Conclusion

The Next Great Transformation: Leveraging Policy and Research to Advance Cultural Vitality

Steven J. Tepper

Engaging art, the title of this book, is a double entendre that encapsulates the transformations documented in the preceding chapters. As an adjective, *engaging* describes our cultural policy for the last forty years—if we are able to produce and present art that is engaging (i.e., attractive, compelling, beautiful), such as world-class music, theatre, and dance, then good things will happen. Audiences will be uplifted, converted, and inspired, and the public interest will be served. But, if we read engaging as a verb (e.g., to interlock, to involve, or to cause) then the title suggests that citizens actively connect to art—discovering new meanings, appropriating it for their own purposes, creatively combining different styles and genres, offering their own critique, and, importantly, making and producing art themselves. One important theme from the book is that perhaps we need to start thinking more about citizen involvement and less about bringing great art to the people. This aim requires focusing on the second definition of *engaging*. However, I do not mean to imply that viewing or listening to high-quality, profession-

ally produced art—from Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* to Martha Graham's *Appalachian Spring*—does not demand high levels of intellectual and emotional engagement. But the reality is that for most Americans, especially younger ones, engagement with hallowed master works is simply not the way they experience art and culture. For them, art is connected to everyday life; it is not a treasure to be taken out on special occasions, admired and celebrated. Culture is like modeling clay—something to be kneaded and worked on, rolled across the fingers until it takes the shape and contour of one's own hand.

We began the book with two basic questions: (1) What is the state of cultural participation and engagement in the United States, and (2) How is participation changing? Although we cannot offer an exhaustive survey of the state of participation, we can assess a few basic trends and patterns. With regard to the second question, the book provides a more textured analysis, but, again, we have sketched these changes in broad brush strokes, leaving room for other scholars to help fill in the details.

The State of Cultural Participation in the United States

First, in terms of current participation, our findings are mixed. It is very difficult to give the United States a single cultural bill of health. If we examine the relationship between the supply and demand of the benchmark art forms, it is clear that the accompanying expansion in the number of nonprofit art organizations over the last few decades has not led to an equal expansion in the size of arts audiences. According to data collected by the National Center for Charitable Statistics, the total number of nonprofit arts organizations—representing art museums, theatres, symphonies, opera, dance companies, and other performing arts organizations—increased by 59 percent between 1990 and 2001 (growing from 4,661 to 7,404 organizations). If we examine arts attendance during a similar period, we find that audiences for the benchmark art forms (i.e., jazz, classical music, opera, dance, theatre, museums) increased more slowly, by approximately 6 percent. In 1992, 76.2 million adults had attended at least one of the benchmark art forms; in 2002, that number had risen to 81.2 million (NEA 2004). The growth of nonprofits might lead to a number of positive benefits—including better and more diverse experiences for existing arts patrons, more

innovation, and better access for certain segments of the population. Nonetheless, it is clear that the growing size of the nonprofit sector has, for the most part, not created an equal ground swell in terms of participation in the benchmark art forms.

Regardless of whether supply has grown faster than demand, it is still possible that a greater percentage of Americans are participating today in the benchmark art forms than a decade ago. The findings in this regard are also mixed. In some areas, like jazz and museums, we see attendance rates staying constant or increasing. In others, like classical music, ballet, and theatre, we see slight decreases (in 1992, 12.5 percent of the public attended a classical music concert; in 2002, 11.6 percent had attended) (NEA 2004). Of greater concern are the significant declines in arts attendance across the benchmark arts for younger audiences. As Paul DiMaggio and Toqir Mukhtar suggest in chapter 12, the declines among the youngest cohorts suggest a failure of these art forms to renew their audiences. On the other hand, if we look at participation as art making—or what Steven Tepper and Yang Gao call *arts practice* in chapter 1—rather than arts attendance, we see some positive signs: with the youngest age group, eighteen- to twenty-four-year olds, increasing their participation in ballet, musical theatre, and pottery and ceramics.

We can also assess the state of participation by comparing ourselves with others. Many critics assume that Americans are less interested in the fine arts than our more cultured European neighbors. Cross-country comparisons are fraught with difficulties, as Mark Schuster explains in chapter 2. Nonetheless, based on his evidence, the United States seems to participate at rates that are comparable to other countries. Almost twice as many Americans attend ballet than do the British. Roughly the same percentage of Americans and French participate in opera and attend art museums. Other than Canada, the United States has one of the highest rates of attendance at jazz performances. In terms of classical music, the United States leads virtually every other nation, including places like Austria and Germany. So, depending on what diagnostics we use, cultural participation in the United States is doing reasonably well.

