

Learning *and* yearning

*Eric Booth
on creativity,
teaching,
and the verbs
of art*



Eric Booth is many things: actor, teacher, arts advocate, and author, to name a few. Booth's consummate talent may be his ability to bring his entire range of skills, experience, and wisdom to bear onstage as a speaker. What follows here is an edited version of remarks Booth delivered at the 2007 Educational Theatre Conference in September. It's not possible to communicate the passion of a riveting speech like the one he delivered to a packed house of three hundred theatre teachers. But in the spirit of the provocative challenges Booth put forth that day, we're going to give it our best effort.

ONE OF THE THINGS I live by—and I have a hunch you will agree with me—is this statement: eighty percent of what we teach is who we are. Eighty percent. The other twenty percent, all the formal aspects of our work and our technique—our pedagogy and curriculum—they're very important too, but the real impact on young people is in who we are as human beings when we are teaching them. If you doubt that statistic—and yes, it is a made up statistic—but if you doubt the veracity of it, think about the great teachers in your own life.

It was not the quality of the handouts or the cleverness of the curriculum that made you choose to direct your life in another way—it was the teacher. I've been thinking about the fact that the two greatest educators in my own life were probably my own theatre teachers. It's been over a decade since I've been in touch with



DON CORATHERS

them. So it made me want to urge you, if you have theatre teachers whose eighty percent made a change in your life, check in with them. You know how good it feels when it's done to you. It feels really sloppy on my part not to have acknowledged how significant their contribution was, and to realize on the recipient's end how much a difference that makes. So, there's that bit of a confession.

I've also been thinking about my very first day as a theatre teaching artist. I was assigned to work in a South Bronx third-grade classroom. I wasn't very good at it. This first day, I had a really dopey activity that had to do with paper plates—you could make a little mask and hold it up and act like a hero. It was a pretty lame exercise—it was good for me as a beginner—but there wasn't much real resonance in it. When I arrived for this class and found my classroom, the teacher said, "Oh I'm so glad you're here Eric, but we're going to have to start class a little bit late because last night somebody broke into the school and smeared human excrement on the walls of our classroom, and I have to clean it off."

So I helped her clean off the human shit from the walls of this classroom. It took us about ten or fifteen minutes while the kids waited. The whole while I'm thinking this is about as degrading a learning situation as humans can make for themselves, and it's actually a part of their kids' lives, starting the day with this. What kind of artistic learning is possible in a setting this depressing?

Nonetheless we cleaned up the room, and I started my lame exercise, offering the twenty percent of the pedagogical part of my work. I had them select a superhero that they really felt strong about and then make a little mask from a paper plate. Then they held up their masks and practiced standing like the superhero for awhile. Finally, we got to the moment where the kids were going to share their superhero poses and positions. The first one to volunteer was the runt of the classroom. The teacher later told me that he was, in fact, the one everybody picks on, kind of the loser of the group. And you know how this works.

As so often happens in theatre, it is the ones who are struggling hardest that find a way to shine and be successful. It's a kind of success that hard to quantify. Etymologically the word "success" means to have a follow-through. So those are the kids that seem to have the most powerful follow-through in some ways.

I invited the kid to be the first one, and he came forward and you could feel years of pent-up energy coming into this moment—he sort of got himself ready, then he put up his mask, and took his superhero posture, and the biggest kid in the class took a half step back and went, "Whoa."

That moment has stayed with me. I thought, "Man, I am part of a practice where the runt in the class can take a position and put a paper plate in front of his face and make the bully go, 'Whoa.'" That's the kind of power we have in our work.

I wasn't very good at using that power in my early days, but I've gotten a bit better over time. I've learned how to channel it through activities, guided by a phrase I use: "enabling constraints." I'm referring to activities that let people become powerful because of the limitations of the very activity itself. This kind of work actually allows people to go deeper because they can *feel* the effect of their work and assess the quality of their learning because of the constraints. I've learned to tweak and adjust and extend and use that power in a variety of ways.

I want to challenge you to think about—for yourself, your field, and your colleagues—how to actually take the power that we have as theatre teachers and look to change it and take advantage of what I perceive as an unusual opportunity that we seem to have been handed. I think forces, actually two trends, are moving that are hugely powerfully to our advantage. If we can tap them I think we have a whole new viability and importance in the education and the art world.

