

**ARTS
Action
Research**

The Emerging Narratives in the Arts
A Special Report From ARTS Action Research

Written and Compiled by
Anne Dunning and Nello McDaniel

Edited by
Catherine Holecko

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Introduction

From its inception ARTS Action Research (AAR) has been committed to advancing an arts culture that is led and directed by arts professionals and supportive and respectful of their work and expertise. Twenty years ago, at an earlier time of recession and retrenchment in this country, AAR began asking questions about the vulnerability and viability of the traditional, not-for-profit, legal and operating structure that had been the prescribed model for arts organizations for a number of years. At that time AAR issued its first Special Report, *The Quiet Crisis in the Arts*, which examined a number of these questions, questioned long-held assumptions about the prescribed model, and urged a greater dialogue about the need for change. We were among a very small minority posing such questions at that time. Interestingly it has only been in the past few years, and especially during this current economic crisis, that a great deal more questioning and discussion – on blogs, at conferences and at funding and policy tables – about the need for structural change in the traditional arts producing and presenting system has occurred.

The fact is, arts professionals in growing numbers have steadily become aware of the dysfunctions of the accepted model and, at least in sites we have observed through AAR's consortia and initiatives, have enacted changes informed and led by the arts professionals themselves. We have been simultaneously heartened by the resourcefulness and responsibility that these arts professionals are taking on their own behalf, and discouraged by how little the prevailing dialogue in the larger arts community acknowledges their actions. There are still so many community and service sector leaders, bloggers, economists, funders and board members who seem to relish the endless dialogue only to offer up simplistic analysis ("there's too much art, too many arts organizations"), responses (wholesale mergers, "innovation training" for arts professionals) and calls for a new model.

Well, the simple (rather than simplistic) fact is, that the arts must lead their own change. It is the will and the responsibility of arts professionals to ensure that their art-making survives, thrives and endures. While others have been obsessing over the problems, many in the field have been writing new narratives grounded in the realities and priorities of the arts professionals themselves and fully cognizant of the enormous challenges facing the arts today. They are keenly aware of the radically changed and changing cultural, political, technological, and resource landscape that accompanies these challenges; and they see new opportunities embedded and emerging as fast as the landscape is changing. These new narratives are by and about a generation of arts professionals more intrigued by the opportunities than intimidated by the challenges; agile and adept in using new technologies and forging new relationships; working horizontally and laterally rather than vertically and

hierarchically; and seeking like-minded partners while rejecting conventions of the past. Importantly, this is a generation of arts professionals characterized by attitude not age.

For twenty years AAR has facilitated and empowered arts professionals in developing their own narratives based on the vision, creativity, invention, craftsmanship, resourcefulness and deep dedication inherent in each artist's and arts entity's own artistic processes. AAR's work seeks particularly to illuminate and better understand change: on an individual *learning* level; on a community *lateral learning* level; and as a function of broad-based transformation extending from within the field itself.

The last couple of years have presented us with an opportunity to more deeply examine and work with a number of arts organizations' processes for leading the change they need. From our work sites across North America including, Philadelphia, North Carolina, Toronto, Portland, Atlanta and particularly through a special project in New York City in partnership with A.R.T./New York, the Theatres Leading Change Initiative, we've observed, documented and incorporated new information and working processes acquired from change-leading arts professionals. This Special Report, *The Emerging Narratives in the Arts*, offers our insights and evolving understanding about how arts professionals are quietly but decidedly leading change.

The first part of the Report, "Emerging Narratives and Behaviors" describes a range of practical ideas and imperatives that we believe characterize some of the new producing and operating formats. A number of brief case examples are provided that illustrate these formats. The second part, "Elements and Dynamics of Change", offers insights into key elements that we consistently observe among arts professionals and organizations at the forefront of leading the changes in producing and operating narratives and formats.

This Special Report like our first one and each one since is grounded in our need to understand and to share that understanding with the field at large. Each Special Report underscores for us the creativity, resourcefulness and profound commitment and generosity of the arts professionals with whom we have the privilege of working. And it confirms for us once again that it is the arts professionals and the field itself that will find the way forward, working from the inside out and assuming responsibility as artists have done for millennia.

I. Emerging Narratives and Behaviors

It is perhaps because we have not learned to recognize and respect existing order in unfamiliar forms that we are frightened of change, unwilling to support and work with the forms that people find for themselves.

--Mary Catherine Bateson, *Peripheral Vision*

What artists most want to do is make their work and connect that work to an audience. No matter how different and diverse they are, artists all share this unifying characteristic, this nearly obsessive impulse and instinct. Artists will find the means and resources to make work, no matter how much their efforts are stifled, deflected, rejected, hindered, questioned, delayed, degraded, disrespected, restricted, redirected, or regulated. This impulse is at once their greatest asset and liability.

Even when arts professionals lack resources, they find ways to cobble together the necessities. When they can find no one else to help, they find each other. While many in the field continue to try to make traditional models and approaches work for them, there are those finding their own approaches, with their own voices, and synthesizing new and more appropriate producing and operating responses. When encouraged and supported, aided and abetted, arts professionals' innate entrepreneurial natures come to the fore. For AAR, aiding and abetting sometimes means providing arts professionals with some new tools; sometimes it means helping them better understand what they already know; and sometimes it means encouraging them to accept and embrace their own creativity, resourcefulness and ingenuity.

Naming and Embracing the New

It is the nature of arts professionals to learn, problem-solve, discover and invent what they need to make and connect their work. Why, then, is there not more dialogue about these inventions, innovations and approaches in the conversations about the arts sector in this country? Understandably, arts professionals have become conditioned over several decades to present what they do in certain terms, acceptable to, if not expected by community and funding leadership. Consequently, many new, highly inventive, even innovative ideas disappear into the miasma of accepted and *correct* structure and language. Quite often the credit for exceptional problem solving is transferred to an abstract organization structure, a charismatic board member, the generosity of a supportive funder, or simply "luck"; and this results in a lack of appreciation for the pivotal role of the arts professionals. Since many outside the arts continue to confuse lack of money with the inability to manage money, even

the most extraordinary efforts won't be acknowledged, if arts leaders themselves don't step up and take credit.

