

“This Is Just The Beginning”
NPN Gathering Closing Keynote
Delivered at the Century Ballroom, Seattle, Washington
Sunday, December 14, 2008

To Mimi, MK, Wesley, the incredible NPN staff, esteemed Board and Network Partners and all the people who worked so hard to make this incredible weekend happen. Thank you for your love, thank you for your hard work and dedication to us.

Let's see who is in the house- all the Presenters-make some noise! Cultural Organizations-make some noise! Foundations-make some noise! And to my Fellow Artists-I am so proud of you-you did your thing and really put it down this weekend-make some noise!!

There are so many people who I love and respect in this room-who I have been supported by, who I have had the privilege to work beside, and laugh and cry with. Then there are those of you who I had the pleasure of meeting this weekend for the first time and falling in love with. And then there are those of you who I have yet to meet and fall in love with and I so look forward to that. This conversation for me today is really special....because you, for me are family.

In preparation for my talk tonight, Mimi and I spoke quite intimately and honestly about the challenges and opportunities of this last year and I was given the charge in this keynote to help sum up the pulse of the weekend and to share a bit about my own understandings and revelations over the past year in the intersection of Art and Activism.

I am going to attempt do this in 3 Parts, 3 Acts or 3 Movements-whatever your artistic pleasure!!!

Pt I: This Moment/This Movement:

We are in the midst of an incredible moment not only from a social, political and economic perspective but also from a spiritual one. We are entering into a time of unification and as the silos fall away and as we watch the dismantling of structures that have long been in existence, it is important to understand

that we are making room for a new paradigm. Imagine that we the human race are very pregnant right now and we are finally starting to go into labor- and we are holding the agony of the process in one hand and bliss of the expected final results in the other.

This is an intense time. It is a time of great hope and deep anxiety. This is the shaking and waking up of our planet. And we are being ignited on various levels, many of us for the first time. Strange things will happen in this time. This is a time of insanity and miracles.

Let me give you an example:

Just last week in Chicago the employees of Republic Windows and Doors refused to leave their place of employment after they were given three days notice that the plant was closing without severance or vacation pay to its employees. The owners claimed that they had to close because the Bank of America cut their line of financing and credit. This after the bank received \$25 billion dollars in direct bail out capital. The 200 + predominately Latino community of workers took up a peaceful sit-in which they used to clean and beautify the plant. On the 3rd day, management came to the table and with the help of Governor Blagojevich who sided with the workers and vowed that the state of Illinois would not do business with Bank of America until it resolved the issue. Needless to say, the bank managed to see the light and lend \$ 1.35million coupled with an addition \$400k from JP Morgan Chase to cover wages and benefits owed to the workers. Carl Rosen, a union spokesperson stated: "This is about more than money. It's about what can be achieved when workers organize and stand up for justice." Two days later the Governor was arrested for allegedly taking bribes to fill Barack Obama's vacant Senate seat.

I mean, you cannot make this stuff up!

As I stated before, this is a time of insanity and miracles and our challenge is to stay alert, alive, awake and aware- to keep both eyes open and both hands on the wheel!

We are just beginning to get present to the consequences of many things-the sub-prime lending fiasco, the callous "right shoring" frenzy and the local and global disenfranchisement and abuse of "skilled and unskilled" labor, the blood soaked business of fossil fuel & its relentless barbequing of the planet, the War in Iraq and Afghanistan and our 1.3 million returning veterans who are coming back with no viable re-integration strategy-these are just some of the chickens that are starting to come home to roost.

But there is hope!

As part of this moment of unification we are seeing a convergence among other sectors and movements in society which are important to become aware of. The Environmental movement is finally sitting down with the Social Justice movement, the altruism of non-profit 501 (c)(3) organizations is caucusing with the business savvy of responsible enterprise, and eastern ancient spiritual philosophy and wisdom are connecting and intersecting with western cosmic science and technology.

And because of this, the potential for a new reality is starting to unfold. This convergence will land in something called the 4th sector and we will begin to see a surge of for benefit companies moving to the fore. These are ventures that incorporate the hybrid of beneficial products and services, sound and profitable business strategy, and philanthropic mission. These ideas have been around for a while, but now, they are really starting to take off. Responsible capitalism will represent a new set of values as venture capitalists scramble to build out this sector. And companies that participate in this sector will now aim to achieve a triple bottom line. One that is profitable for people, profitable for the planet and good for business.

