
September 11th and Beyond: A Compilation

The following comments, reflections, and observations were solicited by Wolf, Keens & Company in preparation for a gathering of cultural organizations from throughout Massachusetts, brought together by the Massachusetts Cultural Council to discuss the impact of September 11 and how that community should act, react, respond. Through the generosity of those who contributed these pieces (as well as others that couldn't be incorporated), the compilation became something bigger than we envisioned. Put together, comment layered on comment, they create a tableau of sorts – a remembrance, a cautionary tale, a meditation, a call and response. We hope you find them as compelling as we do. They have been edited only for length.

— William Keens, President



Personal Responses to September 11, 2001

Murray Horwitz (National Public Radio, DC): I realize more strongly every day that we are still in shock, or psychological trauma, or post-traumatic stress disorder – some damaged state of mind. Watching the second tower collapse on September 11 during my trek uptown from Wall Street, I was mightily aware that whatever the immediate tragedy of death and destruction, I was personally undergoing some kind of psychological disaster. A psychiatrist cousin thoughtfully called the next day and told me that mass psychological trauma is indeed a real medical condition, but that we are all going to get through it. It will take time. As a friend said yesterday, “The doctor can set your broken leg, but it still takes awhile for you to be able to walk right.”

John Paul Batiste (Texas Commission on the Arts): I am reminded how mortal we really are, and the *everlasting* value of our work is comforting; that civilization requires a constant investment in the nonmaterial; and that tomorrow will come, and history will look at our work and affix its critique accordingly.

Michael Moore (Wallace-Reader’s Digest Funds, NY): In every other challenge, be it civil rights or Vietnam, we have had the moral conviction of our own “rightness” illuminating the path to a resolution. In the days following the attack, I was buoyed by the hope that a quest for deeper understanding was possible. Could the fused experience of this horrendous evil and the sublime outpouring of good lead us to a different understanding of the world and our place in it? What would it take to move beyond the binary of East-West, Right-Left, Rich-Poor, Modern-Tribal to begin describing the world of connection that we currently inhabit? My early optimism for deeper understanding and breakthrough thinking is slipping away. As time passes, I feel people reverting to all of their pre-9/11 beliefs, prejudices and values, be it hyper-patriotism or civil resistance. The binary won’t die easily. We must first understand and then be able to imagine and create a different way of living a world worth passing on to those who will inherit it.

Nick Rabkin (Chicago Center for Arts Policy at Columbia College, IL): A couple of weeks ago, I took my kids (12 and 15) to the Old Town School of Folk Music here in Chicago for an afternoon sing-along of “Songs of Hope.” Most of the songs were from the 60s, and it was interesting to find that in the current context, “We Shall Overcome” and “If I Had a Hammer” didn’t have the same meaning they had during the civil rights struggle. In fact, they came out tired and wrong for the moment. We need new songs – and I don’t mean new versions of “God Bless

America” – that capture the meaning of this moment. They will be written by American artists.

Melanie Beene (Irvine Foundation, CA): Individually, more anxious, more a sense of being in the moment. Considered radically changing my life. Feel that America should focus at some point on the downside of capitalism: what about the way we are, the way we have made market-economy wealth accumulation the center of our value system, has made the rest of the world hate us, and what should we do about that as a society?

David Hoffman (Internews Network, CA): I’ve noticed a lot more tension within my family. Several friends and colleagues have gone into deep depression, even unable to work. My wife had organized a big event, a piano concert, to raise funds for the local breast cancer project. She drew parallels between the feelings we had on 9/11 and those that a woman experiences when she’s received a cancer diagnosis.

Anonymous (FL): I am rethinking my values and priorities, personal and professional. At first I was feeling paralyzed, and in the context of world events, my immediate circumstances – personal and professional – seemed so unimportant and meaningless. Then I realized that you either retreat and start dying, or you start living again. But I think my vision of the world and our role in it is changing. As a community, we realize how vulnerable we are. What is power? What is strength?

Ken Trapp (Renwick Gallery, DC): I was asked recently by some graduate students at Virginia Commonwealth University what I thought would happen in the visual arts after the September attacks. My reply was, “I believe people will want beauty in their lives.” Angst is no longer a concept but a reality. Beauty reminds us that human beings have a good and bright side, just as we recognize the evil in us too.

The Impact...and What We Can Do

Colleen Jennings-Roggensack (Arizona State University): We are very busy trying to return to the new normalcy, so that does not leave much time for anything but the work at hand. While we experienced some downturn in ticket sales the week of 9/11, we have returned to making our financial projections, or close to them. We are a stout and hardy Western bunch and insist on going to games, plays, etc. In the local travel and leisure industry, we are also revisiting

and re-strategizing our marketing plans both for the new stay-at-home economy and for the traditional tourist economy.