Fully aware of this pattern, we challenge the arts professionals with whom we work to name their producing and operating inventions and innovations, to develop new and appropriate language for how they are working ("you can't create new approaches using old language"). We ask them to own and acknowledge the inventions and innovations that they create, not just in artistic work but also in organizational approaches. We ask them to understand and explain why they choose the forms and structures that they do; and why and how they are responsible, accountable and disciplined in all requisite legal and operating functions. What follows are some of the ways in which these arts professionals are refocusing and reorganizing their work in ways that are effective for them.

Artist and Entrepreneur

Many of today's worldwide economic, technological and applied research engines revolve around unleashing and supporting the vision, inspiration, creativity and resourcefulness of the *entrepreneur*. By definition, an entrepreneur is someone who organizes, operates and assumes the risk and reward (however reward is defined) for ideas, products, services or ventures produced. Sadly, in the last several decades, the corporate culture hijacked the term such that it has become more associated with unbridled profiteering.

Even as the corporate culture invokes *entrepreneurial* as a way to justify virtually anything they choose to do, some other sectors have taken up and embraced the true spirit of entrepreneurship, while not necessarily owning the term. Social entrepreneurs, media entrepreneurs and arts entrepreneurs are all addressing challenges and creating value in ways very much aligned with the responsive and responsible practices of true entrepreneurship. Arts organizations are entrepreneurial by their nature, and the artist (or artists) is the entrepreneur of each venture. The vision, inspiration, creativity and resourcefulness that advance the arts always come from the artists. Yet the same respect, even reverence, showered upon business, technology, and social entrepreneurs – always capitalized, never subsidized – is somehow not extended to arts leadership.

Artists and arts professionals are at their most entrepreneurial – inventive and innovative – when aligning their work, organizations and producing abilities with shared interests, arts-based and not. This does not simply mean finding new ways to support old processes. Rather, it means finding virtually *any* way to support what the work requires; and what is required and what is possible has expanded considerably.

Case Examples

The Civilians Theatre Company, New York City

Steve Cosson, Artistic Director &
Marion Friedman Young,
Managing Director

Effectual Reasoning and a Center for Investigative Theatre

Over the last several years, The Civilians has been in the process of evolving from an ensemble-based creative/producing company into a center for the creation, development and dissemination of work they refer to as investigative theatre; for engaging in an ongoing dialog on contemporary issues through theater; and for training a new generation of investigative theatre artists.

Several years ago, the leaders of The Civilians made a decision to focus their resources on research, development and creation of work rather than on building the infrastructure for presenting work. They believed that, if they focused on the part of the process at which they excelled, they could build a network of relationships with theatre and media producers and presenters to connect the creative output generated with audiences and extend their reach. In the past few years, The Civilians has greatly expanded the number of projects in which the organization is involved and have had the work produced in numerous contexts across the country. The Civilians' particular brand of investigative theatre, creative interpretations and willingness to deeply engage issues not just on a headlines level, but a more complex personal impact level has generated a unique kind of momentum (for example, The Civilians was awarded a 2010 National Science Foundation grant for "The Great Immensity," an investigative theatre initiative focused on global warming). At the same time, the organization continues to face challenges in sustaining outlets for the work and mechanisms to connect the work with audiences and supporters.

While the leadership continues to struggle with a sustainable producing approach, the idea of The Civilians' 'Center for Investigative Theatre' has evolved as a way of continually identifying issues, building relationships and finding ways to deeply connect mutual values and interests with the possibility – but not the pre-determined goal – of developing new work and resources. In a way, what The Civilians is creating is an entrepreneurial workshop, in keeping with the understanding of entrepreneurship developed by researcher Saras Sarasvathy and articulated by Leigh Buchanan in her INC. Magazine article in this way:

"Sarasvathy concluded that master entrepreneurs rely on what she calls effectual reasoning. Brilliant improvisers, the entrepreneurs don't start out with concrete goals. Instead, they constantly assess how to use their personal strengths and whatever resources they have at hand to develop goals on the fly, while creatively reacting to contingencies."

Like Saravathy's master entrepreneur, The Civilians focuses less on planning for specific 'goals' or generating specific outcomes and more on how to use their artists' personal strengths (their approach to and experience in investigative theatre) to create new ways of approaching contemporary issues through theatre and to generate timely, responsive and relevant work. By creating an environment in which this is possible, The Civilians is able to create theatre that is both a real-time response to very timely contemporary issues (e.g. the Occupy Wall Street movement.) and a long-term investment in research and response to evolving social, economic, political, scientific and cultural circumstances. In so doing, The Civilians often keeps company more with visual artists than with theatre peers who are planning seasons of work months or years in advance.

The Center is one of the ways that The Civilians hopes to create possibilities for the future through investing resources in training, research and public dialog/engagement in the current time that has potential of "paying it forward"; in effect, capitalizing new projects and investing in supporting new work not yet known or conceived.

The North Carolina Stage Company, Asheville, NC
Charlie Flynn-Mclver, Artistic Director & Angie Flynn-Mclver, Producing Director

Go With Angels! When Risk is the Reward

Submitted by Amanda Leslie, Managing Director

NC Stage believes that theatre can be life changing. Plays show us the unfamiliar and make it relevant, and they show us the familiar and make it new. Theatre can help us grapple with the big questions—religion, politics, and existence. NC Stage does not pretend to offer answers; instead, we assert that plays can be a catalyst to discussion and exploration.

North Carolina Stage Company is the only Equity theatre in Asheville, North Carolina, and since its founding in 2002 has performed in a 99-seat converted downtown basement theater. NC Stage produces the kinds of plays that people don't even realize they want to see. They come to NC Stage because they trust us to choose work that will startle, move and amaze them, and present the play in such a way that its essence comes through. We focus on classic works like Hamlet, and what we consider "contemporary classics" like Hedwig and the Angry Inch -- that offer jumping off points for those big questions of existence. We present the playwright's vision in the most truthful way possible. We offer our audience the opportunity to tap into a universal sense of humanity that they can share with 98 other people in a small, dark space.

