

A report on the state of the performing arts  
from the perspective of artists

# THE VIEW FROM HERE





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Organized, researched, written and presented

by

THE BROOKLYN COMMUNE PROJECT

# PREFACE

**IN SEPTEMBER 2011** I was working as the Director of Public Programs at The Lower Manhattan Cultural Council. We had just finished a series of programs commemorating the 10th anniversary of 9/11 when Occupy Wall Street set up camp in Zuccotti Park. My job at LMCC involved talking to artists—a lot. Inevitably the conversation would turn to Occupy and, after a lifetime in the DIY, “Downtown” or “Alternative” arts community, I found myself in the novel position of being perceived as “The Man.” Towards the end of one particularly frustrating exchange with an artist I asked if she had ever received a grant; she said yes. I asked if she knew where grant money came from; she said no.

For the next hour I found myself explaining, in as much detail as I could, how foundations work, what an endowment is, the difference between principal and interest, what a capital gain is and how grant money comes from the same place as any other money and that if you take a grant, you should be aware of your complicity in the very system you are criticizing. That doesn’t mean don’t take a grant; it just means that if you do take a grant, don’t just think about how hard it is to get that grant, but why it is difficult, where that money comes from and how, as its recipient, you are participating in the greater economic system we all inhabit. You don’t have to think about it, obviously, but if you are going to complain about it, then think about it. And if you don’t like it, either don’t play the game or change the rules.

After that conversation I became keenly aware of my own lack of knowledge about the relationship between money, politics and the arts, and in an effort to learn more I organized a panel discussion that was convened on April 11, 2012 as part of LMCC’s Access Restricted program. Entitled “At The Intersection: Art, Money and Politics”, it featured a public conversation between Dr. Jan Cohen-Cruz, Randy Martin, Morgan Jenness and Rachel Chavkin. The moderator was Amy Whitaker, a writer, artist and teacher with an MFA in painting from Slade School of Fine Art and an MBA from Yale University’s School of Management, is one of the most innovative thinkers on these issues. In her opening remarks, she presented the idea that economics is a collective creative design problem, and a light bulb went off in my head:

*What if we did just that?*

Fast forward to August 2012. Several months passed and a late night Facebook rant on artists’ attitudes towards economics occasioned a meeting between myself, Lucien Zayan and Risa Shoup, founder and associate director, respectively, of The Invisible Dog Art Center in Brooklyn. The conversation began with the notion of a panel discussion, which soon became a weekend-long gathering, which soon became a months-long project that none of us had time or resources to undertake. The project was tabled for the moment.

A week or so later I got an email that The MAP Fund applications were due so Risa and I cobbled together an application as quickly as we could. Since The MAP Fund requires a “performance”, we contextualized the project as “social practice” and the culminating event as a multidisciplinary, collaboratively created participatory, durational performance devised from the preceding months’ research.

Needless to say, we didn’t get the grant.

But, like most people working in the arts, we were compelled onward by an irresistible need to realize our vision, to bring this project into the world. Our sense of urgency, mission and purpose was overwhelming. We were convinced that artists, in order to change their lives, needed to become aware of their conditions and how those conditions exist in the

context of a much larger system. We were confident that artists, having acquired a new perspective and the language to articulate it, could help the system really see artists in a new way.

So with no funding and no idea what we were getting into, we moved forward with our planning. On March 24, 2013 we held the first public meeting of the Brooklyn Commune at The Invisible Dog Art Center and the rest, as they say, is history. Like most people who start ambitious projects, if we had known then how difficult this was going to be, I'm not sure we would have done it. That being said, had we known then what we know now, we would already be living in the world we want to see.

This report is the culmination of eight months of hard work. But more importantly it is evidence of what can be done through creativity, commitment and collaboration. We used the same processes for this project that many of us use to make performances; it is a process that is incredibly challenging and infinitely rewarding.

We have met amazing people through this project. From the core coordinating committee to the Facebook group, from avid attendees to casual participants, everyone has brought something unique to the conversation; everyone has added some insight, perspective or provocation to the research.

Our colleagues who self-identified as core members have coordinated research teams and organized events, joked, argued, disagreed and compromised, taught each other, pushed each other and helped each other grow as artists and individuals. It is humbling to realize how many people gave so much of their time, intellect and imagination to this project, and inspiring to think that we have all found something profound and important in ourselves and in each other.

Our work, documented and disseminated online, has occasioned inquiries from San Francisco, Detroit, Philadelphia, New Orleans, Minneapolis, Austin and Portland, from London, Berlin and Budapest. They want to know what we're doing; they are following us from afar and looking to us as they move forward.

It has been an amazing journey just to get to the starting line, and now we are at the beginning of something new. We hope you will join us.

**Andy Horwitz**, December 23, 2013, Brooklyn, NY

## Credits and Thanks

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### PLUS

Several hundred artists, thinkers, administrators and funders who participated in Brooklyn Commune activities in person and the hundreds more who joined in online.

### SPECIAL THANKS

Amanda Cooper and Here Arts Center, Frank Hentschker and Prelude.13, Andrew, Jeff and Caleb from CATCH, Ben Gansky and Cloud City, Theresa Bucheister and The Silent Barn, Emily Harney and BRIC, New York Live Arts, Alison Fleminger and University Settlement, Scott Fetterman, Immediate Medium, The Assembly, Neighborhood Productions, Our Goods, Dance/NYC Junior Committee, William Baumol, William Bowen, Judith Malina, Susan Solt and more.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**THE BROOKLYN COMMUNE** first convened on March 24, 2013 at the Invisible Dog Art Center in Brooklyn. Co-organizers Andy Horwitz and Risa Shoup were inspired to initiate the project out of a longstanding desire to understand the deep, persistent and seemingly intractable dysfunction endemic to the performing arts in America.

As long-time members of NYC’s “downtown” performing arts community, Horwitz and Shoup could collectively recall hundreds, if not thousands, of conversations with artists, curators, administrators, funders, activists and politicians poring over the perennial issues facing artists: low pay, long hours, no advancement, no funding, no space, decreased livability of NYC, deficient press and diminishing audience. Year after year, covering and re-covering the same topics, never making progress. More pointedly, these various stakeholders were never in the same room, at the same time, at the same table for any single conversation. What were the structural impediments to productive discourse and what were the foundational elements of this systemic dysfunction? And why were artists so rarely part of the conversation at all?

The Brooklyn Commune was envisioned as an open, participatory, public research project driven by artists and artist/administrators to identify the root causes of the problems and develop creative solutions. After the first commune event of the eight month process, Horwitz and Shoup were joined by a core team of coordinators and hundreds other artists and arts workers in NYC and from around the world who helped shape the project’s trajectory and clarify its goals and objectives.

Through research online and in libraries, through a self-designed census of our peers, through interviews and social events and visioning exercises, we tried to get a 360-degree view of the ecosystem. We uncovered a treasure trove of lost documents, publications and reports, discovering that chief among the problems of the performing arts is a lack of meaningful documentation and knowledge management, as well as a disastrous lack of intergenerational dialogue and mentorship, not to mention peer-to-peer knowledge sharing.

Most significantly, we learned that we, as artists, are not the problem. We have heretofore accepted the received assumptions about artists—that we are bad with money, that we are unprofessional and insufficiently entrepreneurial. We have heretofore accepted the notion that our labor is not “work”, and as such we should be grateful to labor without compensation, to provide our services for free to institutions who are funded expressly to produce and present our art to the public, for the public good. We have heretofore accepted the notion that the system desires to be equitable and just, that it is self-critical and working to improve itself. Now we know differently.

We learned from Baumol and Bowen’s classic text *Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma* that the problem has a name—Baumol’s Cost Disease—and that it is quite simple. In a traditional market economy based on manufacturing, technological innovation leads to increased productivity that decreases prices and raises wages. But no amount of technological innovation can increase productivity in the performing arts—it will always take a long time to make a play, dance or piece of music, and it takes just about as long to watch Hamlet now as it did in Shakespeare’s day. Since it is nearly impossible for the live performing arts to be profitable and self-sustaining in a traditional market economy (with the exception of the most commercial and widely popular entertainments), this work requires subsidy, most often premised on the idea of “the public good.”

Baumol and Bowen published their study in 1966, shortly after the establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts; of course, the country has changed significantly since then. As part of the ongoing erosion of public life, public funding for the arts has been reduced and arts education virtually eliminated from the schools. Even in arts-friendly New York City, the Department of Cultural Affairs is only 0.25% of the entire NYC budget. The \$146 million budget of



the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) represents just 0.012% (about one one-hundredth of one percent) of federal discretionary spending.<sup>1</sup> (The NEA's budget reached an all time high of \$175,954,680 in 1992, only to fall below \$100M from 1996-2000, indicating that arts funding isn't necessarily a straightforward partisan issue).

In theory, foundations were meant to fill the funding gap. But their support has been increasingly encumbered by onerous Federal oversight and regulation, and the demand for demonstrable impact has led foundations to focus their funding priorities on social problems with more clearly identifiable outcomes and "return on investment."

On the surface this may seem pretty grim, but there's a surprising twist to the story.

For the first time in American history, the number of individuals who dedicate themselves to art making, without even expecting a living wage in return, vastly outnumbers those whose art practice generates their primary income. A 2001 study by the RAND Corporation estimates that these artists outnumber "professionals" by 20 or 30 to 1,<sup>2</sup> and there is every reason to believe that proportion has increased greatly over the past decade.

There are more artists than ever and technology, while not necessarily increasing productivity, has vastly expanded the scope of possible art practices, creating an opportunity for an incredibly diverse and imaginative group of people to engage in artistic pursuits. While the arts establishment increasingly caters to a small (and shrinking) group of aging, white, wealthy people, a robust, diverse and dynamic artistic culture flourishes despite the lack of funding and infrastructure.

Fixing the broken system is, in all likelihood, beyond the capabilities of the artists and audiences who are flourishing outside the walls of the institutions. Indeed, outside the broken system propping up our legacy institutions, the line between artist and audience barely even exists anymore. Thus there is almost infinite opportunity to create something new, something exciting and uniquely American in character.

Over the course of our research we have had many, many debates about how to define an "artist" and what is "art"—ultimately we decided that we would open both terms to the widest possible understanding. Since any individual "artist" may be a director on one project, an administrator on another, a performer in the next, and alternately a designer or a writer in yet another, using wide-ranging skill sets and collaborative creative practices in a multitude of contexts, it seemed counterproductive to limit the definition. The only qualifier we used was that the "artist" must be committed to the creation of live performances, regardless of discipline.

From time to time you may notice the phrase "performed arts" instead of "performing arts". This neologism is used when possible and appropriate to remind us that the "live performing arts" must in fact be *performed*, live, by a working performer.

This report isn't an argument for more, and better, funding, though we certainly would be pleased if that was a result of our efforts. Rather, this document is the culmination of our collaborative, creative investigation into the problems we face, that are presented to us as intractable and immutable. This document is an informed response, a call to see things differently, an invitation to change; for we propose a complete redesign of the existing system and are embarking on the creation of a new one. This document is meant to begin a conversation to change America's perspective on who artists are, what they do, and the impact of our work on society, not merely in economic terms, but how art benefits individuals, groups and communities, and strengthens the very fabric of our nation.

We started this project out of concern for the urgent material needs of our community, exacerbated by a lack of tangible facts about our conditions or commonly held knowledge of how we arrived at this moment in time. We have prepared this report to share our findings with our colleagues and assert our voice in the wider conversation, to educate ourselves and bring our collective creative imagination to bear on seemingly intractable problems.

We were surprised to discover that no problems are intractable, depending on how you look at them, and we're hopeful that we may offer new perspectives and promote an alternative vision of a healthy, vibrant and diverse arts ecology in America.

# INTRODUCTION

## Vision and Values

**THE BROOKLYN COMMUNE PROJECT** is a grassroots initiative organized by Culturebot.org and The Invisible Dog Art Center to educate, activate and unify performing artists of all disciplines to work together towards a more equitable, just and sustainable arts ecology in America.

If economics—specifically the economics that govern cultural production within the arts ecosystem—can be seen, not as a discrete, impenetrable system, but rather as a creative design problem to be solved collectively, then artists will come together to solve it. The project is structured as an iterative, collaborative public research, and visioning process investigating the economics of cultural production in the performing arts.

The goal of our project is to create and document an artist-driven vision of a healthy arts ecosystem in America and to bring artists, institutions, administrators and funders together for mutually respectful, open, non-hierarchical discourse around difficult topics such as resource allocation, capital, value, labor, aesthetics and quality of life.

The Brooklyn Commune Project is predicated on the following ideas:

- Self-identified artists and creative people in all sectors—given space, time, information and incentive—are able to imagine worlds that operate differently than the one we currently inhabit. We have applied our creativity to envisioning meaningful, actionable pathways towards solutions.
- Artists, institutions, administrators and funders have the same desired outcome for the arts ecology: a healthy, vibrant, dynamic, diverse, inclusive, resilient and sustainable arts and culture sector in America.
- We will avoid unrealistic fantasies and unworkable utopianism, instead identifying systemic dysfunctions and obstructions as we work towards real solutions.
- Artists, institutions, administrators and funders must come together in a thoughtful, respectful, collaborative, and rigorous way to create a path to achieve their shared desired outcome.
- Members of The Brooklyn Commune will model the behaviors we are asking others to adopt: openness, transparency, inclusivity, responsibility, respect and rigor.
- We hold ourselves accountable for our behavior as we work to establish a culture of mutual trust, respect and cooperation.

While sited primarily in Brooklyn, the project is inclusive of all New York City, and aspires to develop a vision with national relevance. While our sphere of influence is the performed arts, our sphere of concern is global; through our research we hope to identify how the lessons we learn can be shared and applied widely.

## Who We Are

The authors of this report are a group of artist/administrators who have chosen to spend the past eight months researching some of the seemingly intractable problems faced by performing artists and the sector as a whole. This core group of team coordinators represents a slightly larger group of researchers—also artist/administrators—who in turn represent an even larger, diverse, complex and deeply interconnected ecosystem.

The authors of this report have worked variously as actors, writers, dancers, choreographers, producers, directors, lighting designers, sound designers, mask makers, grant writers, ushers, box office managers and the like. When we have not earned our living from our work in the arts, we have worked as office managers and web designers, copywriters and art directors, DJs, waiters, bartenders, carpenters, project managers, temps and more. The arts organizations we have worked with include chashama, the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, Performance Space 122, ART/NY, Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, New York Live Arts, MOMIX, Columbia Artist Management, Pick Up Performance Co(s), The Surdna Foundation, The Ford Foundation, The Public Theater, BRIC and more.

When this document refers to “we”, it is the authors speaking for themselves. But by virtue of the depth and breadth of our collective knowledge, experience and extended social networks, we believe our findings will speak to a much larger constituency.

## What We Did

The Brooklyn Commune Project consisted of four public research sessions with the first convened on March 24, 2013. It culminated in a weekend-long congress convened November 22-24, 2013. Additional activities included weekly “mini-communes” and happy hours, sporadic special events and regular coordinating meetings. All live events were documented and disseminated online at our blog, [BrooklynCommune.org](http://BrooklynCommune.org), on our Facebook page and through social media.