So I'm going to take a few minutes and unpack these two trends with you, and my hope is that it lets you get a feel for their potential. And remember, they're not mutually exclusive. I think

big forces are coming from behind to support us, as the cavalry, even as we may find ourselves in this cringing posture much of the time in the present.

Let me give you three images to introduce this first force that I think we can tap. Image number one: Lisbon, Portugal 2006, the first ever UNESCO worldwide arts education conference. You know UNESCO—the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. This conference was the first time they had ever they brought together arts educators from around the world to take a look at where they are and see how they can advance their cause. Because it's a UN agency, the event was comprised primarily of podium speeches that were excruciatingly boring. But they were presidents, they were culture ministers, they were heads of state of various kinds, and in this parade of tedium, the same message kept getting pounded for three days: my country has an environmental crisis, an economic crisis, a youth mental health crisis, we have five or six other different kinds of crises, and we lay these crises at the feet of arts education. After about the fourth or fifth one, those of us who were listening started to look at each other. Us? Arts educators? We're this empowered? What could we possibly do to solve every major crisis on the planet? Every one of those speeches concluded in roughly the same way—the only solution we can see is developing creativity in the young.

I was the closing keynote speaker for this conference. It was interesting that that they turned to a theatre teacher to be the one person to make the speech to bring it together. I should note that when they launched this international worldwide arts education conference, they forgot to invite America. That's where we stand. That's how irrelevant we were in the worldwide scene. They forgot, and they only noticed it when no Americans signed up to come. And they said, "Oh God, we forgot to invite them." So retroactively, they invited a bunch of Americans, and I guess to put a little fig leaf over their mistake they asked me to do the closing keynote.

After listening so closely to the other speakers, I said that it was abundantly clear, including to the Americans, that there is a banner of three words we can all walk behind: Literacy—arts educators think it's important for kids to be able to read, write, speak, and communicate effectively with words. Numeracy—we think it's important for kids to be able to work with numbers and understand that system. And creativity.

And all those heads of state turned to us to provide the creative component and to launch creativity across the curriculum. That's what they're turning to us for and ever since that moment I've been asking myself, "How well are we doing?" Are we getting ready to be the instigators, provocateurs, and providers of creativity across the curriculum? And the answer is, we've got a long way to go.

The second image I want to paint for you along the same lines is of the National Arts Policy Roundtable. Doesn't that sound like something you'd love to avoid? That is a real suit fest of the Americans for the Arts. What they did was notice that, of all philanthropic giving in America that happens every year, the share of all giving that goes to the arts has decreased every single year for the last seventeen years. So they pulled together the people who write the checks—not the people who think, "Oh the arts are wonderful," but the people who write the checks, and asked, "Why, when it comes down to it, are you instead of writing a check to the arts, why are you writing a check to social service, to medical institutions, to higher education—what is this?" And their answer was almost universally, "Well, we think we have to write our checks to that which provides public value, and we're not seeing that the arts provide public value." Pure and simple. "We believe in and love the arts, but we don't believe that the arts are providing enough public value to justify our checks."

So it basically comes down to creativity again, because business believes in creativity, but they do not believe it connects much with the arts. In fact, the number one gig I am asked to do

in the corporate world—and those gigs pay very well so I take them all—is "creativity but no art." Yes: "Please give us what matters, the stuff that our future is dependent on, but don't muck it up by, you know, making me be like a tree." They usually go to that one first, unless it's all men in the room, and then it's "Don't make me do ballet." Those are two default associations. The first one is a kind of putting down of theatre activities. You know, act like a tree. That's their default fear of what arts requires of them, and it's not providing personal or public value. Art is soft and fluffy when they want hard and useful. Part of our task is we've got to close the gap and help people grasp that the arts actually have something to do with creativity and that it is powerful in terms of producing effective results. Here's another challenge for you: How many of you would do well in the five-minute speech about the creative component in your programs? How many of you could give the elevator speech, you know, the eighty-second statement that illuminates the ways in which your programs produce the creativity skills that workplaces want? Let me give you an example.

One of Americans for the Arts conferences produced a survey for the National Arts Policy Roundtable I mentioned—which is basically made up of America's big corporations—that lists the primary skills of creativity that they need in their workplace. They asked their corporate people to vote on which ones were the most important. They agreed on ten attributes. As you [read] these think about how they apply to your own work. Here's the list, with a little commentary on the first three:

The ability to originate ideas no one else thinks of. We do that. But do we really focus on it, do we make it clearer, do we make the learners know they're doing that?