For much of its first decade NC Stage's ambitions were like those of many theatres – grow the budget, produce more plays, get a bigger theatre space, and expand the staff. But then, as the theater's 10-year anniversary approached there was a new awareness. Our Producing Director Angie Flynn-Mclver says "Our most important goal is to express our artistic vision in an honest way, while stretching ourselves. When we look at our 2010 production of *Angels in America/Millennium Approaches*, we can say, 'Ah-ha, that was when we stepped up to a new level; when NC Stage was on everyone's lips'. *Angels* changed us; it changed our audiences. And NC Stage's ambitions have to change from *grow more, do more, get bigger*, to work that fulfills our vision and challenges our staff, actors, producing team, board and audiences in a more meaningful way. The prospect of producing *Angels In American* at the outset – the size, scale and content of the play – was a little scary. Therefore we have committed ourselves to projects in the future that are artistically ambitious enough to be a little scary."

Doing this requires rethinking a whole range of NC Stage's ambitions. Our Artistic Director Charlie Flynn-Mclver states, "As we now consider growth, we need to make deliberate choices about how we structure the organization, and not just assume that the standard regional theatre model works for us. For example, in the past, we've had a goal of moving to a new venue – we've changed our mind. Our audiences talk about the intimacy of our space, and how that positively affects their experience of seeing a play. Our small space allows us to take the *right* risks. And if a given play and audience demands a larger or different space, then that demand will take us there. Our plan now is to embrace our space as the asset that it is."

We have also changed the way we think about our company and team. For example, while we need more human resources, creating a hierarchy is not the right choice for us. In fact, we need to do quite the opposite. We are making formal that which has been an informal company model. For instance, the level of acting in our plays is astoundingly high, because we've cast great actors who are not just hired hands – they are deeply invested. It follows that we find and inspire others and the answer is not simply to pay more money; it is in getting them more invested. We have created an informal family of arts colleagues, with a wide range of skills, talents and energies, to organize around tasks and needs. Just as the artistic process is focused on creating the play by opening night, our task forces come together to collaborate on a specific project, whether it's planning a fundraiser or creating next season's operating budget. Even our Board of Directors is inspired by this approach, bringing insight and perspective to the process by working in task forces rather than trying to sustain standing committees. Our artistic process is in our DNA as an organization – from the casting of the right person for the right role, to using a production calendar to work backward from 'opening night', to how we make decisions in a collaborative way. We are creating something that is more than the sum of its parts, and you cannot do that without a deep commitment to artistic risk and investment from all.

Economies of Combination

Collaboration is central to the creative life and operation of all arts organizations. Virtually everything involved in an arts organization's producing and presenting apparatus engages a high degree of collaboration. Over the last couple of decades as resources have become limited and grant dollars more curated and narrowly accessible, the natural tendency for collaboration has extended more and more among artists and across individual organizational platforms. When made more consistent and formal among a group of artists or organizations such collaboration constitutes new *economies of combination*.

Combination adds value as appropriate resources are combined toward a shared purpose; which may be a combined artistic enterprise (an integrated combination format), or combined resources aimed at serving individual artistic aims (a non-integrated combination format). Importantly, economies of combination are not to be confused with the merger of two (or more) organizations into one. In combination no artist, artistic vision or mission is altered, eliminated, subsumed or taken over.

Remarkably there are still many within the arts support system and our communities at large convinced that artists are too competitive with each other to share anything. But anyone observing arts professionals outside of the grants making arena or the performance marketplace knows that interaction, collaboration and sharing among arts professionals is pervasive and dynamic. Interestingly, the calls for 'merger', usually put forward during periods of economic stress, rarely come from within the arts culture but from the arts support culture.

Case Example

13P (13 Playwrights, Inc.) New York City
Maria Goyanes, Producing Director & The Playwrights: Sheila Callaghan, Erin Courtney, Madeleine George, Rob Handel, Ann Marie Healy, Julia Jarcho, Young Jean Lee, Winter Miller, Sarah Ruhl, Kate E. Ryan, Lucy Thurber, Anne Washburn, Gary Winter

D.I.Y. With Terminal Intent

13P was formed in 2003 by 13 mid-career playwrights concerned about what the trend of endless readings and new play development programs was doing to the texture and ambition of new American plays. They decided to take matters into their own hands and created 13P to realize full productions of new plays. The resources of the company are placed at the disposal of the playwright at work, who serves as the company's artistic director during the production of her or his play.

In this producing format the significant advantage to the 13P playwrights is that each can do more in combination with the other playwrights than any one could in isolation. Working alone, in traditional fashion, each would have to build and achieve an "economy of scale" theatre model sufficient to develop and produce the work. Through 13P, the *economy of combination* achieves that scale for the 13 individual playwrights. The group gathers resources around each play in predetermined sequence.

Each playwright helps by bringing his or her own resource pool to the effort. Working together, 13P gains both attention and increasing conceptual and financial support.

To achieve and operate 13P's combination format, the organization adopted a core producing structure, led by executive producer Maria Goyanes, informed by the artists' knowledge about producing a play. According to Ms Goyanes, "As a theatre company, we are production oriented and primarily share knowledge and experience about plays. There was so much else involving running a theatre company that we didn't know how to do. Meetings with AAR helped us clarify our core values and approaches to producing plays so that we could clearly transfer this knowledge and experience to all things company related. So we focused more on what we knew how to do and applied that to everything – and that transformed the company and helped us focus on our strengths and build our confidence."

Continuity is key to the 13P producing model. Ms Goyanes maintains an overview of ongoing needs, relative organizational balance and the longer view, projecting and anticipating each playwright's needs. Those elements integral to continuity (e.g., financial oversight and fundraising systems) yet essential during production are cast by contract with associates able to respond to relative organizational needs. As needed, especially in run-up to productions and performances, all playwrights and associates engage as time and expertise require.

There are two particularly notable aspects to 13P. First, this is a non-integrated combination format. That is, the artists combine efforts *and* resources and collaborate on producing the project *not* creating it. 13P is designed expressly to be non-integrated and malleable to conform to each playwright's play, process and needs. Second, 13P is a terminal project, openly committed to producing 13 plays and then ceasing to exist. According to Ms Goyanes, "13P has long operated as an anomaly, since it is a project with a finite life span." The resource case 13P makes is for the concept of supporting the playwrights and the work of the playwrights, not an abstract guarantee of an institution operating in perpetuity to justify funding support. Unapologetically and unabashedly, 13P is declaring that the playwrights and their work is more important and worthy of support than the institution. While 13P will cease to exist, its impact will linger. The plays will continue to be produced by other theatres and the playwrights have used the 13P very effectively as a springboard to further careers.

