

**Remarks by Ben Cameron**

**Council on Foundations: 2010 Family Philanthropy Conference**

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**Given the conversation of the last several days, I'd like to begin by looking at one of the great success stories of organized philanthropy—the growth of the nonprofit arts sector. Spearheaded by the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations in the late 1950's and 60's; joined by government in 1965 with the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965 and the subsequent creation of local arts agencies in many communities and state arts councils in every state; expanded through both corporate foundations—AT&T, Dayton Hudson and Philip Morris, to name a few—and deepened by innumerable family foundations and by individual donations, philanthropy exploded the arts beyond the major metropolitan areas of New York, San Francisco and Chicago, to cities and communities as far flung as Blue Lake, CA, Whitesburg KY and Douglas AK—all homes to major arts entities today. Designed to professionalization in the arts, improve the economic fortunes of artists, and expand the base of arts audiences and consumers across the country, this effort succeeded beyond our wildest dreams—truly catalytic philanthropy at its best.**

The 1989 NEA controversies involving the works of Andres Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe came as a shock. Assuming that the role of the arts as central to civilized community was broadly understood, arts leaders and philanthropists, while quite capable of discussing critical and aesthetic theory, were often unprepared to address challenges that were based, not in issues of quality, but in value. “What is the value of these images for my community?” critics asked in essence. “What is the value of supporting the arts? Indeed, what is the value of the arts at all?”

These controversies marked a turning point for many of us in arts philanthropy. Ever since, the arts community has worked diligently to quantify its value—value commonly now framed as economic, educational and social.

The arts are indeed critical to local and national economic vitality. Arts advocates often cite local economic impact studies which prove that arts organizations typically leverage an additional, \$3-5 or \$5-7 for the local economy for every dollar spent on a performing arts ticket--- dollars for local restaurants, parking, and gift shops, for local printers who print programs, for

**fabric stores where the cloth is bought for costumes, for the piano tuners who tune the instruments, for the caterers who run the concessions. And more.**

**Today, in fact, the more than 104,000 nonprofit arts and culture organizations generate \$166.2 billion in economic activity. Where the arts are imperiled, entire local small business communities and governments feel the aftershocks as well.**

**These economic arguments were especially powerful for us when I worked at Target Stores (or Tarzhay)—arguments enhanced by our recognition of the role the arts play in creating livable communities to attract and retain potential workers. Moreover, during my time at Target Stores, I came to appreciate that our competitive advantage was essentially an arts advantage. Imagine for a moment trying to walk through a Target Store, divesting it of the work of artists and the influences of arts instruction and exposure. The music over the loud speakers clearly is the first thing to go (something not everyone admittedly may regret, but there you are); next to follow are the audio and entertainment departments. The book section has to go, as does the entire fashion division. Those Michael Graves teapots are out; the colorists and visual artists whose work has informed makeup and jewelry means that those departments too**

have to go. Designers have also crafted much of the furniture and lighting fixtures--- those all go now--- both those in the retail space and those in the “backstage” area where the offices are. At the rate we’re going, we’re only going to have household solvents and fertilizer left, but we will need to repackage those without design labels and special holders—some paper bags will do. Frankly, it’s a miracle we’ve found the store: we need to eliminate the advertising, the copy writing, the clever TV commercials with actors that engender consumer curiosity and loyalty, the branding graphics of the Target image itself. Indeed, we really have no store at all, since architects, those folks who got their start largely in arts classes in schools, suddenly haven’t been there to create the designs. In short, we’re out in a field, where no one can find us or be aware we exist, trying to sell generic products in unappealing packaging. Those of us who follow Target are aware of its rapid ascent into the American consciousness, its place at the center of New York fashion and advertising industries even though there is no Target store in Manhattan. Clearly, Target has competitors--- WalMart and Kmart among others (both of whom arguably have advantages of lower price points)--- but Target’s upscale image, its trend forward fashions, its hip advertising, its in-house lines of designer- and artist-lines like those Michael Graves teapots--- suggest significantly that the

competitive edge stems from having better design, better imaging, better use of language, better art, better artists than their competitors--- artists who began to hone their skills in creative writing classes, in sculpture and painting classes, in music--- orchestra, band and chorus--- classes, in acting classes long ago as children.