Our findings also suggest, however, that a true assessment of the state of cultural participation in the United States requires a broader and more nuanced set of measures that examine participation in less traditional places. For example, Robert Wuthnow in chapter 5 shows

how the arts are increasingly being used by churches as a means to revitalize faith and engage congregants. Almost 75 percent of all congregations include choir singing; 70 percent feature drama or skits; and one third host arts festivals. There is also evidence that the arts are flourishing in immigrant communities, where they are used as a means of passing on heritage, negotiating identity, and reaching out to mainline audiences (see Jennifer Lena and Daniel Cornfield in chapter 6). Over the next forty-five years, 80 percent of the projected growth in the U.S. population will be accounted for by immigrants or the children of immigrants (U.S. Census 2005). For these communities and citizens, the arts are often more integrated into the daily rhythms of their lives (Moriarty 2004). To be sure, immigrant arts face significant challenges—like access to grants, space, and audiences—but given the more central role of the arts in the lives of these new citizens, we may find that this activity represents a new and vital frontier for American arts participation.

Finally, the Pew Charitable Trusts research on technology and new media has found that the Internet is extremely fertile ground for arts and cultural participation. Some 57 percent of online teens create content for the Internet, sharing their own artistic creations as well as remixing existing content into new works (Lenhart and Madden 2005). According to research by Eszter Hargittai at Northwestern University, more college students visit Web sites to interact with others around music, art and culture (65 percent) than any other domain, including sports and politics (Hargittai 2006).

The research presented in this book should invigorate arts leaders and policymakers to reexamine their efforts to engage audiences. Overall interest and participation in the benchmark arts has remained relatively stable as other forms of participation—whether in religious settings, online, or among immigrants—blossom. In fact, by many measures, as the title of this book suggests, cultural participation may be witnessing a renaissance.

A Renaissance of Participation

One sign of this renaissance is the cosmopolitan tastes of audiences. Increasingly, educated citizens are less interested in defining themselves

as cultural snobs and more interested in engaging in a broad, eclectic set of arts activities. This is what Richard Peterson and Gabriel Rossman in chapter 13 refer to as the shift to omnivorousness among arts audiences. Throughout history, the breakdown of traditional hierarchies, the blurring of boundaries between genres, and the interchange between popular and elite forms of culture have resulted in extremely fertile and lively artistic environments (Hall 1998). The Renaissance, Impressionism, and the modernist movement in the early twentieth century were all characterized by a type of eclecticism and boundary crossing by both producers and consumers of art, not unlike what we are witnessing today.

This new cosmopolitanism is being fed by changes in technology. Several authors in this volume discuss the explosion of choice made possible by the emergence of digital culture. *Wired*'s editor-in-chief, Chris Anderson, discusses the emergence of the *long tail* phenomena, arguing that people are consuming culture that is off the beaten path—books and music that are deep in a publisher's catalogue—down the long, long list of available titles. As Barry Schwartz notes in chapter 10, more culture is available today than ever before. Most cable packages offer more than 100 television stations, and satellite provides hundreds of radio stations as well. From our computer screens, we can explore Seattle's latest indie rock band, Johann Pachelbel's *Canon in D* arrangement for electric guitar and performed by a teenage virtuoso in Japan, Sri Lankan hip-hop, short animated political films posted on YouTube, and a fashion show from London. Many of these cultural offerings have little need for the mass audiences demanded by global media, flourishing instead by linking up with small groups of committed fans.

The explosion of choice is contributing to the emergence of the *curatorial me.* Handed the capacity to reorganize cultural offerings at will through new devices like the iPod or TiVo, citizens are increasingly capable of curating their own cultural experiences. The curatorial me is an emerging form of active engagement with art and culture. Although not producing art themselves, many citizens have developed the skills and expertise to be connoisseurs and mavens, seeking out new experiences, learning about them, and sharing that knowledge with friends. We need to pay more attention to this type of variety seeking as an important dimension of cultural participation, which is, perhaps fundamentally, a process of discovery. Analysts need to understand better when and how people find out about and then experience previously

unfamiliar forms of art and culture. With regards to finding new music, my coauthors and I show in chapter 8 that social networks remain critical. Despite the abundance of new devices, people still rely on each other—or what some refer to as *mavens*—when exploring new artists and art forms. Social networks help us to filter the seemingly unlimited cultural offerings, which if we were left to navigate alone would likely cause the types of psychological and cultural disaffection that Schwartz in chapter 10 refers to as the *paradox of choice.*

The curatorial me and variety seeking fit into what many market analysts refer to as the experience economy, whereby consumers search for a broad range of cultural goods and services that are original and authentic and that link to their hobbies, creative passions, and identities. The popularity of custom-designed kitchens, art deco toasters, climbing walls, microbrewed beer, exotic cuisine, yoga, and theme vacations all highlight the way that citizens, in a postmodern world, use cultural consumption to playfully construct their identities. This type of identity work, some would argue, is particularly important for the expanding group of young, unmarried individuals who, in the absence of well-defined family roles and obligations, have the freedom and time to invent and reinvent themselves through culture. On the other end of the age spectrum, there is a growing proportion of Americans who are retired and in better health than previous generations of retirees. Although identity might not be their driving motivation, baby boomers have both the time and income to entertain themselves and to fill their worlds with interesting and stimulating cultural experiences.