Problem identification. There was not too long ago a research survey of Nobel Prize-winning scientists found out that they are no better at problem solving than any other scientists, but that they are way better at problem identification.

Creative problem-solving. There's a school I know that wanted to start as an arts school, but they knew they wouldn't get any funding so they announced themselves as a creative problem solving school, and they were launched in months.

Here's the rest of the list: Originality and inventiveness in work; Ability to take risks. Ability to communicate new ideas to others. Tolerance of ambiguity. Integrating knowledge across different disciplines. Fundamental curiosity. Ability to identify new patterns of behavior or new combinations of action. And finally, the notion of no right answer.

Two of them tied for the top attributes that corporate leaders wanted in terms of creativity skills from high school education. Which ones do you think came up first?

In the first look—they're doing the preliminary research right now so I don't have final results—the top two, an almost redundant match, were tolerance of ambiguity and notion of no right answer. Those are the two creativity skills that corporate America considers most essential for the new workers that they want. Look at what that says. They're actually looking for a kind of attitudinal perspective, rather than real skills. It's almost a philosophical world view, and look at our schooling. Look at what we're doing to those two essential attributes and then look as theatre as a haven.

Think about what we could do if we could illuminate, open that up, and make articulate that we are, in fact, nurturing people to hold ambiguity and to function well when there aren't immediate and clear right answers to situations, and to know what to do when they don't know what to do.

So my challenge to you is, how do we get effective in developing capacities like that?

The last time I spoke to theatre teachers, one of the horses I beat to death is distinction between the nouns and the verbs of art—I think we get ourselves in a real limited situation by over emphasizing the nouns of art. It's the nouns of art that get us in trouble. It's a belief in nouns that prompt peo-

ple to pay a hundred bucks to go see a show on Broadway, or to believe theatre is only being in the show at school. What's happened is we now believe that art is a noun—a thing. America is Noun Central in the known universe. And in a sense we are all complicit in letting the nouns colonize way too much of the arts experience when all the learning happens in the verbs. The verbs are in what people *do* to create those nouns, and those are what businesses want—the verbs that allow for creativity across the curriculum. The verbs are what artists love about art the experiences of making art. Audiences pay for and get attached to the experiences, that is what provides the value in the artistic event, not the mere presence with the noun—and yet we still think of art as nouns.

This is another part of the challenge: How can we adjust our pedagogy in a way to open that up—to focus on and intentionally develop the key verbs of our theatre art, of creativity, through theatre?

Time for a quick pause around the word pedagogy—a word so repellent it sounds like an illegal act. Etymologically, the word “pedagogy” goes back to ancient Rome when a pedagogue was the slave who led the male children of citizens to and from school and kept a general eye on their learning welfare. I was not too happy to discover our teaching lineage derives from slaves, but with my usual positive message of hard truth, I came away with the view that our practice, our pedagogy, is that we lead young people to and from learning experiences, and keep a general eye on their learning welfare. I can live with that. What's important about this definition is that it helps us remember that students do the learning and that our real role is shepherding them well and carefully, holding secret prayer vigils while they're having learning experiences, hoping good things are happening.

I think a big part of our eighty percent—that stuff about what we teach is who we are—is in that general eye we keep on their learning welfare and all that action in the verbs of art. I want us to become more effective in using

those verbs in our work. We need to figure out how to add reflective components in our pedagogy so young people become aware of those verbs.

It was not fair that when I did my first plays in middle school that all I knew to do was try my darndest to be good at the audition and get the part. Then all I could do was whatever any tall person told me to do, lie awake all night after the bad dress rehearsal, and hope everything went well on the show. And then, a year later, when that exact same cycle hit, that's all I had to go on. There was a lot more support I could have been given about the verbs involved to realize that there's actually a discipline here and there are some skills I've learning and I have some distinctive strengths and capacities I might want to build on, and I've got some areas—other than that I don't project very well—that I might want to emphasize. If I had had some more emphasis on the verbs of my art—a bit of reflection on the those things, I could have sunk my teeth into my capacities and knowledge way further, way faster, and gotten a whole lot more sense of myself as a capable, creative person within an art form, within a discipline, which means “to learn.” And it is, in the end, a discipline that provides an enabling constraint for us to learn. To do that, we have to adjust the balance between the nouns and the verbs of art.

There's a story I like to tell—I tell it often because it's really the only smart thing I've ever said. It's a true story of the worst moment of my professional career. I was being interviewed on live television by a very peppy morning talk show hostess, and she said, “Eric we're just about to the end of our time here so could you end our discussion by giving us a very quick, clear distinction between art and entertainment?”

