in EVERY room that I've ever seen the exercise conducted in.) “OK, OK,” the facilitator says. “Let's return to our seats and talk about why this is a metaphor for change.” Men put ties back on, women put those spike heels back on, and once we've comfortably restored ourselves and the room stills, we learn why this is a perfect metaphor for change.

First of all, when I told you to look deeply at your partner or didn't tell you why or what was coming next, the anxiety in the room went up. Change always provokes anxiety: in fact, if you're not anxious, you're not really confronting change. Anxiety is not necessarily a sign that something is wrong or that you need to shift direction; anxiety simply needs to be managed.

Second, change is every accelerating. We went from 5 to 10 to 20, and the next would have been 40. In this world especially, change is operating in exponential, rather than incremental, scales.

Third, when confronted with change, people tend to react in a competitive, rather than a cooperative mode. No one in the room typically in making those first five changes said, “What are the five most obvious changes I can make that my partner will most easily find?” No one put a shoe on top of her head. Instead, everyone instantly tried to make the five smallest, subtlest changes (which may also be worth noting) that her partner would not find. People caught in change default instantly to competition, not cooperation.

Fourth, in a time of change, people typically focus on what they must give up. People started taking things off; remember that “I didn't dress for this; do you want me to strip?” Few go back to their chairs and put things back on—hats, jackets, etc.

The next two for me are perhaps the most powerful of all. Lesson Five: during change, people typically only focus on what is already theirs. If this woman in the front row and I had been partners, and had I then turned to the gentleman beside her and said, “Sir, take my tie; can you let me have your shoe?”—

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essentially if I had been able to turn my focus from what was mine to what was ours—we could have done 20, 40, 80, we could have gone on for hours.

And finally, when the pressure to change is removed, people revert to old behavior, even if it is a less comfortable place to be. Participants are much more comfortable at the end of the exercise at the end than they had been at the beginning, but as soon as the official exercise was over, those ties go back on, those spike heels back on, etc.— in essence reverted to old behavior because of its familiarity, even when the end result was a far more comfortable place to be.

Especially if you lead an organization or a marketing staff, let me urge you to consider these lessons—and especially to free yourself of the burden of the solution by enlisting the partnership of a broader sphere of employees and board members in deriving the solutions that will help you move forward.

The groups most likely to survive will at least entertain the idea of the counter-intuitive, heeding the words of Michael Kaiser of the Kennedy Center whose advice—which I personally believe is far from universally applicable-- urges groups caught in a downturn to expand their investments in artists and programming (which he describes as the source of audience allegiance) and in marketing, noting "You cannot save your way to health."

Groups that wish to survive will essentialize, center themselves in their successes—whatever that word means to you (and I certainly would not limit it to financial), and make conscious choices about what they will give up in order to free up space, time and money for the experimentation and search for new solutions in which they must engage for the future. This time will be a crucible for our values, revealing—by virtue of what we choose to continue doing—what our values really are.

Groups that wish to survive will challenge every organizational assumption that has guided us in the past—from ticket pricing structure to rehearsal policy to programming to expected audience behavior and more. Indeed, the groups most likely to survive will innovate—not chasing the flashy or new but truly innovate—a process that Richard Evans describes as “new pathways to mission fulfillment, discontinuous from previous practice, resulting from shifts in underlying organizational assumptions”—a precise and useful delineation of what innovation should really mean—and that is achieved most often, according to futurist Andrew Zollie, by organizations who assemble teams comprised of very different perspectives and histories focused on a common problem, teams focused on base hits rather than home runs, and who rarely simply adopt best practice, recognizing best practice as outputs, not inputs. The groups most likely to survive will embrace a higher risk tolerance ---risk, not irresponsibility but pushing past our comfort zones, armed with our best instincts, our best data, the counsel of others more expert than we--knowing as we do that a business that does not risk does not grow, a relationship with husband wife or partner that does not risk does not grow, the artist who does not risk--however capable-- is doomed merely to technical excellence but never achieved the true artistic moment for which we all live and work.

If we can rise to these challenges—individually and collectively--we will remember these times, not as an ordeal for survival, but as a renaissance--a time in which we renegotiated old ideas to reach a new consensual reality—a time of rebirth, yes, in which we too hit the reset button and embraced enormous change—a time in which we managed the perilous equation we all face today—working to insure our short-term survival while continuing to work towards our long-term transformation.

Before I wrap up, I want to look at one last ad:

[Show HBO VOYEUR ad]

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This is the emerging world of the arts in which we will all compete.

And while this ad originally both excited and scared me to death, I for one am optimistic about the future of the arts, although I have not sounded it until now.

Two years ago, I decided to plunge myself into the belly of the proverbial beast and attended Pop Tech, an annual conference in Camden, ME for 500 high tech folks, bringing them together to listen to—and interact with—high level thinkers of every stripe and description. Contrary to my expectations, this was not a conference designed to talk about startups or financing: it was—and is—a conference where we listened to world thinkers about the human brain. Global warming. International warfare and terrorism. AIDS research. And the arts, with many artists participating on panels and each session followed by a live performance—Vanessa German, a spoken word artist who blew the roof off with her raw evocation of feeling, a hip hop dancer on crutches, a Gospel Choir of HIV+ singers from the African continent.

