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Synopsis

The idea of the arts as a distinct and separate sector of society became embedded in western consciousness early in the 19th century, and many of our arts organizations still operate on a 19th century business model. But as we advance into the 21st century, we can observe signs of a change of attitude. There is an urgent need to reconcile the notion of arts and culture as a specific sector of the economy with the notion of arts and culture as an essential dimension of our individual and collective lives. This is where our future lies.

Bonjour
Good morning

I know that it is indicated on your program that I am the keynote this morning... and I will, don't worry... but I hope this session will be more a real and engaging conversation with you and not a simple lecture.

My twitter account...

There is much to discuss and debate.

Working in the performing arts today means being constantly challenged by an infinite number of transformations prompted by demographic, economic and political shifts at the local and global levels, technological progress and profound and very fast changes of behaviour amongst those who we would like - or are used - to consider our audiences.

Nothing is easy and more than ever we need to evolve, to be inventive and creative, to explore new territories, to challenge not-so-old assumptions and to reinvent ourselves quickly and constantly to avoid being seriously marginalized or even – as we saw recently in Canada with the Vancouver Playhouse - disappear.

There is a real sense of urgency, we know it, we feel it but this uncomfortable sense of urgency is necessary. It is a powerful incentive for the mobilization of our collective intelligence and resources to reposition the performing arts in a digitalized, on-demand and more dematerialized world.

My topic can be extremely vast but I choose to start with the change of perspectives now happening in public engagement in the arts. And, instead of addressing immediately the phenomenon of "non-publics" – the growing portion of the population that is completely indifferent to or not aware of the cultural offerings subsidized by the

government in a will to democratize or supported by corporations to promote their brand – I want to draw your attention on a portion of the population that we – in this room - know very well: the cultural omnivores and their close cousins, the highbrows.

First identified by sociologist Richard Peterson in the 1990s, omnivores are people who attend both a wide range and a large number of arts events. Highbrows also attend arts events frequently but limit their participation to such art forms as ballet and classical music.

In a publication by the National Endowment for the Arts, (Age and Arts Participation – A case against demographic destiny) author Mark J. Stern, explains that, in recent decades, there has been “a precipitous decline in attendance” at art museums, plays, operas, dance performances, and concerts of both jazz and classical music.

For instance, according to NEA statistics, classical music attendance in the US has declined at a 29 percent rate since 1982, with the steepest drop occurring from 2002 to 2008.

This drop-off of participation in high culture has often been attributed to demographic factors.

Some still make the argument that the baby boom generation (addicted to television) and its children (addicted to Internet) are too immersed in mainstream culture to develop a taste for the arts, which demand a certain level of attention and a willingness to engage with more complex cultural proposals.

Others are still arguing that it is only normal to attract aging audience since they have the money and time to enjoy the most sophisticated things in life, including going to concerts and museums. There is truth in this and we see it happening in Canada.

Using data from the NEA's 2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, Professor Stern breaks down the audience by both age and generation:

- pre-1937
- World War II
- Early Baby Boom
- Late Baby Boom
- Generation X
- Post 1975

He writes: “When we control for other influences — especially the role of educational attainment — the predictive value of age and (generational) cohort turns out to be quite minor.”

In contrast, the likelihood of attending arts events increases dramatically with education, from less than 10 percent for those whose education stopped at high school graduation to more than 40 percent for those with graduate degrees.

What we have to realize is that in the US, the percentage of population classified as omnivores has dropped dramatically, from 15 percent in 1982 to 10 percent in 2008. The highbrow population also declined, from just over 7 percent in 1982 to 5 percent in 2008.

Since the two groups make up “more than half of all respondents that reported any type of arts attendance,” these numbers are highly significant.

Moreover, “The average number of events attended by omnivores and highbrows dropped sharply between 2002 and 2008”.

“Omnivores” average number of events attended fell from 12.1 to 11.0 events per year, a decline of 9 percent. Highbrow attendance fell by 11 percent — from 6.1 to 5.5 events per year — while other participants’ attendance held steady.”

