

State of Emergence: Why We Need Artists Right Now By Shannon Litzenberger

Welcome to State of Emergence: Why We Need Artists Right Now

My name is Shannon Litzenberger and I will be your host and moderator of this session. I am a dance artist, choreographer, director, embodiment facilitator and also a Program Associate with CPAMO.

Since the pandemic hit, I've been thinking deeply about the state of the arts and, more specifically, the state of artists. I've put some of that reflection into writing in the form of an essay that I'm quite excited to share with you now. It's been a labour of love, in the hopes that my perspective as an artist on the current crisis might feel resonant for other artists out there who still need to give voice to their experiences in this time of great disruption.

The essay consists of four parts:

1. The Alienated State of the Artist: An Emergency and a Revolution-in-the-Making
2. From Culture as a Colonial Project to Culture as a Lever for Change
3. Artists as World-Makers
4. From Emergency to Emergence: Detaching from the Current System to Build the Next One

I've invited an incredible group of artists - Irma Villafuerte, Anita La Selva, Greg Frankson and Susie Burpee - to add their voices and experiences to this conversation. They have already had an opportunity to reflect on the themes of the essay and we will hear from them as a panel during the second half of this session. There will also be an opportunity for engagement and questions from the audience - live and online.

Thank you all for being here! Let's dive in.

Introduction: One Artist's Perspective on the Current Crisis

The neon sign erected by the pandemic reads: change or perish. If we take the imperative of social transformation seriously, then we understand that we are living in a time between worlds. The arts were devastated by the pandemic and we are facing a moment of reckoning where we need to examine the ways that we organize our systems of cultural production. This is not just about updating the policies that govern us and redistributing the resources that enable our work, but also about the culture we embody in our field. Recalibration of the former will have limited impact without the latter. We must disrupt the behaviours and practices that perpetuate the system as it was designed.

As restrictions are lifted and we are allowed once again to stage our plays, mount our choreographies, host our galas and open our exhibitions, how will we avoid sliding back into the habits of a world we know is oppressive, inequitable and unsustainable? As a community of culture-makers, how do we work at the level of culture change as a priority, in order to fully embody the world we aspire to?

These questions have been at the centre of my own pandemic-inspired reflections. As a practicing dance artist, embodiment facilitator, changemaker, policy thinker and longtime arts advocate, I am invested in the role artists have to play in this moment of re-emergence and social transformation. I believe that artists are world-makers and that this work is critical right now. I also believe that artists are not adequately centred or supported in the professional arts ecosystem, nor have they been ambitiously mobilized as change agents during this time of crisis, much to the detriment of the arts and culture sector and to society at large. My response to this dilemma is a call for radical experimentation - both to artists and to those who make decisions about the systems that organize our work.

Part One: The Alienated State of the Artist: An Emergency and a Revolution-in-the-Making

"The role of the artist is that of the soldier of the revolution."

-Diego Rivera

The experience we are living through is simultaneously an emergency and a revolution-in-the-making. While these phenomena often go hand in hand, they create a contradiction in the way we, as individuals and as a society, might respond. In an emergency, our nature is to stabilize, to mitigate damage, to prioritize survival. And in a revolution, we mobilize, we disrupt and we set fire to the establishment.

While governments, businesses, and many public service organizations continue to lead emergency response strategies, many artists are at the centre of the activism and community organizing that is fueling a revolution.

Here, we find ourselves in a moment of paradox, where the systems are trying to preserve themselves while artists are joining a mounting resistance. It may seem contradictory, but there is a reason that "emergency" and "emergence" share an etymological root. The Latin *emergere* means "to rise", "to bring to light". What if this paradox is exactly the alchemy that could bring about the social transformation we so desperately need?

What would it mean for a society to ambitiously mobilize artists to do their work well and fully, and with the aim of catalyzing transformative change?

First, we might start by expanding our view beyond the notion that artists are creative unicorns here to entertain, distract and comfort us, as popular media has suggested¹ throughout the pandemic. While comfort, distraction and entertainment have been the emotional crutches of too many months in lockdown, the work of artists is much more fundamental in this moment. The role of the artist in a time of transition is, most essentially, one of catalyzing emergence.

