

Thank you so much for inviting me to be with you today: I am thrilled to be back in Canada, a country whose artists and organizations have been central to my passion and understanding of the arts—from Buffy St Marie and Joni Mitchell to Jon Vickers and Teresa Stratas, from Robert le Page and Robin Phillips to Crystal Pite and Marie Chouinard, from Agnes Martin and Rebecca Belmore to David Cronenberg and Sara Polly, from Margaret Atwood and Michael Ondaatje to Martin Short and Slings and Arrows. I am grateful for them all and honored to back in their native country.

All of us here—whether African, Asian, European, Oceanic or North or South American—are here, I would guess, because of a teacher we had—someone who believed in us and listened to us, who guided and prompted and challenged, teachers that I invite you for a moment to remember and salute in your hearts—just as I salute Tom Haas, Bruno Koch and Jon Mezz at UNC who cast me in a variety of roles from Shakespeare to Stephen Sondheim, or before that Carolyn Brown at T Wingate Andrews High School in High Point North Carolina who gave me my first solo in high school chorus, or Bess Gayle who, from her wheelchair beside the two interfacing Steinways would patiently count the beats as I struggled through a Bach partita, Ruby Dannenburg who coached me through dramatic interpretation in the National Forensic League or the very first of all, Evelyn Cummings who cast me at Jack and Jill Elementary School as the caboose in the Little Engine That Could where, local legend has it, I was definitive.

Our teachers had astounding patience and enormous power in shaping our lives—power that you wield in your own colleges, schools and universities today. You and they are those I think of first in reading Marge Piercy’s “To Be of Use” when she writes:

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
 who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,
 who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,
 who do what has to be done, again and again.

Every day, you harness yourselves to the cart and do what has to be done again and again. You engage, in the image she uses to close the poem, in the work that is real. And for that, my deepest thanks.

I have taught, either full time or part time, for the past 43 years and am the first to appreciate how much has changed since I began that journey: in 1976, I did not have to compete with cell phones in my class, sprinkle my presentations with stimulating visuals to engage a media-inclined generation, or self-censor my syllabus because of fear of trigger warnings. Most significantly, perhaps, I began teaching in a moment when the importance of the arts was an assumed common good, and where it was expected that the young people should learn to sing or play an instrument, learn to paint, read the great plays of the Greeks and Shakespeare, and travel several times a year to professional theaters or museums or presenting centers to see the best of what local, national and world culture had to offer.

As the assumption about common good of the arts has eroded in the United States, we have by necessity become more adept at quantifying the value of the arts in the educational arena, through national study after national study proving that engagement with the arts promotes self-confidence, self-esteem, cooperation, and effective problem solving, improves cognitive skills, promotes greater literacy, greater complexity of thinking and greater grasp of ambiguity. We trumpet the achievements of our students in earning better grades, performing more community service, watching fewer hours of television, reporting less boredom in school and graduating at higher rates—an especially important achievement when we remember that the single likeliest indicator in the United States of incarceration is failure to earn a high school degree.

And yet, even with this arsenal of information—whether quantifiable or anecdotal—many schools and universities are slashing arts budgets, freezing or reducing faculty lines and eliminating degree programs entirely. Resources are increasingly apportioned based on objective test scores, predicted post-graduate salaries and numbers games—often tying departmental legitimacy to the number of students enrolled in a class—criteria that flummox teachers whose work cannot be taught in large lecture halls but by its very nature is individualized or oriented to small groups to allow individual attention, teachers who are most motivated by promoting the intrinsic values of the arts, e.g. delight, contemplation, curiosity, wonder—all of which defies objective standardized measurement. And many of us report rising distrust, both from parents and from students who believe that they should not be exposed to ideas or experiences with which they disagree or that might cause offense, even as our own educations have been deliberately structured to hone our ideas by encountering the uncomfortable.

How can we respond to such developments?

At its simplest level, the world in which our institutions were created and in which many of us were trained is not the world in which we live today. If we want to claim a place in the future, I think we must begin by looking outward at the enormous global changes we are experiencing, at least three of which deserve our particular attention today.