This sector is being fueled by the Green Rush and the Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability markets. And very soon you will begin to notice the mainstream branding of the "Conscious Consumer" as Whole Foods goes primetime and Eco-luxury stakes its claim with Leonardo DiCaprio and a baby Polar Bear on the cover of Vanity Fair. Shout out to Alison Warden and her beautiful piece. Thank you for giving us cultural context for this amazing region of the country, and this beautiful animal.

As a counter to the Eco-luxury movement, we have the Eco-equity movement with my brother, Van Jones, and Green 4 All, and my sister Majora Carter and her dedication to Greening the Ghetto first through the work of Sustainable South Bronx and now through her own company the Majora Carter Group.

This is all part of the new language that is making its way into the mainstream.

Yes! The revolution is finally upon us. And there will be a lot going on-however I believe the most significant shift we will bear witness to is the one where we move out of the Age of the Celebrity and into the Age of the Citizen. In this new age, people will be less consumed with watching Britney and Lindsey unravel and will become more concerned with, as Irene quoting Sekou said, "the possibility of life, liberty, and the pursuit of something new."

For those of us who aspire to create new forms of power and agency-we will want to be engaged around how we can raise our own platforms and make our own brand of contribution.

In addition to the LOHAS and GREEN economies, I believe there is another intersecting economy emerging –one that will be deeply relevant to us and there is a sacred body of work necessary to access this new economy and with it- this new brand of empowered citizen.

Joseph Pine and James Gilmore, godfathers of *The Experience Economy* call it the Economy of Transformation. And businesses who choose to participate in this economy will be offering the promise of CHANGE. Customers who engage this economy will no longer be looking for a product. They will BE the product and they will want to be guided and facilitated towards their highest dreams and aspirations.

Michael Gerber, author of the E-Myth says that “Entrepreneurs are the new revolutionaries.” I would like to modify that statement-I believe that Social Entrepreneurs are the new revolutionaries, and that my friends, is US!

Part II: Why We Rock!

Now I want to tell you why we rock, or as we say in Hip Hop, “this is why we’re hot!”

We have always been about this! In our values and ideals-we have always been in the business of dreams and aspirations, inspiration and imagination, about power, voice, and agency. And the wisdom we have gained-practicing in the margins for all these years will be crucial to disseminate and share as this new set of values and ideals makes its way to the center.

In the breakouts this weekend folks had a lot to say about how we could meet this moment and the various roles we might play:

In Getting Obama-ized-the need for real political engagement and accountability rose to the top of the discussion, and folks saw an opportunity to learn from the Regan era when the arts were the first things cut, and to take bold action by actually encouraging a greater investment in the arts as part of the economic recovery strategy. Kathie deNobriga said, “We are not victims-we need to reclaim our civic process.” She went on to add that Arts and Education needed to be expanded to a real commitment to Arts and Culture and the recognition of its impact on the revitalization of communities. The

return of cultural diplomacy-was another issue raised in the desire for political action that would address the barriers to Artist Visas.

In the Giving Voice to Community Session, the need to strengthen and become more deliberate about our community engagement was expressed as a vital part of playing our role. NPN as an organization has a wonderful opportunity to lead here by expanding the expectation of artists work in community. Scott Turner Schofield talked about creative models and strategies for outreach and engagement that included Facebook, MySpace, colleges and recognized community leaders,-these efforts would be employed with an intentional impact that is good for audience development (i.e. business) and good for communities. Jose reminded us about the importance of documenting our work-and becoming more deliberate about the ways we share our process and pedagogy.

In Hybrid Careers in the Arts-Teo Castellanos talked about the importance of honoring teaching artists-not as the equivalent of flipping burgers but rather as an intentional commitment to cultivating great new artists and great new audiences. He referenced the famous George Bernard Shaw quote: "Those that can do-those that can't-teach" and he countered by saying he walks with Uda Hagden's quote that says "Only those who can-can teach!"

All sessions emphasized a committed and dedicated focus to empowering youth as part of their short and long term strategies. The over arching themes in these dialogues were about recognizing our power, valuing our contribution and encouraging greater internal and external investment in every aspect of our engagement.

