

**Hong Kong Arts Development Council
International Arts Leadership Roundtable 2016**

**Panel Discussion of Plenary 3: New Thinking for International Exchange
(Transcript)**

Moderator: Prof Samuel LEONG, Deputy Director (Academic Programmes and Educational Innovation) of Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts

Panellists:

- 1) Mr Simon BRAULT, Director & CEO of Canada Council for the Arts
- 2) Dr Richard GRANT, Chairman of Creative New Zealand
- 3) Mr Shokichi HIRABAYASHI, Executive Director of Japan Arts Council
- 4) Dr Fredric MAO, Convener of Hong Kong-Taiwan Cultural Cooperation Committee

Samuel LEONG: Thank you for the wonderful session, the panel and the floor members giving us a lot of food for thoughts. I myself have taken a lot of notes. I think they took four positions in terms of international exchange. Interestingly, they share many similarities in terms of their attempts to engage the outside world. We just heard Dr Mao's story of the importance of mutual trust in international exchange. I would like to ask our panelists, in terms of your experience in international exchange, do you see the arts as a catalyst or a commodity? When we talk about exchange, what are we exchanging? Do you see exchanging programmes, ideas, people or something else?

Simon BRAULT: I think it can be any of those exchanges. Today we have a discussion on cultural policies and models to fund the arts. We know that all over the world we are facing more or less the same challenges, so I think, for instance, it is important to exchange new ideas or the new critical vision of what could be the new ways of working. Sometimes cultural exchanges are about exchanging objects, because when arts is created, there is an object, visual arts, for instance. Sometimes it is exchanging a performance. Sometimes it is exchanging a vision of the world or values. I think we should never limit ourselves when we think about our exchanges. We need to be very open, and we need to understand the way we exchange is profoundly influenced by globalisation, technology, and the issues that we are each facing. The more we exchange content and ideas, artistic proposals that are dealing with what our fellow citizens consider to be their pressing issues and concerns, the more powerful the exchanges would be.

- Samuel LEONG: Thank you. Anyone else? Okay, questions from the floor please.
- MUI Cheuk-yin
(ADC Council
Member): A question for Mr Grant. You talked about Creative New Zealand’s “Focus on Asia” scheme. You mentioned Taiwan, Singapore and other Asian countries. I was waiting to hear Hong Kong, but it did not come up. So I would like to ask, if Hong Kong could be a part of this programme? If we would like to communicate with you, what would be the format? Should I contact your council or should it be something like collaboration among different artists? Should we involve other intermediaries to promote this? I would like to know more details. Thank you.
- Richard GRANT: I am sorry if I leave Hong Kong off the list because Hong Kong is part of the programme. We are open to suggestions, but we are working with the ADC as our partner. One of the reasons why we have chosen the countries that I’ve named is because we have some experiences working with them. As a small organisation, we have to have a degree of confidence that we will be able to invest with partners in those capitals so that the programme will work well. For instance, we do not include Indonesia and Thailand in the programme. It’s a bit pragmatic – what do we think would work? It is also based on our historical exchanges. We have people from Hong Kong right now in New Zealand at the Wellington Arts Festival and staying on until the Auckland Arts Festival. We have New Zealand’s artists coming up for the Art Basel. We have a history of exchange with Hong Kong. I am sure that will continue.
- Tisa HO
(Executive
Director of Hong
Kong Arts
Festival): I am Tisa HO from the Hong Kong Arts Festival. May I express a wish in the remake of cultural exchanges? I think it is fantastic that the arts councils, officials, governments and embassies are forming links supporting artists, working with the artists, investing in them and supporting these exchanges. The Arts Festival works with the ADC and Creative New Zealand has benefited from various programmes, and I know that we are not alone in this. We have also independently effected exchanges, for instance, we presented in Hong Kong WOW (the World of WearableArt), which is one of the biggest thing in New Zealand. This year we are presenting Rufus Wainwright, who is a fantastic Canadian artist. But because we are working outside the funding system, I don’t know how we can get captured in the bigger picture of these exchanges.
- Simon BRAULT: I think your question is very interesting. What is the funding system actually? That is a big question. For instance, in Canada, even if we have more money, we consider the specific role of the Canada Council for the Arts is to nurture the creation of the work, first and foremost, in Canada. When we will fund an artist to go out of Canada, we need to make sure that his work is mature enough, or that his work is not only mature enough, but absolutely needs our own support to be presented, because we know that there are many artists in Canada who don’t need the Canada Council for the Arts anymore to travel or to be presented. Edward Burtynsky, for instance, as a visual artist, he has a market and he has people representing him all over the world even in Hong Kong. But

