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This is the text I delivered on 5 March 2014 at the City of Providence's annual Senator Clairborne Pell Lecture on Arts and Humanities, held at the RISD Museum of Art in Providence, Rhode Island. My talk was in two parts. After each part, three distinguished local artists offered brief presentations: Erik Ehn, playwright, director, head of Playwriting and Professor at Brown University; Holly Ewald, visual artist, Founder and Director of Urban Pond Procession; and Sokeo Ros, dancer, choreographer, Director of Hip-Hop at Everett Company/Stage/School.

A Culture of Possibility for Providence, Part 1

Every Saturday morning my husband gets up at five a.m. and drives to Golden Gate Park to teach archery. He's a sculptor. Archery is one of several avocations, a serious one, in part because its wisdom seems to him—as it does to me—transferable to other realms of life. His job is to work with new students to instill good habits before they go on to compete.

He tells them that 99 percent of archery is internal: how you hold the bow, how you breathe, how you align your body, and more. "You can't aim," he explains, "until you are solidly centered inside yourself."

When students have a very hard time connecting with the fundamentals of posture, positioning, and breath, he brings them in close to the target, instructing them to close their eyes as they shoot. "Does it feel right?" he asks. If the answer is no, he tells them not to take the shot.

Some find it especially difficult to bring awareness to their own bodies and sensations. "Are you breathing?" he asks them. Often the answer is, "I don't know." He guides them inside their own experience, helping them assess it: what was that breath like? And the next one? And the next one? If they aren't aware of their actions and the consequences, he says, they can't change what's not working.

Many students come to archery lessons wanting to *kill the target*. They are fiercely focused on achieving something *out there*—and thus mostly miss the mark, because the real work is *in here*.

Tonight, our target is cultural transformation, and our foundational work is *in here*, marshaling the essential knowledge, skills, and resources. Today many people's idea of progress has been reduced to losing a little less than anticipated. As an antidote to the widespread fear of getting our hopes up, we need a culture of possibility in which people can see their own choices as meaningful, as linked to their own futures and their neighbors' and communities' fates too.

Our arrow is creativity, sharing visions and demonstrations of possibility in the service of renewal. To discern what feels right, to hit the mark, we need three skills: (1) changing our stories to change the world; (2) bringing the full range of human capacities to bear on our challenges; and (3) changing the fundamental framework that shapes our choices.

All three skills are intrinsic to the work of artists, can best be learned through engagement with art, and are essential to the renewal and thriving of Providence and every community across the nation. Why this is so is the topic of the first half of my talk tonight. I'm going to start with the work *in here*, and then move in the second half of my talk to what that might catalyze *out there*.

First, changing our stories to change the world. The way we shape our stories shapes our lives. We've all seen how one person uses a setback to cast aside what no longer matters and refocus on what does, while another uses the same setback as proof of the unfairness of the universe. On the macro level, framers and spin-doctors offer competing stories of the economy, elections, and climate change. Every story has its purpose, even the stories we tell ourselves. Is the aim to incite fear, awe, concern, desire? Does the teller want us to take action or subside into compliant silence?

Stories about the future are all about motive, since none of us can know with certainty what will come. What do the tellers want us to feel? The end of the world has been predicted many times, usually with the goal of scaring us stiff. So far, those predictions have been premature. So far, our challenge has always been to go on living. Today, a great many smart people think we have finally made the doomsday prediction come true. But despite our superstitious faith in our own calculations, we can't know.

Everywhere experts run the numbers, extrapolating the future from the past. Sometimes they turn out to be right, but not nearly as often as they'd like us to think. We've seen storms of unprecedented magnitude, rendering forecasts and preparedness based on past events nearly irrelevant. We've seen venerable financial firms crumble after betting their futures on exotic derivatives and subprime mortgages. We've seen economies reel when industries that seemed like permanent mainstays suddenly ship jobs and profits overseas. We've also witnessed stunning, heart-lifting events. The fall of apartheid, the Velvet Revolution, the legalization of same-sex unions lagged for decades, then suddenly ripened, to the astonishment of experts and nearly everyone else. We can't be sure even of outcomes for relatively small things—the impact of a particular policy or project—because the law of unintended consequences is almost never broken.