In this experience economy, cultural goods and services need to connect to everyday life and to the varied lifestyles of consumers. In other words, it is not enough to market a symphony concert or theatre performance as a one-time distinct event. Increasingly, it will become important to synergistically tie together multiple cultural experiences—music, food, film, books, travel, and sports. In doing so, cultural producers and presenters will not only heighten the experience—through reinforcing and reverberating cultural stimuli—but they will also have a better chance of appealing to consumers and audiences whose preferences are increasingly diverse and whose attention is harder to capture amid the din of media offerings (see Joel Swerdlow in chapter 9).

A related trend highlighted in this book is the growing interactivity of audiences. Prior to the twentieth century, audiences were active

participants who interrupted theatre presentations to praise or censure performers, who formed audience leagues to debate the merits of different performances, who produced and performed art themselves, and who participated in parades, pageants, community sings, and other forms of collective expression (see Lynne Conner in chapter 4). Since the late nineteenth century, as the arts became both more professional and more national in scope, audiences have become more passive, leading to our contemporary norm of showing up to an event, sitting quietly in the dark, and applauding on cue. As the aura of high culture fades and as new generations are growing up on a daily diet of digital culture, audiences are no longer content with the arts; they want the arts experience. According to Conner, that involves being able to manipulate content, to use electronic media to project one's identity, and to seize the opportunity to be judges, critics, and experts.

Swerdlow documents the variety of new media and devices—from video games to social networking sites to handheld devices for use during concerts—that are allowing audiences to express their views and to control what and how they consume art and entertainment. The popularity of "American Idol" as well as a growing crop of reality TV shows that allow audience members to vote on their favorite performers, to join online discussion boards, or to otherwise express their opinions is testimony to this growing interactivity. Although some would see this democratization of the arts as a threat to artistic excellence, history suggests otherwise. There is evidence that a large proportion of the populace participated in the selection process of well-known works of art during the early Florentine Renaissance—providing suggestions, letters, and criticism. As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1988, p. 336) noted, "It was [the] tremendous involvement of the entire community in the creative process that made the Renaissance possible. And it was not a random event, but a calculated, conscious policy on the part of those who had wealth and power."

Finally, there appears to be a trend in amateur art making. Charles Leadbeater (2004), a well-known British social critic, argued that the twenty-first century will be shaped by the "Pro-Am Revolution": professional amateurs. From rap musicians who got their start by recording homemade tape recordings to thousands of amateur astronomers whose careful observations that employ relatively cheap but high-powered telescopes contribute to scientific breakthroughs to the hundreds

and thousands of bloggers emerging as a shadow news-media corps, citizens are increasingly spending significant amounts of their leisure time engaged in serious, creative pursuits. Those pro-ams are people who have acquired high-level skills at particular crafts, hobbies, sports, or art forms; they are not professionals but are often good enough to present their work publicly or to contribute seriously to a community of like-minded artists or creators. Pro-ams typically make their livings in other work but are sufficiently committed to their creative pursuits to view them as a possible second career later in life. If we simply look at orchestra musicians, the presence of pro-ams is demonstrable. Of all symphony orchestras, 40 percent have annual budgets of below $700,000 a year. On average fifty-six of the sixty-one musicians in each orchestra are volunteers—and the five salaried musicians make less than $150 per week (Brooks 2002). In other words, almost half of the live symphonic music in America is probably performed by amateurs. The International Association of Music Manufacturers refers to these types of amateurs as weekend warriors—people who play music seriously in their free time—as part of bands, chamber groups, and ensembles.

In part, amateur art making is on the rise because technology has both reduced the high costs of artistic production and has met the challenges of finding an audience. Amateur filmmakers can purchase sophisticated cameras and editing software for a few thousand dollars and can distribute their films online, sometimes to a broad public, but often just to other filmmakers seeking a community where they can share work in progress, offer and receive advice, and develop networks to help them with future film projects. Many of those films are now showing up on Al Gore's television station, Current, where about a third of the programming is contributed by viewers. The same trend can be seen in recorded music, with the rise of do-it-yourself independent music, the growth of pro-am record labels, and the advent of affordable home studios. What is happening in today's world of music production makes the 1970s garage band phenomena look like a prequake tremor. The same trends are evident in publishing, home design, gardening, and other cultural pursuits.