In addition to the official research sessions and weekly mini-communes, individual research team coordinators—the project’s de facto coordinating committee—organized small group meeting and research sessions, devoting considerable time to independent study and writing.

For a more complete description of the activities of the Brooklyn Commune Project, please see Appendix A.

## What It (Would Have) Cost

<b>BROOKLYN COMMUNE PROJECT BUDGET</b>		
<b>ITEM</b>	<b>AMOUNT</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
<b>STAFF</b>		Estimated at \$30/hour
(2) Lead Organizers	\$43,200.00	1,440 hours over 16 Months
(6) Research coordinators	\$31,470.00	1,049 hours over 11 months
(4) Program coordinators	\$14,940.00	498 hours over 11 months at \$30/hour
(1) Social media and Website coordinator	\$5,340.00	178 hours over 11 months at \$30/hour
SUBTOTAL	\$94,950.00	
<b>PUBLIC PROGRAMS</b>		
Venue Rental (Invisible Dog)	\$10,000.00	\$1K/Sunday @ 4, \$6K for Congress Weekend
Speaker Honoraria	\$600.00	PAID BY ORGANIZERS and PRELUDE.13
Guest and Speaker Honoraria	\$500.00	Est. 10 @ \$50
Venue Rental (event spaces)	\$3,000.00	Estimated cost of 15+ Monday evening happy hours
Supplies and Materials	\$1,086.27	
Printing Costs	\$500.00	Handbills, programs, collateral material
Refreshments	\$2,800.00	
SUBTOTAL	\$18,486.27	
<b>RESEARCH and ADMINISTRATION</b>		
Web Hosting	\$136.00	
Meeting Costs	\$3,000.00	Space rental, etc. for 15 mtgs @ \$200/meeting
Hospitality	\$200.00	Estimated
Research Materials	\$326.88	
Research Travel	\$500.00	Estimated
Marketing and Outreach	\$500.00	Estimated
SUBTOTAL	\$6,400	
<b>FINAL REPORT AND LAUNCH EVENTS</b>		
Designer Fee	\$5,000.00	Design and Production of Final Report and Collateral
Printing Costs	\$1,000.00	Printing of Final Report and Collateral (projected)
Presentation Costs	\$750.00	
SUBTOTAL	\$6,750.00	
<b>PROJECT SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>\$124,849.15</b>	
<i>5% Contingency</i>	<i>\$6,167.74</i>	
<b>PROJECT TOTAL</b>	<b>\$131,016.89</b>	
Total Contributed Budget (CASH)	\$8,399.15	
Total Contributed Budget (IN-KIND)	\$116,450.00	
TOTAL CONTRIBUTED HOURS	3165	

## Chapter ONE

## A VIEW FROM ABOVE

## The Economic Dilemma of the Performing Arts

**THE TENOR OF TODAY'S DISCOURSE** around arts funding gives the impression that artists who struggle financially are failing to make their work efficiently, to market it effectively, or to generate work that appeals to a broad audience. While this appears to have a certain surface logic and is repeated enough to be accepted as truth, it is, in fact, wrong.

Early in our research we discovered a seminal, and seemingly lost, text: *Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma* by William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen, first published in 1966 and currently out of print.

Baumol and Bowen were startlingly insightful; the economic dilemma as they articulated it in 1966 remains true today and can be simply explained.

In a traditional market economy, technological innovation generally leads to increased productivity, and workers' wages increase as the economy becomes more productive. Theoretically, if the economy expands by 4% every year, workers' wages should similarly increase by 4%<sup>3</sup>.

This, however, is not the case in the performing arts:

**"The work of the performer is an end in itself, not a means for the production of some good.** When a customer purchases a typewriter, he usually neither knows nor cares how many man-hours of what kind of labor went into its manufacture. Any innovation which reduces the number of man-hours embodied in such a machine [lowers] its price. But in live performance ... **The performers' labor themselves constitute the end product which the audience purchases....** Unlike workers in manufacturing, performers are not intermediaries between raw material and the completed commodity—their activities are themselves the consumers' good." (Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma, p. 164)

"Our encounter with this text was as serendipitous as it was improbable, given that it is out of print. As I began to research the labor of the performing arts, I kept spotting this text in the footnotes of important documents and reports. I was soon surprised to find that the book's two authors were among my father's dearest friends, as each of them had taught at Princeton University together for several decades. Both economists wrote this book relatively early in their distinguished careers. Baumol went on to continue this vein of research at Princeton and NYU, extrapolating its discoveries to other economic concerns, such as health care and the environment. Bowen went on to become President of Princeton, and then became President of The Mellon Foundation, where he helped create JSTOR and ARTstor. I am thankful to Bowen, who loaned me his personal copy of the book upon discovering that I could not track one down."

—NICK BENACERRAF, COORDINATOR OF THE LABOR AND VALUE RESEARCH TEAM

Baumol and Bowen articulated—possibly for the first time in history—the difference between two different kinds of economies:

1. The standard *manufacturing economies*, which produce concrete goods through mechanical production and do not require “direct personal contact between the consumer and the producer”<sup>4</sup> and
2. The economy of *live performance*, which absolutely depends upon the live interaction of humans with one another.<sup>5</sup>

“The immediate result of this technological difference between live performance and the typical manufacturing industry is that while productivity is very much subject to change in the latter, it is relatively immutable in the former. Whereas the amount of labor that is necessary to produce a typical manufactured product has constantly declined since the beginning of the industrial revolution, it requires about as many minutes for Richard II to tell his ‘sad stories of the death of kings’ as it did on the stage of the Globe Theatre. Human ingenuity has devised ways to reduce the labor necessary to produce an automobile, but no one has yet succeeded in decreasing the human labor expended at a live performance of a 45 minute Schubert quartet much below a total of three man-hours.” (Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma, p.164)

Despite all the social, technological, cultural and economic changes of the past 35 years, the economic dilemma of the performing arts persists and is unlikely to change. Simply put, there is no way to produce performed art more efficiently without fundamentally changing its content, or without seriously compromising its quality.

But even if the performed arts are fundamentally unsustainable in a pure market economy, they might still be deemed valuable to the general public. This is called a PUBLIC GOOD.

“While public goods cannot pass the market test, it does not follow that such items are unwanted by the general public. Even though consumers cannot be made to pay for them, they may regard them as well worth their cost. In such a case it is the normal commercial mechanism and not the consumer demand which has failed to function. A government’s decision to supply a public good is, therefore, not necessarily a decision to flaunt the wishes of the consumer. On the contrary, government financing may be the only way in which the wishes of the body of consumers can be put into effect.” (Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma, p. 381)

Just in case you’re wondering—Broadway is no different. Anecdotal industry statistics put average recoupment rates at about 20-30%! Broadway shows are so likely to lose money that potential investors are “means-tested” and must have \$1M in the bank. Profitability on Broadway comes from licensing, merchandising and other revenue streams. Even big music stars on tour have to identify other revenue streams like corporate sponsorships!

The concept of public goods refers to things like clean air in Los Angeles, which almost no single individual could be convinced to pay for, but that everybody desires and from which everybody benefits. In these instances, the market cannot deliver what is in our common interest, and we accept the argument that government and philanthropy—both of which are mechanisms designed to allocate capital towards the public good—must intercede.

## Performing Arts as Public Good

If a public good is something that has public value but cannot “pass the market test” then we need to articulate the value of the performing arts as a public good.

In the 2012 report titled *How Art Works*, The National Endowment for the Arts proposes the following benefits to society of the arts:

**Benefit of Art to Society and Communities**, which refers to “the role that art plays as an agent of cultural vitality, a contributor to sense of place and sense of belonging, a vehicle for transfer of values and ideals, and a promoter of political dialogue.”

**Benefit of Art to Individuals**, which refers to the cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and physiological effects that arts participation can produce in individuals, including transformations in thinking, social skills, and character development over time.

## Benefit of the Performing Arts to Society

Since its founding, the United States has considered a healthy arts ecosystem to be an essential barometer of the health of the country as a democracy. George Washington wrote:

“The arts and sciences are essential to the prosperity of the state and to the ornament and happiness of human life. They have a primary claim to the encouragement of every lover of his country and mankind.”

John Adams, in a letter to his wife Abigail dated May 12, 1780, wrote:

“I must study politics and war, that our [children] may have the liberty to study mathematics and philosophy. Our [children] ought to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history and naval architecture, navigation, commerce and agriculture in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry, and porcelain.”

At the same time, America has aspired to the creation of a large and vibrant middle class as a bedrock of stability to, as stated in our Constitution, “insure domestic Tranquility” and “promote the general Welfare” of the country.

There are other goods that are considered mixed commodities, like education, that offer both public and private benefits. Although it benefits any given individual to receive a strong education, it also benefits our collective interest, because that person is able to contribute more effectively and intelligently to our society. In this case, the government—through primary education and public universities—subsidizes practices that are in the interest of the social wellbeing, but that individuals cannot fully pay for themselves on the market of exchange. There is a strong case to be made that the performing arts are mixed commodities, offering benefits not only to those who directly encounter them, but also to the greater society.

In Walter Isaacson's *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life*, we learn from Franklin's letters that his vision of the strength and success of our nation was to be measured by the size and strength of a class of "proud freeholders and tradesmen" with the "right to vote on public affairs and ample opportunity to feed and clothe their families."

Implicit in this vision is a commitment to "civic cooperation, social compassion and voluntary community improvement" premised on the value of "hard work, individual enterprise, frugality and self-reliance". This is the foundational notion of American democracy—that an educated and informed citizenry, committed to the "liberal values of individual rights and liberties", could self-govern, protecting individual liberties while providing for the common good.

Thus a robust civic life accessible to, and comprised of, a large and vibrant middle class is essential to a healthy American democracy. The performed arts, which are by definition social arts, require the live presence of human beings in close proximity to other human beings. They foster interaction, they have the potential to educate, enlighten and promote discourse; what's more, the role of public space, such as those required by performed arts, is to foster social interaction, an effect of which is to build a sense of community and mutual investment of individuals in the collective whole.

## Benefit of the Performing Arts to the Individual

Participatory democracy in an increasingly complex society **requires individuals to see themselves as citizens.**

In a nation where many diverse communities coexist—sometimes tendentiously, sometimes at deliberate distance—cultural activities, **and the performing arts specifically, can uniquely serve as meeting place, a site for the formation of a shared communal identity as "the public"**. The performing arts may serve as a microcosm of democratic society, where individual free expression meets public space, a space both literal and metaphorical for the convergence of the individual citizen and the collective body politic. Thus the performing arts are an essential public good for the development of citizens and the creation and maintenance of a "public".

"The demographics of the traditional subscriber base—old, affluent and white—don't reflect the demographics of the broader society that these nonprofit theaters were established through public and foundation money to serve." —CHARLES MCNULTY IN THE LOS ANGELES TIMES, 12/18/13

Participation in the performing arts builds skills that last a lifetime, including the confidence required to transcend cultural and economic barriers. Through our research we have encountered countless non-arts professionals—trial lawyers, local politicians, business leaders—who attribute a great deal of their success to the communication skills they developed on stages as children or the ideas they were exposed to as audience members.

At the same time, the performing arts are necessarily performed live: by, in front of, and with other people. In this way they are inherently social arts and provide a necessary opportunity to develop the skills of socialization and communication required by a healthy democracy. In an age of ubiquitous "connectivity", driven by the demands of and expectations of where human interactions are increasingly mediated by technology, the performed arts offer us the opportunity to practice "intentional liveness": to be in community together and preserve the depth, nuance and meaning derived from negotiating the complexity of direct social contact with others.

Yet insofar as the arts are to be valued by everyone, they must be available to everyone, and while gifted individuals will inevitably gain acclaim by creating works of extraordinary merit, it is only through fostering widespread participation in the arts through education, training and attendance that we can create favorable conditions for artistic exceptionalism. Thus widespread participation in the arts—in all forms—should be viewed not as a luxury, but as an essential and necessary contribution to the vitality of an educated and informed citizenry. Widespread participation in the arts should be seen as democracy in action:



“We generally take it as an article of faith that it is undesirable for anyone to be kept from achieving as much as [he or she] can through the abilities with which [he or she] is endowed. It is, therefore, widely agreed that no market test need support the flow of public funds devoted to the opening of opportunities to the impecunious.” (Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma, pp. 378-379)

Indeed, there is a compelling case to be made for the concept of artistic change as a means for peacefully upending calcified ideas and introducing new ones. Civil, ordered social change is central to the very concept of *democracy*, which promises equality not in each individual moment—when there is always a hierarchy of some kind—but in the long term, when everyone may find the opportunity to be in charge.<sup>6</sup> This is at the very heart of what the arts can offer a thriving democracy, and why to invest in the arts is to invest in the long-term health of our nation.

## A Brief History of Funding the Public Good in America

“The provision of public goods cannot be entrusted to market forces alone. The profit motive and free enterprise, which work so effectively in bringing private goods to consumers when and as they want them, are subject to a fatal limitation as regulators of the supply of public goods.” (Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma, p.380)

In order to understand where we are now it is essential to know how we got here. The history of arts funding in America is far too complicated to recount in detail here, so for the purposes of brevity we will summarize our findings based on the NEA’s report *National Endowment for the Arts: A History, 1965–2008* (edited by Mark Bauerlein with Ellen Grantham) and in-person interviews conducted by our Foundations, Funding and Philanthropy research team.

Baumol and Bowen’s *Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma* was published shortly after the Rockefeller Brothers Fund issued a report entitled *The Performing Arts: Problems and Prospects* in March 1965. The report determined that federal support was essential to ensure the future of the arts in America.

Just a few months later, on September 29, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act establishing the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. According to *National Endowment for the Arts: A History, 1965–2008*:

“The NEA was not intended to solve a problem, but rather to embody a hope. The NEA was established to nurture American creativity, to elevate the nation’s culture, and to sustain and preserve the country’s many artistic traditions. The Arts Endowment’s mission was clear—to spread this artistic prosperity throughout the land, from the dense neighborhoods of our largest cities to the vast rural spaces, so that every citizen might enjoy America’s great cultural legacy.

The Arts and Humanities Act included language clearly reminiscent of the Kennedy-era pledge to enhance America as a global exemplar: “The world leadership which has come to the United States cannot rest solely upon superior power, wealth, and technology, but must be founded upon worldwide respect and admiration for the nation’s high qualities as a leader in the realm of ideas and of the spirit.”

The NEA was at once wildly successful and a lightning rod for controversy. At first, critics mostly decried the seemingly insular nature of its panel and allocation processes, and later the presentation of controversial content—with or without NEA funding—in publicly supported institutions.

In 1980 (only 15 years after the Endowment's founding) the role of federal support for the arts began to be aggressively questioned. As early as 1981, Ronald Reagan's Budget Director David Stockman was proposing a 50 percent cut to the NEA's budget, "premised on the notion that the Administration should completely revamp federal policy for arts and humanities support. For too long, the Endowments have spread federal financing into an ever-wider range of artistic and literary endeavor, promoting the notion that the federal government should be the financial patron and first resort for both individuals and institutions engaged in artistic and literary pursuits. This policy has resulted in a reduction in the historic role of private individual and corporate philanthropic support in these key areas."<sup>7</sup>

Political fervor to reduce or eliminate funding to the NEA specifically, and diminish the role of the Federal government generally, increased with the so-called "Culture Wars" of the late 1980's and early 1990's. The remarkable accomplishments of the agency in building a national arts landscape in less than a generation were already imperiled. When it discontinued its grants to individual artists in the mid-1990's, the NEA had already reduced its support for commissioning and touring; the negative impact on the sector was palpable.