All we can really know is that everything created must first be imagined. Which story of the future of our cities is worthy of our imaginations? If the way we shape our stories shapes our lives and our communities, the future demands that we master social imagination rooted in deep knowing that the given reality is not the only option, that another world is truly possible.

Renewing our cities and the other important work we must do will require gifts and capacities that don't often make the priority list. For a community to thrive, the best social policy is always the Golden Rule: don't do to others what you would hate to have done to yourself. To live by the

Golden Rule, we have to be able to imagine another's experience and to see ourselves in the place of the other fully enough to feel genuine empathy. We have to remain simultaneously self-aware and aware of others. We can't learn these skills just by thinking or talking about them. Exactly as in the archery lesson I described, this learning has to be experienced in a realm where all dimensions converge: somatic, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. That realm is art.

Imagine yourself listening to music that you love. Your body is engaged. We experience music through the movement of tiny parts in our ears translated into nerve impulses our brains can perceive. Music sets up answering vibrations in our bodies; its rhythm, tempo, volume, imagery, and mood trigger brain chemicals that excite more physical sensations. Sometimes the impulse to move is irresistible. Listening, we are flooded with emotion. Images and ideas flow. When the music holds great meaning, beauty, or power, the listener experiences it as sublime—profound and ultimately indescribable.

Think back to the archery lesson. Moving through our community, our day, our choices, how do we know when something feels right? We cultivate awareness and discernment, developing our capacity to take in information through all four streams: body, emotions, intellect, and spirit.

Our bodies tell us so much if we know how to listen. Tomorrow I will offer a workshop in Boston for students from the New England Conservatory, MassArt, and Harvard's Arts-in-Education Program; my subject is the ethics of working in community. I will ask if in their work they've ever experienced an *oh-oh* feeling, a hot pebble dropping into the pit of one's stomach, triggering a vapor of anxiety. If my prior experience is a reliable guide, almost everyone will nod and keep on nodding when I ask if they've ever told themselves, "Oh, it's probably indigestion. If I just ignore this feeling it will go away." But our bodies are early warning systems. If you ignore the feeling, the situation usually gets worse. Conventionally, we are trained to disregard most of the information our bodies give us, to push away sensations deemed inappropriate. But artists learn to be aware of the body, to understand and respect its knowledge and power.

We are also typically trained to push away most emotions. Imagine yourself sitting at a conference table. Sometimes I ask people to name the worst thing you can do in a board room. Women answer first: "*Cry!*" they say. Yet often decisions made in such settings can have profound consequences for people whose well-being was not part of the conversation. Tears could lubricate compassion that has grown rusty with disuse. Whatever you may think about conventional decorum, knowing what you are feeling can never be a bad thing. The path of art has a signpost every few yards asking, "What am I feeling now?" Walking it is a good way to develop that knowledge.

When species are listed in order of their "encephalization quotient"—that's a factor based on relative brain weight—humans always top the list. The larger the brain's mass is relative to the body, the more surplus capacity is available for the thinking mind's complex tasks. Humans love to play with our intellects, understanding whatever we perceive, envisioning people, places, ideas, and artifacts that do not exist outside our own minds. Tomorrow I'll do a workshop for the Providence Youth Arts Collaborative on how to frame their work. I'll explain that our minds are subject to what cognitive scientists call "confirmation bias." We tend to notice evidence that confirms what we already think and pay far less attention to the rest. People commonly argue a point by piling up such evidence. But since the world is packed with information, you can find evidence to substantiate almost any point.

Ironically, the best way to prove an argument is to try to disprove it: if you can't refute it, it has a reasonable chance of being sound. I'll ask the teaching artists and youth workers to question their own assumptions, their own habits of mind. They'll have a head-start from their own practice as artists, where one question is always live: what's going on here that I don't already see?