“Taken together,” underlines Stern, “the decline of the omnivores’ share of the population attending arts events, and their drop in average number of events attended, represented 82 percent of the entire decline in individual attendance at benchmark arts events between 2002 and 2008.”

Sterns also points to a 2009 study of Philadelphia residents that found that while many consider themselves “culturally engaged,” their connection to music and the arts tends to be via radio, television and books.

This suggests that getting people to leave their homes to see a show or visit a gallery is becoming increasingly difficult, leaving arts organizations in a precarious position.

This conclusion is reinforced by a separate NEA report that finds while only 34.6 percent of adults attended “benchmark” arts events such as ballets or art museum exhibits in 2008, nearly 75 percent “attended arts activities, created arts, or engaged with art via electronic media.”

But let’s pay more attention to the omnivores:

Sterns notes that the omnivore arose in the 1970s, at a time when people “were no longer willing to let their social status define what cultural tastes were acceptable for them.” This newfound freedom prompted them to sample cultural activities from throughout the spectrum.

As he argues “This quest for a more personal, flexible and organic approach to cultural engagement appears very much alive,”

And as one of my favourite cultural blogger - Linda Holmes (Monkee see) - writes “Omnivores thrive in an environment in which, if you are defined by your cultural interests, you at least don't have to be defined by any one cultural interest. Tolerating the ideas that classical music can be viscerally stirring and that Mad Men can be sociologically interesting allows much better balance — which benefits everyone — than an escalating and unnatural war between fun and art.

Fun and art are natural allies (despite often appearing separately), and forcing them to do battle just divides us into tinier and tinier camps, where we can only talk to people who like precisely the same kinds of culture we do.

That benefits absolutely nobody — not artists, not audiences, and not the quality of discourse”

This opinion is also shared by Karen Brooks Hopkins, the President of the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) when she insists that in order to grow their audience, cultural institutions must create multiple entry points. The approach implemented by BAM under her leadership, is to attract people by what really interest them and then, cross over into other areas, fully participating in the life of the institution. This is why BAM operates now 4 cinemas attracting 200 000 viewers a years, representing for BAM the youngest audience buying the cheapest tickets and a real promise for the future of the institution...

But going back to Linda Homes’ passionate plea in favor of the omnivores... she writes:

“It feels like a very, very hard environment to be an omnivore. I am guilty myself of hearing people recommend a piece of literary fiction and forgetting that in addition to being thoughtful and beautiful, it may also be suspenseful and funny, because I'm so accustomed to having it recommended to me for its seriousness and depth.”

But Madam Holmes also cleverly points out that:

“What is missing from a cultural diet composed entirely of pure entertainment is the beauty part, the enriching part, the part where you are driven to think. The same could be said of film — it's not that people who disdain blockbuster movies hate fun or romance or wisecracking. It's that they fear that we will lose the films that contain more than fun and romance and wisecracking.

Thus, the message in support of traditional high culture focuses on the part of it that feels imperiled, so it often comes in the form of what feels like an endless series of

scolding: What you like is not educational, what you like is not enriching, what you like is not serious, what you like is not thoughtful.

Not surprisingly, this reads as insulting to people who watch television or read genre fiction or like blockbuster movies. It feels personal and belittling, and because the emphasis is on the absence of seriousness, it becomes entirely too easy to classify defenders of literary fiction or art-house movies as driven entirely by humorlessness or pomposity. The word "only" creeps into conversations uninvited, so that "I like television" is read as "I only like television," and "I like opera" is read as "I only like opera," and those two people, once thus defined, have a very difficult time relating to each other. And suddenly, two people who may in fact both enjoy writing, cooking, gardening, Mad Men, and Duck Soup feel like they have nothing in common."

Those of you who have read my book – No Culture No Future – especially the Part 2 know that I tend to share this view - probably because I am an authentic and an incurable cultural omnivore myself.

