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THE PLATFORM IS PUBLISHED BY AEA CONSULTING, A COMPANY THAT SPECIALIZES IN STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL PLANNING FOR THE CULTURAL SECTOR. THE PLATFORM PROMOTES DISCUSSION AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE CRITICAL FACTORS AFFECTING CULTURAL PLANNING AND THE SUCCESSFUL MANAGEMENT OF CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS. COMMENTS OR CONTRIBUTIONS WELCOMED BY ALEXIS FRASZ, EDITOR, AT AFRASZ@AEACONSULTING.COM. BACK ISSUES AVAILABLE AT WWW.AEACONSULTING.COM.

CONFERENCE REVIEW

BY JOHN KIEFFER

LED BY THE EAR



Around 15 years ago I took part in a debate on music with, among others, the musician, curator and writer David Toop.¹ The Arts Council of Great Britain, as the Arts Councils of Scotland and Wales were then called, hosted the debate. There was a range of participants drawn almost exclusively from organisations receiving, or aspiring to receive, public funding. The debate covered familiar ground – too much funding for classical music and not enough for jazz, improvised music and folk. I had known David for some time, and I could see he was getting agitated. Sure enough, he suddenly blurted out something along the lines of: “I can’t stand this anymore. Isn’t it time we moved away from this culture of enfeeblement and took more responsibility for ourselves?” This killed the conversation and his comment stayed with me for a long time.

Over the last 50 years many musicians, particularly those working outside of the mainstream, have broken away from the “culture of enfeeblement” in their quest to discover the best way to get their music to their audience and support themselves in the process. From the 1950’s, when members of Sun Ra’s Arkestra² delivered their self-produced albums to record shops in hand-made sleeves, to the 1990’s, which saw the rise of musician-led record

labels such as singer Ani DiFranco's Righteous Babe and the UK DJ duo Coldcut's Ninja Tune Records, the desire for self-determination among musicians has subtly subverted the culture of enfeeblement.

Changes in the technology for delivering music – the most obvious being Mp3 downloads – alongside the growth of peer-to-peer networks and blogs have added a new range of avenues for musicians and music organisations to reach their audiences. The cost of entry into this world (at least in developed countries) has become so low that there is now very little excuse, apart from time and disposition, for a musician whose needs and aspirations are not met by the music industry to ignore these new ways of reaching audiences.

Successful musician-to-audience connections using new technology span the spectrum of musical genres. The Sheffield-based band Arctic Monkeys have recently reached number one on the UK singles/downloads chart after using blogs and the internet to communicate directly with their fan base. It was only when success was assured that they were signed by Domino, one of the UK's smartest independent record labels. At a more modest level, New York guitarist Wayne Krantz makes all of his live performances available for download on his web site for \$4.95 each and The Gürzenich Orchestra in Cologne has installed an iPod docking station in its foyer so that audiences can walk away with a download of the performance they just heard in the auditorium that evening.

These "alternative" marketing and distribution methods are becoming increasingly attractive as audiences, particularly of the younger generations, demand that artists meet them on their own turf. This marketplace (and, yes, it is a marketplace, even in the nonprofit world), will require musicians and music organisations to develop new skills. Whether a musician chooses the "do it yourself" route or a more traditional career path, it will be a distinct advantage for them to have a deep understanding of and empathy with their audience that goes far beyond traditional marketing techniques.

There is, therefore, a job to be done, both in adding to the marketing and promotional skills of working musicians and in training up-and-coming ones. If music students are to be properly prepared for future careers as musicians, conservatories and music schools must broaden their focus to include much more than technical skills.

Progress on this front has been painfully slow in many of the more established music colleges and conservatoires in the UK. In my experience it is not unusual for young musicians to leave music college with an alarmingly naïve view of the industry and their prospects within it, never mind an ignorance of the possibilities offered by technology outlined above. Without the skills necessary to navigate the marketplace these musicians are unlikely to succeed in the current environment. Within the conservatoires there is perhaps a concern that the stark realities of the commercial music world will stunt creativity and disturb the development of instrumental and vocal technique. Or are they simply in a state of denial that the world has changed?

