

Unconference on Change and the Future(S) Of Toronto Performance

September 19th, 2013

Art Gallery of Ontario

<http://www.smallwoodenshoe.org/uncon>

These are the notes typed from flipcharts. They are references, sparks and reminders.
There are a few more coming.

Anyone can comment. Those comments can be commented on. Ideally I think people would use their names, or at least only comment as if you were using your real name.

If you write anything like a blog post or an article about the unconference, it would be amazing if you left a comment about that too.

Thanks, Jacob.

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#RADICAL DRAMATURGY initiated by Andrea
MAIN ROOM - NORTH EAST

- Laying a play on traditional structure.
 - What is dramaturgy in other mediums?
 - TRADITIONAL VS. MODERN
 - What is needed for the work informs the dramatization.
 - A place where everything is possible.
 - Narrative – story as a hook.
 - How do you find story?
 - Imagination determines the story.
 - INTENT: is the through line?
 - Protocol: set rules to break expectation.
 - Controlling an imposed meaning of beginning/ middle/ end.
 - 360 screenings (immersive company)
 - Sleep No More (immersive theatre)
 - Fighting impulse to fix or clean up a work. >>> What do you find by sticking through that impulse to leave or fix?
 - Marten Spangberg
 - Working from script vs. creating the work from scratch (development).
-

#THE CORPORATE MODEL IS DYING. CAN WE REPLACE IT?

Initiated by Slade.

- 40 year old model.
- Charity / grants/ funds
- S.T.A.F >>> Artists incorporate then need to follow up with legal obligations. Too much for them. Not what they expected.
- Why replace the model? Does it need replacing?
- Do we need an in-between model?
- Are there more ad-hoc run models working?
- Model of excellence vs. sustaining an organization.
- Planted flower (a set company one that needs tending to through subscribers, maintaining a building, etc.) vs. A single cut flower (the individual group that knows it will come to an end eventually)
- Broken chair (organization that runs like an organic farmer)

- Company produces based off what is donated to them >>> ends up being all they use to create their production.
 - Can we replace it? YES!
-

#CRITIQUE AND BLOGGERS

Initiated by _____

- Leverage
 - “Don’t be a duck”
 - “Bitch”
 - The expert – Consumers.
 - Content: theme: form
 - “A good review is a bonus”
 - Opinion / lifestyle
 - “Whose voice is your audience waiting for?”
 - Ouzo
 - Marketing vs. PR
-

#WHAT IS YOUR ARTISTIC PRACTISE?

MAIN ROOM / SOUTH EAST

Initiated by Michael Trent

- Not product
 - Way we work
-

#ART & SCHOLARSHIP

Room 3, Session 1 –

Facil: Colleen

- Publications/Research Centres
- Practise as research/PS
- Subject matter
- Bridging
- Canadian Peer Review Process
 - o 9m Topia (York U)
 - o 9m Can. Journal of Theatre Studies (CTR)
 - o 3-6m Intentions (York U)
 - o Contact Quarterly (Can. Society for Dance Studies)
- Study group @ Dancemakers

- erinbrubacher@gmail.com
 - “All our forgotten papers.”
 - Philosophy as expanded (art) practise
 - Collective writing/outside of the academy
 - Process articulation + thought as performance
-

#HOW TO MAKE T.O.'S ARTS COMMUNITY LESS WHITE OR, Decolonizing the performance ecology in Toronto

Room 3, Session 2 –

- Some models:
 - Mammalian
 - § (Affirmative action)
 - § Social art practise
 - Arise
 - § (LGBT, interdis, artists of colour, or indigenous/emerging artists)
 - Manifesto
 - § AMY Project
 - § (Artists mentoring female youth)
 - Funding may motivate tokenism
 - Location and discipline-specific barriers: Who is not in the conversation?
 - Outreach -> Who is responsible?
 - Networks/professionals are culturally-specific
 - UnConf may not be the right model for convening the various ecologies in TO
 - Strategic partnerships may help
 - Traditional vs contemporary divide (in dance)
 - Theatre has lit-tradition that is Anglo-centric canon focussed
 - Festivalization and increasing role of curator in determining whose work is seen and watched
-

#HOW CAN A FESTIVAL CONTRIBUTE TO GLOBALIZING CANADIAN ARTISTS AND ARTISTIC PRACTISES?

- Playwright Project
 - Pick themes that will connect you
 - Cross-pollinate
- How to promote in practical way:
 - International spotlight
 - Relationships with presenters from elsewhere

§ (For touring potential)

- Sister/Brother Festival
- Canada no longer has any cultural attaché (except QUEBEC)
- Reciprocity – opportunity to write/network
 - o Multi-national project grants
 - o Partner with other National Events?