What would you have done in those two minutes on live television? Well, I will confess that the crap that poured out of me for two minutes was a humiliation to our field. I did us no service. I don't remember exactly what I said—I just poured English blather out of my mouth. In truth, you know how sometimes you're performing and you

know you're dying, and there's this other little voice going on back there? Well, that other little voice grabbed onto something completely useless, something that someone had once told me, “If you're ever dying on live television, just don't stop talking because then they can't turn it into sound bytes that will haunt you forever.” So that's all I had to go on. Take no breaths. Just keep talking, and eventually it will end and be over. So after that experience I said to myself, “What *is* this distinction between art and entertainment because I don't want to go through that near-death experience again.”

What I came up lies at the core of this nouns and verbs issue. First, let me say that entertainment is *not* the enemy of art. Please God let it not be the enemy of art in any way, or we are really in trouble with our high school musicals, with Broadway, and with what I choose to do on many a Friday night. So, please, let it not be in opposition to art. That said, here is what I believe distinguishes art and entertainment: entertainment happens within what we already know. Entertainment, whatever our reaction—laughing, crying, whatever—says underneath it, “Yep, the world is the way you think it is.” Entertainment confirms, and that feels great. I don't know about you, but I'll pay big bucks to have skillful people and fantastic technology confirm my notions of the way the world is and should be in delightful, imaginative, beautiful ways. That is really worth some serious money.

What distinguishes art is that it happens outside of what we already know. Inherent in the artistic experience is the capacity to expand our sense of the way the world is or might be. And here's a challenging piece—the art isn't in the noun you're looking at. The art is in this amazing capacity to expand your sense of the possible. I know this. I talk to high school kids about rock music that I don't even find remotely entertaining, but in what they talk to me about they're having arts experiences. Then I talk to people who've just gone to see *Hamlet*, and they aren't even having entertainment experiences. Art lives in the individual's capacity to

perform this amazing human act of expanding our sense of the way the world is or might be. The art lies in that capacity and I'll tell you, if we can't deliver that, the arts are going down. And I believe American's are hungry for this arts experience—it provides rewards and meaning and resonance beyond that which entertainment can deliver. It is worth the high price of a ticket and only the arts can deliver it—if the verbs are activated.

I have a new job title for you. It's Agent of Artistic Experience. That's the same job title for all of us—the usher, the volunteer, the actor, the director, the person who prepares the stage before the show, all of our jobs are to support other people to engage in this amazing human capacity to imaginatively enter into a world and be changed by it.

Being an Agent of Artistic Experience is our number one gig, and we better make sure we perform well in that role because if the eighty percent that is us gets completely hijacked by the nouns of art, our young people are not going to get what they need. They're going to think it's all about the show—that noun thing again. So we've got to make sure that our eighty percent is holding that verb. Even though corporate America loves to sell their nouns; the verbs of art underlie this emergent trend toward creativity. They want workers who are adept with the verbs of art in their business media. They may say "tolerance of ambiguity," but what they actually mean is to be able to do something in that vague zone of not knowing. America hates to not know. Corporate America *really* hates to not know. What we have to offer are the tools that teach workers what you can do when you don't know what to do—the ways you can actually make meaning and make connections and get new ideas inside the uncertainty zone. Given the speed at which corporations need to adapt to changing circumstances and opportunities, the capacity to function well in ambiguity, create new worlds in changing opportunities and innovate for the sheer delight of it—these are highly prized

work skills, and they are best learned in the arts.

We tend to be pretty indefinite in the way our own teaching accomplishes this. So how can and do we communicate creativity in our teaching and across the curriculum? First, here's an observation: one of the most high quality creative skills is the capacity to make analogies. In other words, metaphoric thinking. This fundamental act of creating is one of the few things in my thirty years of working in this field that I have actually seen atrophy. People seem to be worse at making analogies. You may have your own theory as to the cause. Mine is that, because of the belligerent literalism of the culture we live in it, this skill is weakening in front of our eyes—our culture provides literal solutions and answers before the spirit has to yearn for new meaning. It is harder for people to make analogies, so much so that they are removing the verbal challenges from the SAT exam because they find young people can't do them. It's a startling thing to witness such disintegration in front of our eyes. Are we going to let this continue or can we use creativity itself to rebuild this capacity and then illuminate it for our learners?