Art-making processes are essential right now because we are in a moment where an old world is collapsing and a new world has yet to emerge. We need people who are practiced in the art of working collaboratively and across differences in highly volatile conditions, able to venture into the unknown with the aim of creation. Cycles of history tell us that artists have always been at the forefront in moments of social transformation. In her book *Funny Weather: Art in an Emergency*, author Olivia Laing wrote that "Art shapes our ethical landscapes; it opens us to the interior lives of others. It is a training ground for possibility. It makes plain inequalities, and it offers other ways of living." Art is a process of transformation concerned with collective human development. Art thrives in the 'what if...?' questions and relishes the learning of each experiment.

Art is both a barometer and a process of social transformation.

As we consider the potential role of artists as agents of change, as healers, as animators of the public imagination, as world-makers, can we first turn our gaze toward the experience of artists inside this moment of great disruption? How are artists doing right now? Are they thriving? Are they being ambitiously mobilized to do their most essential work?

The pandemic has been devastating for the arts, though it has been particularly ruinous for artists. Through the pandemic, emergency response strategies in the arts have deployed ample resources to institutions and organizations to ensure their survival. But what about the survival of artists?

Here's a snapshot of artists during the pandemic:

- 62% of artists reported high levels of stress or total burnout²
- Artists lost an average of 36 opportunities amounting to over \$25,000 of income³

¹ <https://www.theverge.com/22150661/entertainment-2020-music-games-movies-comfort-favorites>

² Hill Strategies. A Statistical Profile of Artists in Canada in 2016. November 27, 2019. Sourced at: <https://hillstrategies.com/resource/statistical-profile-of-artists-in-canada-in-2016/>

³ Hill Strategies. A Statistical Profile of Artists in Canada in 2016. November 27, 2019. Sourced at: <https://hillstrategies.com/resource/statistical-profile-of-artists-in-canada-in-2016/>

- 63% of all cultural workers accessed CERB⁴, and for many artists I know, this was a more stable and significant income than in pre-pandemic times

Even before the pandemic, artists were so poorly compensated that pursuing a career in the arts hasn't been viable or sustainable without significant financial subsidization for some time.

Artists are the worst compensated workers in their field, regularly exploited economically to help keep the engine of the arts and culture sector running. In 2016, the median income of artists was 44% lower than the median income of all Canadian workers while cultural workers in general have median incomes much closer to the Canadian norm at 6% lower than all workers.⁵

I live in Toronto, where 69% of artists make less than Toronto's living wage of \$45K per year, and half make less than \$30K according to Toronto Arts Stats 2019.⁶ While \$45K is the benchmark for a living wage in Toronto, "the typical person needs \$69,520 in income to afford to rent a one bedroom apartment in the city."

72% of us work on a freelance or contract basis and have incomes from multiple arts-related sources. To make ends meet, we also have additional part- or full-time jobs within and, in growing numbers, outside the arts.

We are overworked and we no longer believe we can survive here and so we are leaving the city. Like me, 69% of artists moved to Toronto to pursue their careers, while only 28% were born here. The need to work in proximity to robust arts markets, in community with fellow arts professionals is, for many, outweighed by a need to survive - to pay rent, to buy groceries.

Anecdotally, we know that artists are also leaving the field altogether.

In his new book *The Death of the Artist*⁷, essayist and critic William Deresiewicz deftly describes several evolving market conditions that have adversely impacted artists in North American society. First, thanks to monopolizing tech companies, vast amounts of profits have been redirected away from creators to distributors, leaving artists chronically underpaid for their work, even at considerable scale. More nefariously, art in the digital age has been steadily demonetized, expected for free or at a shockingly low cost. How do we reconcile this expectation with the call to ramp up the creation and dissemination of digital content?

Second, artists work for free behind the scenes in order to access the limited and mostly underpaid opportunities offered to them in the arts marketplace. Artists know they must appeal

⁴ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2021001/article/00021-eng.htm>

⁵ <https://hillstrategies.com/2021/10/13/on-precarity-in-the-arts/>

⁶ Arts Stats 2019. Toronto Arts Foundation.
<https://torontoartsfoundation.org/tac/media/taf/Research/2019-TAF-Arts-Stats-booklet-FINAL-web.pdf>

⁷ Deresiewicz, William. *The Death of the Artist: How creators are struggling to survive in the age of billionaires and big tech*. New York, New York. Henry Holt & Company, 2020.

to the gatekeepers of the art world capable of making them stand out in an over-saturated attention economy. Funders, presenters, curators and programmers deploy resources - space, money, access to audiences - in support of the artist's work. Gaining access to these resources requires an enormous investment of time and labour while producing painfully low rates of return. Having a career as an artist has become as laborious as running a small under-resourced arts organization, but with fewer resources. Artists are working for free sourcing opportunities, writing proposals, self-promoting, networking with presenters, producers, gallerists and publishers, and more. This is to say nothing of ongoing training, finding ways to stay creatively inspired, and time for unstructured open-ended imagining.