In many nations, demographic shifts are changing our national sense of who we are as a nation. The United States where I live will be a plurality nation without a dominant race by 2041 or possibly sooner, with especial proportionate growth in Latinx communities, immigrant communities and Asian descent communities. On the one hand, these changes are bringing fantastic new forms, new collaborations, new voices and perspectives, especially as we enter long overdue conversations about which works comprise the literary canon, which dance and music forms are worthy of attention, who in the theatrical world decides whose stories get told and by whom. Even those of us who have specialized in traditional Western aesthetics must recognize that a refusal to expand our vision and embrace perspectives beyond the Western, however nourishing they may have been in the past, is to collude with forces of oppression,

suppress the value our students of color can find in their own lives, and deny our collective educational charge of promoting fullest self-realization. But these changes are upending traditional assumptions about consumer patterns of behavior and loyalty, challenging the falsely assumed supremacy of Eurocentric forms and undermining the presumed authority of traditional arts and educational institutions to set the cultural agenda.

Secondly, technology is radically changing the way we interact. Clearly there is much that technology has to offer that we should rightly celebrate—the ability of anyone to be a witness and broadcast to the world, the potential to link us together across borders and thousands of miles, the unprecedented access we have to information, even the role of video games in promoting faster decision making and greater eye to hand coordination—important skills for surgeons and pilots and military, however we may feel about that, and the democratization of art making, placing affordable creative and distributive tools in the hands of anyone who wants to make and share a work of art.

But technology also poses enormous challenges to education and to the professional/vocational arts as we have known them. A decade ago at a TED gathering in Calgary, I described these challenges in three dimensions: competition, consumer expectation, and cultural economics. In the decade since I gave that speech, these challenges have only intensified and the competition grown: there are now more than 1.6 billion websites and 505 million blogs worldwide, producing more than 2 million blog posts and 500 million tweets per day, social media now requires presence in dizzying numbers of platforms, and more than 900,000 video games, roughly 90% of which are rated for levels of violence, the rise of streaming apps, cable channels, home entertainment systems all compete for our time and attention. And while a decade ago, it was estimated that we are all exposed 5,000 different marketing messages every day and that young people spend 20,000 online before college graduation, those numbers have more than doubled: we now encounter 10,000 marketing messages per day and young people are spending 9 hours every day online not counting time spent on homework or in classes—a total of 49,250 hours between first grade and college graduation—figures that are now 4 years old and that have presumably grown since then. And yes yes people increasingly resist limiting arts consumptions to set venues and times arts organizations have defined: in fact, people are less interested in only attending. Coming from crowd sourcing, Wiki participation and social media, the increasingly expect to co-curate, co-create and at times even assume full and total authority in creating the artistic event. And yes, we continue to convince people that the symphony, opera or ballet ticket is worth \$100 or more when they are used to downloading culture on demand 24/7 for \$1.29 a song or for free.

And the very way we think is changing. Discussions most obviously reference attention spans, which are clearly shrinking for us all, not merely for the young: how many of us find it more difficult to read for two hours at a stretch without taking a break to check email, frequently pause our streaming devices to reload plates or read something new, or at performances breathe a sigh of relief at seeing in a program that “Tonight’s program will be 80 minutes without an intermission” and groan inwardly at “Tonight’s performance will be two hours and 45 minutes with one break”?

Attention spans are only the tip of the iceberg, however. As Gary Small MD, Director of UCLA Memory and Aging, has observed: “Today video-games, Internet addiction and other technology side-effects appear to be suppressing frontal-lobe executive skills and our ability to communicate face-to-face”—an interesting observation in a context where the most common way romantic couples now meet is on line. Indeed, “generation gap” in today’s world is cognitive—the gap between digital immigrants who were raised to value hierarchy, authority and whose perceptual frameworks were set before the advent of computers, PC’s, cell phones and the like and were taught in a vertical teacher-student dynamic to think in linear/narrative constructs--- and digital natives—including X, Y, Z gens and millennials whose distrust of hierarchy and belief in their own authority may be the logical outgrowth of having been the ones at age three to teach their parents how to program the VCR, open a file or load an app—who learn laterally from one another in a style my teachers would have called cheating, and who have been trained, not primarily in the linear but in the visual associative—the kind of logic promoted by the nonlinearity of Sesame Street, MTV, web surfing, and constant IM-ing.