You don't have to believe in the supernatural to perceive spiritual information. When we feel a sense of elevation or enlargement, when something "feels right"—right in the way that says it is time to release the arrow—body, emotions, and intellect braid together into a knowing that transcends logic. When you have a sense that something you've just seen is going to be important in your life; when a piece of music transports you to a place of deep congruence; when you feel the world reorder into a new alignment around something you've read—you are perceiving spiritual information. Accepting mystery is a necessary prerequisite to a full life, as most artists know.

I'm not arguing that artists are better than other people, but that they know how to use and teach the capacities that can save us now. It isn't any old art that can hit the mark. It takes art grounded in empathy, imagination, and relationship to actualize The Golden Rule.

Understandably, many people feel daunted by the challenges of their communities. We are flooded with competing answers. Some experts prescribe tax incentives and public-private partnerships to attract business; others focus on stimulating income with new sports facilities. In rural America, some experts see the prison industry as a panacea. These prescriptions tend to focus on making something happen *out there*, on *killing the target*. Experts speak with supreme confidence, but are they right?

Philip Tetlock proved in his long-term study of expert political judgment that no one has much ability to predict the future, but correct predictions emerge in inverse proportion to expert credentials. Over two decades, graduate students' track record was much better than senior professors. Worst of all were those holding high honors such as endowed chairs. This is not because graduate students are smarter or know more, but because they *know* less. Credentialed experts are even more prey than the rest of us to confirmation bias. Confidence in our certainties makes us dumb. We think we know the answers, but really what we need is to learn to live into the questions.

What if the contest of experts and answers is just a distraction from our real task? Sometimes I use a computer analogy to describe our dilemma and opportunity. Competing answers can be compared to computer software: every computer owner has a nearly infinite number of programs and applications to choose from. No sooner have we made a choice than something new comes along to trigger reconsideration. I doubt there is ever one best answer. There are many practical approaches to questions of community development, just as to environmental and social justice. It is very likely that more than one path will lead to progress.

It is a mistake to believe finding the right answer—the right software—is the necessary catalyst for change. Instead, what our communities need now is to change the operating system, the

mental framework that allows my husband's archery students to ignore the information their own bodies and minds provide. The key problem we are facing isn't persuading people that the future would be better without the kind of precipitous income inequality and blind neglect that marks many challenged cities: no one wants to subsist cold and lonely in an unheated room, no one wants to live amidst the dead husks of neighborhoods that failed to survive social Darwinist policies.

But many people are not now able to see an alternative future in which their own choices and actions have value and agency, in which their own fates are closely connected to the fate of their communities, in which the vast numbers who do not personally benefit from the hollowing out of our local economies recognize themselves as subjects in history, rather than its objects, and reject the dominion of those commanding them to ignore human suffering as collateral damage in the march toward progress.

How then do we address not just the software of society but its operating system: our basic skills of awareness, perception, and interpretation, and how we act on them? How do we convert a culture of skepticism or demoralization to a culture of possibility? Our creative capacities are key. Artists and others involved in arts work are uniquely qualified to heal our collective operating system. Society as a whole has much to learn from them.

Why do I say this? First, artists' own stories have afforded us a glimpse of the necessary transformation, when possibility pulls back the curtain and steps to center-stage. Behind every choice to live as a maker of beauty and meaning or one who supports that process, there is such an awakening. It can best be characterized in spiritual terms, as an encounter with the ineffable, with something that can never be fully expressed but which ignites in our hearts the desire to keep trying.

The specifics of these encounters differ greatly. Perhaps one person was taken for the first time to a theater, a film, or a concert, and in that darkened space was transported to a time and place very different from ordinary life: body, feelings, mind, and spirit coming for the first time into absolute, coherent focus. Another may have lifted his or her voice in song or raised a charged brush to make a mark on paper, and felt time standing still, felt both completely awake and completely dissolved in the experience. These stories are all different, but they are also all the same: when the lights came up—when the song ended, when the drawing was finished—something new had begun to emerge, an enlargement of vision and power that catalyzed a life.