Horizontal and Open vs Hierarchical and Closed

It is commonly acknowledged within the field that the arts are driven, indeed capitalized, first and most by human resources. The arts sector could not produce anywhere near its current capacity without the commitment (paid, underpaid, unpaid, self-financed) of the people who create, resource, produce, present, facilitate and advocate the work. This network of human resources works because of the relationships, partnerships, collaborations, connections and intersections that are constantly built, organized, re-ordered, sustained, dissolved, realigned and rebuilt. The old notion that each artist or group of artists must build their own institution that would attract all the resources needed while keeping competing interests out (what AAR refers to as the "castle/island mindset" in which each artist/entity has their own castle on their own island) is not only philosophically and culturally at odds with the way arts professionals choose to work today, but it represents an unsustainable economic model.

The complex networks of human resources that sustain and support many arts organizations and a whole range of artists' interests are, by design, constantly evolving and

emerging to meet changing challenges and opportunities. Arts organizations working in these formats demonstrate the importance of continually and deliberately realigning and re-imagining relationships. They are creating structures that are flexible and work with available resources and investments in communication tools that facilitate effective and meaningful relationships.

Case Examples

The Atlanta Shakespeare Company, at the New American Shakespeare Tavern, Atlanta, GA
Jeffrey Watkins, Artistic Director

The Adaptive Ensemble Management Team

Submitted by Jeffrey Watkins

The Atlanta Shakespeare Company was born in 1984, when we performed Shakespeare's *As You Like It* at Manuel's Tavern in Atlanta. As in Shakespeare's time, all the lights were left on (for both aesthetic and practical reasons – Manuel's Tavern is a restaurant, not a traditional theater) which meant the actors could see the audience and the audience *knew* we could see them. Thus, the actors instinctively included the

audience in the action, making them not witnesses to the action onstage but a critical *part* of it... and the audience went nuts, stopping the show *23 times* for enthusiastic applause. The production attracted national attention, with articles in *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*, and coverage on CBS and CNN news programs. This was the defining experience for what would ultimately become the Atlanta Shakespeare Company (ASC) and our specially built, Globe-inspired Elizabethan playhouse, the New American Shakespeare Tavern.

In August of 1995 ASC was honored to be the first American company to perform on the stage of the newly-rebuilt Globe Theatre in London, England. From there we completed a \$2.1 million capital campaign to purchase, renovate and expand the Southeast's only Original Practice Playhouse® the Shakespeare Tavern. From 1999 to 2003 we mounted four thematically-linked Shakespeare history plays, (*Richard II*, *Henry IV part 1*, *Henry IV part 2*, and *Henry V*), an American first. We presented them in chronological order, with the same actors performing their characters throughout all four plays.

It was the Elizabethan business model that taught us to be incredibly productive in what we do. From documentary evidence, we know that companies like Shakespeare's routinely presented six different titles a week, adding new plays every two or three weeks, repeating themselves only once or twice every three weeks...and this happened *all year long*. There is evidence that a single company of actors would perform twenty-one different plays in less than two months. Inspired by these companies, we have entered into a contract with our audience that generates a production schedule far in excess of the annual activity of most similarly sized American theaters, and this has given us relative financial stability.

With a budget of just under \$1.5 million, the Atlanta Shakespeare Company works out of a 220 seats house and presents more than 250 performances in a single year. Recent Seasons have included as many as 16 plays in a single year, amongst those the Shakespeare "favorites" and theatrical milestones such as Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. We have learned to exploit the enormous efficiencies of time and money inherent in a "core aesthetic" based on the Elizabethan business model that involves an experienced, year-round resident ensemble of actor/directors.

In addition to being actors, many of the full-time company members are also paid to also take an active role in the management and production processes that make the work possible. ASC's core commitment to Shakespeare's work and the non-stop nature of its production process makes it necessary that fourteen to eighteen actors be available for any given production. So how can just 21 people present 260+ performances of a dozen fully realized period classics each year, implement an astounding array of education programs and manage a facility . . . all while doing the necessary

marketing and development work required by any mid-sized nonprofit arts organization? We call it *Adaptive Ensemble Management*.

Adaptive Ensemble Management is what the name implies: a group of people— having an intrinsic respect for one another's abilities and commitment— managing a variety of processes in subsets of two to eight people. And while many of the processes (production, marketing, IT, etc.) have one or perhaps two individuals who are most responsible for the success or failure of that process, it is also true that all of these people have access to the help and expertise of the remaining company members. One advantage of this management approach is that ASC's management structure is horizontal, meaning that any employee has easy and direct access to other members of the company. This facilitates and encourages communication. And when something specific arises the appropriate group of individuals will coalesce around the issue or event and see it through to completion and then return to business as usual.

Given the never-ending nature of ASC's production process, the limited number of full-time participants, and the stability of the ensemble over time, it becomes clear that the success of the whole organization is truly dependent on the commitment, competence, and integrity of every member of the company. Further, the mutual respect of individuals who have worked together over time becomes the glue that holds the center of the company together.

New Georges Theater
Company, New York City
Susan Bernfield, Artistic Director

Pipeline for Projects-in-Residence

Since its founding in 1992, New Georges has gained a reputation for innovative productions of ambitious new plays, and as a productive home for the country's most promising and accomplished women theater artists. New Georges is interested in the creativity and vision with which artists *theatricalize* the world, and in expanding the boundaries of contemporary theater in ways that challenge both artists and audiences.

New Georges has developed *Pipeline for Projects-in-Residence* to fill a need within the community and within its own mission to supporting new work. According to Susan Bernfield, "For plays we're shepherding toward full production, we invest in long-term production development. In recent years more artists have been approaching us with ideas for experimental processes and ensemble or collaboration-based work. Our fierce interest in these projects revealed a gap in our service to artists: our existing programs don't provide the kind of long-term, multi-process support they required. We saw this as a way to support the many independent artists who have valid aesthetics and the potential to create extremely compelling work, but don't necessarily want to start their own companies to fulfill their artistic vision.

"So we wondered... how could we best support the work that most needs on-its-feet development: projects with a strong collaboration at the center, from first draft or even from the idea stage? In the Pipeline, we've implemented a model that supports individual projects from the ground up, then continues that support through several phases of development and perhaps even through to production. The Pipeline provides a constructive framework for artists who want to produce their own work but don't want to start their own companies."