The benefit of an Arts Endowment grant to an artist or independent company was not only financial capital—though that was critical—but equally important *cultural capital* that came from being recognized by such a prestigious federal agency. This was especially true for minority artists and those working outside of established contexts. In the words of Joan Myers Brown, founding artistic and executive director of the Philadelphia Dance Company, Philadanco:

"The impact the National Endowment for the Arts has made on predominantly African-American dance organizations since its inception can be exemplified by the history of the success of organizations such as Dayton Contemporary Dance Company of Ohio, Dallas Black Dance Theatre in Texas, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Company in Denver, Colorado, and Philadanco in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. **Being able to move into the main or national funding stream because of the approval of the Endowment opened doors to local agencies, foundations, and community-based funding in our areas. This ability to compete for grants, often given only to the more established cultural institutions, allowed what were often considered 'grassroots' or 'community-based' to secure a stronger footing in the field.**"

Many individual artists were affected by the reduced support, and countless grassroots, artist-run organizations—such as Seattle's On The Boards and New York's Dance Theater Workshop and Performance Space 122—faced drastic challenges as their main source of funding disappeared. And in the wake of NEA budget cuts, per the predictions of David Stockman, foundations stepped in to fill the gap as best they could.

But in the early 2000's, a debate began to unfold in the press—and eventually in government—suggesting that some foundations, operating without public accountability, were gaining controversial benefit from their tax exemption. The Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 dramatically increased government oversight and accountability, changing the way all public charities operate and are governed (not just those in the arts). Even institutions already working within the guidelines of the law would need to change the way they did business.

The new law, with its demand for increased accountability and fiscal oversight, introduced new reporting requirements, internal auditing of funding programs, and other administrative obstacles to effective grant making. These administrative obstacles were, in turn and by necessity, applied to grantees. And so arts funding programs increasingly required applicants to clearly define expected outcomes and provide quantitative data to measure impact.

Despite valiant efforts to demonstrate social and economic impact of the arts, influential stakeholders in the funding community have often been unable to persuasively link vitality in the arts sector to a healthy, dynamic culture and overall economy to their boards and trustees (who approve foundation giving priorities). Even among those funders for whom arts funding remains a priority, most are compelled to prioritize measurable impact over individual effects. Even passionate arts advocates at foundations are facing significant challenges in “making the case” within their own institutions, and so today’s philanthropic sector has painfully little sense of urgency towards the arts and arts funding.

This crucible of accountability and social impact leads foundations to favor organizations with those characteristics. “Accountable” organizations have board governance, fiscal oversight and audited financials. “Impactful” organizations have demonstrably large audiences, expansive reach through education and “engagement” programming, and can prove their impact with rigorous audience research, demographics, online analytics, and the like.

Clearly, the administrative infrastructure and capacity required to be “accountable” and “impactful” in the eyes of funders is beyond that of many grassroots organizations and almost all individual artists. So large organizations receive the lion’s share of funding.

This outcome has had two profoundly negative effects on the performing arts in America.

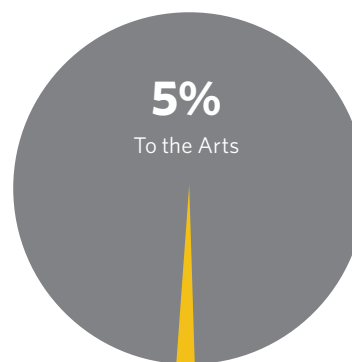
## Identifying The Dysfunction

In order to demonstrate impact and remain accountable, organizations increase in capacity—they hire marketers to grow their audiences, educators and engagement specialists for programming, fundraisers and campaign consultants, evaluation consultants, strategic planning consultants, etc. Increasing capacity requires more capital, which requires in turn even more capacity. Soon it is not enough to merely maintain an arts organization. That organization must grow. Imperative growth introduces a vicious cycle wherein a not-for-profit arts organization is subjected to the same expectations as a for-profit business.

The growth imperative is now so embedded that it is impossible for any business to simply generate a modest profit. Instead, the standard measure of the health of a for-profit organization is generally seen as growth. It’s not enough for the business to simply be earning money every year; the amount it is earning must be growing and its operations must be expanding to support that growth. In this model a truly successful company is thought to be one who is not only growing but whose rate of growth is also growing (up to that point at which the company becomes overloaded with debt).

The introduction of these conventional market-driven business expectations into organizations that by *definition* fail the “market test” is oxymoronic at best, and most certainly counterproductive. And yet, as arts organizations are compelled to identify ever more individual donors from the private sector, this market logic has trickled down from the for-profit world and permeated the culture and thinking of mission-driven organizations.

### CHARITABLE GIVING TO THE ARTS IN THE UNITED STATES



In the wake of increased demand for quantifiable impact and the desire to see more significant short-term “return on investment” it is unsurprising that the philanthropic sector should gravitate to larger institutions who have measurable (and recognized) economic and social impact such as hospitals, universities, museums, research institutions, and the like. By this measure, the allocation of resources to these nonprofits dwarfs that of the arts, **with only 5% of all charitable giving going to the arts.** \*

\* “Giving USA” a special report from The NonProfit Times, published July 1, 2013.

Under pressure to grow, to identify or create new markets to consume its products and services, the arts organization hires more staff in marketing, publicity and administration and even more grant writers and development staff to attract even higher value donors who will inevitably want to see their name on a building, leading to a disastrous and unsustainable building boom in the arts detailed in The University of Chicago's Cultural Policy Center report "Set In Stone".

With all this time, money and resources devoted by institutions to fundraising, grant compliance, reporting, marketing, public relations, real estate and building management, increasingly little can be left over for artists.

## It's Not You, It's The System

"It is easy to visualize what might happen to the performing arts if their prime objective were profit maximization. **One can envision the nation's performing arts reduced to a vestigial state, with a very small number of theaters and orchestras catering to an exclusive group of persons** who could afford to pay the very high and ever-rising prices necessary to keep them going." (*Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma*, p.173)

Baumol and Bowen established the economic reason why artists make so little money in a traditional market-driven economy: as the rest of the economy expands by becoming more efficient, with prices going down and wages increasing (theoretically), production in the performing arts remains constant and wages stagnate (in fact they decrease, for all practical purposes). The only way to raise wages is to raise ticket prices, which does not happen for reasons both ethical (keeping the arts accessible) and commercial (to keep live performance competitive with other media.)

What results is a continuously widening economic disparity where wages in the rest of the economy grow while the wages of performers remain relatively stagnant—and artists fall deeper and deeper into relative poverty.

In 1990 the NEA issued a report on the economics of working as an artist in the United States entitled *Arts in America 1990*. It cited a 1989 Columbia University study of 4,000 artists that found that "three-fourths of them earned no more than \$12,000 annually from their art. Rising medical costs hit hard... affecting artists not only because they tend to be self-employed but also because of the physical hazards to which many artists are exposed."

An NEA study called *Dancemakers*, published in 1993, found that "the average annual income choreographers earned from their artistic work in 1989 was \$6,000, while their professional expenses totaled \$13,000. Including money earned in other pursuits, a dancer's average income reached only \$22,000."

According to The NEA's 2012 publication *How Art Works*, the human impulse to create and express is "the primary motive that powers the system." The human impulse is so strong that people will withstand significant hardship to pursue it.

**"Because performers frequently are dedicated individuals who are willing to work under economic conditions which would be considered appalling in other activities, the performing arts are relatively insensitive to general wage trends,** especially in the short run. Even in the long run, earnings in the performing arts may lag behind wages in occupations which provide less in the way of **psychic income**. Whereas most unskilled workers, for example, are likely to regard the hourly wage as their primary reward for working, the typical performer presumably receives, in addition, considerable pleasure and personal satisfaction from his work. The important point is that, as the general level of real income increases over time, people may well feel that they are better able to afford to pursue careers which offer relatively lower money incomes but larger psychic incomes."

(*Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma*, p.169)

But things are different today. When Baumol and Bowen proposed that, “as the general level of real income increases over time, people may well feel that they are better able to afford to pursue careers which offer relatively lower money incomes but larger psychic incomes”, they were writing in just such a moment in time. The relative affluence of Post-WWII America, near its height in 1966, afforded a wider swath of the population the opportunity to choose psychic income over financial income. But we are currently in a moment when real income in the United States has not increased in nearly 40 years. While the demand for the arts—understood widely—remains constant, and the need for the social value of the arts increases, in 2013 the divergence between psychic income and real income has become a bridge too far for many Americans. Yet the existing system does not acknowledge this divergence.

As public sector arts funding has greatly diminished and foundations direct the bulk of their grant making activities towards large organizations, artists are not only left to fend for themselves, but are increasingly responsible for bearing the costs of cultural production themselves. Baumol and Bowen observed:

“...Arts organizations in financial difficulty have often managed to shift part of their financial burden back to the performers and to the managements, who also are often very poorly paid by commercial standards. The levels of income in this broad field must be considered remarkably low by any standards, and particularly so in light of the heavy investment often made by the artists in their education, training, and equipment.”

(*Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma*, p.169)

But whereas an arts organization in financial difficulty in 1966 might be able to shift that financial burden with less negative effect, the material conditions of the American people have changed considerably since 1966.

According to *The Wall Street Journal*, “apart from brief lapses, like in the late 1990s, wages have been falling for a generation.” In fact, measuring “on an inflation-adjusted basis, wages peaked in 1973, fully 40 years ago.”

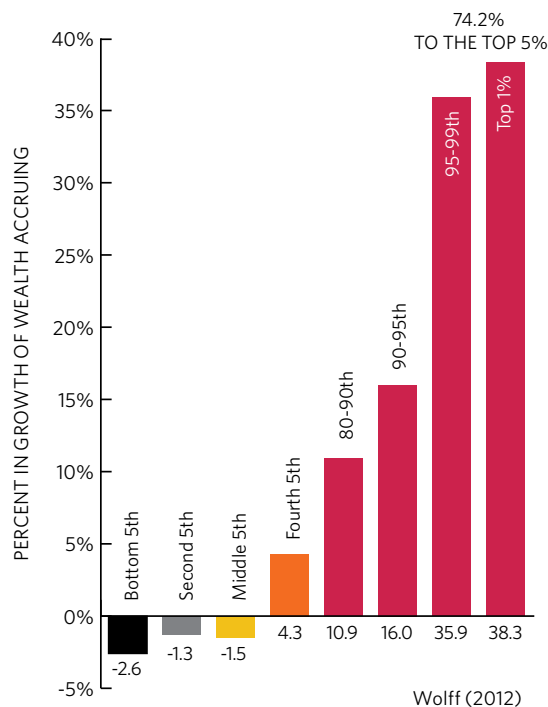
The choice to “pursue careers which offer relatively lower money incomes but larger psychic incomes” is becoming less viable for a significant swath of the population, and for those who do choose a career in the arts, the negative economic impact on their quality of life is significantly higher than it was 40 years ago.

As the income gap in America has grown, the viability of a life in the arts has become increasingly elusive, available primarily to those of independent means, to the exclusion of everybody else. As the income gap widens, so too does the culture gap, so that “the arts” are now perceived as a luxury commodity for the very wealthy, not an essential public good. Self-identifying as an artist has become the domain of a privileged few, even as arts participation, when defined widely, has increased.

Not only is it unrealistic to expect to make a living as an artist in the current system, it is similarly unrealistic to expect to get paid for the art you create. In fact, as an artist you are likely to subsidize your art entirely on your own. So is there a more sustainable system? And what would it look like?

Nationally **68%** of 2012 graduates of public and private nonprofit colleges graduated with an average debt of **\$27,850**  
—PROJECTSTUDENTDEBT.ORG

**SHARE OF TOTAL WEALTH GROWTH ACCRUING TO VARIOUS GROUPS 1983—2010**



## The Wider Effects of Systemic Dysfunction

“A system is an interconnected set of elements that is coherently organized in a way that achieves something.... A system must consist of three kinds of things: *elements*, *interconnections*, and a *function or purpose*.... A system’s function or purpose is not necessarily spoken, written, or expressed explicitly, except through the operation of the system.

**The best way to deduce the system’s purpose is to watch for a while to see how the system behaves.”** —Donella H. Meadows, *Thinking In Systems*

In his book *Future Perfect*, writer Steven Johnson offers:

“Ecologists talk about the “productivity” of an ecosystem, which is a measure of how effectively the ecosystem converts the energy and nutrients coming in the system into biological growth. A productive ecosystem, such as a rain forest, sustains more life per unit of energy than an unproductive ecosystem, such as a desert.”

The arts ecosystem has become spectacularly unproductive because our current funding systems are not designed to meet the needs of a cultural sector so radically transformed by four decades of demographic, political, social and economic change. In the wake of erosion of the public sector, the imposition of burdensome government regulation, and the influence of market logic on arts organizations, an already cumbersome, hierarchical and legacy system has been functionally crippled.

If we take an unvarnished look at the way the system *actually* behaves, we can deduce that with 55% of foundation funding for the arts going to the 2% of arts organization with budgets exceeding \$5 million, the purpose of the system is to allocate billions of dollars to serve a mostly wealthy, white (and shrinking) audience. Yet non-white populations have grown in every region of the country since 2000, more than a third of the country is comprised of people of color and in four states white people are no longer the majority.

Holly Sidford, in “Fusing Arts, Culture and Social Change: High Impact Strategies for Philanthropy,” a report prepared for the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy asserts that “in the arts...philanthropy is using its tax-exempt status primarily to benefit wealthier, more privileged institutions and populations.” Elsewhere, the study states that this “pronounced imbalance restricts the expressive life of millions of people.”

Not only are funders and established arts organizations failing to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population of audiences, they are failing to recognize the work of artists in a diversity of forms and new aesthetics.

“As an artist of color, in today’s field, identity is, in many ways, destiny. Artists of color are employed to bring “diversity,” the “other.” The main audience of theatre (as well as most of the fine arts) is made up of older, somewhat conservative, upper middle class white people. Being an artist of color means having to cloak yourself in some form of exoticism, outsidership in order to justify the act of choosing your work... On the flip side, though, artists are often punished for being too “ethnic,” too much a part of their culture, not “mainstream” or “accessible” enough.” —J.HOLTHAM, PLAYWRIGHT

In a recent article in the Los Angeles Times, theater critic Charles McNulty observed that “in lean economic times artistic decision-making bends in a more conservative direction....The worry over keeping these nonprofits in the black is ensuring that they remain predominantly white” resulting in “more shows featuring white folks singing light FM and more old comedies featuring white folks telling jokes that weren’t that funny the first time around.”

But there is an emerging generation of artists who, feeling marginalized by token institutional efforts at diversification, are increasingly adopting creative practices that transgress labels, actively rejecting myopic contexts for their work or identity. These artists are expanding their practice and developing a capacity to establish meaningful dialogue with communities and experimenting with creative techniques that sustain the involvement and participation of their audiences.