While arts conferences are often dominated increasingly by prospects for survival—how will we compete in a market-driven world? How will we keep ourselves on the funding agenda? What will it take to raise an endowment?—the issue of survivability was never raised at PopTech. The assumption is that many will not—and perhaps should not—survive. Instead, here the issues were not how we will survive financially, but how we will change the world. How we will solve global warming. How we will solve AIDS. How we will leave the world a healthier, ecologically balanced, less poverty ridden place. Indeed, the unspoken agenda was that there is nothing that we cannot do, and in the world of high tech, truly anything is possible.

You might call this folly of youth—and indeed, many of the participants are young.

You may call it hubris.

But what became clear to me is that within this world of infinite possibilities, there are new possibilities for us in the arts.

On the one hand, I was encouraged that this group fought to get there. Camden, ME is not an easy place to access, and if any community can convene virtually, this one can. Yet through PopTech and TED and more, this community insists on coming together because of the unique value of live, face to face, collective experience, to conspiring—meaning to breathe together, to breathing the same air—and indeed, the Voyeur ad, a remarkable exercise in wholistic conception of marketing, culminates in a live, group interaction on the streets of New York—the social dimension of the arts. And throughout PopTech, a minor chord, a palpable hunger throbbed in the background. This group was desperate to slow down, to lead less frenetic lives, to find the courage to live for their passions. More and more, they placed premium on contemplation, on captivation, on focus and extended surrender to single experience—experiences that would captivate, resonate emotionally, at its best enhance spiritual value—to the very things that we in the arts do.

They responded deafeningly to Daniel Pink, (interestingly enough a man in his 30's) in his new A WHOLE NEW MIND, writes of the emerging emphasis on right brain thinking, “one that prizes aptitude the capacity to detect patterns and opportunities, to create artistic and emotional beauty, to craft a satisfying narrative and to combine seemingly unrelated ideas into something new—as well as the ability to empathize with other, to understand the subtleties of human interaction, to find joy in one's self and to elicit it in others, and to stretch beyond the quotidian in pursuit of purpose and meaning” to quote him.

They recognized the ultimate irony of their own success—that prosperity without spiritual enrichment does not bring fulfillment, and in the face of a growing culture dedicated to convenience—to no-iron

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shirts and microwave meals, to hands free parking and more, all striving to convince us that ease is good and effort is bad, there is value—irreplaceable value in the difficult, in the complex, in the ambiguous and the real.

Especially now, in a moment when we all must confront the fallacy of a market orientation uninformed by social conscience, we must assert our role in the formation of our collective and individual characters, particularly the character of the young, who are increasingly subjected to “bombardment” of sensation through violent film and video. In the arts, we stand instead for contemplation, deep understanding and digestion of experience, especially in a popular cultural context that often seems to value humiliation over humanity. And in an age of demonization and fear of difference, of intolerant social policies and politicians who encourages us to view our fellow human beings with fear and hostility and suspicion—we in the arts gather audiences to look at our fellow human beings with curiosity and generosity. However dramatically our business models will change, the urgency of this quest will remain the same.

A time of change. And in homage to our new president—our most visible embodiment of change--we can no longer be contented with “Yes we can” and but must commit instead to “Yes we must.”

Like those young people at PopTech, we must turn our attention to how we can change the world—and how we can be open to the ways in which the world can change us.

As we enter the first year of a new political chapter, it seems especially appropriate to close with the words of a politician—the president whose dedication to the arts led indirectly to the formation of the National Endowment for the Arts and the explosion of government arts philanthropy. Less than a month before his assassination, John Kennedy gave a speech at Amherst College in honor of Robert Frost. He concluded by saying:

I look forward to a great future for America—a future in which our country will match its military strength with our moral strength, its wealth with our wisdom, its power with our purpose.

I look forward to an America which will not be afraid of grace and beauty, which will protect the beauty of our natural environment, which will preserve the great old American houses and squares and parks of our national past, and which will build handsome and balanced cities for our future.

I look forward to an America which commands respect throughout the world, not only or its strength but for its civilization as well.

45 years after these words were spoken, while we continue to look forward to that America— you do more than merely wait for its appearance. Although we may elect our leaders every four years, we elect our values and the lives that will be the fulfillment of those values every single day. You know that, in electing to give your support to the arts, you honor the past, you commemorate the present, you shape and change the future in a way that does honor to all and violence to none. You are engaged in more than aesthetic transmission of craft: you are activists, pledged and dedicated to a world of understanding, of tolerance, of compassion, of hope.

I salute you all tonight as activists. I promise you that the hand of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation remains outstretched to you in friendship both now and for years to come; and I thank you for your kindness and patience in listening to me this morning. Thank you and God speed.