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THE ARTISTS AND THE ECONOMY OF THE STATE

Two years ago, when I became Chancellor of the North Carolina School of the Arts, I was frequently asked to speak about my understanding and vision for education and the arts, and how they impact on society – and by impact, I mean its impact on society’s spiritual and economic health.

What was it about the word “art” that made it such a push-button word in education? Why was it derided by politicians as frivolous and unimportant? Why were artists undervalued, unlike athletes, who were seen as heroes? Why was art the first thing cut from education budgets? Where did the wisdom come from that told our leaders that what is really important is research and teaching and becoming a scientist? And, ironically enough, why do so many other people decry this behavior and yet it has so little impact on our elected officials, and indeed, the electorate?

And yet, why are so many books appearing just now telling us how the arts make our babies smarter, heal our sick, make our cities safer, make us happier, and how the arts are the key to confronting this fast- changing world: a world that sees so many jobs being outsourced that an area like the Piedmont Triad is literally filled with empty factories and warehouses -- and all of that happening within one generation. President Bowles said recently that almost nothing of the economic world in which he grew up in the Greensboro area is left.

With so much leaving North Carolina and indeed the United States, something remains untouched. With the down turns of the world’s economy something remains stronger than ever. America is the source of it – the very center of it -- and everyone in the world seemingly wants to be a part of it. It is exported, generating billions of dollars in goods and services and yet it is never outsourced. It is, simply put, the very thing denigrated and cut out of public education: American Arts.

Let’s look at some numbers first: On July 19, The Associated Press announced that the film, The Dark Knight earned \$18.5 million at its midnight screening, seen on 3,040 screens. The final tally raised in its first weekend – I said weekend – was \$158.3 million. 64% of those who

saw it that weekend said they were planning to go a second time. That same weekend, the total grosses for the top 12 films was \$249.6 million, according the box office consultant Media By Numbers.

Here’s some more numbers about a movie: Kung Fu Panda has already grossed more than \$240 million worldwide, and, according to Jeffrey Katzenberg, a franchise of 5 or 6 sequels is in the works. Remember, every moment in a film involves hundreds of creative people: writers, designers,

actors, cinematographers, editors, musicians, not to mention janitors, chefs, secretaries, interns, and accountants – a virtual city of workers spanning every aspect of what we call “a job.” The next time you watch a movie, stay for the end credits and say the phrase “economic stimulus package.”

Why I singled out Kung Fu Panda as an example is that the Chinese intellectual community is in deep discussion about this film. At first there was a call to boycott it in China, because it was felt that the Americans had absconded with one of China’s most precious trademarks – the panda – and were now making money from it. A lot of money.

The boycott, however, never happened, and the film has broken all box office tabulations in China. The Chinese director Lu Chuan said, “When can the Chinese animation industry make such a good movie? From a production stand point, the movie is nearly perfect. Its American creators showed a very sincere attitude toward Chinese culture.” The point of bringing up this particular film is that while we in North Carolina are watching our furniture industry go to China, China is wondering why they can’t make a blockbuster movie about their own culture. And the answer brings us back to American freedom and creativity, that spark which has kept our country at the forefront of the arts and entertainment industry for almost a century now.

The incredible opening ceremonies of the Olympics were, ironically, directed by a dissident filmmaker, choreographed by an ex-patriot

Chinese, who lives in America and a composer, born in China, but who lives around the corner from me in New York City.

As everyone surely knows, the economic news is mostly bad, with consumers being hit with rising costs for gasoline, groceries and you all know about the housing crisis. And yet, the Walt Disney Company announced in May, that in its second quarter, the operating income in its parks and resorts division rose 33 percent on revenue of \$2.7 billion.

There are a number of things everyone seems to know about the Great Depression, and one of them is that the American film industry came into its Golden Age at that time, with Warner Bros, alone, producing 50 films a year – approximately one a week.

A few weeks ago, Frank Rich wrote in his Sunday Opinion column in the New York Times, in an article called “Wall-E for President,” (Wall-E is Disney-Pixar’s most recent film.) “You know America’s economy is cooked when everyone flocks to the movies.”

Now, I bring up Wall-E because not only is it an example of incredible creativity and technology, it also has the power to change the world -- from the children on up.