## Diversity, In All its Forms

The current system has not only failed to foster cultural diversity; it has also failed to foster diversity in any form whatsoever. Stephen Johnson writes:

“The problem-solving capacity that comes from diverse networks is one of the cornerstones of [our] worldview. In this sense, it deviates somewhat from older progressive traditions, in which diversity is championed in the name of social equality and tolerance. [We] don’t simply want diversity in governments and corporations and educational institutions because certain groups have historically been disenfranchised and thus deserve their proper representations in these organizations. (Though that certainly is a worthy cause.) We want diversity for another reason as well: because we are smarter as a society—more innovative and flexible in our thinking—when diverse perspectives collaborate. For [us], the emphasis on diversity does not revolve exclusively around the multicultural diversity of race or gender; it’s as much about professional, economic, and intellectual diversity as it is about identity politics.”<sup>8</sup>

In other words, diversity in all its forms is necessary for the creation of agile, sustainable, resilient systems of interconnected elements. Yet in an increasingly horizontal, transparent and networked world, the arts funding system adheres to hierarchical, opaque and siloed structures.

“I grew up as a presenter in the late 90’s, when there were a lot of festivals with categorizations—here’s our queer festival, here’s our black festival, here’s our people of color or women’s festival. We’ve moved away from these categorizations to not ghettoize the work and instead, let it exist on its own....I think younger audiences are more inclined towards experimental theater which defies categorization and/or ethnic representation, and these categories don’t matter as much as what the artists are talking about.” —**SIXTO WAGAN, DIRECTOR FOR THE CENTER FOR ARTS LEADERSHIP, UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON**

“There is a lack of Black experimentation on stage because there is a lack of Black curators and producers. So I work...to confuse the traditional approach to ways in which a project can be supported and presented.... I work as a producer, a curator, an artist, a poet. I wear many hats.” —**JAAMIL OLAWALE KOSOKO, PERFORMER, CURATOR**

We often discuss diversity as it relates to society and culture, but we rarely connect diversity with its sibling in the world of finance: **DIVERSIFICATION**.

Diversification is a powerful tool that has been used by investors to reduce the risk of portfolios and stabilize returns ever since 1952 when economist Harry Markowitz devised the mathematics to explain how it works, an accomplishment for which he won the Nobel prize.

In short, the risk of an entire portfolio taken together will always be lower than the average of the risks of each individual element in that portfolio because diversified elements don't always "move together" (i.e. react the same way to the same stimulus). This differs from the non-diversified approach of short-term investors, whose strategies are akin to well-informed bets that lead to either extreme gain or extreme loss. Diversification flattens out these extremes and leads to stability.

Embracing a diversified portfolio approach to the arts could profoundly affect the sustainability of the arts economy and culture as a whole.

The support that funders give to large institutions is essentially a type of hedge—an attempt to offset risk through a safe bet. However, when the bulk of funding gets hedged, there is little investment made in the myriad individual artists and small organizations that produce the risk-taking work that the safe bets of large funders are effectively hedged against.

That is not to say there is anything wrong with large hedge investments per se, but funders and policy makers must realize that without a simultaneous investment in risky ventures, a hedge is a weak strategy. Neither heavy investments in large projects nor risky bets in small, innovative enterprises are investments that work well on their own; each works optimally in a strategy of diversification. University of Wisconsin Community Development Economist Ron Shaffer explains:

“Elementary economic theory suggests that growth should be derived from economic specialization based on comparative advantage. Theory also suggests that stability is achieved by spreading risk over many activities (i.e., diversification). Theory, therefore, seems to suggest that regional policy makers are forced between two polar goals and the corresponding set of policy options. When policy makers attempt to pursue both goals simultaneously, contradictions seem to appear. In other words, to promote growth, one's resources must be channeled to a small handful of high growth sectors, but to promote stability, one must spread their resources around. Can one do both at the same time without contradiction? Diversification policies should be viewed as the long-run envelope of the region's short-run efforts. As stability and diversity increase, so should the potential for growth. **Diversity is not the absence of specialization, but reflects the presence of multiple specializations. The apparent contradictory goals and policies can be pursued simultaneously and consistently.**”<sup>9</sup>

### IN PURSUIT OF SIMULTANEOUS GOALS GROWTH AND STABILITY



Multiplicity of Specializations Leads to  
Greater Potential for Growth



This view of the entire ecosystem as an envelope suggests that we move away from the institutional model of competitive silos and embrace a network model where all parts are connected in a multifaceted and complex whole.

Here we see the value of diversity in a different context, and the ability of resilient, interdependent networks to create stability. Yet the current arts funding system seeks to atomize the interconnected elements rather than integrating them into a diverse, coherent, and interdependent whole, and in so doing, perpetuates the very problems it seeks to address.

While the arts funding infrastructure and institutions have been failing, artistic output has grown exponentially. **The past ten years has seen cultural production in the performing arts turn increasingly towards horizontally organized collaborations and collectives, embracing organizational structures and creative practices aligned with the contemporary experience of an always-connected, on-demand, socially networked world.**

These collaborative processes are informed by the notion that diverse networks and perspectives generate more nuanced and compelling works of art than the product of single imagination. Or rather they make explicit the true nature of creative expression—that even the sound of a seemingly singular voice is supported by a vast, and sometimes invisible, support network. This recognition of the inherently social nature of creativity in the performing arts includes a growing awareness that audiences are part of the process.

In a recent blog post on the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy’s website, that organization’s research and policy director Niki Jagpal writes:

“Large organizations can and do play an important role in the nonprofit ecosystem, but they account for the majority of funds received across different issues. Smaller nonprofits, often grassroots organizations, are more attuned to the complex web of problems that our communities face. This under-resourcing and funding imbalance leads to both an important perspective being lost in the decision-making process as well as lost opportunities to effect lasting change”

She goes on to say that:

“Local organizations are no longer valued as they once were—either for the knowledge they bring to the table or as laboratories for testing out new ideas. The knowledge from communities and the organizations that serve them are frequently predetermined by national level organizations. Put differently, an entire sphere of extremely relevant knowledge is marginalized and there is an opportunity lost to have more impact...While still performing important work, larger organizations can overshadow local, community-based groups, which often have important relationships and knowledge of the [target] constituency...larger groups can be constrained by top-down solutions that do not reflect the needs of local communities.”

And as much as this makes a strong case for diversifying the sector as a whole, it is similarly an argument for introducing artists themselves into the discourse on reinventing the system—and not just artists but the grassroots organizations, often artist-driven, that are most affected by systemic dysfunction.

Chapter TWO

# A NEW ECOLOGY / THE ECONOMY OF IDEAS

**IF THE “NOT-FOR-PROFIT” SYSTEM** for arts funding America is dysfunctional and possibly moribund, then we need to begin asking ourselves whether the benefits of this system outweigh the liabilities. Perhaps a new, more sustainable model lies outside the nonprofit economy, or it is predicated on a dramatic and fundamental shift in the relationship between artists and the institutions who fund and support their art.

A lot has changed since 1966. Then, as now, we must identify a value proposition to the performing arts that exists outside traditional notions of a market economy comprised of goods and services.

According to standard economics, technological innovation in manufacturing economies leads to increased productivity, decreased costs and increased wages. In that context, live performance—like education, healthcare and other services that depend upon live human interaction—consistently fails the “market test.” Fortunately, the past decade has seen the emergence of a New Economy, an Economy of Ideas, where performed arts can provide tangible value as laboratory for innovation and creativity.

The past thirty years have seen an exponential increase in the number of self-identified artists<sup>9</sup> and, increasingly, the notion of what art is has expanded to include an ever-widening field of creative expression. So even as the established, formal structures for supporting individual artists, facilitating arts participation and fostering public critical discourse have stagnated, creative output itself is at an all time high.

In *How Art Works*, the NEA proposes that technology has given rise to innumerable new “methods, techniques, and materials...for conveying emotional states and ideas.” These “new forms of self-expression” exist across multiple platforms and in multiple, new contexts, fundamentally “altering the sources and reach of creative expression.”

It is here that economic impact and public good converge as the NEA report goes on to say:

**“Our capacity to innovate and to express ideas, and its links to forms and outlets for expression, also point up a core liberty within our society: freedom of expression.** This freedom requires certain individual and community level attitudes that are facilitated by the arts: for example, the courage to express oneself and a tolerance of new ideas and vehicles for creative expression. The system map implies a link between arts participation and our ability, opportunity, and likelihood to express ourselves freely.

The benefits of these broader societal impacts spill over to creative problem solving as it applies to a whole range of other endeavors, from the sciences to design and mass media. Regarded this way, **the broader societal impacts of the arts are both greater in scope and more difficult to track directly back to the arts as classically defined.**

The Internet, and now, social media, have fundamentally realigned the relationship between people, place and proximity. It affects how and where we create our communities and influences the dynamics of interpersonal interaction in both live and mediated space. It has wrought irrevocable changes in the way individuals live and work, ubiquitous connectivity and radically open access to information have fundamentally changed our ideas of private vs. public.

So while the new economy has opened up an entire realm of possibility for aligning artistic practice with a wider range of creative endeavor, the tension between “the market” and “the public good” remains.

American society is held inexorably in thrall to the pre-eminence, above all else, of “the market.” As Andrew O’Hehir has written in *Salon*, “One of the greatest acts of neoliberal hypnosis over the past 40 years has been convincing almost everyone in mainstream politics, conservatives and liberals alike, that it was both fiscally prudent and morally necessary to subject the entire public sphere to ‘market forces.’ It was neither prudent nor necessary ... to imprint the values of the market on every aspect of society.”

The widespread privatization of the public sector and public space, predicated on the ideas described by O’Hehir, has led to the concomitant devaluation of the very notion of a “public good”. However, this may be changing.

The late 1990’s were characterized by the emergence of a new economy, the result of the transition from a manufacturing-based economy to a service-based economy. The “new economy” of the dotcom era lost its luster in the wake of 9/11 and, later, the financial crisis of 2008. But global social and economic changes, coupled with the rise of social media, gave rise to the “new economy movement”, described by political economist Gar Alperovitz as “a far-ranging coming together of organizations, projects, activists, theorists and ordinary citizens committed to rebuilding the American political-economic system from the ground up.”

One facet of the new economy movement is the idea of a human economy that is made and remade by people’s actions as social beings. As we wrote earlier, the performing arts are by definition social arts. They require the live presence of human beings in close proximity to other human beings. They foster interaction, they have the potential to educate, enlighten and promote discourse; what’s more, the role of public space, such as those required by performed arts, is to foster social interaction, an effect of which is to build a sense of community and mutual investment of individuals in the collective whole.

When regarded in this context, the performing arts—understood widely and embracing a wide array of practices—can be seen as existing at the intersection of Creative Expression, New Economics, Public Life and Social Innovation Design.

The challenge then is how to convey the importance of liveness in a ubiquitously mediated culture to a constituency that may have no lived experience of the pre-digital world and is highly skeptical of the idea of “the public good.”

One possible response would be to demonstrate the role that human interaction plays in actually creating behavioral change. Writing in *The New Yorker Magazine*, author Atul Gawande shares the following insights in his essay *Slow Ideas*:

To create new norms, you have to understand people’s existing norms and barriers to change. You have to understand what’s getting in their way...

In the era of the iPhone, Facebook, and Twitter, we've become enamored of ideas that spread as effortlessly as ether. We want frictionless, "turnkey" solutions to the major difficulties of the world—hunger, disease, poverty. We prefer instructional videos to teachers, drones to troops, incentives to institutions. People and institutions can feel messy and anachronistic. They introduce, as the engineers put it, uncontrolled variability.

But technology and incentive programs are not enough. **"Diffusion is essentially a social process through which people talking to people spread an innovation,"** wrote Everett Rogers, the great scholar of how new ideas are communicated and spread. **Mass media can introduce a new idea to people. But, Rogers showed, people follow the lead of other people they know and trust when they decide whether to take it up. Every change requires effort, and the decision to make that effort is a social process.**

Live performance is a social process; it is the creation of temporary communities sharing transformative experiences. In this way, the performing artist serves as social sculptor, cultivator and steward of dynamic and ever-shifting social ecologies. While an individual artist may or may not be explicitly concerned with the public good, the effect of a vibrant, sustainable arts ecology is to create a public good for the public good.

Chapter THREE

# THINK GLOBALLY, CREATE LOCALLY— CITY AS LABORATORY

**AS CITY POPULATIONS CONTINUE TO GROW** Americans are becoming an increasingly urban population. We have focused considerable attention on New York—the city we call home—to better understand how the performing arts function on a local level, and to extrapolate lessons that might resonate for other cities.

“There are roughly three New Yorks. There is, first, the New York of the man or woman who was born here, who takes the city for granted and accepts its size and its turbulence as natural and inevitable. Second, there is the New York of the commuter—the city that is devoured by locusts each day and spat out each night. Third, there is the New York of the person who was born somewhere else and came to New York in quest of something. Of these three trembling cities the greatest is the last—the city of final destination, the city that is a goal. It is this third city that accounts for New York’s high-strung disposition, its poetical deportment, its dedication to the arts, and its incomparable achievements. Commuters give the city its tidal restlessness; natives give it solidity and continuity; but the settlers give it passion....each embraces New York with the intense excitement of first love, each absorbs New York with the fresh eyes of an adventurer, each generates heat and light to dwarf the Consolidated Edison Company.” —*Here Is New York*, E.B. White (1949)

New York City has long been a mecca for artists and a global hub of creativity. The artists that have lived here and the works that they created here, as well as their visions of the city and the mythic stories surrounding their lives have been an indelible hallmark of New York City’s global brand.

According to a speech made at the Ford Foundation on December 9, 2013 by outgoing chair of the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs Kate Levin, NYC has over 1200 arts organizations that employ some 220K workers and generate over \$21B. Of the 52 million tourists who visit the city each year, over 50% of them say they are attracted by the city’s cultural offerings. But artists themselves can no longer afford to live here. Ms. Levin was unequivocal in the essential role that artists play in making the city an attractive destination for businesses, tourists and top-notch talent in all sectors from around the globe. But even as artists help drive the city’s creative and economic engine, they are priced out of living here.

A briefing paper entitled “Oversight: Making New York City Affordable For Artists” prepared by the city’s Human Services Division for the City Council’s Committee on Cultural Affairs and presented on October 21, 2013 stated:

“According to the Alliance for the Arts, ‘the concentration and size of all components of the arts industry in New York City make it unique in the United States and place it in the top rank of world cities.’ However, New York City’s longtime preeminence in the creative industry is threatened by a growing number of cities, both domestically and abroad, that are developing comprehensive economic strategies to attract and support creative workers. Such cities include Philadelphia, Minneapolis, Baltimore, Bridgeport, London and Toronto. Young, creative people across the country, and throughout the world, are warned that New York City is incredibly expensive and opportunities to experiment with new works are limited. A growing number of emerging artists are thus relocating to other cities that offer affordable space conducive to their needs and may help them establish long-lasting careers. This growing trend threatens to reduce exposure to the wealth and diversity of the artistry and musicianship that has traditionally been offered in New York City.”