Edward Burtynsky will tell you that at very defining moment of his career, without the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, he would not have become that major artist.

Our government is now reinventing a strategy for cultural exports. It is a post-industrial strategy. The role of the arts council is about the artists and about making sure that the arts is developed to a point that will interest our own population and then the rest of the world. Among the people under 35 in my country, especially in Quebec, none of the artists have imagined that they would create work that won't be presented worldwide. This is how they think at the very beginning of their career. The way we see cultural exchanges need to be adapted to that reality.

Tisa HO:

May I clarify? Perhaps I haven't put my question very well. The context of the discussion in early morning, particularly with Singapore and Korea, is whether the arts are sustainable if there is a great dependency on the government funding.

What I am trying to say is that if there is a kind of ecology, which is active, works well, may or may not rely on government funding, perhaps reliance on a smaller or larger extent. How is this captured when you audit the whole ecology?

Richard GRANT:

Your second information makes the question clearer for me. When I was presenting, I talked about the programme of Creative New Zealand Funds. Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings series are self-funded. We deal with people who come to us for funds. There is no prior selection by us of who is in and who is out. It is the applicant who chooses us whether they come into our system or not. That explains part of your question.

Second part is how we capture the global look of what happens. Let's say the artistic exchange in Hong Kong and New Zealand. It is really not something that the arts council regards as core to its existence. If their activity is taking place outside our channel and it is successful, it is great for the country, but it is not necessarily what the arts council sees as its responsibilities.

Fredric MAO:

I would like to follow up on what Simon just said about many young artists want to be major international artists today. I think young people in Hong Kong feel the same. That is why I say the support has to really work with them, not just for them to follow whatever that is provided as very proper, orderly and enough for them to continue. Some people want to do certain things just for the local community. There are small things that bring great pleasure to do so. Some people have the inspiration or the drive that they want to do something major. That's why I think the support has to come accordingly. It has to work mutually to create a bond and a partnership.

Simon BRAULT: Let me complement that. I have been running theatre schools for thirty years. I am constantly surrounded by artists who are twenty years old. In the 1970s and 1980s, we developed very sophisticated programmes, very precise boxes, and we decided to prescribe the ways to enter those boxes. Clearly you would get the first grant, then the second grant and eventually an operating grant, and it would grow some kind of pyramid. I think this pyramid is wrong now. It should not work that way. We should support the young artists more on their own terms, and not forcing them to enter our boxes. But it is very difficult for bureaucracy, because it is much easier to tell them to enter the box, yes or no.

What is fantastic now is the distinction between the very local and the global is disappearing. The drive to create, especially for those who are digitally native, the way they see the world and the way they see who they want to reach has nothing to do with very specific borders. It has to do with communities that are sometimes very close to them, and sometimes physically very far from them but very close to them in terms of interest. The question of how we see for the future – how people move, how ideas move, how the work is travelling around the globe – all these will be less and less the way we had administered our programme in the last thirty years. I think we need new ways of doing it. We are working with the notion of, for instance, very micro grants. We are also working with large-scale grants. Multi-year projects as opposed to one-year projects to avoid the fact that we are abusing all the time the creation of new institutions and organisations, heavy governance and less and less creation. This is the transformation we are trying to achieve right now. It is challenging, but it is needed, because we are coming to the end of a model in terms of funding the arts.