But the arts value is more than economic. With the advent of new research, we have become increasingly sophisticated about quantifying our value in other dimensions as well. Social behavioralist Shirley Brice Heath of Stanford University—not an arts researcher—was among the first to study the arts in the broader context of after school programs—girl scouts, sport teams, and more. In working with high-risk students in inner city East Palo Alto, Heath was admittedly surprised to find that it was the arts students who dramatically outperformed their peers in significant ways. It was the arts students who are four times more likely to win academic awards and four times as likely to participate in math and science fairs, who showed significant reduction in disciplinary infractions, who performed better on verbal and math SAT scores—a differential of 80-120 points in some studies-- and who are more than eight times more likely to graduate than students without arts experiences. These

studies have been reinforced by a Harvard study focusing on students working with Shakespeare, work that promotes greater complexity in thinking, greater verbal acuity, tolerance of ambiguity, interpretive skills and increased sense of self-discipline and self-esteem.

Academics notwithstanding, arts nurture healthy communities—and not just through links between creation of cultural districts and crime reduction. A UCLA study proves that high school seniors who participated in the creation of theatre are 40% less likely to tolerate racist behavior than kids who were not theatre participants, and was I the only one who noticed the New York Times features on Columbine in the aftermath of school shootings--- features where the students repeatedly said the ONLY place they felt a sense of community, where the cliques lost their power, and the disenfranchised felt welcome was in the performing arts center?

For these reasons, those of us who work in the arts can now stand proudly and confidently in front of civic leaders and government officials and say, “If you care about economic prosperity, you must care about the arts. If you care about educational achievement for your children, you must care about the arts. And if

**you care, perhaps most significantly, for harmonious race relations and a more inclusive, cooperative society, you must care about the arts.”**

**In spite of these arguments the last 10 years have witnessed a gradual erosion of arts philanthropy—regular declines in the percentage of the philanthropic dollar attached to the arts, the inability of arts giving to keep pace with inflation, the disappearance of major national arts funders like the AT&T, and Philip Morris aka Altria Foundations, and the elimination of discrete arts programs altogether, not only at the local small foundation level but at Rockefeller, Ford and many many others. With the national economic collapse, local and state arts giving are under assault, corporate philanthropy has largely abandoned the field and individual donors, who have far less disposable income, are pulling back in ways that affect both contributed and earned revenues**

**But I would suggest that the real crisis the arts face is not economic.**

**Our world today is most dramatically marked by a host of shifting demographics in age, geographic distribution, gender and more; thrillingly by our increasing**

**diversity—moving as we are to a nation defined by plurality rather than majority—and by the advent of technology. For the arts in particular, these shifts have already brought enormous challenges—challenges to the historically Eurocentric orientation of the institutional arts, with special challenges to forms like opera, ballet, and symphonic music. Technology for its own part is radically changing how we think, how we behave, how we congregate, even how our economy works. Together, these forces are provoking a fundamental realignment of cultural expression and communication—a realignment that is shaking the newspaper and television industries, the publishing and book industries, and (in an indication of what may be yet to come) has left the recorded music and music distribution industries in disarray.**

**Far from making the arts irrelevant, diversity and technology promise to make the arts more critical than ever. As we stand on the brink of an age in which the ability to think and to behave creatively will be paramount, arts cannot be viewed as part of the need: they must be viewed as part of the solution, whatever your larger goals may be.**

Chris Anderson, editor of *Wired* magazine and author of a book entitled *The Long Tail*, for example, sees in technology the unleashing of a veritable tsunami of creative energy. With the invention and now affordability of cell phones, mini cams, computer software and more, he notes, the means of artistic production have been democratized for the first time in human history. In the 1930's, people who wished to make a movie had to work for Warner Brothers or RKO, for who could afford cameras, lighting equipment, editing equipment and more? Now who among us does not know a 14 year old hard at work on her second, third or fourth film?

Furthermore, the means of artistic distribution have been democratized. Again, in the 30's, the major studios played that role; now upload your film onto YouTube or Facebook, and you have instant world-wide distribution with the click of a button.

This double impact is occasioning a massive redefinition of authorship and the cultural market. Today everyone is a potential author—and while the market for traditional arts audiences may be eroding, the market for arts participants—those citizens who dance or write poetry, who paint or sing, who make their

own films or—as our very first speaker Arthur Brooks happily noted, play the French horn—is exploding as indeed the market paradigm shifts from consumption to broader participation in which attendance is only one option.