The Center for an Urban Future’s report *Creative New York* affirms: “The high cost of work space and housing in New York has prompted increasing numbers of artists and creative workers to decide it’s simply not worth it to stay here.... The fierce competition to be seen, heard and appreciated helps preserve the high quality of the city’s creative offerings—but it also drives down wages and makes it extremely difficult...to stay afloat long enough to find an audience.”

In the 2013 Brooklyn Commune Performing Arts Census, over 60% of respondents to the question, “How often do you considering leaving New York?” answered either “Sometimes” or “Often.”

Like all cities, New York is home to a complex artistic ecosystem. At a recent memorial for iconic New York artist Lou Reed, producer Hal Willner played a recording of a young Lou Reed, still working a “day job” at Pickwick Records churning out imitation Brill Building ditties for girl groups, playing an early acoustic sketch of the song that would define an era: “Heroin.”

The recording was illustrative of the New York that was, and that we are in peril of losing forever—one where a young musician with a day job can craft a vision of the world from the city around him, and create a work of art that will make an indelible mark on the collective imagination.

The life of the artist is never easy; Philip Glass notoriously returned to driving a taxi after the premiere of *Einstein on the Beach* at the Met in 1976. Then 39 years old, Glass kept at it for the next three years. After the break up of the Velvet Underground, Reed was compelled to return to his parents’ house in Long Island.

But the “downtown” or “experimental” world has always existed in uneasy and mostly informal relationship to the “uptown” or “commercial” world, and while artists often move between these worlds, value rarely does. And as the cost of living in NYC increases and early career artists are unable to develop their skills and social networks simultaneously, and in proximity to where they live and work, NYC is in danger of becoming merely a cultural marketplace, not a cultural producer.

“New York is becoming more of a market for art, than an incubator. It’s still a place people want to come and make it, but more people say: ‘I’ll pass, and stay here in Berlin and make art and if what I do catches on, then maybe I’ll eventually come to New York.’ the Center for an Urban Future’s report *Creative New York* warns.”

While a great deal of attention is currently being paid to creating affordable rehearsal and studio space, the real crisis is affordable housing and jobs. In some ways, little has changed since the NEA issued its report *Arts in America* 1990. Artists still tend to be self-employed, or sporadically employed with unstable sources of income. But finding jobs is more difficult than ever, much less jobs that offer sufficient compensation to provide a reasonable quality of life.

NYC's creative excellence depends on urban complexity that arises from density, diversity and the resulting likelihood of "serendipitous encounters" between disparate individuals and cultures. Historically the city has been known for its social mobility and public spaces where people of any race, color, creed, class, culture, country of origin, religion or sexual identity could meet and mix.

While other cities have moments of extraordinary creative vitality, New York City has thus far been one of the few global cities to maintain its exceptional artistic and cultural profile despite economic vicissitudes. Yet that stability is largely due to the ability of those individuals E.B. White refers to as "settlers" to, in fact, settle.

If NYC is to maintain its status as a global city for creativity, innovation and cultural production, it needs to create favorable conditions to not only attract but retain the innovative, iconoclastic and ambitious creative cultural producers; to support them in the development of sustainable, resilient communities, so they may take their place in the long line of great artists and visionaries who have called NYC their home.

The effects of the Affordable Housing Crisis include:

- Decreased proximity of artists to each other that fosters dynamic thinking, interchange of ideas, spurs creativity and innovation
- Cultural homogeneity that inhibits new thinking and decreases likelihood of unexpected encounters with new people and new ideas.

One of the most notorious examples of the creative power of proximity and informal connectivity is MIT's famed Building 20:

The first division to move into Building 20 was the Research Laboratory of Electronics, which grew directly out of the Rad Lab. Because the electrical engineers needed only a fraction of the structure, M.I.T. began shifting a wide variety of academic departments and student clubs to the so-called "plywood palace." By the nineteen-fifties, Building 20 was home to the Laboratory for Nuclear Science, the Linguistics Department, and the machine shop. There was a particle accelerator, the R.O.T.C., a piano repair facility, and a cell-culture lab.

Building 20 became a strange, chaotic domain, full of groups who had been thrown together by chance and who knew little about one another's work. And yet, by the time it was finally demolished, in 1998, Building 20 had become a legend of innovation, widely regarded as one of the most creative spaces in the world. In the postwar decades, scientists working there pioneered a stunning list of breakthroughs, from advances in high-speed photography to the development of the physics behind microwaves. Building 20 served as an incubator for the Bose Corporation. It gave rise to the first video game and to Chomskyan linguistics. "Groupthink" by Jonah Lehrer, published in *The New Yorker*, January 30, 2012

In an economy where artists are increasingly expected to be entrepreneurs, NYC must develop infrastructure to support self-employment that is not limited to art practice, provide more access to affordable housing, and intentionally and strategically transform itself into a large scale Building 20, promoting diverse multicultural, intergenerational, intellectual and creative engagement.

## The Individual Artist and the Artist Community

As we reviewed the cultural data currently available to the field we realized that little of the existing research directly addressed the financial situation of artists. Recognizing the need to get a realistic perspective on artists' personal finances—and to attempt to bring transparency to the varying fees and support provided to artists by institutions—the Brooklyn Commune Coordinating Committee, through the initiative of Dorit Avganim, embarked on conducting a census.

The 2013 Performing Arts Census was designed to collect anonymous data about the financial realities of artists in NYC and share it publicly in the service of transparency, to facilitate knowledge-sharing and foster solidarity. We believe that it is only through a frank discussion of economic reality that we can accurately assess the financial and material conditions of our community.

Designed by a subcommittee of coordinators, the census was conducted using Survey Monkey at an approximate cost of \$400. With 68 questions over six sections, we asked self-identified artists and artist/administrators to share their personal history and financial information, income and expenses, work history, educational history (including costs and debts), and answer more general questions about the financial reality of their lives and their expectations for the future.

Promoted on Facebook and Twitter, through e-blasts and direct outreach at live events, the census eventually gathered data from a total of 526 respondents (426 respondents to the first version, 100 to a second version that had been modified in the wake of technical issues).

Brooklyn Commune Project coordinators taught themselves SPSS software and, in consultation with a freelance data analyst who contributed pro bono consulting services, cleaned and ran the data. Given that many of the data fields were “open” in order to accommodate a wide variety of individual responses, the scope of our analysis was inherently limited by our lack of expertise and access to resources.

Acknowledging that none of us are trained statisticians and therefore both the census design and methodology are likely flawed, we nevertheless believe that there is an important story here, and hope that this will lead to the development of a more rigorous census; one that is scalable, shareable and user-friendly and can be deployed in NYC and in other communities.

The data sourced from the 526 respondents and analyzed by Brooklyn Commune Project coordinators yielded the following insights:

<b>78.52%</b>	of those polled were White (Caucasian)
<b>59.35%</b>	Female
<b>36.64%</b>	Male
<b>1.34%</b>	Transgender
<b>72.33%</b>	grew up in Middle Class or Upper-Middle Class <sup>11</sup> homes
<b>75.00%</b>	claimed to make between 0-10% of their income from their art practice.
<b>50%</b>	of those polled spend at least \$2000-5000/year out of pocket on their art practice.
<b>81%</b>	of those polled spend \$2000 or more per year out of pocket.
<b>\$75,000</b>	was the median annual income to be considered “successful”
<b>\$45,000</b>	was the median annual income to be considered adequate for “stability.”
<b>20%</b>	is the amount of total current income artists claim to receive from their art practice
<b>95%</b>	is the amount of total current income artists hope to receive from their art practice in five years.



## Chapter FOUR

# THE ARTIST OF THE FUTURE

## Redefining the Artist

**JUST AS THE EXISTING SYSTEMS** for arts funding are failing, so too are the existing, accepted definitions of “art” and “artist.”

As the focus of our research is the performing arts community, we have chosen to define the term “artist” widely to include any individual who self-identifies as an artist and is committed to the creation of live performances, regardless of discipline. This may include—but is not limited to—actors, dancers, singers, choreographers, musicians, playwrights, directors, set designers, lighting designers, sound designers, producers and administrators. Performing arts practitioners tend to have wide-ranging skill sets and collaborative creative practices. An individual “artist” may be an administrator on one project, a performer on another, alternately a designer and a writer in yet another.

Self-identified artists increasingly use their wide range of skills and creativity across a similarly wide range of projects. In some sense the difference between art practice and “work” is decreasing, with art practice being the application of skills and creativity to activities with no defined revenue attached.

We also define the artist not only by what they produce—works of art—but how they make their creative work: collaboratively and iteratively. Our artist community values process as much as product. This demands that we build relationships and collaborations over the course of decades, in order to create sustainable structures for self-reflection and self-criticism for understanding our work, our risks, and our continued development as artists, individuals and as a community.

When describing “The Future of Work,” Marc Tucker, the President of the National Center on Education and the Economy, has said:

“The jobs that would survive would go to those who were not only highly educated, but highly flexible. Those who would be in the best position would be those who were the most creative, the most innovative, the best communicators, the best at working in groups in which one was a leader at one moment and a follower at another. The workers who survived would be the workers that could offer their services to many employers at once, often in different roles, acting as self-employed contingent workers or as entrepreneurs. Flexibility would be the watchword, creativity the byword.”



\* Adapted from *Tough Choices or Tough Times: The Report of the New Commission of the Skills of the American Workforce*, 2007

Recent research shows that few so-called “professional” artists make a living solely from their artistic output—everyone is an “amateur” artist until, one day, they aren’t,<sup>11</sup> and most artists use some of their creative skills and talents for their “day job” too. Most artists, in order to maintain their creative practice, make a living through freelance jobs, often finding work in gray economy of word of mouth referrals for sporadic gigs at wildly varying pay scales. In addition, 28% of all those in the city’s creative workforce are self-employed.

It is the nature of systems—economic, ecological, political, social, even computer operating systems—to be interdependent. And so as the need for skilled designers of sustainable interdependent social systems,—for economics, ecology, politics, etc.—becomes more apparent, specialists in the design and implementation of social objects, skilled in creative collaboration, will be much in demand. As we move from a material economy through the service economy into an experience economy and finally an ideas economy predicated on knowledge production and creativity, artists will be in demand—not for the value they generate in terms of profits, but the research they do into what might be possible.

For the purposes of this research we originally chose to use this definition of art as proposed by the National Endowment for the Arts in their 2012 report *How Art Works*:

“A work of art is an act of creative expression done within the confines of a set of known or emerging practices and precedence that is intended to communicate richly to others.”

But, as the NEA proposes later in the same report, technology has given rise to innumerable new “methods, techniques, and materials...for conveying emotional states and ideas.” These “new forms of self-expression” exist across multiple platforms and in multiple, new contexts, fundamentally “altering the sources and reach of creative expression.” In this light, the definition of “artist” must be equally fluid and dynamic. The overall strength of the system depends on inclusion, not exclusion. In an almost infinitely complex system of interconnected elements, it is impossible to definitively determine what will and will not stand the test of time. **Diversity in all its forms is required.**

So we must redefine the artist, redefine our relationship to capital, to markets, to economies and society. We must simultaneously return to the foundational concepts of the live performed arts—for the performing arts must be performed, live—and re-imagine them for the digital age.

## Looking to the Future, Looking all Around

According to the 500+ respondents to our census, the median response to the question “What is the amount of annual income you associate with financial success?” is \$75K, while the median response to the question “What is the amount of annual income you associate with financial stability?” is \$45K.

According to a February 2013 report released by the office of former NYC City Council Speaker Christine Quinn and titled *The Middle Class Squeeze*, “middle class” in NYC means a household income between \$66,400 and \$199,200. Lower Middle Class would be \$53,120 to \$66,400 and Low Income would be anything below \$53,120.

This is how the report defined the Middle Class:

“According to a recent study by the Pew Research Center, a little under half of all Americans think of themselves as middle class. That self-identification goes beyond income to also reflect the values, expectations and aspirations of the respondents. Achieving economic stability, saving for retirement, owning a nice home, having your children attend good schools and even college are all typical middle-class aspirations. Achieving these aspirations for most families takes work, planning, savings and a middle-class income.

When the Pew study asked respondents who identified themselves as middle class how large an income a family of four required to be in the middle class, they received a range of answers. For example, lower income households answered \$40,000, respondents in the Midwest \$60,000, African-Americans \$75,000, upper-income households \$100,000. The median response was \$70,000.”

Why do artists think there even is an “enough”? Maybe it is because we do not work in a sector where extreme wealth is likely. In other sectors CEO pay increased steadily from 1979-2011 until by 2011 CEOs received almost 200 times more income than their employees, according to the Economic Policy Institute.

Apart from a few very well remunerated leaders of huge, corporate arts centers, most artists aren’t likely to see that kind of disparity. For that matter, artists—like educators and many others—aren’t in it for the money.

Artists tend to look for wealth in other ways—through psychic capital, the rewards of collaboration and the satisfaction of completed work. For artists, the goal is rarely material wealth. The goal is creative excellence, artistic maturity, changing perceptions, aesthetic adventurousness and practical rigor. The goal is the work itself—but in that, artists are not alone. Increasingly, individuals in all sectors are pursuing meaningful work and psychic income. The pursuit of a “paycheck for a purpose” is a defining characteristic of the evolution of the American workforce.

The Romantics’ notion of the artist as apart from society and creative only in poverty and bohemian squalor is just that—a romantic notion, born out of a time and place very different than this one. We reject entirely the notion that a culture of scarcity is good for artists.

- We aspire to a society that provides sufficient material stability to all its citizens that they may pursue knowledge and creative expression.
- We aspire to a society that provides creative educations for all students.
- We aspire to foster a diverse, inclusive Aesthetics of Democracy.
- We aspire to a vision of the Arts in America where the arts and artists are very much a part of society, where the contributions of artists are valued as public good, where a diversity of individuals and creative practices are supported for the creation of artistically excellent, transformative live experiences that are available to all.

And to this end we hold ourselves accountable to enact these changes in our personal and professional conduct, to advocate for the same among our colleagues and the public at large, to work collaboratively and collectively to the establishment of a new and better society with the arts as its center.

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**OUR RESEARCH HAS REVEALED THAT** we are in a period of enormous social and cultural transition, one in which artists will be left to their own devices to create a new, different and sustainable system more suited to their temperament and outlook.

In many ways, the artist's experience of this cultural transition is no different than a great many other people who seek value and meaning in creative human endeavor. The widespread effects of a larger cultural shift towards privatization and the relentless imposition of market-logic on the not-for-profit sector have created a crisis that is as much moral as it is structural. The implicit goal of America's prevailing corporate economic ideology is the complete erosion of public life, the diminution of government and the commodification of every aspect of daily living.

On a practical level, this has resulted in the near-incapacitation of legacy arts funding in America. The National Endowment for the Arts persists under great duress and has begun to refashion itself as a "thinking organization" as much as a granting organization. While this is a significant and quite possibly strategically advantageous shift, it still leaves a significant funding gap of "direct-to-artist" resources, especially among artists and organizations that have insufficient capacity to procure funding from large foundations.

However, an opportunity has arisen in the wake of the crisis in traditional arts funding. That is the possibility to greatly diversify the arts sector by expanding existing definitions of who is an artist and what constitutes art to encompass the vast array of new ideas, creative practices and individuals made possible by technology and cultural shifts.