§ G20

#SOCIAL MEDIA

Room 1, Session 3 –

Facil: Adam

- Where to put what focus?
 - Which strategies and tactics should be used when?
 - Is social media the only way now?
 - Social media doesn't hit over 50's
 - Social media is a technology, Facebook is a product
 - What are the costs of social media?
 - How to link to other communities?
 - How to target your audience?
 - Success/failure stories?
 - Content matters more than the channel
 - Language that is specific and personal
 - Use to promote organization, not just specific event
 - Find the right voice: sincere, humourous
 - Are these just suggestions for any form of communication?
 - What are people using and how?
 - o Formal social media plan
 - o Tell a story over time
 - o Twitter most effective during [production]
 - o Facebook immediately proceeding
 - o Email early and ongoing
 - Artists should contribute to their networks
 - o How to control the message that's going out?
 - o Does the benefit of not controlling outweigh the cost?
 - How to track effectiveness?
 - Reciprocity of communication
 - Make connections you otherwise wouldn't have known of
 - Should we re-tweet negative reviews?
-

#HISTORY & ARCHIVES

Room 1, Session 4 –

Facil: Adam

- Issues of ownership and accessibility
 - E.g. soundmakers.ca
 - Creative commons license
 - Interactivity to create
 - A composer in residence on the website
 - Archives as a learning opportunity
 - How to track derivative works
 - What are the user demographics?
 - Not for revenue generation during the first iteration
 - A way of maintaining relationships with distance audiences
-

#How to make arts organizations more accessible to “non-artists” to create art, participate, and challenge?

(SW Mainspace 1:30 – 2:05, Maggie)

-Not all audience members are artists, how do we make art organizations of all sizes approachable and accessible to them? People who do not produce art for a living or do not have an arts background call themselves “non artists” but does that label discourage them from creating or enjoying art? We should be empowering everyone to participate and engage them. Should we change that language, especially to dispel the “elite artist” myth.

-How do we make the community feel comfortable/interested to come to a theatre or an event?
–Location? Art in public places?

-Can all institutions have programming for youth and community? Not just artists with prior project funding?
- Many organizations have outreach to community, scales and target niches vary due to resources and mandate. However, an outreach or community/youth involvement should only be done if executed well and is beneficial to community/youth.

-Is it possible for established institutions and organizations to support a smaller independent group? IE: AGO supporting community arts, COC supporting small music artist.

-How do you partner/collaborate with the community?
–Perhaps to get community involved, offer jobs and volunteer opportunities to “not the

usual suspects". Partner together to combine resources.

-Outreach is so variable. Take into consideration the type of community vs the discipline of the company vs the size and resources vs the interest of outreach existing by both.

If we are in a position to include non-traditional mediums and new partners, we should.

An artist is not labeled an artist because someone gives them a stamp of approval. By creating a body of work and being recognized by your peers, that is what makes an artist.

Communities and companies should feel encouraged to ASK about collaborations, many are very open to needs and requests.

#Funding in Multidisciplinary Industry (SW Mainspace 2:10 – 2:50, Loree)

How to find new funding sources?

What are possibilities for radical restructuring of funding?

How do we measure the impact of our successes and how to we use that as a leverage for more funding?

Artists need to advocate on behalf of funding and acknowledge it!

Specialization vs multidisciplinary funding in reference to Arts Councils and grants: Do the old models work now that more and more projects are moving into multidisciplinary directions? Should we recognize that the western models of funding might not be the best and change accordingly?

Is a project that is theatre/dance/new media "more theatre" or "more dance?" or "more multimedia" and do the respective offices feel the same? Councils do not necessarily have the ideal people (in terms of disciplines specialties) on the juries.

There is a huge importance to emphasize honesty and excitement for a project instead of strategically making it fit into a grant application.

Perhaps a new model for grant applications should be implemented, like in Australia where they did away with separate disciplines for applying for funds.

What if to apply, you standardized applications (due to shrinking funds, shared resources etc):

1. Propose a project and budget
2. Suggest the type of people to assess/judge the application.

OTHER funding prospects:

- Patrons (networking, letters, fundraisers, personal connections)
 - Foundations
 - Corporations and Sponsorships (Artsvest – matching donations from sponsors)
 - Shared Platforms (identities maintained under umbrella company with charity status – helpful to noncharities and individuals. Check out TAC's platformA)
 - Crowdfunding
 - yes you pay taxes on them.
 - Not easy.
 - Short campaigns are better.
 - Not good for long term fundraising plans.
-

#Art and Capitalism **(SW Mainspace 3:00 – 3:50, Thomas)**

Art is rooted in capitalism historically. Can art transcend it and do we want to?
After all, dominance is success, right?