Although attendance at some benchmark art forms may be waning, other types of participation are on the rise. Henry Jenkins and Vanessa Bertozzi (chapter 7 in this volume) describe the aforementioned trends as a type of revitalization of folk culture where art and art making is

participatory: Much of it can be produced and consumed in the home; many people contribute and learn from each other (without necessarily considering themselves professional artists); and much of what gets produced is considered community property. From this vantage point, the next great transformation of America's cultural life feels more like a return to an earlier era of participatory culture rather than the onset of some new, unfamiliar form of postmodern cyberculture.

Changes in Participation: New Inequalities and a Growing Divide?

Some critics and pundits see a less optimistic picture. Rather than a democratization of culture and the flourishing of citizen-based activity, they track a growing monopolization of culture brought about by the convergence and consolidation of media and entertainment industries. Consolidated ownership, centralized control of content, the increasing use of data-driven audience research (see chapter 11 in this volume), and bottom-line pressures in public companies, critics argue, are leading us toward less diversity, less risk, and fewer opportunities for new or emerging artists or art forms to find audiences. Such trends are crowding out local and independent voices. Citizens are confronting a homogenized culture that does not speak to their unique expressive needs. Thus critics see a growing cultural deficit, not cultural democracy, in the United States.

Bolstering their concerns, in many art forms there is strong anecdotal evidence suggesting that the gates are too narrow: Many artists and works of art find it difficult to connect with potential audiences. For example, most contemporary radio stations program only a few recordings, generally playing no more than two dozen titles in a given week, half of what they played ten years ago (Ivey and Tepper 2006). For a record industry that places more than 30,000 compact discs in distribution each year and that is dependent on radio to present new work to audiences, tight playlists keep far too many recording artists out of the system and limit consumer choice. Consolidation has produced similar constraints in book publishing and film.

Simultaneously, many critics contend, nonprofit museums and performing arts organizations have also narrowed the gates, attempting

to maximize attendance and contributions by advancing conservative, repetitious programming choices. Small and medium-sized organizations are facing competitive pressures from the growing number of big performing arts centers that might bolster a city's image but that bring with them some of the same constraints endemic in the consolidated media industries.

And, of course, there are the related issues of intellectual property. Today, consumers must navigate an increasingly complex network of payments for arts products. Moreover, cultural consumption is quietly making the transition from a purchase to a rental model. Even consumption that feels like a purchase, like an iTune download, is often really a rental, as digital rights management technology limits our ability to copy or transmit our download. In the future, renting songs, television shows, films, or perhaps even online pages of books will become a bigger proportion of our entertainment budgets, creating significant financial burdens for some segments of the population.

In addition to these larger changes in arts and entertainment production and distribution, there are inequalities in the labor market that have adverse consequences on cultural participation and consumption. Bonnie Erickson (chapter 14 in this volume) discusses the increasing division of jobs into those creative occupations that require highly skilled individuals to work across firms, divisions, sectors, and continents and those service-level jobs that require few skills and very little interaction across occupational groups and global borders. The former group—new, creative professionals—must have a broad knowledge of culture to interact with people in a variety of settings from a variety of backgrounds. Knowing a little about bhangra, classical music, jazz, and glamour punk can help a manager of an international media firm interact with programmers in India, board members in New York City, investors from New Orleans, and newly employed recent college graduates. Having a broad range of cultural knowledge and experiences helps these individuals succeed in their professional lives, and such success exposes them further to new groups of people who introduce them to still new and different types of culture. Workers in the service economy neither are rewarded for having broad cultural interests, nor are they exposed through their work to a diverse network of people. So their cultural options and opportunities start off limited and remain that way. Moreover, these workers often hold two or three jobs, have less access

to technology, and have less time for leisure. We expect, therefore, that, compared with creative professionals, service workers are less likely to have the time or resources to take advantage of either the pro-am revolution or the long tail phenomenon.

Who is right—the cultural optimists, who say, "A thousand flowers are blooming, we are drowning in a sea of possibility, and we are surrounded by a new creative ethos"; or the cultural pessimists, who say, "The market is too restricted, people are suffering from a dearth of cultural opportunities, and demands of the new service economy are leaving many workers with little time, energy, or resources to engage with art and culture?"

Both sides are right; each sees a different side of the cultural coin. They are both right because America is facing a growing cultural divide—a divide separating an expressive life that exudes promise and opportunity from one manifesting limited choice and constraint. It is not a gap marked by the common signposts—red versus blue states, conservatives versus liberals, secularists versus orthodox—and it is more embedded than the digital divide that separates citizens from technology. It is a divide based on how and where citizens get information and culture.