Through The Pipeline New Georges, a small company with relatively minimal resources provides the infrastructure and tools to empower artists to be pro-active in producing their work themselves. "We see no lack of desire on the part of artists who want to begin collaborative projects", says Susan Bernfield. "Brave ideas are sometimes abandoned before they begin. To make cool collaborative projects un-abandonable, what many artists need is encouragement and incentive. This may take the form of deadlines or space or seed money or simply the knowledge that someone is watching your project emerge – anything that provides firm outside encouragement to schedule time and follow through on ideas. Incentive is a key foundational notion of The Pipeline.

“ A Pipeline-supported production might look like this: we provide advice, expertise and mentorship as needed throughout the process; we grant each project seed money artists can leverage to raise production funds; we establish crediting to use in publicity materials (such as “a New Georges supported production”), adding value and validation to the project. Our name association and production support will bring more attention to the work of independent artists, and will make producing seem less onerous and lonely, more possible and doable.”

Interactive and Agile

A growing number of arts entities – particularly ensemble-based ones – are intensely focused on project development. In some cases the entity is consumed with one project at a time, and some cases they are focused on multiple projects in various stages of development and production. In order to accomplish this many adopt an integrated project core structure, which is an operating architecture that directs maximum resources – human, financial, time, space, technical and audience relationships – toward developing and producing the project. By design, the integrated project core is interactive and agile and expands to produce each project (play, event or series) according to what the project requires. Equally important is the capacity for the integrated project core to contract between projects when fewer resources are needed. In this way, the integrated project core keeps a low-maintenance operating profile with a high-yield producing capacity, maximizing resources for each project. In maximum producing mode, some of these entities may appear similar in size and scale to large institutions; yet at minimum core between projects they may seem to be little more than an informal group of artists.

Case Examples

**Elevator Repair Service (ERS),
New York City**
John Collins, Artistic Director

Flexibly Integrated Sustainable Human Resource (FISHR)

Elevator Repair Service creates ensemble-based theatre with a strong emphasis on invention, integration of sound, movement and text, and shifts in the audience perspective and experience.

Founded in 1991, ERS initially invested in developing an infrastructure similar to companies like The Wooster Group, maintaining a rehearsal space and building staffing in an attempt to sustain the work and attract resources. However, over time it became increasingly clear that not only was this approach not bringing the resources needed, it was also depleting and diffusing ERS’s people and undermining support for the artistic process. They let go of their rehearsal space, minimized staffing and refocused on the ensemble and the work. The realignment around the artistic core allowed the creative output to become the center of the organization and, as their productions succeeded, they were able to start to build an appropriate structure around it – driven by the artists in the ensemble themselves.

Since creating *Gatz*, their blockbuster 2006 production, ERS has been touring extensively across Europe and North America with *Gatz* and with subsequent productions including *The Select: The Sun Also Rises*. Artistic success and the demands of extensive touring, however, started to overwhelm their organic infrastructure. Observing other theatre companies, they understood that being pushed

into growing infrastructure by their success would again put them into an unsustainable position. They wanted to find a way to manage their artistic growth without creating an overwhelming organization to maintain.

According to John Collins, “As an artist-run organization for almost two decades, we were feeling more limitations on our human resource structure than strength and growing capacity. We recognized a need for change. We wanted to continue to value and sustain the elements of our administrative structure that worked; but we also felt that a flexible, ensemble-run administrative structure had been a major contributor to our past success. Instead of building the work around an infrastructure we needed to build infrastructure around the work, emphasizing the strength of our human resources as much as possible.”

The Flexibly Integrated Sustainable Human Resource (FISHR) approach is designed to be a self-organizing, adaptable staffing approach that allows ERS to increase and decrease human resources as needed and move collaborators within the organizational structure to address key artistic and operating needs while accommodating the changing personal needs of members of their team. Importantly the FISHR approach allows ERS to acquire a greater level of contributed support for R&D and operations (there is little distinction between general and project funds), while building a reserve of unrestricted earned income to balance inevitable revenue fluctuations over time.

Through the FISHR approach, ERS is experimenting with ways to self-organize to serve growing needs without compromising key values or creating organizational rigidity. Rather than looking to larger institutions for models, the work of ERS was and is very much about learning how to learn from themselves—how to adapt and advance the work through their own approaches.

The Cucalorus Film Festival,
Wilmington, North Carolina
Dan Brawley, Executive Director
***Bluesky Barter: An Expanding
and Contracting Institution***

Submitted by Dan Brawley

The Cucalorus Film Festival was launched by the filmmaking collective Twinkle Doon in 1994 as a one-night showcase in a riverside restaurant in Wilmington, North Carolina. The festival grew out of the bustling Hollywood scene that had been thriving in the small port city since Dino DeLaurentiis moved his operations there in the 1980s. Founded and run by artists, Cucalorus

organizers decided to remain non-competitive and therefore not give awards, focusing instead on creating a relaxed atmosphere for learning, sharing and connecting. In 2006, TIME Magazine noted “at this event, unlike others, there are no prizes awarded; the ruggedly independent event celebrates the pure love of filmmaking.” For the past 18 years, Cucalorus has garnered international praise for its programming and its spirited retreat-style approach to film festival making. MovieMaker Magazine listed Cucalorus as one of the 25 Coolest Film Festivals in 2010; the Brooks Institute hailed Cucalorus as one of its “Top Ten Film Festivals in the United States.”

There are two contrasting components that animate the Cucalorus Bluesky Barter model – a *contracted core* and the *expanded ensemble*. The contracted core includes the director and a skeletal staff of 2 working throughout the year planning the festival, securing necessary financial resources (the festival relies heavily on business sponsorship) and maintaining key community and industry relationships. The contracted core represents continuity and, by design, is low maintenance but highly efficient. The festival thrives by recruiting an expanded ensemble of young and enthusiastic newcomers who organize and execute the annual festival with little or no pay. These “staffers” in turn acquire valuable training for their future work as curators, organizers, entrepreneurs, and activists. In the months leading up to the festival, Cucalorus leadership interviews and hires more than 100 volunteers. The result is an organization that looks and feels like a major institution for two months of the year. This expansion creates a very special opportunity for future creative professionals to test their on-the-job skills in a temporary setting. In exchange team members contribute hundreds of unpaid hours, eager to be part of a business where advancement and responsibility are easy to come

by. Former Cucalorus staffers have gone on to work at the Slamdance Film Festival, the Santa Barbara Film Festival, Sundance, SXSW, Tribeca Film Festival and the Edinburgh Film Festival.