Is art a luxury or a necessity?

Do we try to break the system and start over, or do we try to use it to the best of our availability?

#Arts Management and Training **(Seminar 3 Backroom 4:00 – 4:40, Jeanne)**

Training/Mentorship/Opportunities

There is a lack of training for arts management in Canada. Some institutions like Ryerson, Humber, and Shulick have them, but what are other routes to get the training?

How do we keep managers to stay in the arts sector when they can be making more money elsewhere.

Not enough training/mentorship opportunities and not enough young managers to fill in the empty positions and not enough money to keep them in the sector = a sad conversation.

Where does a manager go after heading to the top of a small company?

Who is responsible for training new management when current managers of small companies are also stretched thin?

Generalized management vs specialized management

Where are the opportunities to learn and gain experience that are not unpaid internships/going back to school? –Foundations like Metcalfe, Art institutions with training mandates like Kennedy Centre, Banff Centre.

NOTES from the Breakout Sessions
Main Room NW

#Audiences

(Erin Shields)

- Decreasing?
 - Personalization
 - When do we think of them?
 - Populism
 - TAPA Research
 - Accessibility – specific and personal
 - Specific and personal
 - Demonetizing
 - Experience – breadth, what is it?
 - In-narrative (as opposed to with-narrative)
 - Status
 - Trans-media
 - ARTS ACTION RESEARCH
 - “growing audiences”
 - Publication
 - Content and relationship
-

#Working as an Artist in the Context of an Arts Driven Institution

(Erin Shields)

- What are commonalities/differences between artists and producers?
- Admin as full-time/year-round

- Artists vulnerable/excluded
 - Losing control when you enter the machine
 - More or less shepherding/trajectory?
 - How do you improve communication
 - Meet departments
 - Protection (both of artists and of the institution)
 - Do you lose your voice?
 - How do you make the most of your time?
 - Culture of scarcity
 - You have to live with yourself as an artist
-

#The Economy of Friendship (Cathy Gordon)

- Friendship to advance work
 - Friends asking to help
 - Developing friends out of career setting
 - How do we break into this working group when it's closed off to friendship circle?
 - Ego + Performance + Friends
 - Friendship and professionalism
 - Abusing the word "friend"... Or is it "colleague"?
 - Priority listing
 - Risk with friends – Good or bad?
 - Apology
 - Content and relationship
 - Grants as individuals?
-

#Distinction without Stigma (Jacob Zimmer)

- How to get past "*oh, it's all just taste*"
- Necessary Canadianism
- Publicly making distinctions/finding the people that the work speaks to
- Describing yourself by:
 - What you are
 - What you are not
- How to talk about work you don't like (people are scared)
- What risks are you willing to take, including alienation?
- We all have the right to fail
- Art making as process
- Evaluating work on it's own terms (and then, are those terms helpful to the world?)
- Indirect communication/direct communication with the artist
- Conversation without key player(s) in the room
- "Most theatre is boring"

- Personal relationships vs. bigger forms
 - Respect for difference in work, even if it's not your "thing"
 - Learning how to critique
 - Distinct artist choices beyond what's in "fashion" or not
 - MONTHLY SESSIONS – Come talk about work, be honest, share context
 - "Making Talking Dancing Body" in Vancouver (talking about work in a new way)
 - Being "nice"
 - Work pushing boundaries is vulnerable – feedback is important
 - Get in touch with Ame if you want more information/would be interested in this in Toronto
-

#Power (Naomi Cherney)

Main Room SE

- Who has it?
 - What is it?
 - How does it show itself? (in our experience)
 - Limiting vs. enabling
 - What can you do with it?
 - How do you get it?
 - How do you know who has it?
 - Belief that I am in control of my actions?
 - Cultural
 - Sociological
 - Psychological
 - Biological
-

#ART IN PUBLIC SPACES

Session 1

Seminar room 1

Conveners: Jacob and Sally

- Game designers plus theatre people equals successful collaborations internationally (in terms of immersive events)
- What performance measures can be used?
 - Participant complaints
 - Positive impact
- Sizes (of immersive events) can range from 200 to a few thousand (e.g. one three day festival had 20-30 games of different shapes and sizes)