Increasingly, those who have the education, skills, right types of jobs, financial resources, and time required to navigate the sea of cultural choice will gain access to new cultural opportunities. They will be the ones who can invest in their creative hobbies, writing songs, knitting, acting, singing in a choir, and gardening. They will be the pro-ams who network with other serious amateurs and find audiences for their work. They will discover new forms of cultural expression that engage their passions and help them forge their own identities, curate their own expressive lives, and enrich the lives of others; they will be among the rising creative class (Florida 2002).

At the same time, those citizens who have fewer resources—less time and money, diminished social networks, and less knowledge about how to navigate the cultural system—will increasingly rely on the cultural fare offered to them by consolidated media and entertainment conglomerates. They will engage with arts and culture through large portals like Wal-Mart or Clear Channel radio. They will consume hit films, television reality shows, and blockbuster novels; their cultural choices will be limited to the narrow gates defined by the synergistic marketing that is the hallmark of cross-owned media and entertainment. Finding

it increasingly difficult to take advantage of the pro-am revolution, such citizens will be trapped on the wrong side of the cultural divide. Technology and economic change are conspiring to create a new cultural elite and a new cultural underclass.

Cultural Vitality: Participation and the Public Interest

How are we to make sense of these cultural changes? In some cases they will exacerbate the cultural divide, and in others they will reduce inequalities. But for policymakers and arts leaders to expand or enrich cultural participation in the face of these changes, it is necessary to have a clear set of criteria for what we would consider serving the public interest. What levels of participation and types of engagement should we aspire to? When will we know when we have achieved our goals? In other words, from the public's standpoint, what constitutes cultural vitality?

In many areas of public life, there exists consensus around the notion of vitality. Economic vitality includes low unemployment, modest inflation, strong economic growth, a strong housing market, and a positive trade balance. Political vitality includes high voter turnout rates and an active citizenry who participates in self-government. It also includes meaningful voter choice and healthy debate. But what is cultural vitality, and are the aforementioned changes increasing cultural vitality in America?

As discussed in chapter 1, arts participation was originally linked to notions of citizenship and participatory democracy in the nineteenth century. Like religion and politics, culture was seen as an arena where citizens exercised their entrepreneurial spirit, where they expressed their individual voices, and where they connected to their neighbors and fellow community members. From this perspective, cultural vitality can be judged by the same criteria as political vitality. First, do citizens have the capacity to create or influence culture? Similar to voting, organizing a rally, speaking at a school board meeting, or participating in a campaign, *cultural capacity* includes the ability to play an instrument, to edit a film, to sing in a choir, or to otherwise add one's creative voice and talents to the larger cultural domain. Second, do citizens have ample choices? Political theorists argue that elections are only meaningful if citizens have real choices between candidates

and if some of those candidates reflect the voter's own preferences. Similarly, it is important to ask whether people have access to culture that speaks to their individual needs and preferences. Before the 1960s, most citizens who lived outside of major metropolitan areas did not have the opportunity to enjoy professional theatre or classical music or to visit a local art museum. Their choices were limited and cultural policy responded by building nonprofit, professional arts organizations across America. How are choices constrained today and for whom? Do people have meaningful choices between culture that is local and global, between art works that are contemporary and those that reflect and celebrate the past (heritage), between work produced in a community context and work that is made and presented by outside professionals?

Finally, do citizens have the opportunity to critique culture and to share and exchange ideas with fellow citizens? Political theorists from Immanuel Kant to Jurgen Habermas have argued that political vitality requires a thriving public sphere where citizens can debate and discuss the most important issues of the day. Similarly, as Conner contends in chapter 4, it is important for citizens to be able to express opinions about culture. This is what I call *cultural criticism and connoisseurship.* Audience leagues served this purpose in the nineteenth century. Some would argue that online social network sites are serving this function today, as young adults share their opinions and preferences with each other regarding, for example, music, films, books, video games, art exhibits, or television shows. Cultural criticism and connoisseurship, like political discourse, requires literacy, general knowledge, and a willingness to speak out and share opinions. It also requires an accessible forum where Americans can debate art and culture, can share their judgments and ratings, and can connect to one another around common cultural tastes and interests.

In many ways the cultural changes discussed in this book have the potential to advance all three dimensions of cultural vitality: capacity, choice, and criticism and connoisseurship. To realize this potential, policymakers and cultural leaders need to be more thoughtful and deliberate about how to support cultural engagement in the twenty-first century.