One of the ways I've been working on this is to create a new body of work I call "habits of mind." As part of the work, I've identified twenty different ways people in the arts work when they're fully engaged in any subject matter, be it artistic media or social studies. I've been working with teachers *not* to teach these habits of mind in forty-minute blocks of time, the most difficult currency to work in any school system. Instead, I'm suggesting teaching them in two-minute blocks, twice a day, five days a week—isolating a creative habit of mind and playfully working it, consistently, like an isometric exercise. What I am finding is that, when an art teacher works with a classroom teacher, and they partner in certain habits of mind skills, the teacher starts to say, "You know what? I find after two weeks of working on this kind of thinking, metaphors start appearing on the playground and in student writing."

This leads me to a point I want to drive home about partnership. It is a big trend in American arts learning. Partnering of all kinds is going on—it is a regular Reverend Moon marriage ceremony out there. But there are some structural impediments. As we all know, it's really hard to partner a teaching artist and an arts teacher. There's partnering happening between arts teachers and classroom teachers. There's partnering between arts organizations and schools. Partnering between schools and after school programs is beginning to take root. Partnering between arts teachers and teaching artists is another story.

In order for effective partnering to take place between arts teachers and teaching artists, we've got to get out of our separate silos. We have to do this if we want to build our impact and—as those corporate people are saying—make evident that the arts do indeed provide public value. Making *evident* that the arts provide the skills of creativity is the one damn thing the world wants from us—at UNESCO, at the Business Round Table, in my work, that is the one thing the world wants from us. And it is one of the things we are most leery about clearly providing. We say we develop creativity in the young, but I think we doubt the truth of that, and so avoid really focusing on it. We may indeed need to tweak our pedagogy a bit, and add some reasonable documentation and assessment, but I believe it is all there, if we can get serious and commit to the goal.

So how can we provide what the world is begging us for without twisting our pedagogy into some kind of unnatural contortion? Here's an answer to that question, in a roundabout way: in a recent talk I gave I mentioned another significant change in our field. I call it the Triad. Basically, it means that the best learning for kids happens when three different players are connected in a Triad—basically a triangular configuration with three contributing forces. As I originally wrote it out, I put myself on the top of that Triad because my own background was as a teaching artist. On the other two corners were the arts teacher and the

classroom teacher. My notion was that if we could get the three of them focused, with enough planning and working time, we would provide optimum impact on young people.

I've changed that Triad to reflect what I see is a change in the field, which is this: it is the arts teacher that is now at the apex of the triangle. There's been a lot of discussion in the last six months about the need for arts organizations to support arts teachers in schools, by getting more teaching artists into schools or offering more professional development to classroom teachers. There is I think, in general, more recognition that your position is actually the key one. It also means you must take the lead in creating partnerships and help define the skill of creativity within your teaching.

So there is real urgency about how we can break down those intractable barriers that limit adequate planning and impact both within the schools and in relationship to partnership organizations and individuals. As a teaching artist, this is all very exciting for me. For so long, I thought I was the center of the educational universe. All evidence of time in the classroom to the contrary, I thought it was me that made the difference in the schools I was lucky enough to visit. In fact, I have come to recognize I am a resource that can help advance this huge power we have in potential. I alone am a definite plus in kids lives, but I am little more than a good experience that passes quickly compared to a triad that is focused and well-planned.

Our challenge now is how can we bring the Triad together to achieve the results of visibility and impact that we have within our reach? How can we tweak things to make that work? To begin with, we've got an accruing pile of research that is making it clear that theatre perhaps more than the other art forms is producing those instrumental benefits that everybody likes so much. For example, the collage of research studies confirming theatre activity produces significant language art results is so strong you can't argue with any more—even the curmudgeons have to admit it is true. But are we tapping that?

We need to get a little sharper and intentional about how we illuminate the creative component in our pedagogy and yes, assess that creative component so we can not only make the case but render it really visible. Corporations don't need to go out and hire special professional development people who charge obscene amounts of money to help teach essential workplace skills. We, as arts teachers, are already doing that. It's about that eighty percent I keep bringing up.