The group of mostly emerging artists who attend the festival each year can relate to the bare-bones, volunteer led atmosphere at Cucalorus. This creates an immediate connection and understanding – one of mutual sympathy for trying to compete in a high-dollar industry without any dollars. Artists come to the festival to learn and to share knowledge with peers. In a sense, the festival is a place where artists come and learn ‘how to be filmmakers.’ This learning includes the development of new language and the exploration of new audience engagement techniques. The festival’s works-in-progress program puts filmmakers out in the community where they can gather input from atypical audiences to inform and direct editing decisions. During the 2011 festival, more than 290 artists were in attendance to share work with Cucalorus audiences.

For four days in November, Cucalorus takes on all the characteristics of a major film festival event with hundreds of artists and staff members coming together to experiment and share. The festival has gained a reputation for breaking out of the traditional festival approach through events like Dance-a-lorus, Visual Soundwalls, and a Blue Velvet locations tour. The festival’s signature is undoubtedly the team of comedians, musicians, spoken word poets, and other artists (one mime was on the team in 2011) who introduce films with a blend of styles and approaches that brings the role of the emcee solidly into the world of performance art – at times bizarre and sublime. Cucalorus leaders take a blue-sky approach to each festival – entrusting emerging artists and staffers with a great deal of responsibility and freedom. The result is a unique entity – a temporary institution of learning where new models and new ideas can be tested year after year, unaltered and undeterred by its success.

II. Elements and Dynamics of Change

The most important thing to keep in mind about the above examples, and others like them is that they are *examples* and not *models*. As interesting as these producing and operating approaches are, they are far less significant than the internal elements and dynamic processes that each entity employed to achieve them. The following two sections describe some of these elements and the processes of change that AAR has identified through this work.

From Learning to Innovation

Arts professionals understand change instinctively, yet this quality is not recognized or valued, even by the arts professionals themselves. For decades now, despite dire warnings (dwindling resources, too much art, too little support), the field keeps expanding. Artists keep making more and more work, and most of it changes and evolves, as it should. Like the proverbial bumblebee theoretically unable to fly, arts professionals keep creating more work and finding audiences despite evidence suggesting it shouldn't be possible. In obvious as well as subtle and even invisible ways artists change as needed to make their work and connect it to an audience.

Learning is integral to this change. By definition, learning is the process of *acquiring* knowledge, information and experience that *changes behavior*. Learning is not education. Learning is a natural, human quality and process; education is a human construct designed to direct and enhance learning (or enforce or stimulate learning depending on one's formal education experience). In AAR's experience arts professionals are among the most voracious and motivated learners in society.

We have long observed that the artists and arts organizations that are most healthy, balanced and productive in good economies and bad adopt behaviors that support their visions, missions and work. They continuously learn how to do what they need to do, often more efficiently and better than before. They don't wait for conditions to change in their favor, or to be suddenly favored by a conditional windfall grant. They change their own conditions through learning, creativity and invention.

Learning and "Lateral Learning"

The arts marketplace, like any marketplace, is by its nature competitive. But it's a myth that arts professionals are so competitive that they cannot collaborate or share ideas and information. The arts community is much larger than the arts marketplace. Anyone attuned to

the community (and not obsessed with the marketplace) knows that any new idea, discovery or invention is shared laterally and almost instantly throughout the community.

As learning is the process of an individual acquiring knowledge, information and experience that changes behavior, *lateral learning* is the process of *sharing* knowledge, information and experience that brings about community-wide change. The natural state of learning is horizontal and lateral, not hierarchical and top-down. In *The Third Industrial Revolution*, Jeremy Rifkin, who coined the term “lateral learning”, observes:

Lateral learning starts from a completely different assumption about the nature of learning. Knowledge is not regarded as objective, autonomous phenomena but rather, the explanations we make about the common experiences that we share with each other. To seek the truth is to understand how everything relates and we discover those relationships by our deep participation with others. The more diverse our experiences and interrelationships, the closer we come to understanding reality itself and how each of us fits into the bigger picture of existence . . . Lateral learning redirects the fulcrum of power and authority in the classroom from hierarchical, centralized, and top-down to reciprocal, democratic, and networked.

A significant body of AAR’s work for years has been conducted in consortium format designed specifically for the purpose of facilitating and intensifying lateral learning (a recent term for a concept also described as *group learning*, *community learning*, and *co-learning*). We have consistently been warned, in virtually every situation, that “this community is too competitive for consortium activity.” And consistently, in every project experience we learn again that all of us know more than any of us, and just how natural, effective and productive lateral learning is among arts professionals.

[Learning → Invention → Innovation](#)

While arts professionals change behaviors through learning, they change conditions by *invention*. For artists, invention is a natural extension of learning and the two are connected by creativity. By definition invention is the act of creating something, typically a process, device or idea. Every time an artist enters into an artistic process he/she is learning about various dimensions of the work, layers of meaning and nuance while discovering and addressing the problems of how to approach the work. So the artistic process involves creating a whole series of inventions to solve problems, make key decisions and draw new insights and meanings from collaborators and audiences.

The artistic process itself is the most effective method available to arts professionals, not only for making work but also for engaging with all aspects of their organizations. The artistic

process is the seminal element that both compels and allows arts professionals to defy any known economic model to achieve work inconceivable in virtually any other arena.

When members of an arts community learn laterally and share, apply and build upon changes and inventions, the result can be *innovation*. In *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge posits that true innovation derives from a confluence and integration of inventions. Senge notes that it was 30 years between the Wright brothers' first powered flight and the reality of commercial flight, which required a complex set of inventions (e.g. pressurized cabins, hydraulic systems, etc.) that provided the building blocks for the innovation of commercial flight and the airline industry as we know it today. Closer to the arts experience, choreographer Merce Cunningham became a celebrated innovator not through a single work but through a body of work developed over many years. Learning, lateral learning and invention can lead to innovation, which in turn can result in profound change.