If artists take a proactive role in redefining themselves, their relationship to the existing system and their context in the culture at large, they possess the distinct advantage of complete reinvention, free from the encumbrance of legacy structures. Not all artists will become sufficiently entrepreneurial, nor will they want to, but those that do will thrive. And those who manage to align their artistic concerns with the concerns of others, either through creative collaborations with other sectors, social innovation or other cross-sector partnerships, will both survive financially and innovate artistically.

The challenges of the current moment are significant and, as it has been said, the only constant is change. But insofar as artists are inherently resilient, agile and dynamic, they will find ways to create change in their own lives that will, eventually, diffuse out to the wider society.

## To The Field

### 1. REDEFINE GROWTH, VALUE

The arts sector should redefine growth to include factors beyond budget and building size; adopting a philosophy that allows organizations to attain and then maintain sufficient scale, and grow creatively, without the imperative to grow financially. Alternative frameworks include a limited-growth model and a “no growth” model<sup>12</sup> in which an arts organization declares the resources it needs to fulfill its mission—the creation of X number of works by X number of artists serving X number of constituents—and once it achieves those goals, maintains its health and matures. Its aim is to get better, not bigger.

Similarly we propose redefining the notion of value to include both quantifiable and unquantifiable measures. Adopt (or develop) methodologies for assessing or quantifying “psychic income”, the impact of “transformational experiences”, the “happiness quotient” and the long tail social benefit of the performing arts beyond mere economic impact. Pivot to place “meaning” in the center of the conversation on the future of work, where “psychic income” is an essential consideration for workers in an increasingly purpose-driven economy.

*(Additional information on “No-Growth” may be found online in the report from the BKCP’s Economics and Finance Committee at [www.brooklyncommune.org](http://www.brooklyncommune.org))*

### 2. CULTIVATE SUCCESS, ACCEPT FAILURE

Art, by definition, pursues the risky, the untested and the new. Failure is inherent in the creative process; every success leaves a long tail of failed experiments behind it. For that matter, risk and failure are inherent in all human endeavors. Yet if for-profit businesses were subjected to the kind of scrutiny and judgment by their shareholders as not-for-profits by their funders, the world would be a much different place. So rather than creating a false equivalence to market-driven or VC models and creating conditions for almost assured failure, let’s propose developing an appropriate framework for what “success” looks like for content creators in the performed arts and build structures that enhance the likelihood of successful outcomes.

### 3. POOL RESOURCES AND FACILITATE PEER-TO-PEER KNOWLEDGE AND RESOURCE SHARING

The current trend towards resource pooling should be encouraged and the creation of infrastructure for resource pooling should be prioritized as an essential component of sustainability for the entire independent performing arts community.

The Alliance of Resident Theaters (ART/NY) is currently developing an initiative, Arts Pool, using a “collective insourcing” model to facilitate the pooling of capacity for backend administrative operations.

Within the arts ecosystem, existing organizations in New York City such as Materials for the Arts (MFTA) and Build It Green facilitate the recycling and redistribution of material goods for both creative and administrative purposes.

Organizations such as The Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, chashama and Spaceworks all serve as trusted partners to the real estate sector, helping to identify underused, disused or transitional spaces of all kinds that can be repurposed as artistic workspace.

Many of these organizations also offer workshops in basic careers skills such as managing finances, self-producing, grant writing and fundraising, these kinds of programs could be consolidated, streamlined and standardized by leveraging the “collective insourcing” model being developed by Arts Pool.

Other opportunities for resource pooling include subsidized shop space to provide wider access to tools, equipment, storage and working space for scenic, lighting and costume artists; subsidized storage space for scenery and costumes. Pooled storage space would allow artists to maintain the value of their material investments, repurpose them for future work and even rent them to other artists when not in use, with fees going to support the storage space’s rent and maintenance costs.

While these initiatives may not generate profit in the traditional sense, the development of affordable shared work and storage space would provide essential public space for “serendipitous encounters” and the exchange of creative ideas.

Still, creating and managing organizations, building buildings and acquiring knowledge are all labor-intensive, capital-intensive and inefficient. While resource-pooling initiatives by existing organizations in the arts ecosystem may mitigate systemic dysfunction, they perpetuate the structural impediments to efficiency by creating yet another intermediary between funders and artists, another organization serving as a gatekeeper for the flow knowledge and resources.

The key to maximizing efficiency and insuring more strategic and impactful distribution of resources is to build

frameworks instead of institutions and organizations. Therefore we propose the development a broadly open, networked and peer-powered system to facilitate peer-learning and interdependent systems of mutual support in order to alleviate the problem.

This would also address the chronic condition of insufficient sector-wide knowledge management, by creating a shared knowledge base that is collectively created and tended as a commons.

Essential to this vision is the cultivation of intergenerational connections, providing access points online and off for artists at all career stages to share knowledge, history and resources, share new skills and transmit the wisdom that comes from experience. This platform will facilitate the possibility for non-transactional, non-outcome-driven, serendipitous encounters, both online and off.

#### 4. EXTEND THE VALUE CHAIN

Develop frameworks and infrastructure to provide financial equity in intellectual property and creative content, insuring that capital moves back to R&D from the other end of the long tail. Compel artists to take a proactive role in insuring their long term ROI from their creative output. Collaborate with Intellectual Property lawyers and establish efficient systems to document aesthetic innovation.

Develop systems to assure that value moves back into the system. For instance, The League of Independent Theaters (LIT) has started a \$0.05 LIT Fund where participating organizations donate \$0.05 of every ticket sold to the fund, which is then invested back into emerging companies.

#### 5. INCREASE CRITICAL DISCOURSE

Our research suggests that the failure of traditional journalism to maintain an active arts discourse is due, at least partly, to the perceived lack of audience for the writing and profitability of the sector. As “arts presenters” become “experience providers”, their areas of endeavor must shift beyond mere presenting and into contextualization and meaning-making. In addition to supporting the creation, presentation and distribution of live performances, we must also support thoughtful, creative intercultural initiatives where the performed arts functions as an engagement platform for negotiating cultural difference, identifying likeness where possible and confronting the unassimilable where necessary. It is not enough to present performances; it is necessary to cultivate lively, candid and meaningful discourse.

## To Foundations and Government Agencies

### 1. FUNDER, INNOVATE THYSELF

Rather than imposing innovation strategies on grantees, funders should innovate their own process and increase their effectiveness by becoming more nimble, agile, responsive and transparent.

We propose that arts funders conduct a rigorous, sector-wide self-critical evaluation of their current funding goals and strategies, and assess their real vs. perceived impact.

It is our hope that a process of self-evaluation will lead to more intentional and inclusive allocation strategies that provide meaningful support for artists and organizations at all levels and in all communities.

As part of innovating arts funding we propose:

- That it is in foundations’ best interest to develop mechanisms for direct-to-artist funding and devise less onerous systems for accountability and reporting, as the administrative bloat at the organizational level resulting from the current system has led to nonstrategic allocation and inefficient deployment of funds.
- De-linking institutional funding and project funding, with bricks and mortar institutions being funded for general operating expenses and artists being funded to make art.
- A universally accepted standardized template for first-round grant applications (like a “pitch deck” for start-ups) to democratize access to funding.
- Direct-to-artist funding should be tied to completely rethinking funding structures that envision support at every career stage from emerging, mid career and established.
- Recognizing the role of the independent producer and developing infrastructure to make this a viable and sustainable career. Our research suggests that as the burden of creative development, producing, touring and fundraising is increasingly shifted onto the artist, a desperate need has arisen for skilled independent creative producers who know how to work outside the institution. Masters programs in arts administration train people to work in large institutions, not in the entrepreneurial skills needed to work in the free market.

## 2. ENGAGE WITH ARTISTS AS CITIZENS

We believe that government, through policy, plays an essential role in promoting the arts as a civic activity serving the public good. In practice, government funding ameliorates the for-profit marketplace's inability to adequately support the performing arts.

Whether through direct funding of the arts or creating infrastructure and incentives for creative communities, we encourage the government to engage with artists as citizens. Through government, public/private partnerships and peer-powered networks, artists can attain the stability to develop roles as citizens who generate positive economic and social impacts. At the same time, that stability allows artists to deepen their practice, make their best work and build community.

We propose that government:

- Provide tax incentives for artist-driven entrepreneurial initiatives.
- Broker partnerships to provide access to capital for artist-driven entrepreneurial initiatives.
- Create affordable housing in close proximity to work spaces.
- Provide access to feasible opportunities for creating equity by purchasing property.
- Facilitate the creation of niche mission driven community banks, (e.g. an Arts and Culture Bank of New York) to provide low-interest or no-interest capital loans for the acquisition of real estate by individual artists, arts organizations, and other social and cultural organizations in underserved or developing neighborhoods.

Ultimately, a thriving performing arts ecology requires artists to find advocates at all levels of government to make the case when budgets are made, to develop relationships with creative, visionary investors in the private sector and to serve as trusted partners in creating positive change.

## 3. HELP US HELP YOU

We propose bringing artists more fully into the conversation at all levels of the arts: government, foundations, institutions and organizations.

Our research has revealed in stark terms how much resistance funders and government face in advocating for the arts. We are aware that the problems are systemic and that many individuals operating within this dysfunctional system are as committed to change as we are.

*So help us help you.*

As mentioned before, systems are, by definition, interdependent. Their viability depends on sustainability, agility and resilience—but most crucially on diversity. A complex, interdependent system demands the meaningful integration of multiple stakeholders in conditional hierarchies, 360 degree thinking and as much attention to process as product.

At the same time, systems comprised of people can be seen as social objects: infinitely complex, ever-shifting interlocking layers of individuals, groups, organizations and institutions of varying structures, forms and duration. It is likely impossible to know the entirety of the system at any given moment, and no one perspective is more “true” than another. And yet system performance can be optimized when individual components are incentivized to work collaboratively towards a shared desired outcome.

Artists bring an important perspective to the table, unexpected thinking and unique insights to seemingly intractable problems. The system has consistently discouraged artists from seeing themselves as empowered actors with agency in the system, casting them repeatedly in the role of needy population to be served or desperate supplicants. The truth is different.

Artists are partners in an interdependent system that we all want to see thrive, so help us help you create change.

## To Institutions

### 1. PAY ARTISTS

Arts organizations exist to share the work of artists with the public and as mission-driven, not-for-profit institutions they receive philanthropic and public money to do so. If you want artists to share their work with the public at your institution, pay them.

### 2. SHIFT THE FRAME

Shift your frame to embrace a 360-degree perspective on being a site for public engagement with the performed arts. Embrace a long arc view where the “performance” is only one moment in an ongoing creative investigation and an extended conversation that blurs the line between artist and audience.

*Aspire to become “experience providers.”*

### 3. DIVERSIFY

Engage directly with artists from underrepresented communities and actively invite them in the curatorial and community development processes of your organization.

### 4. DO LESS, BETTER

Artists, institutions, audiences and administrators all suffer when too much work is undertaken by too few people being provided with insufficient resources. We propose that institutions do less, better. Serve your audience better by developing deeper, richer, more meaningful programs; invest more in the people who create and implement those programs and allow those programs time to propagate through word of mouth and social connections, don't rely on marketing.

Invest in human resources, retain staff, promote from within, provide opportunities for professional development; grow administrators, artists and audiences together over time. Invest in the long term.

*Slow down, scale back, do less, better.*

## To Artists

### 1. CHANGE YOUR EXPECTATIONS

As Andrew Simonet of Artists U. has said, “there is no one coming.” Don't change your artistic aspirations, but do change your expectations of where you will find support and what that support looks like. Don't expect your art to ever provide financial sustainability; bring your creative imagination to bear on crafting your life as rigorously as you do your art.

### 2. WORK WITH INSTITUTIONS MORE STRATEGICALLY

The primary benefit of working with an institution is cultural capital. Though an institution may provide financial resources and logistical support for producing or presenting your work, it is just as likely that you will be doing the same amount, if not more, work as when working independently. Artists bring value to the institution with their creative output and their audiences. Work with institutions as their responsible and trusted partner, but demand equitable treatment.

### 3. SELF-ORGANIZE

Nothing beats peer power. It is the nature of a vertically integrated, hierarchical system to maintain power and access to resources by creating divisions among resource-seekers (in this case artists). Hierarchical systems—by design or by accident—actively hinder peer-to-peer knowledge and resource sharing, thus reinforcing a culture of competition for scarce resources. Artists must self-organize to share knowledge and resources and create a culture of collaboration across disciplines and outside existing structures to build a new system.

Practice radical fiscal transparency. Publish budget and real costs on websites and in programs of each production. Be honest about where money comes from and how it is spent to raise awareness and encourage greater transparency in the field.

Organize politically, and identify as citizens. If you choose to pursue and accept non-profit funds to support your work, then that work is held to be in the public good and that support is dependent on an engaged public. Learn to be a citizen and get involved. Participate in the Public Sphere. Advocate for policy changes you believe in. For instance, if you think Portland, Oregon was wise to institute an Art Tax, figure out how to do it where you live. Remember, public officials were elected by you to serve you. **Vote.**

*Think globally, create change locally.*



#### 4. TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

Take responsibility for your life, your work and your attitude.

The current dysfunctional system reinforces negative behaviors and mindsets in artists through an unrelenting narrative meant to diminish artists' capabilities and infantilize their behavior. Once again, it is the nature of a vertically integrated, hierarchical system to maintain power and access to resources by locating the dysfunction in the resource-seeker, rather than the system. Artists must reject this narrative while taking responsibility for their conditions; resist neediness, passivity and expectation and be proactive in managing both their personal and artistic lives.

Change your mind about what you do. Redefine value. Reframe vocabulary around skills and "products" artists offer in a way that demonstrates value to other sectors to more easily attract capital, investment, and donations. Build cross-sector partnerships where there is a mutual exchange between artists as voices of the public and other industries interested in social good. Make an effort to bridge the communications gap. Face outward and move beyond the comfort of the familiar into new environments, new people and new perspectives.

*Listen and participate, don't fight and alienate.*

#### 5. DEVELOP 21ST CENTURY JOB SKILLS

Artists' collaborative creative practices are already valuable as are their self-producing and social organizing skills; identify ways to bring those skills to the market remuneratively outside of your art practice. Don't limit your skill set to art-making only, learn the life skills necessary to realize your work. Learn how to create proper budgets and manage your finances, seek help and further education as necessary. Share your knowledge with your peers.

At the same time develop practical skills for the knowledge and creative industries (such as graphic and web design, video and audio editing, programming, copywriting) that will support the financial demands and flexible time requirements of your artistic practice.

Get a "normal" job and advocate for the arts from the inside, create change from the inside, because "us" and "them" is an outdated framework. Be a creator of social objects and extend invitations far and wide.

## Subjects for Further Inquiry

Due to the all-volunteer nature of this project and the steep learning curve of acquiring new skills and knowledge to conduct the research, there are a great many areas of investigation that invite further inquiry. The data from 2013 Performing Arts Census was not yet fully analyzed at press time, we plan to publish our findings in February. Other areas of investigation are considerably more challenging and include:

- Identifying, quantifying and mapping introduction of financial capital into the arts ecosystem through remittances from friends and family to individual artists.
- Quantifying and mapping peer-to-peer capital transactions within the arts ecosystem.
- Quantifying total value of sweat equity and uncompensated non-monetary contributions into the performing arts ecosystem.
- New models for the quantification of public good and alternative value models.