In that figure is our greatest strength and the reason kids like what we do. It's the crucial idea of intrinsic motivation. It's one of these invisible things that's about to get noticed. To me, motivation is really the whole franchise, and we're the ones that can teach students to understand the difference between the extrinsic motivators that run their lives, and the opportunity for intrinsic investment that can change their lives. It is our charge to urge young people towards intrinsic motivation and clarify why it is powerful and important to pour yourself into something for your own reasons. In other words, to make meaning and let your art verbs pour in. The research on creativity makes it clear that people will not create out of extrinsic motivators. You can get them to manufacture stuff, but you can't get them to engage artistically, so our work is to open up this intrinsic motivation. A kid can have her hands on clay all day long and not have an arts experience; a kid can be in six high schools shows and not have an arts experience. A kid has to be able to *do* something with the opportunity of that clay or play to tap its artistic potential. She has to be able to pour herself into the medium, let it fill with who she is and have the courage to offer herself to the word through it, to begin to tap the potential of those verbs. She has to get the feel for the verbs of art, so she can learn how to pour herself into the many opportunities life will provide her. But it doesn't happen automatically; she needs an agent of artistic experience to develop her capacity with the verbs of art.

You've probably heard of the research that cites the relationship be-

tween working in the arts and increases in self-esteem. The research doesn't *actually* say that, but we'll take all the false premises that work for us. We need them. What the research really says, as I read it, is that there's a correlation between increases in self-esteem and engaging in intrinsically motivated tasks. And here's another thing the research says: if you engage in a task for intrinsic reasons, you find a way to make it your own and you complete that task. What's more, when you are witnessed for having completed the task—even if the final result is only mediocre or isn't the best in the class and you don't get an A—it *doesn't matter*. Your self-esteem goes up, just by intrinsic completion, you feel better about who you are. Conversely, if you engage in a task for extrinsic reasons—all those other reasons we get people to do stuff, including pleasing the teacher—and you complete that task and are witnessed for having completed it, even if it's an A-plus, best one in the room, with lots of praise, your self-esteem goes down. And that is why we have so many high-achieving depressed kids going to top colleges and then perhaps cutting their skin. That's happening because they are getting further and further away from that essential human necessity—to be able to pour who you are into something, and be encouraged to offer it to the world in the belief that it wants to be received. That's why the work we do as arts teachers is so important.

Here's another way to look at intrinsic motivation. I'm simply going to substitute the phrase with the softer word "yearning," in a quote that is pretentious—because it's by me—but I think worth mentioning: "Yearning, pouring yourself into something you want more as a human being."

The quote sums up the most important thing I want to say here. What gives us the power, when a young person holds a goofy mask in front of his face and takes his stance that can make the bully back off, is yearning. I think we're in the yearning business. "People are shaped by what they extend themselves into. We must be very careful with the objects we present to

ourselves and to our children because we are changed by them. Art lends shape to yearning. Art is the best container for yearning because it is so rich, so human, so satisfying on so many levels. Art gives serious outer shape to serious inner yearning. And if these yearnings are informed by less rich objects, they go to sleep, they die, or eventually express themselves in the harmful symptoms of search that fill the pages of the daily paper.” That’s where we come in.

That’s the note I want to conclude on because I think those are the stakes, and here’s the opportunity. Again, I think the world is coming to us. The stats may say we’re struggling as a field, and that theatre teachers are low in numbers. All that’s true. I don’t want to argue with it, but I see the world coming toward us in a rearview mirror that may be in our blind spot. All it takes is a little bit of adjustment for us to harness this amazing power we have, ready to provide what the world wants. So I want to challenge you to make the adjustments that will illuminate and make the partnerships that are a little awkward because the system is diabolically opposed to them, to surface this power that we’ve got. And I want to thank you for doing that by acknowledging the courage that it takes with one final etymological comment.

A word beloved in the theatre is the word “bravo.” When bravo was first called out in the English-speaking theatre it was not called out of the recognition of great virtuosity as it is in the opera world today. You know, when that person three chairs down the row from you shouts, “Bravo” in relation to what the tenor just did, recognizing incredible, perfect performance. When it was first called out in the English-speaking theatre, it was called out in recognition of great courage. If you saw a performer take a chance, even if it wasn’t completely pulled off, you hollered out “bravo” to recognize that fundamental act. I have a lot of teaching artist colleagues now who have established bravo policies in their classrooms where young people are to call out “bravo” when they notice one

of the other students taking a chance and to recognize that fundamental act of courage. So I want to close with the word “bravo” in advance of any efforts you can take to adjust and expand work you now do—good, powerful work, way better than a silly mask in front of the face. I urge you to take that power to the next step so that we may overcome the hurdle of invisibility and, together, to tap and capture these forces that are coming our way. Bravo.