Artists are also qualified to work on our society's broken operating system because we know how to make a portal for others' transformation, inviting them into a state most aptly described by Abraham Joshua Heschel as "radical amazement." Heschel wrote:

The greatest hindrance to knowledge is our adjustment to conventional notions, to mental cliches. Wonder or radical amazement, the state of maladjustment to words and notions, is, therefore, a prerequisite for an authentic awareness of that which is.

Radical amazement is opening our minds to the reality that we are living on a giant rock, hurtling through space, and that while we are able to learn a great deal about *how* that works, no one can say with certainty *why* we are here. Radical amazement is seeing straight through the pronouncements of competing experts to the heart of lived experience.

Many of us connect with amazement most powerfully in that integrated state of being that arises from an encounter with the sublime. It is the way we feel in the full flow of creativity, when overcome by love, when gazing into the heart of a rose, when standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon or the Pacific Ocean, bathed in setting sunlight. It is one of the essential experiences of being human. Many of the artists who create occasions of wonder, of radical amazement, are driven by the desire to awaken fully, both themselves and others. It is the core of identity and meaning from which many artists' passion evolves.

Making and engaging with art are not the only routes to this experience, but they are direct, accessible pathways. One aspect of radical amazement is the awareness of connection to a vast universe and all the forms of life inhabiting it. Every one of us has the capacity to glimpse it; the ability to feel empathy is encoded in our brains and bodies. But being able to experience deep imaginative empathy doesn't automatically mean it will shape our choices any more than possessing the physical equipment for dancing or singing means any particular individual will actually do either. Moving from the latent capacity to the practice of compassion must be learned. When I sit in a theater, opening my mind and heart to experiences very different from my own, the tears, laughter, anxiety or confusion I feel activates these capacities. Drama sets that learning in motion. The more I experience empathy with characters different from myself, the more skill I gain at understanding and compassion. The more I encounter ways of seeing that don't slide easily into my old operating assumptions, the more I question those assumptions.

The late, great writer James Baldwin is a hero of mine. One of my favorite epigrams of his says that, "The purpose of art is to lay bare the questions which have been hidden by the answers." Remember a little while ago, when I said that, "We think we know the answers, but really what we need is to learn to live into the questions"? Living into the questions *is* changing the operating system. It is something that many artists know a great deal about. And it is at the heart of nurturing a culture of possibility for Providence.

I will pause now to give three accomplished and dedicated local artists who are very much engaged with questions of community a few moments apiece to talk about their own journeys. I've asked Erik Ehn, Holly Ewald, and Sokeo Ros to share something of whatever set them on their own transformative paths. After that, I'll return to talk about how living into the questions can sustain a culture of possibility for Providence.

Part 2: Imagining Providence

I'd like to take you on a journey to 2034. This is my 2034, of course—my story of one possible future among many—but you are in it too. The prompt for my story is simple: what might Providence be like in 20 years if its citizens understand how art and culture are essential to a sustainable future, and if they have the foresight to weave art's transformative power into every aspect of public and private life?

Let me begin by noting that you already have a big head-start. Providence is blessed with a large number of artists and creative thinkers. Many have started organizations that suggest the broad transformation that would occur if their work were taken to the scale of a city. The Department of Art, Culture + Tourism is halfway through implementation of a ten-year cultural development plan

that calls for building community, inspiring young people, raising awareness, and otherwise creating the conditions for what they call “Creative Providence” to thrive. As I speak tonight, many of you will be able to discern the seeds already planted in your community that bear fruit in my future vision.

I spoke in the first part of my talk about the need to cultivate widespread empathy and social imagination, two of the core capacities of artists. I also want to speak of other capacities, equally essential, that drive artists’ work and must also drive a culture of possibility—a vivid, feasible, shared vision of a future we want to inhabit.

Connectivity is a core artistic skill. Nowadays we think about this in terms of technology, of digital culture and social networking. But it isn’t so much a mastery of tools—though that’s important—as the understanding that relationship creates community. Artists know how to connect people across differences, recognizing that no matter how distinct may be our languages and customs, the ways we celebrate and mourn, we are all responding to what we have in common: life’s beginning and its end, facing loss and finding resilience, celebrating milestones, giving thanks. So as I tell this story, I want you to remember that it features people from Africa, Italy, and Ireland, from Cape Verde and the Dominican Republic, from Cambodia and Liberia, those whose ancestors have stood this ground for a thousand years, and those whose forbears arrived before the American Revolution, those who came yesterday, and all of them make the story together.