Some training institutions are beginning to realize that these changes are irreversible and have changed their offer accordingly. In the UK there are now a number of degree courses that focus on the business, technological or cultural aspects of the music business, in addition to the technical ones.³ These practical and contextual programmes, while becoming more prevalent, are still somewhat at the periphery of the prospectus. The Professional Skills programme at Trinity College⁴ and the Connect project at the Guildhall School of Music⁵ (to which I am an adviser) in





their different ways embody a perspective of continuing professional development and offer a holistic approach to training the next generation of musicians.

The burgeoning emphasis on the development of broader skills for musicians extends beyond the formal music sector. Community Music, a pioneering service network for non-professional musicians, has expanded their programme of training courses for musicians who have not had exposure to formal education to include preparation for the rigors of the music industry. Meanwhile, the Asian Dub Foundation has established their own educational project to promote access to the music industry for under-represented youth communities.

Technology, demographic change, globalization and audiences who will not do what they are told will continue to play havoc with the world of music as we know it. There is a particular challenge for funding, development and educational bodies to broker partnerships and collaborations that cross the firewall between the non-profit and commercial sectors if we wish to give musicians the opportunities and training they deserve. Almost certainly, these relationships will look like nothing that preceded them. But surely – from Bach to Biggie and beyond – a little bit of musical improvisation is a good thing?

This article is based on a presentation to the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, Finland in October 2005.⁶ The presentation along with one from Dan Hill, the Head of Interactive Technology for BBC Radio & Music was the basis for group discussions and workshops with music professionals.

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ARTICLE

BY ALEXIS FRASZ & HOLLY SIDFORD

WE ARE (NOT REALLY) THE WORLD

We live in a world of “widespread hostility toward the United States and its policies.”⁷ This antipathy is not limited to the countries and peoples that are directly affected by America’s “war on terror” and its attendant policies, but includes many of our former allies and fellow democracies. A friend who just returned from a year in Spain reports that she spent a significant amount of time and energy convincing people she met there that America is not an undifferentiated swarm of ignorant, jingoist consumers obsessed with dominating the rest of the world economically, politically and culturally, as if we were all part of an elaborate video game.

This situation is not just unpleasant for international travelers, it has severely negative consequences for America’s ability to do many things in the global arena. As a September 2005 report on cultural diplomacy commissioned by the State Department asserts, “put simply, we have lost the goodwill of the world, without which it becomes ever more difficult to execute foreign policy.”⁸ Although our government has made attempts to improve this situation recently, the results have been mostly counter-productive. Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy Karen Hughes’ recent tour of Islamic states was by most accounts a diplomatic failure, if success is measured by improvements in America’s relations with the Muslim world. Ms. Hughes only reinforced perceptions of the American political regime as defensive, dogmatic and uninterested in the complexities of the Muslim countries. She spoke, but she did not listen.

That the State Department commissioned a report on cultural diplomacy, and such a thoughtful and well-written one besides, is a step in the right direction. First and foremost, the report acknowledges the urgency of addressing America's negative image worldwide. As America's image darkens in the eyes of the rest of the world, its ability to generate consensus around any policy is exponentially weakened. Secondly, the report suggests that it is through its culture, not its foreign policy, that a nation reveals its sympathetic self – its "soul" – to the wide world. The effect that culture has on the course of political events should not be underestimated. The report observes: "history may record that America's cultural riches played no less a role than military action in shaping our international leadership, including the war on terror. For the values embedded in our artistic and intellectual traditions form a bulwark against the forces of darkness. And cultural diplomacy, which presents the best of what American artists, performers, and thinkers have to offer, can enhance our national security in subtle, wide-ranging and sustainable ways."⁹

Culture's importance to realizing foreign policy goals is not a novel realization for the U.S. government, although the strategies reflecting this understanding have waned in recent years. The U.S. sponsored some of the most extensive and successful cultural diplomacy initiatives in modern history during the post-WWII period, including exchange programs for U.S. and foreign artists, educational exchanges between foreign and domestic academic institutions, tours by musicians abroad (jazz musicians like Louis Armstrong were particularly effective), and the distribution of American books

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throughout U.S. sponsored libraries in foreign countries. Many of these initiatives were administered through the United States Information Agency (USIA) and (covertly) the CIA, and they are widely considered to have been instrumental in expanding the U.S. sphere of influence and winning the battle for "hearts and minds." At the time all parties understood that hearts and minds would determine success.