In case you are unaware of this film, it tells the story of a little robot whose job it is to clean up the garbage and waste left behind when mankind has simply left the planet. People float about the earth in spaceships, waiting for it to be cleaned up. As Rich writes, “Sitting among rapt children under 12, I felt as if I’d stepped through a looking glass. This movie seemed more realistically in touch with what troubles America this year than either the substance or the players of the political food fight beyond the multi-plex’s walls. ... The kids at Wall-E were in deep contemplation of a

world in peril – and of the future that is theirs to make what they will of it. Compare any ten minutes of the movie with ten minutes of any cable-news channel, and you’ll soon be asking: Exactly who are the adults in our country and who are the cartoon characters?”

The Arts in Western Society have always acted this way. They function as teachers. Sometimes they uplift us. Sometimes they show us the way. Sometimes they act as a warning. All those Broadway musicals -- from

the 1927 *Show Boat* through *Finian’s Rainbow* of 1947, *South Pacific* of 1949, and *West Side Story* in 1957 -- led the way to racial integration by teaching a huge audience about the destructive and un-American power of racism. The Arts are always political in some way or other. The Greeks knew it, which is why they brought the populace together in amphitheaters to experience the catharsis of tragedy and purification. It is why Verdi wrote *Aida* and *La Forza del Destino* and why Picasso painted “*Guernica*.” And it is why music, during the time of Confucius, was part of the public administration system. Music created an environment that encouraged the Chinese people to behave in a civilized way.

The people who went to Broadway shows, or their Hollywood adaptations, were rooting for *Magnolia*, a woman of mixed race thrown off a showboat and whose life is destroyed by miscegenation laws. The post-war audiences wept to see Lieutenant Joe Cable die before overcoming the racism that confronted his love for a young Polynesian woman in *South Pacific*. And watching the Puerto Rican-American Maria follow the impromptu cortege of Jets and Sharks carry the body of her Caucasian-American lover, Tony, is a final image that no one who has ever seen or performed in *West Side Story* will ever forget.

But, let me stay with numbers a while longer before I talk to you about the power and function of Art in any society, and why it is one of America’s greatest achievements -- one that is linked to the very philosophy that created the United States in the first place.

I have mentioned numbers – large numbers – involving the profits from motion pictures. Remember, these motion pictures are making millions, billions, and that is AFTER they have paid the people who work on them. But movies and television have a new creative partner: video games.

You may not be aware of this fact: Half of all Americans over the age of six play computer and video games. Each year, Americans purchase more than 220 million games, and more than 40% of these people are women.

The video game business is larger than the motion picture industry. Last year, it grossed \$10 billion and films grossed a mere \$9.5 billion. That was last year. The only thing that will change, should someone want to

read these words next week or next month – or indeed any time within the foreseeable future – is the size of these numbers. Every day we can update the examples, but what we are witnessing is a new era and the leaders of commerce and economic development who will succeed recognize it as such.

Video games require unbelievable patience and skill. No one needs to require kids to play. They do it because they love it. Everyone participating in this brand new entertainment is using vast and complex skill sets. It is a key to education in the future, and I intend to explore its use for just that purpose. And, needless to say, a video game requires designers, musicians, thinkers and imagination. After that, the scientists and technicians make it possible.

Now most of the people who work in the film and gaming industry would not call themselves artists. They work with the artists, using their expertise to fulfill the artists' vision. This is an important aspect of the synergy between the artist and a technological society.

Technology has but one function: to make the romantic dream happen. Once man realized that the big white disk in the ever-changing sky was not a hole but a round thing, and called it the moon, mankind has wanted to go there. And so, centuries later we did. That's what creative technology did. Once Einstein and Poincaré helped us to understand time and simultaneity, people have wanted to communicate simultaneously with other people. Our current technological response to that romantic dream is the Internet and the cell phone. Again, technologies at the bidding of the creative dream, and together, they have literally changed the world -- and within fifteen years.

Anyone who worked in Germany before the Wall came down, knows that the East German Communist government simply could not sustain its position against the West because the East German citizens, taught to wear grey and never deviate from prescriptive behavioral patterns, got illegal satellite television and every home in Dresden, Leipzig, and Karl Marx Stadt could watch American television and every kid wanted to be like us. They laughed at *The Flintstones* and wanted to be part of an open society that had the courage to make fun of itself. Communications technology brought creative entertainment, whose subtext was one of freedom and laughter. Against that, there is no wall high enough. Nor is there a wall strong enough.

The relationship between the professional, self-professed artist and the rest of society is as creative as the arts themselves. One part of society cannot exist without the other. And yet, we still refuse to recognize the facts, borne out by the numbers and the ever-changing world. In Daniel Pink's book, *A Whole New Mind*, which is required reading for everyone here, Pink writes the following:

The late Gordon MacKenzie, a longtime creative force at Hallmark Cards, once told a story that quickly entered the folklore among designers. MacKenzie was a public-spirited fellow who often visited schools to talk about his profession. He'd open each talk by telling students he was an artist. Then he'd look around the classroom, notice the artwork on the walls, and wonder aloud who created the masterpieces.