Samuel LEONG: That is a very important observation and development. I think two ecologies will have to be considered. One is the country ecology. Once we get engaged in international exchange, we then expand or extend the country ecology. How would the two ecologies synchronise, or would there be a battlefield?

Myungjin PARK
(Chairperson &
CEO of Arts
Council Korea): I have a question to Mr Brault. I think you raised a very important question about international cooperation. You emphasized the expanded role of the arts in society and on the necessity to work together at an international level. As several arts councils here are from the Asia-Pacific, do you have some precise or more concrete suggestions for that?

Simon BRAULT: It would be very difficult for me to put a precise proposal for this specific region, but I will give you a simple example. Twenty years ago, we were talking a lot in my country about nation-building. We had the idea of cultural policies, the role of the arts council, what to build a nation or to build a trusting space that would be national. We realise more and more now that it is more about society-building than nation-building. This question is very important because society is beyond the very notion of nation. It means that we could collaborate more and more by addressing issues that are beyond our respective

nations. I think this is where we need to move.

For the question of competing, it is very dangerous right now because the biggest problem of the arts council is the possibility that we would become more and more marginalised, more and more irrelevant, more and more not important in a world of extremely dense content all over the place. For me and the context of being the endangered species, we should unite and collaborate as opposed to compete, which had been the model in post-WWII. In the time of crisis, like the one we are facing right now, it is time to join forces and develop ways of working that are much more collaborative as opposed to competitive, and try to find ways and programmes and initiatives that are platforms of collaborations. I see the ones on the NordArt right now. I am talking about the aboriginal, this is an international movement. There are many possibilities of collaborating together, to create a new space for artists. I like the examples you gave. I think these are the models for the future. We need new funding model, crowd-sourcing, platform of collaborations, and all of that are models that we were not built for. There is a sentence I like. It's on my fridge in my apartment: "Any bureaucracy tends to maintain and nurture the problem for which they consider to be the solution". We need to move from where we were to a new way of partnering and collaborating.

Isaac LEUNG
(Chairman of
Videotage):

I would like to respond to Tisa. I think there is a missing gap between the top-down model and the bottom-up model. On one hand there are big festivals that are collaborations between different governments, like Videotage is involving at the MOCA (Museum of Contemporary Art) show in Taiwan. But at the same time, in arts organisations we initiate a lot of international exchange programmes. For instance, we are doing a crowdfunding, kickstarter programme with Art Basel, and I am building a European network, having a long-term collaboration with UK institutions. It is very interesting that our UK programme is half-funded by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council, and half-funded by the Arts Council England. If there is some conversation between the Arts Council England and the Hong Kong Arts Development Council to shape bottom-up programmes, that would be really great. For us, taking part in those programmes is very different from like what Dr Mao said, it is kind of intimate, bottom-up and trust-based collaboration. I think there are lots of missing gaps, and I really wish between governments there are ways we can provide opportunities for these bottom-up forces.

Winsome CHOW
(Chief Executive
of ADC):

This is Winsome of the Hong Kong Arts Development Council. It is my pleasure to hear about so many new ideas, especially from the Australia Council for the Arts and the Canada Council for the Arts. They are now moving into new model to funding. Also New Zealand is realising the identity of the future New Zealand, and moving your cultural policy towards that. In international exchange, nowadays or in future, perhaps it is no longer the model of just sending out finished products and works. Instead, I would think we should be giving more attention to the exchange of people, because it is only

from the people that we can build understanding, trust and perhaps a better future for the entire world. On top of the audience and artists, there are many other missing gaps and needs of supporters, e.g. arts administrators, producers, impresarios and agents. I am so glad to hear that New Zealand has an Asian producers' platform camp. I will be talking to Dr Grant about this. I hope, if Canada has its funding doubled, we may think of some rooms to have more exchange of people.