In No Culture No Future I am arguing that "an individual seeking to enter into contact with a work or attending a cultural event is not interested in a classification of artists based on a position in the list of prizewinners of the subsidized cultural system. The relationship between the public and an artist is emotive and even sometimes passionate. Of course, and very fortunately, there are connoisseurs and an informed public for every form of art. But the artists and works they value do not belong to them. The notion of exclusivity brings nothing to the art. Any tendency to exclusion or discredit of those who are not connoisseurs places its legitimacy in peril.

As I wrote in my essay: "... I refuse to join, eyes closed, the camp of those who decry, with spectacular drama and a tinge of condescension, what they qualify as prevailing cultural relativism. According to them, this triumph of relativism has replaced the desired and correct hierarchy of works. It has shaken up the ideal pyramid of good taste and knowledge and almost irreparably divided the bases of a perfect construction to which only a few privileged people could be initiated in the classical education of times past or through writing a doctoral dissertation.

I am wary of the obsession to classify works and cultural productions with yellowed stickers on which have been carefully written words such as "classic," "contemporary," "current," "avant-garde," "marginal," "ethnic," "traditional," "emerging," "popular," "urban," or "commercial." Art and the true artists do not need this classification, especially when it is only a pretext to assert the erudition of those who do so.

Disdain does not serve art and does not foster excellence.

If I refuse to decry the rise of cultural relativism by citing the canons of classical curriculum, I also refuse to be taken in by consensus-seeking words that certain

programmers use to justify a lack of imagination and audacity. It is very practical to claim to bring together everyone around culture when in fact they seek to have us consume ready-made products that are to culture what empty calories are to healthy eating.

We live at a time when there is an overabundance in an era with an abundance of proposals and cultural products. The illusion of access to culture for all has never been so strong, comforting and . . . commercially profitable.

Supply outrageously dominates the current cultural equation. But what happens to demand? And what cultural demand should we address? What need we do for this demand to express true cultural needs and not be the result of a systematic incentive to consume? How to encourage discovering and expressing cultural aspirations and needs of each human being? How to encourage cultural participation that places citizens in contact with art? It seems to me that we should ask these questions and try to reply to them even more carefully at a time when the promises of technology may result in reducing cultural participation to a frenetic consumption of the latest trends.

All of us in this room profoundly believe that art and culture are guarantors of an aspiration to freedom and civilization. They demand and proclaim it loud and clear. Their presence is essential to give human beings means to express to others what they feel and dream about, and what connects them to life.

We also believe that art's intrinsic transformative power affects people. They also have the capacity to transform our living and working environments.

But, if we are observing a shift in the attitude of the cultural omnivores, we also notice an increase in the phenomenon of "non-publics," particularly in big cities. The "non-publics" represents the portion of the population that is completely indifferent to or not aware of the cultural offerings encouraged by the government in a will to democratize. Many factors contribute to this state of affairs: poverty, illiteracy, incomplete education, insufficient mastery of the language, family situation not conducive, lack of time, mobility issues, etc. There are enormous economic and social obstacles to overcome to mitigate cultural exclusion.

The mainsprings of cultural participation are many. Attendance at arts events can take different forms and its intensity may vary. But one thing is certain: it must be encouraged, facilitated, supported and valued socially. This implies education, mediation, time, practice, reinforcement, insistence and an adaptation to the needs, affinities, circumstances and rhythm of each person.

Family, school, extracurricular activities, and organized recreation should play a key role in promoting this participation. We must continue to keep fighting for this to happen. However, like the health sector, which can no longer simply cure people but must also

do preventive work, the cultural community must defend democratization and cultural participation, while taking great care of the omnivores because the next generation will probably count a majority of ultra-omnivores with a constant attention deficit and with no notion of the so-called loyalty to an institution that cultural marketers of the nineties were dreaming of.