The world has changed since the height of the USIA's work in the 1960s and '70s. In the decades immediately following World War II the U.S. enjoyed widespread admiration and affection in areas of the world that were not part of the Communist bloc. We seemed not only to have won the war but also to be winning the peace. Since the 1980s, however, the phenomenal growth and universal distribution of U.S. commercial culture (not always a pretty picture), the sometimes adverse effects of globalization, and our steady march toward more rigid and doctrinaire foreign policies have altered perceptions of the U.S. abroad. Whereas 30 years ago we could assume that most countries held a generally open and friendly attitude toward the U.S., its citizens and its cultural products, (despite any issues they might have with aspects of our foreign policy) the same cannot be said today.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the booming world economy of the mid-1990s, the U.S. emerged as the clear global leader in multiple domains. International cultural diplomacy declined as a government spending priority, and much of the infrastructure for managing cultural programs during the Cold War was dismantled. By 1999, USIA programs had been substantially cut in size, and the organization was absorbed into the Department of State.

As the public sector investment in cultural exchange diminished, a number of private foundations expanded their programs for cultural exchange with the former Communist bloc, while others turned their attention to cultural exchange with the developing world and countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia. However, compared to

the opportunity and need, private funding for international cultural exchange still comprises a minor proportion of overall “global philanthropy.” Between 1998 and 2002, foundation funding for international programs more than doubled, but only 6.5 percent of the \$2.2 billion invested in 2002 (approximately \$142 million) was allocated to arts and culture, down from 8.6 percent in 1998.¹⁰ Funders cited a “greater urgency to address global issues,” but the arts fell well below health, relief, environmental issues, and education as giving priorities, even as total international giving increased.

Even many who would be instinctive supporters of international arts and cultural exchange consider the arts of tertiary value in the face of the overwhelming number of catastrophic events and devastating chronic problems in the world. But evidence from the field suggests the contrary. The Report on the Commission of Africa, for example, states, “we believe that the inattention to culture in the policy-making of many donor countries goes some way to explain the failure of so many development initiatives in Africa over the years.”¹¹ The Report goes on to demonstrate with examples of the AIDS epidemic, the Rwandan conflict and the famine in Somalia, that it was only when culture was taken into account that aid programs were truly effective in achieving the desired results. The conclusion of the Report is that culture should become “a way of working as well as an end in itself.”¹²

Finding a new model for cultural diplomacy that fits the needs of the 21st Century and that can help to bridge cultural divides is one of the most urgent and necessary challenges for the world today. Those who know the power of arts and culture, the cultural sector and its supporters, must articulate a new rationale and powerful, fresh strategies to propel us forward. Members of the current administration, career diplomats, and those focused on unbridled development of commercial markets, are unlikely to know how to take advantage of the opportunity.

In his book *The Gift* Lewis Hyde talks about the bond which the artistic gift creates between those who experience it and a “wider self” of which we all are a part. He says, “these creations are not ‘merely’ symbolic, they do not ‘stand for’ the larger self; they are its necessary embodiment, a language without which it would have no life at all.”¹³ The gift is something that is given without expectation of return and whose value is augmented the more it is shared or transferred, rather than diminished by use as a commodity would be. It is through arts and culture that people make sense of and interpret the world, it is not merely ornamentation after the essentials are taken care of. Through the exchange of art and culture with others we are able to understand that we are part of a larger whole and can respond to difference with compassion and understanding.