These are only a few of the areas that merit further consideration. It is our hope that this effort will serve as a model for artist-driven creative research and that it encourages others to join in and support our work, or initiate this work in their communities so that we can share findings across geographies.

# Change Matrix

		RANGE OF EXPERTISE NECESSARY		
SCALE OF THE ENGAGEMENT	THE FIELD	3.1	3.2	3.3
	ART ORG.	2.1	2.2	3.2
	ARTIST	1.1	2.1	3.1
		ARTIST	OUTSIDE EXPERT	CROSS SECTOR

To guide us in our thinking exercises, The Brooklyn Commune used a modified Pathways in Social Design Matrix, originally created at the Fourth Winterhouse Symposium. The matrix helps social innovation designers locate themselves situationally within a problem, identify leverage points and map points of intervention along pathways for change.

We used our version of the matrix to map points of intervention on a scale of complexity ranging from “peer-to-peer” (1.1) to “field-wide/cross-sector” (3.3), with “peer-to-peer” serving as the most readily implementable by an individual artist and “field-wide/cross-sector” signifying a paradigmatic shift.

This matrix is a work-in-progress and is meant to be iterative. Our goal in sharing this is not only to illustrate our process, but to provide a tool for others to participate in the visioning process as we work to create a vibrant, sustainable arts ecology.

- Pursue meaningful public conversation on the impact of class on access to training, education, resources and capital.
  - Pursue meaningful conversation on class in relation to aesthetic biases and how aesthetic biases intersect with class, culture, and social bias.
  - Investigate how, in light of class and other biases, we can create a more meritocratic and equitable ecology.
  - Foster meaningful public conversations on how we think about, construct and perform our identities and how this affects our art.
  - Develop list of recommendations to funders for new policies.
  - Redefine the social function of live performance.
  - Recognize and support each other as artists.
  - Educate emerging artists with practical skills they need; create professional development program for artists in public schools.
  - Infiltrate Everywhere. Take our artist selves to “normal” jobs and advocate for our perspective and agenda inside the institutions and elsewhere.
- 3.1**

- Let things die! Encourage sunseting of unsustainable organizations.
  - Adapt a “no growth/limited growth” philosophy.
  - Mentor young people of color in the field.
  - Develop structures to facilitate intergenerational dialogue and relationships among artists.
  - Identify, acknowledge and aggregate existing platforms for artist support.
  - Evaluate, propose and design different models and platforms for critical feedback.
  - Build coalition with activists around shared goals.
  - Advocate for the arts in political and civic contexts.
  - Increase critical discourse. As live performance shifts to “experiences,” we need to cultivate meaningful dialogue to help audiences and presenters understand and engage with new forms.
  - Pay artists.
  - Advocate for the arts in political and civic contexts.
- 2.1**

- Join BKCP Facebook group and email list. Stay involved with events and news in the community.
  - Start your own community of practice both around your art and around these issues, Make Your Own Commune.
  - Get involved in local politics. Stand up for what you believe in for the arts and other causes. Make your voice heard!
  - Create an “arts tithing” model for giving intra-arts community.
  - Create structures for intergenerational, intra-community knowledge sharing and legacy planning.
  - Resource sharing within the community—ask peers for support in creating proper budgets, fundraising, skill sharing, etc.
- 1.1**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>De-professionalize. Look at other models of training and professional development like peer learning, apprenticeship and informal mentorship.</li> <li>Challenge higher educational institutions to more clearly articulate the value proposition of their arts administration and creative graduate programs in relationship to economically viable careers post-graduation.</li> <li>Interrogate conventional wisdom and existing vocabularies of diversity: i.e., what does “privilege” actually mean? How do we speak to people other than “the choir”?</li> <li>Adopt methodologies for assessing or quantifying “psychic income”, the impact of “transformational experiences”, and the “happiness quotient” to create ways to further express the long tail social benefit of the arts &amp; other intangibles in a modern, meaning-based society.</li> <li>Extend the value chain. Develop frameworks and infrastructure to provide financial equity in intellectual property and creative content, insuring that capital moves back to R&amp;D from other end of long tail.</li> <li>Provide tax incentives for artist-driven entrepreneurial initiatives.</li> <li>Create affordable housing in close proximity to work spaces and provide access to feasible opportunities for creating equity by purchasing property.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;">3.2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Define “the public” that we serve and choose strategically how we want to engage with “them.”</li> <li>Redefine values (ethical principles) and value (worth and usefulness) of the arts internally and to the public at large. Raise awareness on both of these fronts.</li> <li>Promote ethical, just modes of capital allocation to create an even playing field.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;">3.3</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate alternative economic structures for arts organizations besides 501c3.</li> <li>Explore new structures that support the creation (and dissolution) of short-term, project-based organizations with specific end dates and outcomes.</li> <li>Identify and engage with lawyers to advise on structural, economic and labor-related legal issues.</li> <li>Envision new and hybrid alternatives to traditional non-profit model.</li> <li>Renegotiate relationship of individual independent artists or companies to institutions, organizations and funders.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;">2.2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create better way to quantify labor and value for labor in non-commercial markets.</li> <li>Embrace the non-profit shift and encourage emerging sector of blended businesses (“5 bottom lines”).</li> <li>Create tangible sense to extended community, the city and public officials what happens if creatives leave NYC.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;">3.2</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Map extended social networks to more comprehensively and strategically link resource seekers with individual supporters of means.</li> <li>Engage more deeply with Fractured Atlas or United States Artists as alternatives to Kickstarter.</li> <li>Engage with and ask questions of communities without an arts focus and include them in our process and decision-making.</li> <li>Identify alternative forms of capital and strategize how to quantify it, engage with it.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;">2.1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address uptown/downtown community differences. Actively work to create dialogue between the two and see what insights and assets can be shared from both worlds for mutual benefit.</li> <li>Listen more, talk less. Listen to the arts community, listen to the audience, listen to our peers, listen to needs &amp; asks from culture at large.</li> <li>Develop more effective way to share opportunities and resources.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;">3.1</p>

## Author Bios

**Dorit Avganim** is a producer and manager having worked for independent arts companies and other nonprofit groups in NYC including: PearlDamour, The Assembly, Elders Share the Arts, CollaborationTown, The Representatives, IRT Theater, The Debate Society (Blood Play), Half Straddle, Rainpan43 (Elephant Room), LMCC, and Pick Up Performance Co(s) among others. She is a performer and artist working continuously to develop her craft while offering logistical support to others as co-founder of Neighborhood Productions. Avganim continues to work in TV and Film as a producer and production manager. She is currently earning an MS in Nonprofit Management at the New School. She is also co-artistic director of arts collective Group Theory.

**Kimberly Bartosik** is a Brooklyn-based choreographer, performer and writer. She is deeply grateful for everyone who has supported and believed in her artistic and intellectual work, and is very excited to be a contributor to the Brooklyn Commune vision. [www.daela.org](http://www.daela.org)

**Nick Benacerraf** is a visual artist, organizer, and creative thinker whose work activates and transforms social structures. His practice travels freely between the theater and the gallery, and often into the classroom and the streets. Nick is co-artistic director of The Assembly, a Brooklyn-based collective that creates rigorously-researched collaborative performances, committed to realizing a visceral and intelligent theater for a new generation ([assemblytheater.org](http://assemblytheater.org)). Nick has collaborated with the Living Theatre, Richard Foreman, The Yes Men, *QUEEN OF THE NIGHT*, Occupy Wall Street, Waterwell, La Mama, Son of Semele Ensemble, and won an LA Weekly Set Design Award for *THE CITY*. Nick holds a BA from Wesleyan University, an MFA in Design from CalArts, and an MA in Aesthetics and Politics, also from CalArts. [www.nickbenacerraf.com](http://www.nickbenacerraf.com)

**Max Dana** is a Brooklyn-based performer, director, and mask designer. He currently serves as Producing Director of the performance collective Immediate Medium and as technology lead for A.R.T./New York's ArtsPool project, a new initiative designed to create a collective framework for nonprofit arts management.

**Seth Hamlin** is an artist, graphic designer and arts administrator living in Brooklyn. He is the co-founder of the Stable Cable Lab Co. with whom he co-created and directed the devised piece *The Eden Project*, Christopher Shinn's *The Coming World* and a reading of Sara Farrington's *the edge of sleep and other short plays*. He has performed solo works at Theatre 80 and Theatre for the New City. As a visual artist he had an installation included in The Puck Gallery's exhibit "Positions of Conflict" in 2011 and is currently working on a series of abstract compositions using tape on paper. He was a 2010–2011 Resident Artist with Artists4Israel where he developed and presented the interactive performance piece "Self-Portrait" and the auto-theater piece, "And Eat It, Too." He was one of the 2010–2011 NYU Emerging Jewish Artist Fellows and was a member of the Hangar Theatre Summer Lab Company. He is a graduate of NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and currently a proud member of the staff at A.R.T./New York.

**Andrew Horwitz** is a curator, critic and creative producer with over twenty years of experience in the not-for-profit and for-profit creative sectors. He is the founder of Culturebot Arts and Media, Inc. and publisher of [Culturebot.org](http://Culturebot.org), a website devoted to thought-leading conversations on arts, culture and ideas. From 2010-2013 he worked for the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council where he curated The River To River Festival, a free, month-long multidisciplinary festival at sites throughout Lower Manhattan. Previously he worked as Producer at Performance Space 122 and, from 2007-2009, curated the PRELUDE Festival at the Martin E. Segal Theater Center at the Graduate Center at CUNY. He has also worked as Director of Strategic Partnerships at the Foundation for Jewish Culture. He recently received the prestigious Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant to write a series of essays on Art Criticism for the Post-Material World.

**JJ Lind** is a Brooklyn-based artist and arts manager. He is the Artistic Director of Immediate Medium, a performance and producing collective he cofounded in 2002. As an arts manager, JJ has served as the Executive Director of The Civilians and as the Director of Strategic Integration for New York Live Arts. In this latter role, he worked closely with Live Arts leadership to manage the merger and integration its founding partners, Dance Theater Workshop and the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company. Previously, JJ served as the Director of Development for New York Live Arts and in that same capacity at the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, where he was a critical member of the team brokering, planning, and executing the merger. JJ is a graduate of Yale University with a degree in Theater Studies and is originally from Vinita, Oklahoma. For more info, visit [www.immediatemedium.org](http://www.immediatemedium.org)

**Kyoung H. Park** is Artistic Director of Pacific Beat Collective and the first Korean playwright from Latin America to be produced and published in the United States. He is author of *Sex and Hunger*, *disOriented*, *Walkabout Yeolha*, *TALA*, and many short plays including *Mina*, which is published in *Seven Contemporary Plays from the Korean Diaspora in the Americas*. He is recipient of an Edward Albee, Theater of the Oppressed and Global Arts Village fellowship; grants from the Princess Grace, Arvon, GK foundations and a 2010 UNESCO-Aschberg Laureate. Kyoung has worked internationally in Chile, Brazil, South Korea, India and is member of the Ma-Yi Writer's Lab, EST's Youngblood, and Soho Theater's Hub. BFA: Dramatic Writing (NYU); MA: International Politics (KHU); MFA: Playwriting (Columbia Univ., Dean's Fellow).

**Risa Shoup** is the Associate Director of The Invisible Dog Art Center, Brooklyn. She works to provide artists with the financial and workspace resources they need to create work that the public can experience accessibly and in non-traditional spaces. In addition to her work at the The Invisible Dog, she has worked with many other presenting and artist services organizations including chashama, BRIC, Recession Art, and The Wassaic Project (where she remains a member of the Artist Advisory Committee). She has lectured, curated and served as guest critic at countless other NYC institutions and across the country. She is also currently a graduate fellow in the Program for Sustainability, Planning and Design at the Pratt Institute. Shoup studies the production of affordable space for housing, manufacturing and the arts (they are inextricably linked).

**Monica Snellings** is a designer, producer, and art director with over 25 years of experience working with cultural arts organizations, foundations, museums, non-profits and government entities. She is currently working on a MFA in Design for Social Innovation at the School of Visual Arts in New York. She lives in Brooklyn, New York and Washington DC. She is committed through design to a more effective, efficient, sustainable and just world. [www.msnellings.com](http://www.msnellings.com)

**Liz Maxwell** is a theater director, physical performer, and researcher of culture. For three years, Liz served as the Artistic Director and Programming Director of the Art Monastery Project, an international non-profit that cultivates personal awakening and cultural transformation through art, contemplation, and community. Liz lived at the Project's pilot site, Art Monastery Italia, for 3 years before moving to New York City in fall 2013. She is working on a book about theater and spirituality, writing a new work for the stage, and constantly dreaming about what a vibrant, sustainable world for the arts might look like. [www.Lizziemax.com](http://www.Lizziemax.com)

**Tara Sheena** graduated from the University of Michigan with a dual degree in Dance and English. Since relocating to NYC in 2011, she has enjoyed an active freelance career as a dance artist, most recently for Heidi Duckler (Quartiers Danses commission) and Eddie Peake (Performa 13). Tara has also contributed regularly to Dance Informa and The Dance Enthusiast. Her writing has appeared in *Critical Correspondence*, *Art Observed*, *Culturebot* and the *Huffington Post*. In addition to performance projects, she is currently assisting with research for two upcoming book releases by Dr. Angela Kane (*Paul Taylor A to Z*, University of Michigan Press 2015) and Clare Croft (*Funding Footprints: Dance and American Diplomacy*, Oxford University Press 2015).

## Appendix A

What follows is a description of the activities of the Brooklyn Commune Project.

Further documentation and details may be found online at [www.brooklyncommune.org](http://www.brooklyncommune.org).

### **March 24, 2013 Public Research Session 1**

Our first public research session, convened at The Invisible Dog Art Center in Brooklyn invited the community of individuals working in the performed arts to an open conversation on arts, economic and politics. Randy Martin, Chair of the Art and Public Policy Department NYU's Tisch School of the Arts gave a presentation on the financialization of American life and artistic citizenship.

This was followed by an interview with performance artist Cynthia Hopkins about her personal finances and production budgeting, conducted by Danielle Hlatky, a certified public accountant with an artist-focused practice.

Attendees were invited to participate in a self-directed conference using Open Space Technology. At the conclusion of the session, breakout groups reported back to the larger group, and from this session the following research topics were identified:

- Economics and Finance
- Labor and Value
- Foundations, Funding and Philanthropy
- Working Outside The Institution
- Cultural Democracy and Representation
- Aesthetics of Performance

### **March–May 2013 Self-Guided Research**

Individuals self-identified to serve as research team coordinators, these individuals formed the core “steering committee” of the Brooklyn Commune Project.

Each team coordinator was given autonomy to decide how to conduct their research, and operate the research teams, the core committee meets irregularly to share knowledge and plan next steps.

### **May 12, 2013 Public Research Session 2**

Our second public research session, once again convened at The Invisible Dog Art Center in Brooklyn, featured a presentation by Amy Whitaker entitled “The Letter and The Envelope”, a revised, expanded and updated version of the presentation she gave at the LMCC panel on art, money and politics. In this presentation she discussed the relationship between artistic practice, creative process and design thinking in business.