Happily, more and more artistic and cultural companies and institutions are aware of the importance of the issue of democratization.

They realize their future depends upon it. Even when they start by responding to the unconcealed ambitions of marketing, their attempts to build bridges with new audiences helps promote cultural participation of a greater number of people.

Culture Days and it's inspiration (Les journées de la culture)

The logic of supply still dictates most of the public investment choices in terms of content and infrastructure. I am not suggesting a radical change in policy. If we do not support original, diverse and abundant artistic and cultural opportunities, we give up defining and expressing our identities. We also leave the field open to cultural production with the markets as the only sanction. That would jeopardize precious assets for the rest of the world. Art needs more extensive support, but I am convinced we also must stimulate cultural participation going beyond simple consumption. If we don't, we are exposing ourselves to costly socio-cultural divisions, particularly in big cities. We will also be throwing the subsidized cultural system into a crisis of legitimacy.

How can we maintain that taxes serve to finance a system that would intentionally advocate ignorance of the majority of the population?

Lest be honest: our organizations are facing major threats when they are not severely under attack. And we have to admit that in many countries, including in many regions of our own country, the arts are an easy target in the public forum because they are still described and perceived to be nice and pleasant but not necessary or essential.

More and more informed observers, especially in England, Australia and in the US come to the conclusion that after years of relative but constant growth of public and private support for the arts, we can see a plateau and even various levels of decline in that support that have too little to do with the current economy and the need to balance the budget.

In an essay published in the RSA Journal (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts), Bill Ivey who chaired Obama's transition team for Arts and Culture and who was also the Chair of the NEA in the second Clinton administration wrote:

“The tenuous character of public investment in the arts can be blamed on trends in the overall economy, but I believe that the issue is more complex. After all, despite recent economic distress, western market democracies, including the US and the UK, have found it necessary to maintain and even increase government support for public education, national defence, public health and protection of the natural environment.

...

So the crisis is more than one of constrained national budgets. The argument for public investment in culture is today unable to compete with education, healthcare, the environment and other destinations for government support deemed more essential or worthy. The diminished standing of culture among public priorities is reflected in shrinking corporate and foundation support. In the US, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has set the philanthropic agenda – global health, poverty and the environment are in; arts and culture are out.”

“Although mired in a dog-eat-dog world of competition for fixed or shrinking resources, orchestras, museums and dance and theatre companies persist in putting forward old arguments, hoping against hope that belt-tightening, a retreat into mainstream, popular programming and a little luck will get them past a rough patch without massive layoffs or fatal injections of red ink.”

I will not quote more from Bill Ivey's paper than this additional paragraph, but I wanted to reassure you about his intention to continue the battle:

“Why should the standing of art and culture in the minds of policymakers matter? Quite simply, it is because artistic heritage and creative practice are at the heart of a wide range of human engagements that are critical to both happiness and the workings of democracy.

Consider this ‘thought experiment’. If the standard of living in western market democracies declines over the next decade (as it almost certainly will), how will the affected societies – besotted by 30 years of debt-enabled consumption – reconfigure definitions of a high quality of life to maintain happiness and order in an era of shattered expectations? Is there an alternative to widespread misery, dissatisfaction, discouragement and loss of confidence? If the false promise of consumerism is unmasked, can a deeper engagement in cultural life – in the nurturing roots of heritage and the empowering achievement of personal creative practice – provide an alternative path to meaning and satisfaction? Might smart, affordable public policies designed to initiate broad cultural engagement be the vehicles for reinvigorating the core principles of democracy?”....

Dans la même veine que les propos de Bill Ivey (davantage développés dans son livre *Arts, Inc – How greed and neglect have destroyed our cultural rights* -) , je vous invite à prendre connaissance d'un rapport publié il y a un an et demi à Cincinnatti et qui s'intitule « The Arts Ripple Effect ».