The gift bond of cultural exchange cannot be created through an ever-expanding global marketplace for commercial culture, manifested in the reach of Hollywood and the wide distribution of Putumayo world music albums. As the recent UNESCO vote allowing countries to protect their heritage from the free market shows, culture is widely understood by the world to be different from other types of commercial goods. What united the 151 countries who voted for the agreement—only the U.S. and Israel opposed it—“was their agreement that cultural products have a double quality: they involve identity as well as commercial value.”¹⁴ Although the UNESCO agreement may lead to protectionist practices, that ultimately harm cross-cultural understanding, it does indicate a general acceptance within the world community that culture is intimately linked to the unique character of a nation or a people and therefore must be nurtured and treated with care. An appropriate follow-up to this, perhaps led by the U.S., would be a joint effort to create a system that encourages and supports broad-based and reciprocal cultural exchange between nations but outside of the marketplace in order to communicate and share the value of what countries care so deeply to protect.

The beginnings of an effective and responsible system of international cultural exchange and cultural diplomacy for the U.S. would most likely involve the following elements:

🌐 Working to lower the economic and political barriers to international cultural exchange for both foreign and U.S. based artists and audiences.

🌐 Educating audiences about the artists, artworks and traditions of other cultures and our own nation's increasing cultural diversity through contextualizing programming through scholarship.

🌐 Incorporating anthropological and cultural expertise in all U.S. activities abroad (by both government and NGOs) regardless of whether they are focused on arts and culture.

🌐 Expanding opportunities for artists, students, and citizens of other countries to visit the U.S. and to experience the work of U.S. artists in their own countries.

🌐 Long-term investments and collaborations.

Specific initiatives that can be undertaken by funders, arts organizations and policy makers include:

🌐 A web-based information network about international exchange that can coalesce the now widely dispersed and disorganized information, reduce cost of entry into this field, and promote collaboration and knowledge-exchange.

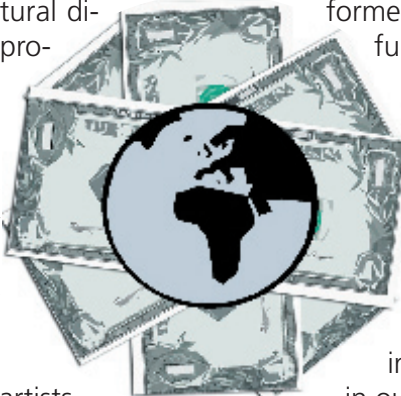
🌐 Pursue partnerships with international funders and organizations for research, commissioning, presentation and interpretation projects. Include ventures with international funders interested in health, environment, education and other non-arts sectors, to

enable artists and cultural organizations to bring their talents and creativity to bear on these issues.

🌐 Travel support for artists and arts organizations to defray the cost of international work and affordable insurance to protect against losses incurred by unforeseeable circumstances (artists denied entry at the border, international incidents, etc.)

🌐 Sponsor a series of cultural summits (informed by research) bringing policy makers, funders and practitioners together to discuss policy issues such as immigration policy and visa regulations, definitions of art and culture employed by major policy bodies (funders, UNESCO, etc.), and the relationship of U.S. foreign policy to cultural diplomacy.

🌐 Recognize the vast resource of information and assistance represented in our immigrant communities, and engage these communities more extensively in various kinds of international cultural exchange and cultural diplomacy.



In a world splintered by parochial interests and where “identity politics” play an increasingly important role in determining actions of nations and individuals, art has a critical role to play in mediating the images and information that are communicated across national and cultural boundaries. Through creative mediums we can experience, and even come to understand, a foreign culture in a way that we cannot through logic and analysis of policy alone. Art is not the panacea for global problems, but it is one means that can and should be promoted more widely, in conjunction with other political and social strategies, to foster dialogue and compassion between individuals, communities, nations and religions.

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CAN CULTURE SAVE DOWNTOWN?



It is very unusual for any urban renewal plan not to include reference to the role that arts organizations and arts buildings can potentially play in regeneration. Most recently, in Hurricane Katrina's wake, both have figured prominently in discussions about the future of New Orleans and Biloxi. But the discussions about arts organizations and those about arts buildings are curiously and uncomfortably divorced. The role that buildings are seen to play is usually in the context of bravura high-profile physical redevelopment, while the role of arts organizations is more often discussed in the context of fine grained community-building and the knitting together of anomic and atomized populations through the generation of "social capital". The buildings and the organizations they host are discussed in different forums by different people using different vocabularies and often manifesting a certain amount of mutual disdain. Arts organizations are only weakly enfranchised in discussions about arts buildings, a supplicant at a discussion that includes the booming voices of private developers, local politicians, urban renewal agencies and master planners.