Ms. Whitaker's presentation was followed by a Long Table Conversation entitled “The Art of Making Work/The Work of Making Art” to explore issues of life/work balance from pioneering women in the arts. Participants included Elise Bernhardt, Jane Comfort, Cynthia Hedstrom and Shay Wafer.

The afternoon concluded with a Research Team Fair, where individual coordinators were available to discuss their research with attendees and invite others to participate in an existing team or create their own.

### **May–July 2013 Group Research, More Meetings**

Upon realizing that the project required more coordination between research teams and more opportunities for public participation, we initiated a series of regular team meetings and Monday “Mini-Communes” – themed events or happy hours to increase visibility, provide access to our process and generate discourse. These informal gatherings continued through mid-July and, after a hiatus in August, resumed more formally from September through the Global Congress in November.

*(See Appendix B for schedule and descriptions of weekly events)*

### **July 14, 2013 Public Research Session #3**

Our third public research session was the Brooklyn Commune Bastille Day ShareBQ, held in the garden at The Invisible Dog. Attendees were invited to bring something to share whether it is food, drink, knowledge, a talent, a skill or monetary contribution.

The day featured a presentation by Susan Oetgen of “To Fail & Fail Big”, a study commissioned by artist service organization The Field to explore the challenges of midcareer artists, performances, food, drinking and conversation.

### **July–September 2013 Group Research, More Meetings**

Research teams meet individually, group meetings are convened sporadically due to scheduling challenges.

Dorit Avganim and Nick Benacerraf propose the 2013 Performing Arts Census and with the support of Seth Hamlin and input from the core team devise a census to gather anonymous data on the financial conditions of our community.

**September 22, 2013 Public Research Session 4**

Convened in association with Prelude.13, our fourth public research session was held in the garden at The Invisible Dog. The day began with a presentation by Andrew Simonet (Artists U, Headlong Dance Theater) on “Why Artists Are Poor and Why They Shouldn’t Be” and was followed by a Long Table conversation on the relationship between aesthetics and the economics of cultural production with guests including Arthur Aviles, Gelsey Bell, Annie Dorsen, Carla Peterson and Clyde Valentin, moderated by Shonni Enelow.

The day concluded with the official launch of 2013 Performing Arts Census

**September–November 2013 Group Research, More Meetings**

- September 30: Monday Mini-Communes resume
- November 4, 2013: Research concludes
- November 5, 2013: Census closed
- November 13, 2013: Research teams submit initial reports

**November 20-22, 2013: Brooklyn Commune Global Congress**

The Brooklyn Commune Global Congress was held from November 20-23 at the Invisible Dog Art Center. The weekend began with a reception and presentation of preliminary findings by the research team coordinators.

Public programs included The MAP Fund Panel Impersonation Game, The Economic Dilemma Seder, The Uncomfortable Conversation, Working Outside The Institution, A Self-Producer’s Budget Charette and an “Ask A Lawyer” conversation about artists, finance and real estate.

The weekend concluded with a participatory collective design session to inform the process of synthesizing the research and focusing the final report.

*(See Appendix C for schedule and program descriptions)*

**December 2013–January 2014 Writing the Report**

- December 7-8: All the individual reports were collated and the collective writing process began with a weekend workshop in the Ma-Yi Studio. The decision is made to speak from a collective voice, rather than separating each group’s findings in an individual chapter. A collectively developed document is shared online and edits continue throughout the following week.
- December 14: The core team assembles for a second daylong session of writing, debate and discussion. The revised document is shared online and edits continue throughout the following week.
- December 14-23: Edits continue

**January 3, 2014: Report is finalized, ratified and approved for publishing.**

## Appendix B

What follows is a description of the weekly activities of the Brooklyn Commune Project.

Further documentation and details may be found online at [www.brooklyncommune.org](http://www.brooklyncommune.org).

### **Monday September 30 @ 7PM**

The Economic Dilemma  
Cloud City  
85 N 1st Street, Brooklyn

Ever wondered why people in the performing arts make so little money? Well, it turns out there's an actual reason for that, and it's called the Baumol Effect. Come by and learn why economic theory makes it literally impossible for the performing arts to remain competitive with the rest of the economy in today's marketplace. Written in 1966, Bowen and Baumol's book, *Performing Arts, The Economic Dilemma*, generated a stir, giving voice for the first time to the cause of the economic inequality, and warning that it will only worsen in the coming decades. Together we will talk through the past and current arguments for government subsidy and philanthropy, and discuss emerging solutions to short-circuit the economic intransience. Facilitated by Nick Benacerraf, co-artistic director of The Assembly and leader of the Brooklyn Commune's Labor and Value research team.

### **Wednesday October 2 @ 7:15PM**

Performing New York City  
Martin E. Segal Theater Center  
The CUNY Graduate Center  
365 Fifth Avenue, Manhattan

Brecht predicted, "Because things are the way they are, things will not stay the way they are." In consideration of a decade of PRELUDE, former and present PRELUDE curators come together for a lively discussion (led by artist David Levine) about the way things could become. These curators, who also live double and even triple lives as scholars, artists, producers, and administrators, will harness the insights they have gathered over the past decade to debate their visions of contemporary New York theatre and performance in the decade to come. Geoffrey Jackson Scott, and Helen Shaw.

### **Monday October 7 @ 6:30pm**

OCTOBER REVOLUTION VODKA PARTY  
(Or, We're Crashing the Bessies!!)  
The Lobby of The Legendary Apollo Theatre  
253 West 125th Street

The Brooklyn Commune teams up with the DanceNYC Junior Committee for the annual New York Dance and Performance Awards, or the "Bessies." Join us for a lobby meetup with some of the younger constituents of #BrooklynCommune and the DanceNYC Jr Comm to hash out (and hash tag) ideas around making it work in our young, restless lives—creatively, financially, and sustainably. This meeting of minds occurs in the context of an important event for the NYC dance community, so consider staying for the awards ceremony at 8pm (tickets start at \$10).

### **Monday October 14 @ 7PM**

The Columbus Day Post-Colonial  
Happy Hour  
Lavender Lake  
383 Carroll Street, Brooklyn

Join us for a freeform happy hour event to meet new friends and check in with the Brooklyn Commune Coordinating Committee. If you've wanted to catch our massive public meetings or have been keeping up with our research on our blog or social media, this is your chance to meet us all in the flesh. Come have a Columbus Day drink and let's talk it out!

### **Monday October 21 @ 7PM**

SPACE ODYSSEY: A beer summit on independent artist-run venues  
Cloud City  
85 N. 1st St. Williamsburg BK

Amidst the skyrocketing rents, rapid real estate development, and aggressive rezoning that have defined the last decade in NYC, the artist-run independent venue has been a critical link for the dense community of performing artists who need spaces to develop and present non-traditional work. Join Max Dana, research coordinator for Brooklyn Commune's Economics and Finance team, and invited guests Jim Findlay of The Collapsible Hole, Noel Allain of the Bushwick Starr and others for an informal conversation about current challenges in the DIY landscape, new models for sustainability and growth, and how artists and venues can move beyond simply being shock troops of gentrification and advocate for a more inclusive and balanced approach to community development.



**Monday October 28 @ 7PM**

Super Spooky Halloween Happy Hour  
Lavender Lake  
383 Carroll Street, Brooklyn

“When shall we three meet again/In thunder, lightning, or in rain?” Join us for a freeform happy hour event to meet new friends and check in with the Brooklyn Commune Coordinating Committee. If you’ve wanted to catch our massive public meetings or have been keeping up with our research on our blog or social media, this is your chance to meet us all in the flesh. Put on your scariest costume or come as you are and raise a goblet of witch’s brew and dance in the darkness with spirits in the material world!!

**Sunday November 3 @ 2PM**

From Intern to Elder: The Long Arc of the Artistic Life  
Design for Social Innovation at SVA  
136 West 21st St, 5th floor

What are the critical inflection points for artists? How does this mesh with “real life”? How might we as a community help each other—in both creative and practical ways? Join us in a conversation to explore roles elder artists can play with emerging artists and vice versa. In a cross-generational conversation facilitated by Monica Snellings for the Brooklyn Commune we will examine ways to transfer knowledge, capture history, personal stories and share resources. We’ll use the world cafe conversation format—multiple simultaneous conversations at small tables, rotating in 20-minute sets. We’ll close out the conversations with a harvest—looking for insights and new possibilities.

**Monday November 4 @ 7PM**

Mayoral Madness Pre-Election Happy Hour  
The West Café  
379 Union Ave, Brooklyn

Join us for a freeform happy hour event and screening of Raul Barcelona’s film *The Promise of New York*, documenting NYC’s 2005 mayoral election featuring Brooklyn Commune’s own Andy Horwitz. Laugh at those innocent pre-crash days of economic health and well being! Witness first hand the corrupting effects of money in politics, then go to the polls on Tuesday hungover and cynical!

**Tuesday November 12 @ 7PM**

Creativity, Capital and Community: A Conversation on Gentrification  
University Settlement  
184 Eldridge Street

It’s no secret that the incredible pace of gentrification has affected artists’ abilities to live and work comfortably in New York City for the past couple of decades. This, in tandem with decreased funding for community-based organization providing essential services to low-income residents, has made valuing the arts and recognizing the needs of artists increasingly challenging for the social sector. In a conversation facilitated by Risa Shoup and Alison Fleminger for the Brooklyn Commune and University Settlement, this discussion concerns issues around gentrification, affordability, and trends in fundraising and philanthropic giving. With a focus on the Lower East Side, the Settlement House model and the unique opportunities it offers to expand conversations between artists, low income communities, administrators, funders, and policy-makers, the event will take its cues off of the broader initiatives of the Brooklyn Commune to activate continued public discourse on the economics of cultural production.

**Tuesday November 19 @ 7PM**

The View from the Stoop: An Examination of Diversity in the Performing Arts  
BRIC House Stoop  
647 Fulton Street, Brooklyn

Join BRIC and the Brooklyn Commune for an open conversation among artists and audiences about representation and inclusion of diverse communities on our stages, in our galleries, in our media, and in our organizations. Moving beyond a solely race-based definition of diversity, how do the arts embrace the complexities of our communities, humanize others, and shape a future of just participation? The focus of the evening’s discussion will be determined by the people in the room, with featured speakers TBD.

## Appendix C

What follows is a description of the Global Congress of the Brooklyn Commune Project.

Further documentation and details may be found online at [www.brooklyncommune.org](http://www.brooklyncommune.org).

### FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 22

#### 6:00PM Registration and Opening Circle

The BKCP Global Congress opened for registration and began with a cocktail hour featuring a performance from Montreal-based musician Jordan Officer. Following introductory remarks by co-organizers Andy Horwitz and Risa Shoup, an opening circle was convened with introductory statements by Brooklyn Commune research team coordinators, a presentation of preliminary findings from the 2013 Performing Arts Census and a group conversation.

### SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 23

#### 10:30AM The MAP Fund Panel Impersonation Game

A mock panel was conducted with BKCP participants serving as panelists to review three MAP Fund applications based on the fund's stated priorities and guidelines. The mock panel was conducted after consultation with MAP Fund leadership and, while not intended to represent the actual process, was a useful tool to gain a funder's perspective on grant applications.

### 12PM LUNCH

#### 1:30PM The Economic Dilemma Seder

Participate in an Economic Dilemma Seder using a "haggadah" based on Baumol and Bowen's seminal 1966 study "Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma," edited by Nick Benacerraf.

Participate in

#### 3:00PM "The Uncomfortable Conversation"—A Long Table Conversation on Cultural Representation

Kyoung H. Park and a cadre of diverse artists invite members of the Brooklyn Commune to a safe, constructive conversation about race, gender, and privilege. The audience will participate in a privilege exercise, followed by a long table discussion about community-level solutions that promote transformational representation and cultural democracy in contemporary performing arts.

#### 4:30PM Working Outside The Institution: A Self-Producer's Budget Charette

The curators and artists of CATCH, along with the organizers of AUNTS came together for an open, participatory conversation to share and compare budgets, budget philosophies and best practices.

### 6:00PM DINNER

#### 8:00PM CATCH

The Brooklyn Commune Global Congress continued with a special edition of CATCH, a multi-disciplinary platform for showcasing new performance and socializing. CATCH 58 featured work by Gelsey Bell, Erin Courtney, Ken Rus Schmoll and Rick Burkhardt, Eric Dyer, Nellie Tinder, Melinda Ring, Title:Point, Emily Wexler and Ben Williams.

For the past decade, CATCH has sustained itself with an alternative economic structure in which every show starts and ends with a \$0.00 balance. Here's how it works:  $\text{Box Office Income} - \text{Direct Expenses} / (\# \text{ of artists \& organizers}) = \text{WAGE\$}$ .

### SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 24

#### 11:00AM Ask A Lawyer! A round table Q&A about artists, finance & real estate

The Congress continued with a working session on artists, real estate, finance and the law featuring a panel discussion and round table led by Genan Zilkha, an attorney and legal advocate, considering the following topics: property acquisition, contract execution and licensing, and lease negotiation. Panelists include Aaron Pierce, Andrew Muchmore and others.

#### 12:30PM Collective Design Session

Participants used a "change matrix" to collaboratively organize the ideas generated over the weekend and integrate them with the findings of the research teams and census. The goal of the collective design session was to create a vision for a vital, sustainable and viable arts ecosystem. Participants identified existing problems and potential leverage points and mapped what actions could be taken, involving which stakeholders and on what timelines.

#### 2:00PM Closing Circle

Participants reviewed the results of the Change Matrix and shared concluding thoughts before departing.

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 National Assembly of State Arts Agencies “National Endowment for the Arts Fact Sheet”, Spring 2013
- 2 This has not been technically true since the 1980’s, when real wages stagnated, though the promise that hard work will be rewarded with rising wages persists as the fundamental presumption of our economic system.
- 3 William Baumol. *The Cost Disease*. Yale University Press: 2012. p. 20.
- 4 *In Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma*, Baumol and Bowen explain that live performance, like education, healthcare and other services that depend upon live human interaction, become more expensive every year, whereas manufacturing economies are able to regularly cut costs. More on this later.
- 5 Jacques Ranciere. *Hatred of Democracy*.
- 6 *National Endowment for the Arts: A History, 1965–2008*
- 7 Stephen Johnson, *Future Perfect: The Case For Progress In A Networked Age*(p. 98-99)
- 8 <http://www.aae.wisc.edu/pubs/cenews/docs/ce245.txt>
- 9 *The Performing Arts in a New Era*, by Kevin McCarthy, Arthur Brooks, Julia Lowell, and Laura Zakaras, 2001.
- 10 The census did not define “Middle Class” or “Upper Middle Class” by income amounts, respondents were allowed to self-identify.
- 11 *to fail and fail big: A Study of Mid-Career Artists, Success and Failure*, The Field, 2013
- 12 As proposed by The Collapsable Giraffe’s Jim Findlay for the future home of the recently closed creative incubator space The Collapsable Hole in Williamsburg.



[www.brooklyncommune.org](http://www.brooklyncommune.org)