- How can we ensure success (of running an event/creating art in public spaces?)
 - o Start well in advance
 - o Get community groups to support you, consult with them and get their input
- Problem: many spaces that people think are City of Toronto space are actually not (or are under the jurisdiction of arms-length organizations)
 - o (this also means that using a public space is not always cheaper than a traditional venue, even when it's a rarely used space (e.g. hydro line that no one uses versus Trinity Bellwoods park))
- Also – different departments are responsible for permits for different spaces (e.g. road closure permits vs. park permits are different departments)
 - o On top of this buy-ins are often needed from other departments (e.g. need police support for road closures)
 - o i.e. things aren't as clear cut as you might think
- At what point are permits necessary? (e.g. after a certain number of people, if the event is being promoted, etc)
 - o Core issue regarding control via permits is about liability
- Are there indoor City of Toronto spaces to use for events? (e.g. parks and rec centers)
 - o Yes but they're limited and you must apply early
- To get a permit to use a civic square for your event you must be a not-for-profit or community organization and your event must be open and free to the general public (at least part of the event must be free and accessible, you can also have a ticketed portion)
- Need insurance to use parks, civic squares, or roads
- Permit costs can be per day (e.g. \$83/day for road closure) or by number of people expected (but it depends on the department that's doing the permitting)
- Are people interested in performance in public space because of COST or because it brings MEANING to your art piece ?
- Interest in “accidental audience” and local audience
- Parks as a mediating space between private and retail spaces
- Creating a small temporary social economy
- Frustration from artists surrounding “permission”
- Element of surprise “accidental performance”
 - o What will/can permission-granting bodies let slide?
 - o Tension between surprise/spontaneity and permission (better to ask for forgiveness than permission?)
- Human need for spontaneity
- Public spaces provide opportunities for art – make a city feel more about people (rather than cars, etc)
- Common question: do I need a permit for a flash mob?
- Best advice is PLAN FAR IN ADVANCE (especially for permit process)
- Artists being used to populate/animate private public spaces
- How are people culturally conditioned to use a space?

#FEMINIST WORKING GROUP

Session 2

Room: ?

Convener: ?

- A space to resonate
- What is feminist strategy?
- Autobiography
- Interpret dead white guys in light of a contemporary women
- Listening; taking the time to
- A different point of departure
- Taking on a leadership role
- Voice/inflection
- Not second guessing
- How to ask a question without diminishing authority
- Closed vs. open questions
- How much "space" are we allotted?
- Supportive of each other or worst enemies
- Are support systems gender specific
- By articulating we diminish
- Exercise economic leverage
- Challenge allocation of resources
- How to resist labels and structures
- E.g. women and tans only days diminish
- Does feminism equal identity politics?
- Raise consciousness of people
- Can we tell the stories of other?
- Abolish the concept of neutral
- What justifies an intervention?
- Critique from one's own position
- Voicing the uncomfortable
- Where are your lines drawn
- Be brave and have conversations
- Articulation of rules of engagement

#IMMERSION AND INTERACTIVITY

Session 4

Main space SW

Convener: David Fono

- Models for interactive events
 - o How do we make the more individualized?

- “Accomplice” show in US – good model for experience outside theatre venue
 - The Virtual Stage (company in Vancouver) produced Zombie Syndrome (immersive event on Granville Island) – good model
 - Toronto event on 1812 – audience influences outcome of story (choose your own adventure meets capture the flag) – another good example
- Audience matters: |people interested in cool nights out” vs. theatre crowd
- The value of interactivity is audience active participation (not puppet to storytelling)
- Is this (interactivity) forwarding or ruining theatre?
 - Or is it a different entity altogether?
- Audience feeling of having to “act out” a role for performance when engagement is executed poorly
- “audience” vs. “co-creators”
 - Length of the project can facilitate this feeling (of investment/buy in/co-creation)
- How to market to non-theatre audience?
 - Go to where they already are
 - Don’t call it a “theatre” show
- “experience” of theatre
 - Physical experience (uncomfortable seats, feeling stuck) vs. immersive theatre which can involve running around outside, breaking into a car (as part of the story), etc
 - Ideal is creating a feeling that your presence (as an audience member) will change something
- The Mission Business: “we take the fiction of reality, turn it into fiction, and make that reality”
- San Francisco Planetary Dance in Union Square (another interesting example of immersive event but totally different because no storyline) – happens globally, concentric circles of running, dance, and drums. People stat their intention for movement and then participate.
- What’s the role of technology and social media in theatre? In developing “immersion”? in reaching new, younger audiences who are “connected”?
- Audience members get as involved as they choose to invest
- Contingency plans for audience members who don’t want to engage?
 - Building trust
 - Safety in numbers
- Is there a place for discomfort?
 - Build in check-ins, different possible routes depending on responses
 - Responsibility as an artist to challenge people
 - § Do we hold back as artists for our audience?
 - § Important to have a way out
 - Or space to redefine the role to make you feel comfortable
- Assumed rights of audience in a theatre, feeling of entitlement
 - This changes in an interactive environment
 - In an interactive theatre they become involved, changes the relationship/experience