The reasons that museums, galleries, theaters and concert halls have come to play such a central role in urban renewal are well rehearsed. They provide a context for the highly expressive and iconic architecture that is so central to the branding of a place; and in a privatized, secular, fragmented,

post-modern world they are one of the few candidates for public space that can provide a more communal feeling than the circulation areas and car parks attached to shopping malls. Sports stadia and public parks bear a similar civic burden.

The contribution that certain overwhelmingly successful arts buildings have made to the brand definition and revitalization of urban areas. The Guggenheim in Bilbao, Tate Modern in Southwark and most recently Disney Hall in downtown Los Angeles – has encouraged a rather naïve "copy-cat" strategy in many cities throughout the world. This approach is almost certain to fail in cases where the following three factors are neglected.

First, culture cannot revitalize downtown alone. Where cultural infrastructure plays a role it plays it alongside public and private investment in other civic amenities, transport systems and housing. The Brookings Institution, in a recent regeneration-by-numbers primer *Turning Around Downtown: Twelve Steps to Revitalization*,¹⁵ puts "Create an Urban Entertainment District" as Step Seven, slightly ahead of housing and retail but well behind the creation of a Business Improvement District. That's probably about right. Disney Hall is part of a major initiative that has a further \$1.2bn of public and private investment earmarked for Grand Avenue. Tate Britain is part of an integrated revitalization of the South Bank of the Thames river. It is depressing, however, how often significant investment in cultural buildings is made outside of an integrated urban renewal strategy. These cultural institutions then come to bear impossible expectations alone and without context.

Second, the cultural building boom has not been driven by 'consumer demand' in the sense of an increase in audiences. Global cities like London, New York, Los Angeles and Tokyo have a density of population in their immediate catchment and a sophisticated cultural tourist market that smaller cities cannot match, and yet many "supply driven" infrastructure projects do not take this into account. Large scale arts buildings have recently

been opened in Madison, Dayton, Denver and Omaha; new ones are in the pipeline in Miami, Dallas, Orange County and Nashville. Given the economics, it seems likely that these buildings will have a major adverse impact on wider ecology of the arts in these communities as they preempt and siphon off existing audiences and philanthropic resources rather than generating new ones. This is hardly the regenerative function that the planners will have had in mind.

Third, vibrant arts centers require thriving occupants if culture's role in revitalizing downtown through generating social capital is to be realized. In the Faustian pact between cultural organizations and urban planners, both parties have tended to gloss over the longer term financial impact of expansion on the resident organisations whilst playing up the economic impact on the community as a whole. But struggling arts organizations, seeking to meet the increased fixed costs that come with a highly specified new building, are unlikely to deliver on hopes for wider community revitalization.

The antidote to naïve optimism with respect to the contribution of culture to urban regeneration is not unqualified and jaded conservatism, but greater due diligence by both arts organizations and those responsible for renewal strategies. Arts organizations contemplating a potential role in urban regeneration would be well advised to:

- Look at your options from a simple perspective: Will the opportunity increase or decrease your organization's ability to fulfill its mission and realize the full potential of its programming ambitions? Without constantly referring back to this test, it is easy to get caught up in the chase and the dramas of building.
- Look at the long-term viability of the plan. "Sufficient unto the day" is not good enough, and very few organizations have sufficient political support to go back to stakeholders after the event and persuade them to increase operating funding to a level where

it is possible to thrive (as opposed to survive) after the initial thrill of the building opening has passed.

- Consider how you would respond to the worst-case scenario as well as the best. Obvious risks are delays in the completion of adjacent infrastructure or uncontrollable changes in the plans for adjacent buildings (from high-end residential housing to shelters or from restaurants to offices etc.). Remember that everyone is selling, not just you, and so the conversations are often about best cases instead of most likely cases.
- Have a Plan B and know at what point Plan A has deteriorated to such an extent that it is no longer appealing and Plan B should be triggered. Do not hold onto the remains of Plan A because of the time and moral capital invested in it. Fears about loss of face make for a weak negotiating position.
- Accept from the outset that your organization's agenda and the urban agenda overlap, but they are not identical. There are things you care about and need to protect that a development agency does not and vice versa. Do not resent the differences, just ensure that

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the common (and uncommon) ground is fully understood.