I also want encourage us to think beyond just the realm of the arts-we have an awesome opportunity to bring our talents and gifts to places we never imagined and, through sharing our wisdom, be real ambassadors for change.

As I traveled the nation this year with the Hip Hop Mental Health Project, an initiative of 1+1, what we realized is that many people are suffering in silence-not just from what can be diagnosed or prescribed for- but on a soul and cellular level there has been a deep societal estrangement that is looking to be reconciled in the matter of our humanity.

Audiences came out of the shadows this year with us to begin to inspect the individual and collective damage and to imagine the possibility of a national agenda on healing.

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Through this work we were approached by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in Washington, and we are now engaged in conversations with the Government about how they can use this methodology to help transform the way mental health professionals engage “consumers”, and their families.

If you had told me I'd be rolling with Jay Z or Puff, depending upon the strategy and intention I might believe you, but rolling with the Feds? I want you to know that there are revolutionaries working in the Federal Government, dedicated to a new agenda of transformation and healing to eliminating societal stigma and supporting greater accessibility to more compassionate and competent care. They are looking to us and it is a beautiful thing.

We know the power of what we do in the arts...and it's ability to heal and transform, we have each in our own way bore witness to people coming into themselves-discovering their own greatness and cultivating their own truths....we have seen art bridge the divides of insider and outsider-we have all used our work to make a profound difference.

We have an opportunity to share this wisdom to engage with new and unusual suspects in our broader society. We have a chance to take this revolution beyond the bounds of our own backyards.

Part III: The Work We Get to Do!

As revolutionary Social Entrepreneurs -our new empowered citizen movement fully realized will rely primarily on three things:

- #1. It will rely on our ability to move people closer to and in alignment with their truest selves i.e. their Vision, Mission and Purpose.
- #2. It will rely on our ability to move people closer to one another- i.e. the building of authentic community
- #3. It will rely on our ability to heal and foster the healing of the cultural wounds of Scarcity and Separation.

In the aesthetics panel discussion there was this question posed as cultural diversity vs. excellence which some felt was really about addressing the impact of racism in the arts.....

We have an unprecedented opportunity to have this field lead by leaning deeper into the mythology of these divides...these social constructs of: Race,

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Class, Geography and Gender- to lean into the divides of “commercial” or “traditional art” vs. “Community art”, of “age” vs. “artistic merit”, of “professional” vs. “grassroots”-to dig deep into the divides-of politics AND generation.....and even sometimes the perceived divide of “presenter” and “artist”, and “consultant” and “theater” and “community space” of “mainstream non-profit” and “ethnic cultural center”

The challenges we face in marketing and audience development rest in these divides. The challenges we face in terms of leadership succession live in these divides.

We have a chance to do our very best work-right here-by healing and transforming the angst and tension that exists within us -that exists in our communities and that exists in this room.

There is so much pain and disappointment that lives in these constructs-the competition for space, and resource and validation, the never ending need to prove that we are worthy and deserving of an opportunity, the anger, hurt and cynicism we feel from perceived rejections-the fear and anxiety that prevents us from taking risks with ourselves and each other.

We have a monumental moment before us-to help usher in this process of unification-to mend these wounds and to hold each other accountable to a higher vision; one where we recognize and take full responsibility for our power, our beauty, our grace, and our brilliance.

At the risk of being totally cornball-there is no separation! We are all part of a larger magnificent consciousness-expressing itself through each of us nobly-nobody is expendable-no matter how angry we get-or how right we think we are-when the moment of power -falls into our hands we each have a responsibility to remember this.

The world is abundant-there is enough for all of us. Even in the moments of grants that fall through and fiscal crisis-and the threat and reality of recession and the collapsing stock market-we can easily forget- just how vast the universe is and just how many incredible resources we have at our disposal. Money is also a social construct. And what lies at the core of our currency is appreciation-the more that we can divinely appreciate our talents, gifts, and blessings, the more they will appreciate.

I'd like to leave you with a little story.

It is November 5th 2008- midnight-I am on the phone dialing-after the third ring I hear the booming jubilant voice of my 81 year old father-up past his bedtime-
“did you see it” he asks me?

I ask him: “How does it feel Daddy?” He says: “Whoa child-I never thought this day would come-and I never thought in a million years that I would live to see it”

I laugh and tell him like I tell you-buckle your seatbelts-this is only the beginning.....

-End-