Moving Forward: New Research on Changing Patterns of Participation

Although the contributors to this volume have sketched the contours of the changing patterns of participation, more research is needed to fill in the texture and details. In many ways our current knowledge and discussion about arts participation in American mirrors the conversation that took place ten years ago with regard to civic participation. At that time, Robert Putnam published an article in the *American Prospect* (1996) that argued that according to most indicators (e.g., voting, church attendance, party affiliation, Parent–Teacher Association [PTA] and Rotary club memberships), America was suffering from a decline in civic participation. Putnam's argument, later expanded in his book *Bowling Alone* (2000), generated much publicity and scholarly interest. Many were convinced that the great civic generation—composed of those who came of age during the 1940s and 1950s—was behind us and that the social glue that held America together was beginning to wear thin. Putnam and others maintained that the decline was due, in part, to the growing pervasiveness of television and home entertainment.

Today, scholars and arts leaders lament the seeming decline of cultural participation. Similarly, they see the passing of the great cultural generation—those arts enthusiasts who filled our concert halls and theatres and whose patronage supported the flourishing of art across America. Some of the available indicators, as noted earlier, affirm these fears, consistently showing that young people are not maturing into their roles as consumers and patrons of the benchmark art forms. Like civic participation, many critics blame television, the Internet, video games, and other forms of popular entertainment for this imminent demise.

As it turns out, Putnam was only partly right about civic participation. Scholars began searching for other indicators, employing different methodologies, and asking new questions about the nature of participation. What they found was that civic engagement was alive and well but was showing up in new places: in soccer leagues rather than the PTA, in donations to the Sierra Club rather than local political parties, in support and self-help groups rather than established churches. These new forms of participation did not entirely replace old forms, nor did they serve the same functions or elicit the same types of social capital. But the emerging picture of participation was much more complicated than Putnam first thought and the strategies for building participation more varied.

Similarly, we expect that our current fears about declining cultural participation are not without merit, but they are constrained by old assumptions and ideas. What are the cultural equivalents to soccer leagues, running clubs, and new political and spiritual movements? Do these new forms of cultural engagement provide the same rewards and expressive opportunities as older forms? Do they complement or compete with these established traditions? Do they meet the criteria for cultural vitality already discussed? Research is needed that documents how arts and culture fit into and animate the lives of a diverse sample of citizens. Scholars need to spend time with citizens in their homes and in their communities, listening to how they describe their cultural commitments and engagement—their habits of interacting with and expressing themselves through the arts.

Moving Forward: Increasing Cultural Vitality for All Americans

Build and Support Citizen Capacity

Forty-five years ago, Lyndon Johnson signed Public Law 209, which created the National Endowment for the Arts. At the time, he noted the importance of supporting a "nation's most precious heritage" and bringing national support to "a great national asset" (Zeigler 1994, p. 17). The ball was set in motion to support professional art making in this country through grants to state agencies, nonprofits, and individual artists. But what if instead of funding professional arts, the government had made millions of dollars available in the form of cultural vouchers—where individual citizens could apply for a voucher to use toward developing proficiency in an art form—from playing the guitar to drawing to basket making and animation? How would this alternative path have affected arts participation, nonprofit arts, or the size and quality of professional artists? It is impossible to know where such a policy would have led, but a comparison with another area of culture life—sports—provides some possible answers.

By most measures, sports continue to thrive in America. Cities line up to offer millions and millions of public subsidy to attract professional

football, basketball, and baseball teams; sports networks are flourishing; and sports coverage remains a prominent feature of daily newspapers and radio talk shows. How is it that professional sports have captured the imagination of so many Americans? John Kreidler (2005), of Cultural Initiatives of Silicon Valley, contended that sports, compared to the arts, has a much healthier ecosystem that blends sports literacy, amateur practice and professional goods and services. He argued that professional athletes sit on top of a pyramid whose base includes all of those Americans who know about sports, are familiar with the rules of the game, occasionally read the sports page, follow their favorite teams and athletes, and devote countless hours to watching games. The middle layer of the pyramid includes the millions of Americans who actually play sports—all of our children who are members of school and recreational teams, avid runners, amateur tennis and golf players, swimmers, bicyclists, and the millions of others who participate in some physical activity. The combination of sports literacy and practice combine to create a huge base of fans who care about professional sports because they understand, judge, and appreciate the excellence exhibited by professionals and because they can connect the activities they watch on TV and read about in the newspapers to their everyday lives. Of course, this thriving sports ecology did not just blossom overnight, nor was it the outcome of the market's invisible hand. Rather, it emerged as the result of strategic policy interventions, most of which have been directed at amateur athletes—investing in everything from parks, bike paths, and athletic complexes to youth sports leagues, physical fitness centers, and physical education in schools. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and intercollegiate athletics has been one of the most important and sizable policy tools to encourage and reward amateur sports.