Nick Rabkin (see above): We are, of course, already seeing signs of a crisis in the “business” of the cultural community, at least in certain sectors. In this, the arts are no different from much of the rest of the economy. On the other hand, these are times that call for the special gifts of the arts – for rituals of community and healing, probing exploration, and new meaning-making. These are times in which the arts’ values can be asserted and recognized in new and important ways. My sense is that the best strategy for moving beyond the crisis will be to develop these values.

Nigel Redden (Lincoln Center Festival, NY; Spoleto Festival, SC): New York has changed in some ways for the better. The spiritual aspect of the city, of a community, is much more evident than it had been. This is not necessarily religious, although there seems to be more fervor in religious observances than there was. It is much more about the sense of life and lives being precious, and of lives being lived. Who knows how long this feeling will last. As a member of the cultural community, I am still aware that we have not forgotten our old grievances and our old obsessions. But individual performances are being seen through a lens heavily informed by September 11. Artists whom I had asked to do projects in New York have a renewed energy, or else deeper questions about what they should and will do. In that way, the response has been positive. But one also lives in a practical world, and one has to deal with the practical impacts. We are still trying to be as adventurous as possible (Iranian and Middle Eastern programs at the Lincoln Center Festival; programs that raise issues about the African past in Charleston), but have had to cut back on the budget. It’s too early to tell what the impact will be on our fundraising or ticket sales, but one must expect some fallout from the huge amounts of money that have gone to the September 11 relief efforts, and from the weakened economy. We are looking at tiny growth or cutbacks.

John Paul Batiste (see above): Cancellations of some events by organizations and artists have already produced serious concerns. Arts organizations across Texas are experiencing some significant loss of resource commitments and are fearful of how audiences, private-sector funders, and government sources of support will ultimately respond.

Linda Hoeschler (American Composers Forum, MN): We are considering some emerging funding trends. Some corporate and foundation funders are reporting that their resources are down. Gifts may not be discontinued, but they don’t

expect to entertain requests for increases or for new programs. Individual fundraising is similarly difficult to read. The economy was soft before September 11, but most people felt that it could go up at any time and were still giving generously. After the terrorist attacks and the subsequent economic reverberations, more people are telling us that a recession is inevitable.

Ben Cameron (Theatre Communications Group, NY): We are hearing great nervousness from our field. Single-ticket sales are off in many locations, but rebounding (albeit at different rates depending on the community). There is significant loss of income because of missed performances. Philanthropic patterns are cause for concern, both because asset bases are declining as a result of stock market shifts and because of competing social needs. Organizations are forecasting declining endowment draws. School matinee programs have been decimated because of the cancellation of school field trip programs for security reasons. Staff (especially here in NYC) are experiencing morale and attention problems. And of course, tourist-based funding is taking major hits, and that will affect the arts. But to the *good*, we are seeing great loyalty among subscribers and boards.

David Hoffman (see above): Internews Network is planning to launch a major public campaign called “Turn on the Light,” which will connect terrorism to the absence of open media, and ask for contributions to our Open Media Fund.

Val Marmillion (Pacific Visions Communications, CA): Our research shows that the biggest impact, in a word, has been “uncertainty.” Recent events have most everyone feeling uncertain and insecure – a reversal from years of feeling strong and immune to forces beyond our control. Now we all need to develop coping skills that build our resiliency. We cannot undo what has happened, but we can become more resilient in response to the erosion of confidence and hope.

Andrea Rogers (Flynn Theater, VT): Individually we are distracted and hurting and now fearful of conflagrations in Muslim nations. As an organization, in many ways our programs have even more resonance and meaning, though it is hard to get press and public attention. Sales are pretty good. We have had one cancellation and an immediate substitution, which should help keep us from losing our shirts. I anticipate some slowdown in donations and have great anxiety about foundation and corporate support that we depend on for next year. As a community, I think we need to keep doing what we are doing, and acknowledge the importance of our work in such a time. And over time, our artists will surely grapple more specifically with some of the issues and events we are experiencing. There is, of course, a danger that our freedom to express ourselves through the

arts may be constrained by public jingoism and national pride. There is a danger that cross-border travel will become more difficult. I have even been told that musicians can no longer carry their instruments onto a plane. We must stay vigilant about these kinds of issues.