Those public agencies wishing to use culture as a policy tool are well advised to:

- Reflect on the financial and organizational fragility of most arts organizations and the fact that they are ill equipped to weather radical changes of plan or timetable. Try not to jerk them around.
- Remember that when you describe yourself as a 'partner' in the process they take you at face value and will expect you to honor the usual conditions of partnership – that you keep communication channels open and keep commitments made. If the commitments are implicit, make the explicit.
- Understand what you want out of 'culture.' It is not an undifferentiated mass. Different art forms and different scales of activity work better and worse in different contexts (hint: sometimes it's not a building).
- Work with what you have got. If culture is to play a role in both the physical fabric and the social texture of renewal, then it is critically important to work with and build on the existing cultural infrastructure rather than displacing it through "trading up."

This article is based on a presentation made to the October 2005 Grant-makers in the Arts conference in Los Angeles called "Can Culture Save Downtown?"

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ARTICLE

BY ELIZABETH CASALE

MISERY LOVES COMPANY

It is difficult to scan the news about the increasingly intertwined fields of not-for-profit and commercial culture, entertainment, and leisure without encountering a story about the struggle everyone seems to be having connecting with that fickle, elusive animal known as the "cultural consumer." Whether reading about the plight of Podunk Symphony on artsjournal.com, Hollywood's bumper summer detailed in *Variety*, or the *Financial Times'* account of the threat posed by the latest Google or Apple scheme to media networks, it's pretty clear that everyone's having a tough time sustaining, or sometimes even finding, a reliable audience base.

The stories are illuminating. Network television's audience is declining precipitously, losing one-third of viewers since 1985 as they opt for cable, DVDs, TiVO, and now video iPods. Shows like "The Miss America Pageant" and "Monday Night Football" that, in their brash, preposterous way, became part of the country's iconography, have been relegated to whatever cable channel will pick them up. Saturday night, which once featured a legendary lineup that included *M.A.S.H.*, *All in the Family*, *Maude*, *The Bob Newhart Show*, and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, is faring particularly poorly, as are the networks' attempts to catch the attention of what was once their core viewer ship—male, aged 18-34. A recent article in *USA Today* reports that "the state of network television on Saturday nights has become so dire that ABC has essentially put a prime-time slot up for auction to anyone who has a compelling idea..."¹⁶ Network television has got the blues and the underlying business model no longer works. Disney's Robert Iger has boldly acknowledged this, going with the

technological flow and teaming up with Apple to offer pay-per episodes of some shows, starting with *Desperate Housewives* and *Lost*. (Someone at Disney has a dry sense of humor.)

Meanwhile on the big screen...2005 is looking to be one of Hollywood's worst seasons ever. Movie attendance is declining for the third consecutive year, dropping 8% already this year over last, after declines of 2.8% and 3.4% in 2004 and 2003 respectively. 2005 summer box office receipts were down 9% from 2004, the lowest figure since 2001,¹⁷ and summer attendance was the lowest since 1997. Declining prices on home theatres, combined with rising ticket¹⁸ and popcorn prices (not to mention gas) and an overall increase in the "hassle factor" has diminished the multiplex experience and enhanced the appeal of the already-irresistible couch. Some theater chains, such as Muvico and Cinema de Lux, are trying to counter the trend by "enhancing the movie experience" with supervised playrooms, valet parking, VIP lounges and sushi bars.

Radio listenership is at a 27-year low; Americans spend an average of three hours less per week listening than 10 years ago. CD sales are down due to new modes of consumption spurred by the Internet and digital downloads. According to the Recording Industry Association of America, the number of units shipped to retail outlets has declined 21% since 1999. Even commercial live entertainment is toughing it out corporate mega-producer Clear Channel, to the surprise and probably delight of many in the industry, has spun off its concert promotion and live venue divisions due to declining revenues.