Professional artists, like professional athletes, sit on top of a pyramid in which the base is made up of both avid fans and enthusiasts and amateur art makers. Unlike sports, however, cultural leaders focus their intervention only at the peak of the pyramid. This strategy ignores the reality of how art and culture is experienced by most Americans. Ruth Finnegan, an anthropologist from the Open University, puts it this way: "To focus on the professional side alone is to omit the symbiosis and interdependence of the amateur and professional worlds, where the first, at the least, provides the essential training ground, expert enthusiasts and reservoir for the second, and to miss the pervasive interaction, overlap, and movement between them" (Finnegan 2005, p. 3).

In summary, the old cultural policy model in the United States was predicated on the delivery of certain types of arts to citizens across the country; the new model must be focused on unleashing the creative and expressive potential of all citizens. In addition to supporting organizations that present professional arts, foundations and other cultural policy actors can provide cultural tool kits for citizens. They can create or support community-based media centers where aspiring filmmakers can go to learn to make films, find mentors and teachers, borrow equipment, edit films, present their work to the public, or otherwise further their expressive capacity. They can support libraries where musicians can borrow instruments, and arts collectives, where printmakers share a printing press or photographers share a dark room. They can partner with for-profit purveyors of instructional videos and DVDs (a blossoming market) so that citizens can get free access to videos that teach techniques of drawing and painting, playing an instrument, dancing, acting, photography, and other media arts. Funders can support spaces—stages, rehearsal spaces, studios, laboratories—where citizens can nurture and develop their creative capacities. Cultural policymakers can and should, in the words of Amartya Sen (1998, p. 317), "expand the facilities that local culture gets to present its own ware, both locally and beyond it."

Expand and Facilitate Choice

In terms of choice, we are living in an age of abundance. Given the explosion of cultural options, it is hard to make a case that policy leaders need to pay attention to choice as a dimension of cultural vitality. Nonetheless, there are significant areas where choice has been constrained, and evidence suggests that too much choice can have negative consequences for consumers and audiences (Schwartz in chapter 10).

First, as mentioned already, choice and diversity in cultural offerings can be constrained when media outlets are concentrated in the hands of a few big corporations. In those cases where the evidence suggests that diversity and choice are threatened, cultural leaders need to form alliances with public interest groups to push back against deregulation and consolidation.

Of course, expanding choice must be coupled with reliable filters to help people navigate the potentially overwhelming number of options. These filters might include software that helps people find the books, films, and music that they like (e.g., collaborative filters) or institutions that use their brand name and reputation to sell or recommend certain products and services (e.g., critics' picks for the *New York Times*; objects sold by the Guggenheim's museum shop), and they might include friends, colleagues, and others who share or make recommendations. Without such filters, Schwartz (chapter 10 in this volume) argues that consumers and audiences will turn into pickers rather than choosers—that is, we will settle on or pick from those cultural options that are most readily available rather than actively choosing art and culture that might challenge, invigorate, or otherwise enrich us. How can cultural policy ensure that the right intermediaries or filters exist? What values do we want to embed in those processes, tools, and technologies that help people filter and find culture?

This is a question that deserves broad debate and discussion. But, as a beginning, I would suggest a few important criteria. First, filters should help people widen, rather than narrow, their cultural horizons. Some observers fear that certain types of collaborative filters might only recommend items that feed the *daily me* phenomena—offering those things that narrowly reinforce existing preferences and tastes. And, as Rossman points out in chapter 11, the interests of organizations (both nonprofit and for-profit) often lead to the use of research and technology to give people what they know they want, thus reducing the risk of selling books, songs, or movies that are new and unfamiliar. Thus, neutral filters—technologies and cultural brokers—should be established that serve the interests of audiences and consumers rather than the specific needs of organizations to sell products or fill performance halls. Such devices and techniques should encourage variety seeking in ways that efficiently match people with potentially meaningful cultural experiences.

Second, we should prioritize and support those filters and devices that promote and rely on social networking. The process of discovering new art and culture is social: It involves forming and sharing judgments, opinions, and critiques. In short, filtering itself can be driven by connoisseurship, criticism, and connection, which is one of the key dimensions of cultural vitality. By nurturing modern-day audience leagues—arts clubs, forums, social networking sites—policymakers can

create the types of organic, social filters that help people narrow their choices without narrowing their horizons. Finally, policymakers could consider investing in and supporting cultural mavens. In addition to funding artists and arts organizations, perhaps resources could flow to mavens and cultural ambassadors, those people who are writing blogs, making mixed CDs, creating podcasts, or otherwise serving as information gateways.