Kathleen Hall Jamieson once suggested that the constant bombardment of visual stimulation and the speed with which these stimuli shift may be suppressing the development of capacities for reflective thinking—a shift which can be felt in our call out and cancel culture which demonizes in record time based on a single act or opinion, in the speed to which we rush to judgment through the constant injunction to like or dislike everything we see, and an increasing collective willingness to accept even the most outrageous falsehood in the moment as fact without deeper investigation or quantification—a willingness exploited in elections and media manipulation. And—remembering that ethics are not a snap judgment of right vs wrong—that’s the realm of morals—but the choice between two rights--what will be our future capacity for ethical action be, given that ethics require reflection—often deep, extended reflection--before an ethical choice can be made?

In essence, our students have changed, we have changed, our world has changed. In today’s context of faster and faster change with less and less time to learn and adapt and in which, per Thomas Friedman, constant disruption, not merely change, is the new normal, the traditional arts as we have taught them—with its insistence on patience, reiterative construction, on reflection, on deep listening and delayed gratification—is increasingly out of step. If, as one corporation’s internal mantra states, “Life has never been this fast before but will never be this slow again,” what claim on the future do we have?

Brian Walker and David Scott who study systems and resilience note that industries caught in uncertainty rarely falter because of lack of efficiency or skill but because of disruption by outside forces—a disruption that requires a fundamental choice.

We can stop—a choice that, in the arts world, we do not celebrate frequently enough. If a dance company has been created to foster the work of a specific founding choreographer for example, why

must that organization continue when that dance maker is finished? Can we celebrate our good fortune in encountering that work even as we say farewell—an especially important question in a landscape where the number of arts organizations and academic arts departments far exceed the ability of the philanthropic community—whether government, private or corporate—to support them?

Alternately, we can hunker down and dig in, we can persevere in our former behavior, even as our industries contract, the competition for resources grows more fractious and our stronghold on cultural behavior is weakened. We can continue to focus on the value of the traditional artistic event and promote technique, expression and the canon in our teaching. In the educational curriculum in the United States where core skills are called STEM—science, technology, engineering and mathematics—we can argue for the transformation of STEM to STEAM by inserting the arts into the core curriculum as a fifth discrete discipline, worthy of study. And absolutely, the world will, I believe, always need traditional arts instruction and arts experiences—the spiritual reflection promoted by the wave of symphonic sound that washes over during a live orchestral concert, the visceral delight in standing before a major painting, the mental jolt of self-recognition occasioned by a great poem. Like the Catholic Church—which has remained relatively unchanged for the last 700 years despite the massive Religious Reformation around it, many of our institutions today may similarly well survive, essentially unchanged and operating as they do today. We need you to train the artists, managers and technicians that can lead these major institutions—they are the logical homes where works of a certain scale can be produced and are currently our best opportunities for certain kinds of artists to find a life, not of riches but of simple economic dignity. There is enormous value in the core mission in many of your departments that revolve around artistic excellence, whatever you may define that to mean.

Or, especially in the world in which we live today, we can choose to fundamentally reorganize.

In 2014, I heard President Scott Cowen of Tulane University share his experience on returning to a devastated New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina—a city decimated physically, socially, spiritually. His University—long a leader in higher education in general and in theatre in particular—longed to reunite, to reconnect to its past, to re-form, and move forward in its long-standing mission of being a center for learning and reflection. At the same time, he realized, nothing in that mission required Tulane to go beyond its own walls, to reach out to its surrounding community, to roll up its sleeves, get its arms dirty, to strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward, as Marge Piercy would say.

And so, Cowen chose to go beyond the mission—to require without debate every student, every course, every department and facet of the university to add a public service component to rebuild the City. Business students counseled start-ups, engineers tackled construction, philosophy majors worked to rebuild education, recognizing their ability to debate complex ideas and starting debate clubs in every surrounding high school. Some resistant faculty moved on, others frankly were marginalized, but in the wake of this new purpose, applications grew,

retention rates grew, graduation rates grew, contributions grew, the sense of community grew, Tulane grew.

Both within our walls—and beyond our walls in our communities from whom we all too often shield ourselves—there are enormous groups of people, begging us to roll up our sleeves.