"How many artists are there in the room?" MacKenzie would ask. "Would you please raise your hands?"

The responses always followed the same pattern. In kindergarten and first-grade, every kid thrust his hand into the air. In second grade classes, about three-fourths of the kids raised their hands, though less eagerly. In third grade, only a few children held up their hands. And by sixth

grade, not a single hand went up. The kids just looked around to see if anybody in the class would admit to what they'd now learned was deviant behavior.

A few lines later, the author simply states what we artists know:

The wealth of nations and the well-being of individuals now depend on having artists in the room.

Recently, the National Endowment for the Arts published an extensive paper called *Artists in the Workforce 1990-2005*. Dana Gioia, Chairman of the NEA, writes in the introduction to this paper

The time has come to insist on an obvious but overlooked fact – artists are workers. They make things and perform services, just like other workers, and these goods and services have value – not merely in lofty spiritual terms but also in dollars and cents. Without denying the higher purposes of the artistic vocation, this report shows that artists play an important role in America's cultural vitality and economic prosperity.

There are now almost 2 million Americans who describe their primary occupation as artist. Representing 1.4 percent of the U. S. labor force, artists constitute a sizeable class of workers – only slightly smaller than the total number of active-duty and reserve personnel in the U.S. military (2.2 million). Artists represent a larger group than the legal profession (lawyers, judges and paralegals), medical doctors (physicians, surgeons and dentists) or agricultural workers (farmers, ranchers, foresters, and fishers.)

The size of the artistic community gives the group enormous, aggregate income – approximately \$70 billion annually. In terms of sheer numbers, artists represent a powerful labor force whose economic contributions go largely unrecognized by both general public and the government.

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While American artists are not unemployed, they remain conspicuously underemployed. One-third of artists work for only part of the year. Actors, dancers, choreographers, musicians, and other entertainers are especially vulnerable to seasonal unemployment. These statistics reveal a huge loss of cultural and creative expertise. Such widespread underemployment seems almost tragic in a nation whose public schools have increasingly eliminated arts education.

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From global exports to local investments, the new American economy depends on imagination, innovation, and creativity, and those are the skills that artists develop, nurture, and promote. Isn't it time that the nation notices?

Dana Gioia is saying exactly what Daniel Pink and so many others are saying: In Pink's words: "The future belongs to the creators and empathizers, pattern recognizers and meaning makers."

We have just passed through a century of linear thinkers who predicted a future that never happened. Futurism and the dualities brought to us by the Greeks and finding its apogee in our binary computer systems is being supplanted by the view of our Universe that is more complex and based on Quantum mechanics. Everyone should also read *Programming the Universe* by Seth Lloyd to understand the way physicists are attempting to comprehend the way our physical universe actually works. It is no longer viewed as a series of on-off switches. It is not about night and day, good and bad. Nor is it about creating separate subjects from which to teach and quantify our students. Artists have always known this. The so-called “thinking outside the box” might be a definition of Art.

But it is more than that. I hope to encourage everyone to return to the time when each of us was in kindergarten and every one of us considered ourselves an artist, because we all have that in us. Every day we make artistic decisions in the clothes we wear, the food we order from the menu, the way we present our thoughts and solve the problems of our jobs and our lives.

I believe artists must take some of the responsibility for this imaginary and unfortunate line that separates those of us who are artists from the rest of the world. My father, a medical doctor who was a general practitioner, had to use his expertise every half hour when he had office hours to diagnose each and every patient who came to him. He was one of the greatest artists I ever knew. He made that leap of imagination, using his knowledge and skill, to cure and comfort the sick and the needy. It is very close to what I do when I conduct a symphony.

The world we artists understand is a world of co-creation, connections and interdependence. Stephanie Pace Marshall has written an extraordinary book on education. It is about the structures of our universe and how by being congruent with those structures, every organization, whether it is how we teach our children (and indeed ourselves) or run our businesses, can inform the healthiest paradigm for

our future. Her book, *The Power to Transform* is an exploration of how institutions can transform themselves in light of what we know about nature. It could be a story about the state of North Carolina, or a story about your life.