#How to make a festival an international platform

'Sell ourselves' overseas, might be easier than selling ourselves to ourselves

International European theatre movement - huge presence in Australia.

How can artists 'make it' without having to leave.

Canadians are already globally awesome. (first we need to recognise it!)

GEOGRAPHY

Summerworks - grow it? (international, development)

- or start something new?

- programming already overwhelming

-tapping out community already?

CIRCUIT

Theatre festivals

Summerworks + perspective of toronto performance makers

Boutique Fest/ Festival Conference

-pitch fest

-magnetic north industry series

-many festivals under 1 umbrella (TIFF, Under the Radar)

CANDANCE - commissioning network

CULTURE CONGRESS (EU) - EU culture program

FTA in toronto

Exchange New Dance alliance

-performance mix

-stuido 303

CANSTAGE-International Spotlight

Super underattended

-lost in translation
-failure of marketing
-can we trust Canstage?
Schizo

#Ethics and What We Do.

Convener: Jenny Jimenez

Mez A

Session 3 : 3:05

Ethics- Broad in issue.
In reaction to performers- Value?
Ownership of intellectual property

When should ethics come into play? - Always.
When does it not?

Audience Responsibility
What does it mean for the audience experience. Ethics of consent.

Difference between ethics and morality.
Personal vs Universal.

Could there be a code of artistic practice?
Ethical norms of social arena, Dynamic of norms and legislation.

Discussing three areas-
Creation of art
Performer and audience
Audience and community

Art as justification.
The idea that ethics prohibit good art.
Censorship is a cousin of ethics.
Self awareness- interpretation- ownership

How do we want to be interpreted?
What is the question and why are we putting it out there?

Ethics of working dynamics and how that effects what we make?

Situated ethics- dynamic between positions- Mika Hanula

Art as opportunity to embody the world that we hope for.

willfully to go through pain for the art as opposed to doing it without consent.

What do we do as artists to condone behaviour by choosing to work with people again? (When they work in ways we do not agree with)(but they have a certain stature or its work. or...)
Agency and choice and taking the risk.

Dancers not being paid what they are worth.

Questioning collapse of economic and artistic value?

the language that the government uses-
"Subsidies" for mining and forestry etc.
"Grants" for the arts.

#Beyond "Emerging Artist"

Justin

Mez A

2:20

Beyond the support and opportunities when you were "emerging" - Support for mid career artists.

How can we support each other? - When we can't access supports out there?

Some companies are realizing there is no age limit to emerging- using years of work versus age.

Should we campaign for a formal structure to inform and connect mid career artists. ex. Young Vic Directors Program in London, UK.

or Pursue a co-op of groups of artists in similar stage coming together to share space and present together.

Could speak up and pitch for the programs, approach a company and ask for space.

Mid Career Issues:

independent artists producing independent work as a way to get in.

How to get the conversation with funders and established institutions that there is value in supporting mid career artists.

Playwright workshop death- Pieces workshopped to death , but not getting produced.

Mid career collective.- we are in a position to be likely to get grants.

When does emerging stop?

We are learning other things and this learning of other things lasts longer.

People use the title of emerging when trying new things. - used as a safety net.

New situation at the moment - More established artists are not leaving the plush careers. Have to redefine what getting "there" is. A lot of these "theres" were created by people who were in our situation. But the same situation does not exist.

"Just do it yourself" - but with what money and time?

Fringe is an option.

How to stay inspired as an artist?

Why are we still here? We must love it.

"Underwriting" your work with other work.

Pick the write thing to do this. Don't recommend starting your own company. Difficult to keep all the balls going. Find an underwriting project to maintain and avoid the burnout.

Definition of mid-career - "You're still doing it."

Should the starving artist die?

If still struggling for survival then can't be creative.

Is theatre becoming something only for mid and upper class?

Alternative spaces are facilitating accessibility for artists and publics.