In today's world, arts organizations and universities are being asked to go beyond the artistic and adopt a three part mission—one that still embraces the artistic—it is after all why people come by and large—but one that now also embraces a civic mission—one that measures the impact of our work on the greater world around us—and a values explicit ethical mission as well.

This new larger civically and socially engaged role is the growth sector in the arts as artists and organizations attune themselves more and more to the potential civic impact of their work. Communities of color have long seen the arts as crucial to formulating collective identity and animating labor movements, just as arts organizations targeting children have long recognized the link between the arts and cognitive development. In this new version, we are less likely to argue for the change from STEM to STEAM than to argue for STEM raised to the A power—the role of thinking and behavior as infused and transformed by the arts—a shift seen at University campuses that have increasingly been attuned to new visions of impact: a movement where musicians teach doctors how to listen at the University of Michigan Medical school, attuning them to issues of tempo, volume, shading, not to grow audiences at symphony concerts but to better doctor-patient relationships and better medical care; where chamber ensembles teach consensual leadership models to executives at Federal Express in Memphis Tennessee not to increase appreciation of Beethoven but to promote more inclusive, even innovative cultures; where at Dartmouth College playwright/performer Anne Galjour recreated interviews with area citizens losing their homes to rising taxes as the centerpiece of a campus wide sociology and political science symposium on class and money as a prelude to public policy reform; where choreographers at Wesleyan University team-teach global warming with scientists; and where Anna Deveare Smith joined the law school faculty at NYU to teach listening and narrative as a way of helping lawyers not only learn to gather evidence but to construct stories for jury understanding. This shift is transforming pedagogy, transforming interest in the arts, transforming public conviction that the arts are increasingly essential in these difficult times and that indeed the arts are not part of the need, they are part of the solution.

Artists and administrators dedicated to this path need a very different set of skills. At the very least, inter-cultural fluency, technological facility, policy articulation, grasp of political process, donor psychology, and community organizing will be baseline skills not only in the management of organizations, but in artistic practice for the civically engaged artist.

Teaching these new skills, embracing them in the curriculum will be enormously challenging. It will beg the question, not of what we will add, but what we will let go of, what we will STOP

doing to give space, time and energy to the study and development of these new essential skills.

For many of you, this represents a profound, seismic shift for your departments—and I hope you have heard throughout my remarks an affirmation of both/and—the need in our larger world for both traditional training and the traditional artistic mission focus, and for this socially engaged artist—and this latter work may not be for everyone. But forward-thinking departments are at least asking themselves, what if the value of the arts is not only in producing art works but in social orchestration? What if the role of the artist is not just to make products to be consumed but to create experiences that will be springboards to their audience's own creativity? What would happen if we thought of ourselves less as arts departments and more as platforms designed to aggregate creative energy? Indeed, if—as MIT says, innovation is useful knowledge for solving problems, and if the arts, as many of us believe, are a way of knowing, what is the useful knowledge that we have, and what is the problem we are trying to solve?

Whatever road you choose, the world needs us to find ways to have hard conversations that we are avoiding both within the academy but in our larger world as well, to model vulnerability even at personal and potentially professional risk, to admit to uncertainty and to lead the larger community towards paths of forgiveness that we will need as we try to reach one another across the fractious and acrimonious social and political divides that now separate us. Our effectiveness will rely on each of us being intentional in our paths, courageous in aligning our actions to our beliefs and crystal clear, scathingly, rigorously clear, about the deepest values we promote. Service? Financial success? Expertise? Justice? Autonomy? In addition to articulating why doing our work at all is important, how do we lead our students to clarity of what they want their our lives to stand for?

Even as you promote—as I hope you will—these conversations about the values of your departments, I hope you will ask them of yourselves. Especially as you are asked to do more and more, the potential not only for exhaustion but for burnout looms. Work 18 hours a day on something that you deeply care about, you remain pumped and beg for more: two hours in something that does not nourish the core leads to depletion, exhaustion and despair. Physical exhaustion while real is not burnout: burnout is disconnect from core values, and if you do not know what your own values are, how can you possibly keep your life on track, renew yourself in an ongoing way, and find the energy and strength to continue especially in these most difficult of times? It is terrible when someone burns out and leaves. It is worse when they burn out and stay.