Let’s start our journey through Providence 2034 at life’s beginning. Perhaps you’re the first baby born after midnight strikes on New Year’s Day. When it’s time for your mother to check into the hospital, instead of being greeted by a harried person with a clipboard, her intake experience is a conversation with a member of the resident storyteller corps. Indeed, the storytellers sit with every family in the waiting room, whether they are visiting the hospital for a blessed event or a health crisis. Storytellers invest enough time and attention to get to know each person, helping patients mine their own stories for whatever they need. “Did you ever hear about your own birth?” a storyteller might ask your mother. “Do you remember when your siblings were born?” Her answers would provide cues to the kinds of comfort she needed, and those in turn would lead to new stories that support her through the birth.

Throughout the hospital, artists are helping people put their experiences and feelings into images, making collages or digital stories that help to anchor each person in his or her own healing. Writers are finding words for feelings that otherwise threaten to overwhelm patients. Musicians collaborate on playlists attuned to whatever each person needs, choosing or composing music that responds to the latest research on music’s power to heal. In every ward, patients are teaching musicians the lullabies they heard as children.

In 2034, medical needs are no longer perceived as purely physical. People understand that birth is a ritual as well as a miraculous bodily process. They understand that disease is a relationship between a human being and an invader, whether that is a virus or bacterium, cells gone haywire, or an oncoming bullet. Effective care needs the cooperation of all parties, who must be invited and engaged. Once that was understood, it was a no-brainer to make artists central to the healing process.

Social imagination is another core capacity of artists, the ability to perceive existing reality clearly while rejecting the propaganda generated by every social order—that our way is the natural, the right, the enduring way—in favor of imagining a much fuller, freer, more permeable set of arrangements that support individual initiative and cultivate community. In 2014, social imagination is often a key missing ingredient in children’s education, where the default setting of most conventional curriculum is that the given reality *just is*, that it is *just as it should be*.

In my novel *The Wave*, the narrator visits a future classroom in which the children are entertaining a visiting alien—really a teaching artist—who has popped out of a giant egg and needs to be taught to eat, drink, and speak. The students discover how culture-bound these things are by trying to teach them to someone who has no experience with their culture. Afterwards, the school’s principal reminisces to the narrator:

“When I was in school,...these experiential modalities that used creative, artistic skills would be sequestered into one or two classes a week. If I could bring someone from my elementary school through time to Yung Wing today, they wouldn’t be able to tell me what class they were in: we use music and dance to study math, we make digital stories in science class and write poems about history. There are artists in every classroom, and every child has real opportunity to develop any strength he or she possesses. By the time I was in high school, teaching to the tests was the watchword, and most of our classroom hours were spent on rote tasks—quizzes, parroting back what we’d read in a book, drills. Everything was upside down. If someone was strongest as a kinetic learner, too bad. If someone had a great passion to interact with the world through visual images—the kid who filled the margins of his paper with drawings, for instance—that was a discipline problem, not a revelation of that child’s essence and opportunity.”

If you’re old enough in 2034 to attend school in Providence, you are living into this change. It is understood as inhumane to subject children to factory-style education, programming them like computers. The approaches of groups like Community MusicWorks, AS220, Everett, CityArts for Youth, and New Urban Arts have completely infused this community’s public and private education. Now every child in Providence has the same opportunity not just to master artistic skills, but to do so in a way that teaches all of the capacities they will need to thrive: leadership, collaboration, self-awareness, empathy, improvisation, resilience, and more.

As you age, this learning will equip you to exercise another artistic capacity, cultural citizenship. In a condition of full cultural citizenship, everyone’s contribution to the life of the city is acknowledged and valued. Everyone feels at home in his or her own city. People see their collective cultural assets as a commonwealth. They want to learn from and share with each other

in ways that build the social connective tissue which is as critical to a resilient city as to a resilient human body.