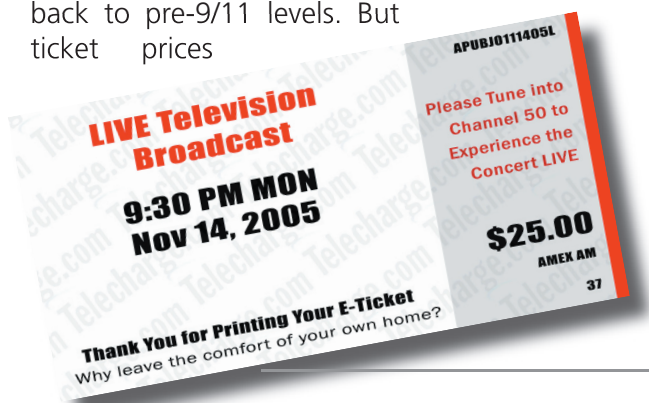
Things are a bit better on Broadway, although it has taken four years for ticket sales to crawl back to pre-9/11 levels. But ticket prices

are up due to increased production costs (the average is now over \$66 and the \$110 maximum price threshold was just crossed last month) and audiences are demanding extraordinary, expensive spectacles. Industry watchers worry about sustaining audience levels over the long term.

Big-money professional sports is losing audience, too, a gestalt-change that was brought home with a wallop when the National Hockey League went on strike in 2004 and was met with indifference from fans. Even purveyors of luxury brands, including stalwart fashion conglomerates with fantastic, enviable marketing budgets such as Chanel and Louis Vuitton, are struggling to find the right formula to reach customers and maintain their loyalty. Their ad agencies are working overtime to think up innovative strategies, like commissioning artists to create unique marketing tableaux in the form of short films and installations. Television advertising spend is plummeting while online marketing is skyrocketing, projected to increase 30% this year, to \$10.2 billion. The latest experiments are asking consumers to watch a commercial to receive a download or even to tolerate ads that are embedded in the programming itself.

So it's tough all over. The exceptions would appear to be church attendance, online gaming, NASCAR and cable television watching, all of which are booming. Last month, Nielsen Media Research reported that the average American household watched an average of 8 hours and 11 minutes of television per day, the highest amount since Nielsen starting measuring in the 1950's and 12.5% higher than a decade ago; NASCAR is currently the top television sports program. The phenomenal rise in church attendance and concomitant building boom in new facilities, including mega-churches in the suburbs, means that the church has usurped the civic centre, the county hall, the public stadium as the place where people convene (often literally, as stadia become the venue for large-scale church functions and religious revivals). Internet pornography sites are also doing pretty well.

The old assumptions – the nonprofits and the high brows struggle while the commercial and the low-



brow guys have it easy – no longer hold. High, low, or no, mass, crass, big money, grass roots and everything in between – everyone’s roughing it. What works for the consumer isn’t working for the producers and distributors of content. Consumers seem to want lots of options for culture, leisure and entertainment and ones that are a good value for time and money; that cater to individuated choices around what, when, where and how and that are mediated by technology and accessible in the living room.

Those organizations whose success depends on convening their audience members in large-scale, publicly-funded facilities such as sports stadia, museums and concert halls are vulnerable in today’s world. They depend upon a social contract and an idea of community that may no longer be applicable. Traditionally there was a pact with the community that worked like this: the federal government decides that a symphony orchestra provides a public good and, in exchange for providing that good, it does not have to pay taxes. The local community supports it on this basis, both with their contributions and their attendance. These organizations are a part of the core identity of the community and cannot be separated from it. When they thrive it signifies the thriving of the community and all are proud. When they struggle, so does the community as a whole.