Nurture and Enable Critique, Connoisseurship, and Connection

Critique and connoisseurship ultimately entail helping citizens form a deeper engagement with art and connecting audiences and fans to artists as well as to one another. One way to deepen engagement is to allow audiences to see behind the curtain—to witness, in the words of sociologist Erving Goffman (1959), the backstage interactions and behavior that lie behind every great performance or exhibition. Over the course of the twentieth century, as national art markets grew and as the arts became more professionalized, producers and presenters erected walls between audiences and art making. Art was presented to the public in its finished form as an embodiment of excellence and perfection; rough edges were polished down; blood and sweat were cleaned up; the creative process was out of sight. This form of presentation overlooks the interest that audiences have in the creative process itself. In chapter 9 in this volume, Swerdlow describes how technology can increasingly be used to give audiences insight into the creative process—describing one dance troupe that showed audience members a videotape of rehearsals that included missed jumps, jumbled choreography, and disagreements between dancers and artistic directors. Similarly, the wild success of reality TV shows, such as Bravo's "Project Runway," which follows the trials and tribulations of a group of fashion designers, provides evidence of the interest and enthusiasm audiences have for witnessing the creative process. Policy must help audiences get backstage to see the inner workings of creative pursuits.

Finally, audiences can be connected to the creative process by becoming patrons. One of the more interesting new models to support the arts is commissioning clubs. Anywhere from a few people to several hundred can come together to support the creation of new works of art—commissioning a series of paintings or prints, public sculpture,

plays, musical compositions, and dance. These projects can be small or large and can involve each club member giving anywhere from fifty to several thousand dollars each. Typically, a commissioning club meets with its chosen artists several times during the course of a project's evolution and often gets to see early versions of the final product. In short, commissioning clubs represent an opportunity not only to support professional artistic activity but, more importantly, to involve many more Americans in the creative process itself as well. Again, though such clubs have sprung up without outside support, it is possible for foundations, nonprofits, and agencies to facilitate commissioning clubs by providing advice and financial mechanisms often unavailable to such unincorporated groups.

Cultural criticism and connoisseurship can also be enhanced by linking dedicated fans together in a community of discourse. Marty Khan (2006, p. 88), a veteran jazz advocate and producer, argued that spending time cultivating serious fans is not only important in terms of developing an audience base, but it is also an opportunity for artists to get feedback from dedicated and smart connoisseurs: "New technology means that those two or three thousand fans worldwide that record companies and promoters view as not warranting an investment take on a much greater value to the artists." Jenkins (1992), scholar of comparative media at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and contributor to this volume, wrote about the practices of serious fans who critique and write about the object of their affection through self-produced fanzines and online forums; they interact with artists and producers, offering feedback and suggesting new directions (e.g., new plot developments, new characters, new endings); they engage with other fans at conventions or through the Internet; and they often create their own forms of art—books, films, posters, music, drawings, costumes—derived from the artworks they love. In many ways, Jenkins's fans engage in the sorts of activities common to the types of audience leagues that Conner discusses in chapter 4 in this volume. Part of the challenge for policymakers who care about arts participation is to encourage more fan-like behavior—more connoisseurship and conversation. Fandom is more than being a season ticket holder: It means becoming an active member of a community in which the enjoyment and pleasure of participating includes sharing opinions, linking up with others, and incorporating one's cultural interests into daily life and conversation. Raising the bar of participation—

forcing audience members to go beyond mere attendance to become connoisseurs and critics—seems like a daunting challenge in a world where time and attention are scarce. But, somehow, millions and millions of sports fans rise to the occasion every day, finding time to read the sports pages, analyzing and responding to sports blogs, discussing and debating players, coaching strategies, rule changes, and controversial calls. For these audiences, fandom seems like a natural part of their lives. Cultural vitality requires the same devotion and commitment.

Thomas Bender (2003), historian at New York University, tracked "the thinning of American political culture" in a book of that title. Bender argued that, in the nineteenth century, there was a thick interdependence between social life and politics. People participated in political parties, they engaged in political debate with neighbors, and they attended rallies and campaign gatherings. In short, politics were embedded in social life and helped form and narrate everyday experience. Today, by contrast, the rise of national media, public polling, consumerism, celebrity politicians, expensive media-driven political campaigns, and weak political parties have created a thin political culture. Citizens have become passive political consumers. The exact same trend can be detected in our artistic and cultural lives.

In the twentieth century, as new media industries emerged, the United States moved away from thick cultural engagement. As art and art making were integrated less into everyday life, we experienced a type of thin participation, defined more by national celebrities, professionals, experts, spectacle, big media, and passive participation. In the twenty-first century, we can observe encouraging signs of renewed thickening, but not for everyone. A thick cultural life requires meaningful choices, the capacity to create and express oneself, and opportunities to develop and actively share opinions and ideas about culture with others. For some Americans, what we might call the cultural elite, the transformations described in this book are increasing each of these dimensions of vitality. But our suspicion, and the suspicion of several of the authors in this volume, is that not all citizens are benefiting equally from the changes. Our challenge today as educators, artists, and arts leaders is to harness the next great transformation in America's cultural life for the benefit of all citizens.

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