The Artistic Process and Emergence

In his book *EMERGENCE From Chaos to Order*, John Holland describes *emergence* as “much coming from little; where the whole is much more complex than the behavior of the parts.” By this definition the artistic process is *emergent*. When we refer to the artistic process we mean the creative, curatorial or programming practice appropriate to each arts organization. The artistic process has been and remains a centerpiece of AAR’s work because it is a unique combination of vision, creativity, intuition, and collaboration balanced with craft, technique, accountability, discipline, and use of time and resources. The artistic process is, without qualification or quantification, the most effective planning, problem solving, decision-making, relationship-building process available to any arts organization. It may be the most effective process available to anyone.

Complex Adaptive Behavior leads to Emergence

Complex adaptive systems are characterized by at least three things: (1) they consist of numerous components, e.g. actors, directors, writers, administrators; (2) the components interact organically, intuitively and dynamically with one another; and (3) that interaction results in *emergence*. It is possible to understand the whole system only by understanding the dynamics between components, in addition to the nature of the individual parts.

Therefore, AAR asks the professional arts leadership of each organization with which we work to (1) fully understand the nature of their own artistic process, and, (2) allow their

artistic process to *inform* and *lead* every aspect of the organization. When an emergent approach such as the artistic process is applied to organizational planning, problem solving, decision-making, relationship building, producing approach and operating formats, then organizational behavior becomes emergent. Notably emergent behavior is more substantial and different than simply adapting to external influences.

Emergence vs. Adaptability

There is a prevailing assumption regarding adaptability in the marketplace that goes something like this: businesses operating *for-profit* are adaptable because they are in the marketplace and thus are sensitive to disturbances in the economy. In contrast, nonprofit businesses are less adaptable because they are distanced from the marketplace and protected, perhaps even unaware of disturbances.

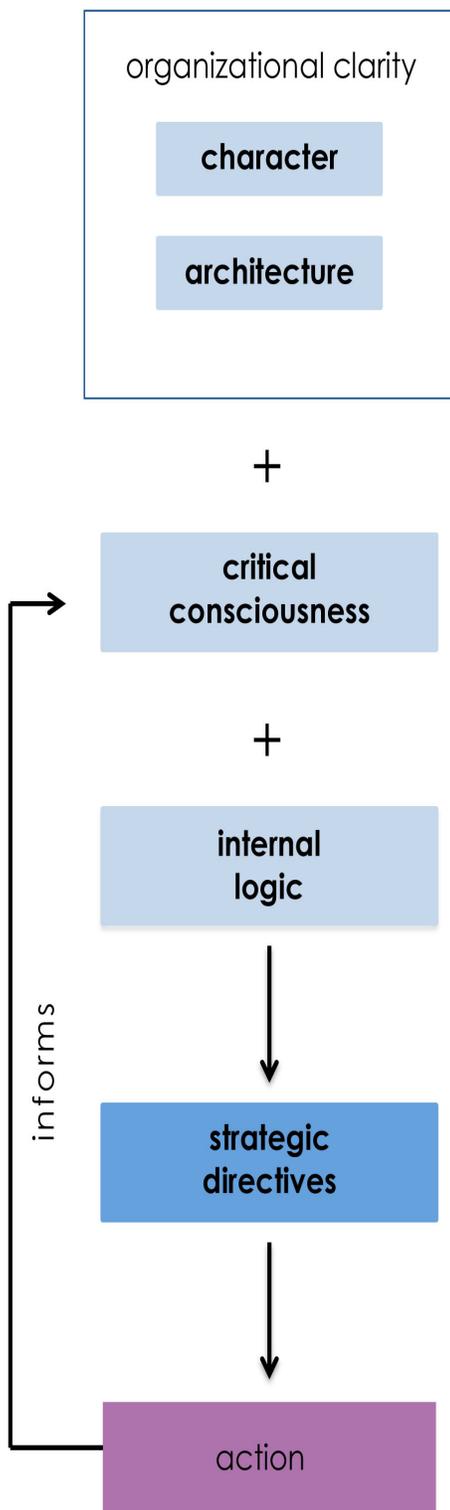
But, on closer examination what may be interpreted as *adaptable* behavior in for-profit businesses is actually more akin to accommodation or absorption of disturbances. That is, for-profit businesses reduce costs, mostly by reducing workforce and inventories. Those who can increase prices and those big enough to seek government assistance in the form of tax relief or direct financial relief pursue those remedies. When environment factors rebalance, most for-profit businesses resume doing business as they did before the disturbance.

These forms of adaptation by accommodation and assistance are largely unavailable to not-for-profit arts organizations. Indeed by this definition, they are not adaptable (a six member theatre ensemble eliminating three ensemble members does not reduce expenses, it destroys the ensemble). Yet this in no way suggests that arts organizations don't change – they do so in *emergent* rather than simply *adaptable* fashion.

The Emergent System

Emergence drives or causes change to unfold from the inside out. Much like the artistic process, we observe emergence in actions and structures that arise without (or in spite of) requirements or demands from the outside. This is a proactive response in which internal building blocks, the unique alignment of resources and relationships, self-defined imperatives, and simple rules defined by the arts entity itself result in complex patterns of response and action. This phenomenon stands in sharp contrast to adaptive behavior that, as noted above, simply absorbs or accommodates external demands or disturbances.

The Emergent System



There are a number of characteristics and components that AAR engages to prepare and motivate an arts organization to change in a proactive (emergent) rather than reactive (adaptive) way. These components include:

Character: Identity and Principles. Character is comprised of the internal 'givens' that define identity, values and the nature of the work -- forming the continuity and parameters of why the arts entity exists and how it works. *Character* is specific to each arts entity and consists of: (1) leadership, (2) vision, core values and mission, (3) programming, (4) quality of relationships (especially among staff and board), (5) clear and effective organizational processes for planning, decision-making, problem-solving and assessment.

Architecture: Operating, Programming and Working Format. The structural *architecture* is the functioning extension of the art entity's character. It is here in which the resource pool is determined and calibrated and it includes all resources: human, financial, partnership, collaborative and combination constructs, and the use of time and space. This unique economic model not only recognizes but is organized around the human capital invested by artists and arts professionals.

Critical Consciousness: Gaining Insight. It is said that hindsight is 20/20; it can be informative, ironic and sometimes painful. Unfortunately, when used in linear planning and problem solving, hindsight can rarely do more than project the immediate past onto the future. *Insight* is a more complex, multi-dimensional and textured view of oneself and one's current and evolving realities. Insight comes from connecting the dots – ideas, relationships, patterns, opportunities, and possibilities. Critical consciousness allows arts professionals to gain the insight needed to drive effective change from within. It is the result of three complementary and interacting components:

Whole systems thinking – instead of attempting to see and make sense of the whole by understanding and focusing on the discrete parts, whole systems thinking focuses on the relationships between parts that generate the dynamics of the whole. Each arts entity, regardless of character or architecture,

is a whole, integrated operating and programming unit. Unfortunately the nonprofit resource environment in which these groups exist is obsessed with discrete parts, focusing on project funding rather than operating support.