I am deeply optimistic about the future of the arts, no matter how much I may not have sounded so until this moment.

I am cheered that, as live arts attendance erodes, arts participation—not only people accessing the arts through technology, but people writing their own songs, creating their own dances, making their own movies—is exploding at an exponential rate.

I am cheered by the eloquence of the Harvard Task Force on the Arts in its cry that the arts enable students to become citizens of the world, prepared to apprehend what at first may seem only strange and participate in a human creativity that is not tightly bound by time and space—a cry that has led Harvard to launch its first arts major sequences for Undergraduates.

I am cheered by the explosion of interest that is seen in the ever growing numbers of students—almost 120,000 last year alone—who graduate with arts degrees and the 30% increase in those numbers every decade.

I am cheered by the research of the Metropolitan Group in their Public Will Building effort that indicates that those who are most passionate about the social power of the arts to connect us to one another are people under the age of 40 and people of color—the world that we in the United States at least are increasingly becoming, rather than the world we have been.

And, let me say as I round proverbial third and head for home for all you baseball fans, I am convinced that our role in the world is more important than it has ever been.

Six years ago, I read Peter Coleman's *The Five Percent: Finding Solutions to Seemingly Intractable Problems*—a book examining those situations like the Middle East or the abortions right divide or the antagonism between fundamentalism and secular society. Coleman argues that such situations are fed by over-simplification of issues and lack of nuance; by a competitive “win/lose” rather than a cooperative dynamic; and by a dependence on self-reinforcing feedback loops that entrench beliefs and disqualify alternative perspectives—a dynamic of dysfunction that describes the current Congress of the United States as aptly as any I have read to date.

I believe that the arts are an alternative to intractability--we offer nuance in the face of simplification, cooperation in the face of competition, and in the face of reinforcing disqualifying loops, we gather people unlike one another to view their fellow human being with generosity and curiosity.

God knows if we have ever needed this capacity in human history, we need it now.

Whatever choices we make about our aesthetics, our disciplines and our goals, it is this capacity that makes us all inherently social activists.

In a time of race baiting and onerous immigration laws, of mounting hate crimes and appalling rise in teen suicides, especially in the LGBTQ community, instilling respect for those with different heritages or beliefs or lives is social activism.

In an age when video games offer instant gratification through dehumanization and proclaim victory through virtual body count, redefining our social time signature, promoting digestion of

human experience, the reawakening of human feeling, contemplation and internalization of the consequences of human actions on others is social activism.

In a time when where we can demonize, reject and ruin one another for a single belief or action—even one in a distant past—or even for our choice of friends, yes we must call out injustice and to insist upon reform, but we must also call in—reconciling accountability with openness, true curiosity, grace, empathy and imagination—and to call together—to bring together people just to laugh together, or cry together, cheer together or sit in stunned silence together, to conspire or “breathe together” an important step towards repairing our social fabric which is increasingly frayed—all a sign of social activism.

To work in the arts is to have a platform--however many or however few come to bear witness to our work-- we have a platform. But it is not a platform to be taken for granted any longer. In a world of polarization, of increased competition, of fear, we must seize it, we must own it, we must earn it.

I leave you with a benediction from theatre director Anne Bogart, who in *A Director Prepares*, writes the following:

Do not assume that you have to have some prescribed conditions to do your best work.
Do not wait.

Do not wait for enough time or money to accomplish what you think you have in mind.

Work with what you have right now.

Work with the people around you right now.

Work with the architecture you see around you right now.

Do not wait for what you assume is the appropriate, stress-free environment in which to generate expression.

Do not wait for maturity or insight or wisdom.

Do not wait until you are sure that you know what you are doing.

Do not wait until you have enough technique.

What you do now, what you make of your present circumstances will determine the quality and scope of your future endeavors.

And at the same time, be patient.

I salute you all not only as educators but as social activists, pledged to a world of inclusion, compassion, empathy and hope.

I charge you with the final words of *Angels in America*, when Tony Kushner writes, “*You are fabulous creatures, each and every one. And I bless you. More Life. The Great Work Begins.*”

And I thank you for your kindness and patience in listening to me this morning. Thank you and God speed.