Here's the point: We are not separate. We are all interconnected. Our true institutions are based on a web of connections and not a series of discrete and separate subjects, categories, or functions. That is how an Aspen grove feeds itself, grows and survives. It is what every artist knows. Wagner's music dramas did not come from nowhere. They are based on his interpretation of Greek drama, and fueled by his love of Italian opera and pride in being a German following the era of Beethoven. And his library was not that of a musician, but that of a philosopher.

We humans are storytellers. It is bound into the DNA of what it is to be a human and the language of art and music emerges when most anthropologists define us as homo sapiens: The walking and thinking hominid. And the day we became human, we built a scaffold and painted huge pictures on the walls of caves. We just had to tell our stories.

Understanding this is power: Power to create the viable institutions that will bring the jobs and a restored livelihood to our state. Jobs that can be done cheaper and faster in other countries

will go to other countries – that is, until a computer does it faster and without fatigue. But the creative mind will always trump the unthinking mimic and the disengaged mechanic and that is our advantage.

American Art is the strongest because we do not avoid outside influence – we encourage it and then make it our own. The French can refuse to call a computer “le computer,” as a way of preserving their “Frenchness,” but we just smile at their defensiveness. We have no problem with giving Academy Awards to composers from Italy, China, England, and Spain, simply because we judged their work to be the best. The world calls it Hollywood and thinks it resides somewhere in Los Angeles, but the truth is: Hollywood is part of the American philosophy and it only

makes us stronger. Consider for a moment the classical musicians who created the American sound: Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland and George Gershwin – all American-born children of Russian-Ukrainian immigrants. I left our Irving Berlin, because he was born in Russia.

Our freedom of expression, guaranteed as the very first amendment to our Constitution, linked with our ever-changing multi-culturalism, is the closest thing I can think of as a ticket to our success in this new world of commerce and trade. That is why we can make a Kung Fu Panda movie and China did not. Other countries can replicate our designs cheaper than we can, but we are the designers. That is why jazz came out of America. That is why, although the cinema may have been invented by two French brothers, we make the movies that the world wants to see. And when it comes to training artists, it is America that has the greatest conservatories, not – as you might think -- Europe, and that is in spite of their huge governmental resources. In European conservatories the kind of art that generally gets taught and is valued is very much controlled by a post-World War II aesthetic, one that stifles a full embrace of the cultural possibilities of the 21st century. Yes, American schools need money, but freedom will always trump money when it comes to invention and imagination.

The students from the University of North Carolina’s School of the Arts I took with me to play in the Vienna Radio Symphony were so good, the Viennese are suggesting an exchange program with our school. The two string players I took with me to the Grammys – one from Charlotte and one from Emerald Isle -- were so good that the contractor wrote to them to tell them that if they ever come to Los Angeles he will hire them. One of our freshman just composed a ballet that had its world premiere in Venice last month and a high school senior of UNCSCA has just entered London’s Royal Ballet. And the other day 15 School of the Arts film alums created, directed and acted in Pineapple Express, a sensational new comedy.

But, it is up to North Carolina to consider whether all these kids should be trained here and then have to leave for Los Angeles or New York. It is up to this great state to look at what is happening right now and make a commitment to its own future. It is really quite clear, but it takes courage to read the tealeaves and respond to the transformation that is happening around us. Will we sit back and watch the jobs and the talent

go somewhere else, or will be capture this moment and make it our destiny?

I remind you of the following: The great state of North Carolina was the visionary place that saw that one of its fundamental responsibilities was to create a public university, when nothing like it existed in Massachusetts, Connecticut or New York. December 11, 1792 was that day. George Washington had just become President of the United States and the University of North Carolina was born.

Centuries later, in the early 1960s, the state of North Carolina created America's first public conservatory for the performing arts, now called the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. The state legislature has in the two years I have been chancellor awarded the school some \$50 million to create new buildings and programs, one of which, significantly enough, is for a new animation, gaming and digital design building. Other moneys are for a proposed Center for Design Innovation.

Our elected officials are beginning to see the future – but, as I have said before, the future began yesterday. Artists – and I believe they will be American artists – will imagine and create the future. Technical support will be the essential partner, but the impetus will come from the dreamers and storytellers. They are the creators – sometimes I prefer to use the word ‘translators.’ Stephanie Pace Marshall calls them ‘transformers.’

The true history of the world is the history of human artistic endeavor. That is why we go to Rome, or listen to a symphony, visit the Eiffel Tower, gaze at the Great Wall of China, or go to the movies. No matter what happens in world economies and world politics, it is the art and the artist that connects the dots, makes us think, makes us laugh, reminds us to sing, warns us to behave and gives us hope.

Thank you.

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