Presented as « A Research-Based Strategy to Build Shared Responsibility for the Arts », this report commissioned by the Fine Arts Fund in Cincinnati also comes to the conclusion that the art sector has failed to make the case:

“While arts enthusiasts feel deeply about the importance of the arts...many of them have been frustrated by an inability to spark a positive, national, constructive public conversation on the topic”.

The report argues that “We need a message strategy that positions arts and culture as a public good – a communal interest in which all have a stake.”

Here in Canada, a considerable amount of efforts have been invested in the recent year to make the case with the economic argument.

There is still much research to be done to understand all the correlations between creating, producing, providing access to and exporting cultural goods and activities, and the various aspects of economic development of countries, nations, regions, and urban centres. Fortunately, many researchers from all disciplines and schools of thought are enthusiastically doing so.

And, frankly, we cannot afford not to invoke their findings when we deal with governments, especially during an election.

I am arguing that art needs less economic validation than the 21st century's economy needs artists' creative contribution. Arts and culture affect the economy directly and indirectly; in certain conditions, they can even act as a powerful economic motor. But their first *raison d'être* is not and will never be that.

We have to move fast, we have to change our discourse and not stick to the economic and utilitarian argument that does not work anymore –especially after the crisis of value that we just lived -, we have to re-frame the public conversation on art and culture.

Culture may continue to be understood as a sector of activity with defined lines. Over the course of the last seventy years, the sector organized itself and operated in ways specific to it. Its true engine is artistic creation, whether current or past.

This sector possesses and manages specialized physical and virtual infrastructures. Its economic weight and impact are measurable, even though much still must be done for the measure to be exact and widely accepted. It reacts and adapts itself to market pressure, consumers' preferences, technological advances, and demographic changes. It is an area of activity stimulated, supported, or negatively affected by a wide array of laws, regulations, and political decisions stemming from logic that is more or less compatible.

But make no mistake: art and culture are not and should not be the prerogative of the cultural sector, however important and dynamic it may be. First and foremost they are fundamental attributes of human beings. Culture constitutes a dimension of life that precedes and goes beyond sectorial and economic concerns.

By ignoring this consideration, rejecting it or abandoning it out of annoyance to anthropologists or philosophers, we are de facto reducing the discussion on culture to essentially financial and commercial concerns. Moreover, in so doing we are mortgaging development of the cultural sector itself by isolating it from the socio-political dynamics which shape it and that it can influence. We are digging our own grave.

What we need to do right now:

- Raising the awareness about the importance of public engagement, of the necessity to forge broad and deep connections with the public, within our own sector, within the community of producers and presenters of the performing arts
- Raising awareness in our society: values, education, capacity to live together in a multicultural context
- Reframing the public conversation about the arts and the many private conversations about the experiences that we are inviting people to, using the traditional and the social media
- Culture pour chacun: co-creation, engagement with, participation : la partie 2 de mon livre.
- Réconcilier culture pour chacun avec culture pour tous : ne pas jeter le bébé avec l'eau du bain
- Valoriser la médiation culturelle

I know it will require strong leadership at every level to achieve this re-framing of the public and private conversations on arts and culture and to evolve but I can see that a lot of people in this room have shown in the past such leadership based on vision, credibility and integrity.

Vision is the capacity to anticipate the future, using imagination and creativity. Credibility only exists as long as people are convinced that their leader believes in what he or she is saying.

Credibility has a lot to do with past achievements. We need to build on our past successes to invent a new trajectory for our sector and this is why I am pleased to see that many of you have a lot of experience.

Integrity is the way in which the individual thinks and behaves, guided by genuine ethical principles.

I will conclude with this quote from Charles Landry: "A leader will weave an incredible tale and his or her talent lies in persuading each and every person that they have an important role to play in this particular story".

Dear friends, this tale, this incredible story we have to tell and persuade everybody to play a role in is about the necessity of a rich, diversified and fulfilling collective artistic and cultural life in which the performing arts have an essential role to play today and tomorrow.

I wish you – us - success in this journey.

Thank you.