Finally, the often hidden truth Deresiewicz makes explicit is that economic advantages within the system are essential for professional viability, let alone "success". Advantages like spousal or family support means spending more time on pursuing art and less on other activities required for survival. Having privileged access to donor networks, promoters, producers and other market gatekeepers also improves the likelihood of standing out in the crowd. These advantages make careers in the arts possible. And these are class-based privileges, with implications that cut across dimensions of social location.

Given these realities, Canadian artists and many of their supporters are advocating for a guaranteed basic income⁸. How else to level the playing field inside an industry so deeply entrenched in the dynamics of neoliberal capitalism and its inherent inequities? But let's be clear that the call to arms for social relief for artists is only made necessary by the way the system is exploiting them to begin with. In the same way that late stage capitalism is amplifying wealth inequality and therefore heightening the demand for social supports across many facets of society, a guaranteed basic income for artists is necessary because our system of cultural production has so significantly eroded the value of the arts and disabled the artist's ability to make a livable income in this system.

The precarious economic situation of the artist is very much putting at stake the ability of the arts to "retain its independence and freely express its truth".⁹ What, then, is at stake for a society when artists are no longer able to freely express their truths? What happens when artists no longer have time to steep themselves in imagination? When they are too mired in trying to stay afloat economically in order to ever contemplate, reflect, experiment and allow newness to emerge?

One of the greatest challenges artists face at this moment is that the industry we work in is steeped in the rules, dynamics and cultural norms that we are seeking to disrupt.

⁸<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books/article-canadas-largest-municipal-arts-councils-ask-for-a-basic-income/>

⁹ William Deresiewicz, public interview via Zoom, hosted by Saskatchewan Arts Alliance, May 15, 2021

Our near impossible task is to disentangle ourselves from a worldview that celebrates individualism, that chases production, progress and economic growth at the expense of human and planetary health, that uses power as a form of dominance and control instead of as an abundant source of fuel that catalyzes our individual and collective ability to achieve purpose¹⁰, and that commodifies every gift of our shared existence from the water we drink to our time, attention and labour.

In this world, art as a way of knowing is devalued. Art as a process of imagining new worlds is relegated to the realm of entertainment and distraction. Artists are reduced to producers of commodities, invested in by governments to fuel economic development.

If we as a culture sector don't experiment radically with ways of disrupting this worldview, we will inevitably continue to propagate it.

Part Two: From Culture as a Colonial Project to Culture as a Lever for Change

"Decolonization is presencing what is absent."

- Melanie Goodchild¹¹

Developing Canada's nationhood through a robust, government-sponsored system of cultural production has been a highly effective strategy of the colonial project. The Massey Commission of the 1950's gave birth to a "Canadian" culture, distinct from our American neighbours and reflective of Canada's British and French colonial roots. Today we can look back on a considerable legacy of national cultural institutions, Canadian-made art work and Canadian art heroes seeded and nurtured by the state.

The truth of this legacy, however – the legacy of the nation we call Canada - is that it came at an unconscionable cost to human life and dignity. In the name of creating a 'national culture', Canada was simultaneously enacting a cultural genocide. The systematic erasure of Indigenous peoples along with their cultures and languages is a shameful and devastating part of our legacy of nation-building, as is the enslavement of Black peoples, the subjugation of Japanese, Chinese, and South Asian populations through indentured labour, and the oppression of Jewish and other ethnic minority people and cultures. At this moment, we are facing a very hard truth about the process of creation that made Canada.

Today, in this increasingly pluralistic, post-nationalist society colonially known as Canada, it is essential that Canada support cultural sovereignty for First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. We must honour the TRC calls to action as well as the recommendations for justice in the

¹⁰ King, Martin Luther. 1967.