Rupert MYER
(Chair of Australia
Council for the
Arts):

It is fascinating that Mr Hirabayashi was referring to the Japan Kabuki theatre, and Dr Mao mentioned Puccini in a particular context. But I wonder for both Dick and Simon whether they would comment on what responsibility you felt in your respective nations you had to preserve the Western cannon or orchestral music, opera and ballet within the context of transformational ideas that you've presented. I have been listening very closely. As you can imagine, in Australia we have similar questions.

Simon BRAULT:

In the Canada Council for the Arts, 80% of the money right now goes to organisations. 20% goes to individual artists working alone or in collective. Most of the money that goes to the arts organisations is captured by the old organisations, what we called the legacy organisations, e.g. symphony, ballet and opera. When I arrived at the Council, the big question was whether we can shift anything. What do we do with what a lot of people consider to be the sacred cows, the organisations that we have been nurturing for sixty years, which are coming from an era that it was very expensive because it was very labour-intensive. What do we do with that?

The question is, I think, what should be the contribution of those major organisations to the society today? We start to think about the question of scale. Let's start with the issue of diversity. If you get public money in a very diverse country like Canada, you do have a responsibility to reflect diversity, your programming reflect diversity, and your labour, workforce, on your board and all of that. We know that it is less out-of-reach for a multi-million dollar organisation to reflect that diversity, than it is for choreographer along with two dancers. What we started to do is to gauge what arts assessment criteria are for organisations that are in certain scale and other organisations. To make sure we would not invest in new models and let other organisations that are capturing most of the resources unchanged. What we are seeing right now is that if these organisations want to get public money in the future, they need to reinvent themselves, working with the youth and working with different models that are micro-models compared with them, because this is where the energy will come from.

When we announced that, a lot of people said this guy Simon will fall on his head. It would take two minutes. But it did not happen. Actually most of the leaders of those institutions were so pleased that we were paying real attention to them and trying to help them to stay relevant in the society. The problem of

relevance is their problem, it is our problem, it is a common problem. When we will announce in a few months where the new money would be invested, it is clear that there would be different expectations, depending on the youth, the larger organisations, incubators, smaller organisations. We don't have a model anymore of one-size-fits-all. We realise that re-building all the six programmes, with a very clear idea of what are the expected outcomes, what are the assessment criteria, and what is the role of public money in the 21st century. This is where the discussion is right now. A lot of colleagues in the world decided that we would touch everybody. We would not try to reinvent the model at the fringe, but we would go into the middle of the model directly with the major organisations or very micro-organisations.

Richard GRANT: I guess my answer is very similar. You know we have the same problem in Australia. Most of our contracts with our major performing companies have requirements that make them tutor young theatre actors. If you are in theatre and you are a big company, you have to execute a programme of tutoring young actors. We've just refunded New Zealand Opera, which is a big legacy organisation that people around my Council would be aware of if they could. One of the arguments, in respect of what I was saying before, is that there is now a very strong tradition in New Zealand of Samoan New Zealand opera singers. That is one of the Polynesian ethnic communities in New Zealand. The men in particular have got wonderful voices. Part of the reasons that the opera company got across the line was because they were able to say "listen. We are being socially responsible by offering a career path for talented young Samoan New Zealand singers who basically came out of lot in the southern parts of the community".

Simon BRAULT: This is not just a recipe. One of the two biggest ballet companies in Canada, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, is the first big organisation who did a profoundly moving show dealing with very pressing and challenging issue of the community where they are based in Winnipeg. Who would have thought five years ago the ballet company would present the most relevant work today in Canada? This is possible. They would still have Pétrouchka and they would still do Nutcrackers at Christmas. But I think the question is there are still many powerful symphony orchestras could bring something that is as relevant as it is today as that Pétrouchka was created hundred years ago. I think it is a realistic approach for the future.

Samuel LEONG: Our speakers have given us some stimulating insights and how their works have been. International exchange is rampant everywhere in the world. Everyone talks about international exchanges. It is great to see the strategies, the issues that you wrestle with, and that we can share that, even at a more local level to the more regional level to a more distant level. I hope you will continue to share with us in Hong Kong.

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