In Providence 2034, there has been substantial public and private investment in every community, especially those where unemployment was over 10% and child poverty 40% back in 2014. Those communities' natural gathering places—the transit hubs and shopping streets where farmers' markets and new entrepreneurial enterprises have sprung up—are rich with storefront art spaces built into nonprofit housing developments and programmed with a mix of local and imported events and exhibits. Building on the 2014 plan for the Department of Art, Culture + Tourism to run mobile art trucks between Olneyville Square, Trinity Square, and Columbus Square and Community MusicWorks' vision of pop-up restaurants and community-based performance venues in Olneyville, South Providence, and the West End, art-based community development has spread across the face of Providence 2034. There aren't just some neighborhoods recognized for their cultural lives and others for their deficits. There are just neighborhoods, all understood as fertile ground for cultivating cultural citizenship.

There is a pervasive sense of mutual belonging and participation. Everyone sees their own images reflected in sites of public memory, such as parks. Back in 2014, there were wonderful festivals and programs scattered throughout the city. There were parks with beautiful signage and community rituals inspired by Holly Ewald's work with Mashapaug Pond beginning in 2007, which helped bring environmental justice into the equation. By 2034, every park has a visible presence of people who are there to protect plants and wildlife, clean up, answer questions, give directions. They're all members of the Guide Corps, a wonderful job for new graduates, retirees, and others attracted to community service. They preside over changing multimedia exhibits that bring natural and cultural history into the present, such as demonstrations of how native plants were used in indigenous people's cooking, or an overview of the geologic and natural history of this land. They don't accost you, but they're there if you need them.

Walk the city streets and you can stop at almost any location to use your own phone or smart glasses to browse through downloadable stories that share the history of that place and those who lived or worked there. There are oral history recordings—you can walk along the river and listen to Barnaby Evans telling stories from the first forty years of Waterfire; or view newspaper facsimiles or video footage from the early days of Trinity Rep. You can stand at Westminster and Clemence listening to Don King of the Providence Black Repertory Theater and Len Cabral of Roots Cultural Center talk about the history of 276 Westminster, feeling sad and mad that it's gone, but knowing these contributions to culture are not lost, that people can still learn from them and carry that learning forward.

Another of artists' core capacities is improvisation, which always comes packaged with resourcefulness. Artists know how to make new and beautiful things out of the broken pieces of the old. The project of nourishing vitality and vibrant civic life is much more like creating a vast and continuously evolving work of art than building something from a blueprint. Like love and democracy and so many other things worth having, community is never finished, always in the process of becoming.

Providence knows how to improvise: over time, people inspired by earlier cultural entrepreneurs like Clay Rockefeller and Nick Bauta have repurposed disused spaces into incubators for cultural life. There's an online hub for theaters and other performing arts groups to borrow, rent, and remake costumes, stage sets, props, and lighting and sound equipment. The agencies in charge of environmental protection lend their technical expertise and support to greening the arts here, with everyone competing to see who can produce work with one hundred percent recyclables and no toxics.

In 2034 that relationship serves both parties. For years, the city has been addressing unemployment for its large number of arts graduates by recycling bits of the budget that were formerly wasted on information leaflets no one reads and PSAs no one watches. That money has been repurposed to employ artists to bring public policy goals to life. In 2034, Providence knows that grassroots theater is an effective way to convey health information, relating it to community members' own lives and challenges, that works of public art are effective means of recognizing and promoting the value of cultural diversity, that songwriting workshops give more pleasure and well-being to elders living in care than just about anything else. They know that all social goods are more efficiently distributed when we recognize that many of the people who need them cannot be reached with nifty leaflets and public service announcements, but must be engaged in real relationship.

In 2034 as today, Providence is an incredibly diverse city of immigrants and natives. But in 20 years, there's much more widespread recognition of the trauma behind the 21st century's massive displacement of population from the global south to the north. Both psychological research and lived experience have shown that when people share their stories so that they are received with dignity and respect, when they are witnessed and accepted with love in the service of healing, they are able to integrate their experiences and find pleasure and meaning in life.