Elizabeth Miller (Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers, DC): Here in the Washington region, it is evident that the awful long-term ripple effects of September 11 are deep and far-reaching. But I also see an amazing thing happening for the good here as a result. For many years, Washington was the town where you came to work for the government, but it really wasn't "home" to many. As the New Economy grew and prospered here, we began incubating a real sense of community for the first time. The terrorist attacks have galvanized our community and made it a "community of caring." For the first time, we were all in the same boat, feeling the same fears. Now grantmakers and grantseekers sit at the same table, facing common problems and working side-by-side to meet the critical needs that we face. And there is no longer "The Hill" and "The Business Community." Now we're all folks, sharing our fears and working for the common good together.

Philip Bither (Walker Art Center, MN): The expressions of concern that I have received internationally from artists and colleagues have stood as profound proof of how small this planet has become, how much we now share with others, and how this attack is not just against our country but against civilization. In recent years, the arts community has witnessed dramatic growth in interest and understanding of cultures around the world. Now our work to bring artists from all parts of the world to our country, to build channels of communication and a sense of global community, is more vital than ever. It would be tragic if, out of fear, suspicion or prejudice, our country turned inward and attempted to shut down the increasing flow of ideas and expression from different parts of the globe. Already a more sober, less trivial, less materialistic and more nuanced public culture is emerging from the ashes. How long it will last is unclear. (From a piece slated to appear in *Inside Arts*, the magazine of the Association of Performing Arts Presenters.)

Judith Allen (Blumenthal Performing Arts Center, NC): I am trying to keep my folks on an even keel. Many of them have never had to deal with war, and do not have the coping skills. So they get frightened easily. As for our community, we have two of the country's largest banks headquartered here in Charlotte, and the Center is appended to one, the Bank of America. There have been many bomb threats and evacuations, which add to people's fears. Ticket sales are non-existent for Broadway shows. Opera is down, and symphony sales likewise. It will take

time for people to adjust, and to realize that our expectation that we were entitled to live in a non-threatening environment was unrealistic. We should thank our lucky stars that for many years we were able to do so, while the rest of the world dealt with terrorism, war and famine all the time.

Murray Horwitz (see above): Music helped right away. Humor is beginning to come back – not on television or the internet, but in people’s daily interactions. What we have to press on with now, including our normal lives, is a rethinking (I would say a rejection) of our currently fashionable modes of living, and of the arts and skills that serve them. We have begun treating one another and people all over the world as marks, as customers, rather than as human beings. This attitude has permeated world culture as marketing has become the dominant global force. If we are to galvanize our national will, if we are to integrate peacefully the nations of the world, then we need to shift the emphasis to the humanistic, the humane, the human.

Melanie Beene (see above): What can we do? Spend more time with people you care about. Individually, pray, meditate, speak out. Collectively, send aid, pray, meditate.

Ken Trapp (see above): I am concerned that anything negative – social or political comments, a bad press review, and so forth – will be viewed now as unpatriotic. This possibility disturbs me because freedom permits *all* to be heard. What can we do? Honor the dead by living our lives as fully as possible. Treat each other with greater respect. Don’t judge one another so harshly. And know that lives are lived moment by moment, in simple ways.

What We Need of Funders Now

These suggestions and observations have been drawn from all of the comments received.

- Survey the short-term and long-term impact on artists, organizations, audiences, and sources of support, and provide the results to trustees, elected officials, arts organizations and patrons. Wherever possible, combine, coordinate and standardize these efforts to make them more useful and to minimize the time they require.
- Provide support for rescheduling cancelled performances and events.
- Encourage efforts by the cultural community and grantmakers to convene in order to identify and strive for common goals that are appropriate in the aftermath of 9/11.
- Provide special capacity-building funding and operating support to keep the fragile infrastructure of fields afloat, as needed – e.g., the network of dance artists, companies and presenters.
- Stay alert to the spectrum of worthy cultural projects having nothing to do with 9/11 that will emerge in the months ahead.
- Support artists and the making of work, which can help define the moment in powerful ways. (Nick Rabkin cited a news report on the first noticeable changes in territories that the Northern Alliance had taken from the Taliban: it was the sound of music in the streets, “a sure sign of the centrality of the arts in the struggle for human freedom worldwide.”)
- Be reasoned in our response. Don’t create another crisis of sorts by rectifying the first. We have yet to fully understand the impact of events, much less prescribe the solutions.
- Don’t become single-focused; make room for culture to make its case in the context of new priorities and economic realities.
- Support international cultural expressions and exchange, especially performances and activities that make the arts “a place where understanding between diverse beliefs can be sought.”