It is in embracing this shift that the possibilities—the necessities—for a new chapter in arts philanthropy arises. Indeed, the Solomonic question facing us all may well be, “How do we reward the hopes, dreams and aspirations of a new generation, without dismantling the still vibrant seminal achievements of the past?”

Let me be clear: I for one believe that the historic institutions that we have funded to date will continue to be worthy of our investment. They represent the best opportunities for lives of economic dignity for many artists, and the logical place where artists who need and deserve to work at a certain scale can find an appropriate home. Whatever we do as a funding community, we must continue to nurture and promote these groups, and especially support their efforts to adapt and change to the larger world.

**But to see these institutions as synonymous with the totality of the arts is far too limiting. The most dramatic recent development in the arts is the rise of the hybrid artist, the artist who works in multiple arenas—who works in science or technology, prison reform or education, AIDS awareness or environmental reform, not for economic survival (although that may be a benefit) but because of a deep organic belief that the work she or he is called to do cannot be accomplished in the traditional hermetic environment of an arts institution but can only be accomplished through deep engagement with other fields.**

**Today's dance world is defined, not only by the great companies of New York City Ballet and Alvin Ailey, but by companies like Liz Lerman's Dance Exchange, a multi-generational company with dancers in age from 18 to 79, who collaborate with genomic scientists to embody and explore the DNA strand or nuclear physicists at CERN in Geneva.**

**Today's theatre world is defined, not only by great institutions like the Steppenwolf of Chicago, Arena Stage of Washington DC or New York's Public Theatre but by a dense network of small ensembles and groups dedicated to community building and social action—groups like Cornerstone Theatre of Los**

**Angeles, whose faith based project brought together 10 religious communities—Bahai, Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, Native American and even gay and lesbian believers—to work, both within faiths and collaboratively across faiths, to create plays to bring diverse religious congregations together to explore common belief and engage in social healing in the aftermath of 9/11.**

**Today’s museums embrace, not only great visual artists working in traditional media, but groups like Stan’s Cafe, who use grains of rice to graphically embody and contrast the distribution of population and wealth—one grain of rice for every African with HIV next to a pile with one grain of rice for every African—powerful embodiments and depictions that serve as preludes to substantive action and policy reform.**

**Today’s leading poets work, not merely in the isolation of the study or the retreat, but actively with Iraqi war veterans to help them translate and articulate their experiences as a part of healing, while today’s playwrights work, not only with directors and actors, but with youth gangs, helping them articulate, channel and represent their experiences as alternatives to violence.**

Indeed, however important the arts have been to date, they will be even more important as we move into the future.

The arts will be increasingly important to economic vitality and business success, especially as creative industries explode: witness the recent explosive growth of iPods, the emergence of the computer gaming industry—which now outsells music and film recordings combines—neither of which any of us foresaw a decade ago. Leaders of these and other new and emerging industries will benefit from arts exposure as well: as author Daniel Goldman, in his book *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, notes, the primary indicators of success in leading include empathy, the ability to listen to others and motivate, commitment, integrity; the ability to communicate and influence, to initiate and accept change--- the very principles that lie at the heart of creating art, the very abilities instilled by arts instruction. Not surprisingly, both the Harvard and Yale Business schools have recently restructured their curricula to promote critical and creative thinking.

The arts will play in increasingly pivotal role—if we let them—in educational and cognitive reform. Traditional emphasis on science and math, while critical,

falls short of the advanced integrated thinking of left and right brain demanded by the future--a shift articulated by, of all people, Mike Huckabee who compared science and math-only education to creation of a data base without a server. Already, we see a dramatic move within colleges and universities to embrace and seize the power of the arts to promote deeper reflection and awareness—an entire Creative Campus movement typified by Dartmouth University's two-year campus-wide examination of class and privilege, involving the political science, psychology, economic, humanities, sciences and business departments—with artists like director Peter Sellars and Anne Galjour, who interviewed local citizens and recreate their experiences in a play squarely at the center—a success that now has placed the arts at the table in Dartmouth's strategic long-term planning.

The arts will be increasingly critical as we move to a democratic pluralistic society. As Francois Materasso observes, the arts enable people with non-majority values, ideas or lifestyles to represent themselves to the majority, to become subjects of their own characterization rather than the object of characterizations by others. How has our understanding of the injustices of the criminal system been expanded by *The Exonerated*, the play about prisoners on

death row performed across the country and at state capitols; of Iraqi war refugees reshaped by *Aftermath*, currently touring the nation, or of the experience of women through *The Vagina Monologues*? How did the film *Philadelphia* and productions of *The Normal Heart* and *The Laramie Project* humanize the HIV positive and gay community for an indifferent nation?