Theater is a powerful modality for this work, but it must be theater that is developed by and for the people whose stories it tells, carefully, over as much time as it takes. By the time a group of stories has become a public performance, months of preparation and development have been invested in transmuting individual tales into dramatic shapes that can safely be shared. Public and private agencies provide support to ensure that the sharing completes a healing process, which then opens out to the audience at a performance.

Across the city, this type of theater work and its counterparts in dance, writing, music, and visual art are integral to what used to be conventional social service provision. Teen mothers and incest survivors, people living with HIV and homeless families are helped through sophisticated processes that enable them to turn their pain into something that has beauty and meaning for the whole community, and the whole community benefits.

Artists are experts in innovation. But it isn't novelty for its own sake I'm talking about. It's the capacity pull back the frame on a challenge or opportunity and see it in a new light, stepping off of the trodden path of expectation and opening a new road with our own feet. Providence's largest resource for economic development in 2034 is artistic creativity. Since Daniel Pink's 2004 pronouncement that "the MFA is the new MBA" and the 2010 IBM CEO study focusing on creativity, business literature has argued that innovation, improvisation, and storytelling are the chief capabilities needed to navigate the ever more fluid business environment. Design thinking is the dominant approach and design labs are the new conference rooms.

In the past, arts-based business learning was seen as a kind of spice. There was the usual way of doing business, and then you had a team of arty consultants in for a day or two to shake things up. Tons of people were under-used in the old corporate culture, hating their jobs, being seen as having far less to offer than they actually did. In 2034, Providence has upended this equation. It is famous as the home to business organizations that are mostly design lab, with smaller territories staked out for basic infrastructural tasks such as financial management, supply chain, building maintenance, and so on. Providence is a recognized center of upcycling, designing products that are free of toxics, that can be entirely disassembled into both organic and technological nutrients, and remade into something even higher on the evolutionary scale than the original. And the masterminds behind this renaissance are artists.

Even the political landscape has been transformed. Public policy debates are conducted through legislative theater, invented by the Brazilian theater director, organizer, and theorist Augusto Boal in the mid-1990s when he was elected to Rio de Janeiro's municipal legislature. People come into a public space for a short performance based on a proposed law or public policy. Then they use Boal's methods, which break down the barrier between spectator and performer, to try out alternative storylines that may end up as new laws or programs.

But it may be political campaigning that has changed most of all. In the early 2020s, Rhode Island led the nation in establishing public campaign financing, taking all of the private money out of elections. In 2034, when an election approaches, citizens get involved through all sorts of arts practices. For instance, people are invited to make digital stories—three or four-minute videos with words, images, and music—that portray key issues and challenges for their own communities and futures. There's a crowd-sourced process to pick a small selection of stories that touch most voters. Then candidates respond to each of them, engaging in dialogue with the ordinary citizens who created them. This gives everyone a really deep look into each candidate's heart and mind. It makes people believe in and care about the democratic process in a way that would have astounded their counterparts back in 2014.

In Providence 2034, there is pervasive understanding that the way a society treats artists is not a trivial special-interest issue. We see it as a litmus test. In the animal kingdom, indicator species are sentinels alerting us to an imminent threat from disease or climate change: oysters and mussels are bio-monitors for marine environments, for instance. Among human beings, artists function as an indicator species. It is understood that art and other forms of cultural expression are the practice of freedom, that culture is the secret of survival, the matrix in which we cultivate identity, work out shared meanings, and fashion any hope of a livable future. Artists are seen as the stem cells of the body politic, creating the many forms of beauty and meaning needed to teach us, to inspire us, to sustain us. How they are treated testifies to social well-being. And how they are treated in Providence 2034 speaks very well of your community.

I will pause now to invite my fellow artists back to the podium one at a time to share one story from their own visions of Providence 2034 transformed by the understanding of culture's power. After Holly Ewald, Sokeo Ros, and Erik Ehn speak briefly to you, I'll return to ask you a question, and then we'll have some time for discussion.

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