This model assumes several things. It assumes that there is a “public,” that individuals form a binding geographically defined community that has ties that go deeper than the elective communities of interest (music, book-clubs etc.) and that that community forms a coherent whole that shares basic ideas about how to spend its leisure time, matters of taste, the value of the arts, sports, and, yes, even a good trashy movie. But as this traditional experience of community – one that is based on physical place and a sense of *civitas* – dissolves, so too does the sense of affinity and responsibility to a community organization. Thus, the social contract breaks down. Perhaps Mrs. Thatcher’s most notorious assertion has been realized - there is no such thing as society: there are individual men and women, and there are fami-

lies. If this is true, then why would an individual support “their” symphony, why would they get exercised about the fact that “their” team lost if the very sense of ‘their’ and “there” are both eroding?

It is not quite that we are all atomized or that no one cares about community anymore. It is simply that the community that people are seeking out is not centered around gathering in civic spaces as it once was. More frequently these new elective communities are formed along the lines of personal interests, and they often, though not always, encounter each other at least some of the time in psychic or virtual time and space. As a result, these communities are not bounded by the restrictions of opening hours or show times or buildings or travel time; and the traditional civic institutions are understandably having trouble figuring out how to function in this environment when their entire structure – from funding to governance to management – is built around a contract that is being proved to appeal only to a niche of its own.

What’s a typical museum, symphony orchestra, and theater to do? It’s probably a good idea in general to think smaller, more narrowly – find a niche and hone it. Don’t fight technology and consumer choices, leverage them and go with the flow. Focus on quality, as quality does seem to trump all, despite the doom and gloom statistics. Engage in scenario planning and risk analysis, as the corporate and political worlds have done – the world is not always sunny side up. And be extremely judicious when contemplating any expansion, especially one that will require heavy public subsidy for operations. That subsidy depends on a social contract that is eroding.

These are difficult issues and there are no easy answers. But at least if artists and nonprofit cultural organizations are struggling to figure it out, they can take comfort in knowing they’re in big-budget company.

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Worth Noting

Check out www.pandora.com

A gift from the founders of the Music Genome Project, an ambitious attempt to analyze and categorize the technical attributes of music from all genres. Pandora puts the Project's work into action to "help you discover new music you'll love." You put in a song or artist you like and Pandora creates a radio station for you based on other songs that share similar musical attributes. You can save your stations and pick up where you left off whenever you get online, but, in an attempt to tiptoe around the FCC, you can't download the station. Go ahead, rock out.

Footnotes

¹ David Toop is author of *Ocean of Sound* (Serpents Tail 1995) and other books. More information at <http://www.davidtoop.com>

² <http://www.dpo.uab.edu/~moudry/>

³ <http://www.uel.ac.uk/programmemes/ssmcs/undergraduate/musicculture.htm> , <http://www.wmin.ac.uk/mad/page-903>

⁴ <http://www.tcm.ac.uk/RVEf6a850751b9f4e95b3a13d76a17e3fe2.aspx>

⁵ <http://www.gsmd.ac.uk/connect/>

⁶ http://www.siba.fi/fin/ajankohtaista/musiikin_tulevaisuus_seminaari/

⁷ "Cultural Diplomacy: the Linchpin of Public Diplomacy" Report of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy. U.S. Department of State. September 2005. 3.

⁸ Ibid, 6.

⁹ Ibid, 3

¹⁰ Renz, Loren et. al. International Grantmaking III. The Foundation Center. 2004.

¹¹ *Our Common Interest: A report of the Commission for Africa*. March 2005. http://213.225.140.43/english/report/thereport/english/11-03-05_cr_report.pdf. 122.

¹² Ibid. 130.

¹³ Hyde, Lewis. *The Gift*. Random House: New York. 1983. 153-4.

¹⁴ Fraser, Graham. "Cultural diversity policy voted in." *Toronto Star*. October 18, 2005.

¹⁵ Stephen B. Leinberger, March 2005 http://www.brookings.edu/metro/pubs/20050307_12steps.htm

¹⁶ "Saturday Night TV a Long Way from Heyday," *USA Today*, AP: New York. Oct. 16, 2005.

¹⁷ Fritz, Ben and Gabriel Snyder "End of summer bummer: 'Transporter' hot, but the season certainly was not," *Variety*, Sep. 5, 2005.

¹⁸ Ticket prices increased have increased 42% since 1995, to an average of \$6.21. Source: National Association of Theatre Owners.