Ever since Charles Dickens novels produced changes to child labor law, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* galvanized the abolition movement, the arts have been critical to social change. Those of us who remember the Vietnam war protests—protests that always began with singing *Blowing in the Wind*—or the civil rights movement—where we always sang *We Shall Overcome*—cannot be surprised by the power of the music to form instant community posed to move together. Arts can be a massive force for social change.

And the arts is an arena where family foundations have a special role to play.

The essential local nature of many arts groups means that the bulk of arts funding will always come from local sources. Given that the huge majority of cultural organizations have budgets of less than \$1 million, grants of modest or even relatively small size can have an extraordinary impact financially and

emotionally—especially given the value that the imprimatur of a grant from your foundation can bestow. Whether you might choose to support a theatre or orchestra or ballet or another cultural organization or to support arts programs at a Boys and Girls Club or support prison and health care reform through the lens of arts interaction, engaging with the arts will expand your creative sense of the possibilities of the future, expand your multiple generation reach, and build communities in new ways—communities informed by deep listening, by creative expression and by mutual respect, which all too often today are in shockingly short supply.

I for one am optimistic about the future of our nation and of the arts. As a Luddite who still regards his computer as a typewriter with a screen, I decided three years ago to plunge myself into the belly of the proverbial beast and attended Pop Tech, an annual conference in Camden ME for 500 high tech folks, bringing them together to listen to—and interact with—high level thinkers of every stripe and description. Contrary to my expectations, this was not a conference designed to talk about startups or financing or survival, but about

how we will change the world. How we will solve global warming. How we will solve AIDS. How we will leave the world a healthier, ecologically balanced, less poverty ridden place. Indeed, the unspoken agenda was that there is nothing that we cannot do, and in the world of high tech, truly anything is possible.

You might call this folly of youth—and indeed, many of the participants are young.

You may call it hubris.

But what became clear to me is that within this world of infinite possibilities, there is infinite value to be found in the arts.

Artists are embraced at every level at PopTech—they speak on the same panels as scientists and social activists, and virtually every session is followed by performances by live artists—artists like young African American Vanessa German who blew the roof off with her powerful spoken word evocation of passions and feeling; like a physically challenged hip hop dancer who danced on his crutches, shattering our sense of what the human body could and could not

do; like the gospel choir of HIV+ Africans from the African continent, whose singing said more about the complex intersection of faith and disease than any report could every suggest.

I was encouraged that this group of high tech leaders fought to get there.

Camden, ME is not an easy place to access, and if any community can convene virtually, this one can. Yet through PopTech and TED and even through conferences like the one we all attend today, communities insist on coming together because of the unique value of live, face to face, collective experience, of conspiring—meaning to breathe together, to breathing the same air. And throughout PopTech, a minor chord, a palpable hunger throbbed in the background—a hunger that the arts meet, not in the extrinsic or instrumental values they offer, but in the intrinsic—in the realm of emotions and spirit. This group was desperate to slow down, to led less frenetic lives, to find experiences that promote contemplation, captivation, focus and extended surrender, that resonate emotionally, delight, provoke curiosity, enhance spiritual value—the very intrinsic domain that the arts always occupy.

**Especially now, in a moment when we all must confront the fallacy of a market orientation uninformed by social conscience, we must embrace the role of the arts in the formation of our collective and individual characters, particularly the character of the young, who are increasingly subjected to “bombardment” of sensation through violent film and video. And in an age of demonization and fear of difference, of intolerant social policies and politicians who encourages us to view our fellow human beings with fear and hostility and suspicion—we must nurture the arts--the arts which gather audiences to look at our fellow human beings with curiosity and generosity. God knows, if we have ever needed that capacity in human history, we need it now.**

**We are here today, joined by common cause. We work together to promote a healthier, more vibrant world, to ameliorate human suffering and nurture a more thoughtful, empathic and substantive and yes economically prosperous society.**

**I invite you to embrace arts in your efforts and to be animated by new possibilities. I promise you that a hand of friendship is extended not only from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation but from Grantmakers in the Arts to help**

**you think through this work, both now and for years to come; and I thank you for your kindness and patience in listening to me this morning. Thank you and God speed.**