Replacing Absolute with Relative – a key component of critical consciousness is this capacity of professional arts leadership to define operating balance as a relative rather than absolute state, accessing the positive, proactive tension between stasis and action. When leaders cease to seek a static absolute and start defining a relative state of balance, it opens up possibilities to move the entity along new or different paths.

Proactive referencing – the consciousness and capability for change evolves when leadership stops referencing external demands (expectations, directives, convention, regulations) to internal variables and instead references internal needs and capacities to external variables. In this way, the drivers become the internal needs and capacities rather than the external demands and leaders are better able to guide the change they need within their own organizations.

Internal Logic: Gaining Foresight. Insight often arrives unannounced and unexpected, often in an endorphin-spiked “Aha moment.” Every artist and group of artists have their own ways of describing these moments of insights that occur in the development of a work; or the evolution of an ensemble collaborating on a body of work. It is in such moments that insight in the artistic process imperceptibly morphs into *foresight*, a complex understanding and vision of where the work or ensemble is going. Transferring and then translating such insight into the producing and operating aspects of an organization provides professional arts leaders with a complex organizational view of how present awareness can move toward and shape a future reality. Insight and strategy merge in foresight, an iterative ‘if/then’ sequence of logic that envisions, informs and directs new organizational actions.

Strategic Directives: Converting Strategies and Resources to Action. “Strategic Directives” describes the convergence of strategy and available human, financial, time, space and technical resources into action.. Strategic directives and action constantly bump up against a wide array of barriers, problems and challenges, all of which is fed back into the emergent system sequence illustrated above.

The View Ahead

It has been said that change occurs when the status quo can no longer reconcile the anomalies. As noted early in this Special Report, there has been growing awareness among certain arts professionals for a number of years that the not-for-profit arts model can no longer effectively address today's realities. While the world wide economic crisis has helped fuel this awareness, it was not this crisis that suddenly and unpredictably exposed the weakness of the model. There have been fundamental flaws in the model from the beginning and the new realities have inevitably caught up with a model unable to reconcile them. As this Special Report illustrates, the most positive side of the confrontation between old ideas and new realities is that it has released the energies of a whole cohort of arts professionals whose instincts, expectations and cultures allow them to learn, invent, learn together, innovate, change and emerge in ways not possible before.

All of our work with arts professionals and the process of developing this Special Report remind us again and again of how much the arts community is an ecosystem with many complex and interacting components. Like any ecosystem, the balance of the whole depends on the careful balance and support of its various elements and organisms. When any of these elements becomes seriously unbalanced and unattended to then organisms die and ecosystems are threatened with collapse. By analogy, individual organizational and resource systems in the arts community must conscientiously consider their relationship to the larger arts ecosystem and infrastructure.

To the arts support system and resource providers who may be reading this we say: Please be aware that resources allocated without respect and understanding for the arts eco-system will destabilize organizations and the arts community instead of supporting them. If the bulk of the resource base continues to support only certain segments of the field or certain types of projects, both individual organizations and the system as a whole are at risk. There is no template, no single best practice, no single model for a healthy and functional arts organization. Instead, there is an astounding array of approaches, forms, practices and systems that *work*. Trying to fit these many and varied solutions into predetermined programs and expectations is frustrating and counterproductive for all concerned. Therefore we strongly urge funding partners everywhere to trust the arts professionals and the forms they find for themselves, and in turn find ways to support and engage the amazing variety of approaches.

To arts professionals and your partners we say: Today more than ever you must assume authority and responsibility for the work, resources and organizations that you need, however you structure and define them. Today, no arts professional or organization can wait for the next new model to be developed and presented. To ever again believe that there is any kind of a ‘one size fits all’ model for arts organizations to embrace in this incredibly complex environment is delusional. No arts professional can wait to be given permission to change conditions, or for authority to be granted to them – it has to be seized.

The most positive thing that has been reaffirmed for us in our work in recent years is meeting arts professionals who are finding—and sharing—ways to lead the change they need. To quote beleaguered U.S. President Obama, “We are who we’ve been waiting for.”

About ARTS Action Research

ARTS Action Research believes that the challenges confronting today's arts organizations demand that arts professionals and their community partners respond more forcefully and proactively than ever before. These responses must be complex not reflex, strategic not prescriptive, systemic not situational, studied and deliberate not imitative and tentative, and most of all they must be from the inside out, not engineered from a distance. The future demands that our organizational responses be as creative, bold, entrepreneurial, clear, courageous and adaptable as the art we produce, exhibit and present. ARTS Action Research is committed to an arts community that is artist-centered — led and directed by arts professionals.

Nello McDaniel, Director, ARTS Action Research

The ARTS Action Research Team

Nello McDaniel
Director, Brooklyn, NY

Mary Giudici
Business Manager, Brooklyn, NY

Anne Dunning
Principal Associate, Boston, MA
& New York, NY

George Thorn
Principal Associate, Portland, OR

Jane Marsland
Associate, Toronto, ON, Canada

Kristin Patton
Associate, Chicago, IL

ARTS Action Research is an arts consulting group widely recognized for its groundbreaking work in redefining the role, relationships, and operation of arts organizations in today's challenging arts environment. The ARTS Action Research team has served hundreds of arts organizations of all sizes, disciplines and working formats nationally and internationally.

ARTS Action Research works with performing, visual, literary, presenting and service arts organizations in both single and cross discipline configurations. AAR's Team of Associates address a range of needs from the most basic developmental to complex restructuring and repositioning of veteran arts organizations. ARTS Action Research works with organizations individually and in consortium (involving a number of organizations in a community or geographic setting.) Regardless of working format, AAR works with organizations on individually tailored planning processes and strategies that extend directly from each organization's artistic process.

For information about ARTS Action Research projects, services and publications, please contact us at:

423 Atlantic Ave. #1E
Brooklyn, NY 11217
718-797-3661
www.artsaction.com