¹¹ Melanie Goodchild is the founder and co-director of the Turtle Island Institute.
<https://turtleislandinstitute.ca/about-us>

Report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. The work of cultural transformation cannot begin without it.

To build a new foundation of cultural democracy¹² for a future Canada, we must re-imagine cultural policies in support of a much more pluralistic expression of the socio-cultural context we share.

To do this, we simply cannot continue to privilege classical Eurocentric art aesthetics by disproportionately distributing funds to the large institutions that promote them. Art forms like ballet, opera, classical music and a historical canon of European visual art have a place in the Canadian cultural landscape. Their state-sponsored dominance, however, can no longer be justified. The fact that these institutions are frequented primarily by affluent patrons, receive annual government grants and private donations totaling in the millions each year, benefit uniquely from taxpayer-matched endowment funds, and operate at a scale exponentially greater than most others in the field is impossible to reconcile with the imperative of building a cultural democracy.

While these institutions consume the lion's share of resources, the rest of us, working across a broad range of cultural forms and practices, collectively reaching a highly diverse group of people and communities, remain relegated to the grassroots battlegrounds. Here we work in a domain of highly competitive all-or-nothing project funding, micro-granting and Kickstarter campaigns. While some organizations occupy a more comfortable middle ground with regular and predictable government funding, they also struggle to fulfill an essential bridging role across a widening gap in the so called 'ecosystem' between the best and worst resourced players. In many cases, these mid-scale organizations are the pseudo-institutions of a particular cultural context or form of practice, playing a critical role within the field that extends beyond a typical creation and production mandate.

While disheartening, this should be no surprise because Canada's cultural policies were never designed to reflect the contexts or processes of a wide range of cultural expressions present in our country's diversifying population. Significant historical inequities remain, despite the ways in which policies have shifted incrementally over time to include support for a more diverse palette of cultural expression. The multicultural society proposed by Canada's expanded cultural policy project is still imbued with the features and organizing principles of colonialism. "The enactment of Canadian Multiculturalism reflects a nation-building project that assumes a two-founding nation - French and English - model. Thus, despite its references to diversity, Aboriginal struggles, and a celebration of different 'cultures', the policy in fact disavows

¹²"Cultural democracy" stands for pluralism, participation, and equity in cultural life and cultural policy. Cited from Adams, Don and Goldbard, Arlene. 1995. Sourced at: <http://www.wwcd.org/cd2.html>

race."¹³ In other words, it has been a project of 'othering' where a dominant Eurocentric culture retains its centrality.

Decades of advocacy efforts on the part of under-supported artists and equity-seeking groups continue today under the banner of sovereignty, anti-oppression, anti-racism, diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. However, diverse human and cultural identities simply represented within a colonial white supremacist heteropatriarchal system risk being exoticized, tokenized and co-opted to further the original aims of the colonial project.

Representation within the system as it was designed, risks producing the same old outcomes. It's the very design of the system we need to concern ourselves with.

To design a more just system - one that more equally distributes the benefits and burdens it produces¹⁴ - we can't simply recalibrate an old system to become more fair and efficient, nor can we simply reorganize the distribution of power along identity lines, maintaining the existing architecture. We need to engage in a more fundamental process of creation organized around principles of cultural plurality, equity and justice, sustainability, creative engagement, collective care and wellbeing, and others.

Radical disruption in the arts means re-evaluating things like standards of artistic excellence, measures of public value and economic viability. It means unpacking the implicit biases hidden underneath notions of talent and merit. It means challenging hierarchies and reorganizing power structures so that shifts in policy and resource distribution will be informed by a plurality of cultural experiences and aesthetics. This is how we start to shift away from a system that has been aligned with a Western worldview inside a neoliberal capitalist system.

In recent years, there has been a growing attention¹⁵ to the imperative of updating Canada's cultural policy framework by replacing the outdated narratives of the 70 year old Massey Levesque Report. Indeed, reimagining the 'rules' of the system and the ways in which those rules govern the distribution of coveted resources is critical, but only part of the equation. What must be disrupted are the patterns of behaviour the current system has conditioned. We in the arts embody the rules and dynamics we have been shaped by. We have been enculturated by this system and our most challenging project is to disentangle ourselves from the habits of being this system has shaped us to carry out.

¹³ Bannerji 2000; Haque 2012; Mackey 1999; Walcott 2001 as referenced in *Wait Canada Anticipate Black*, by Katherine McKittrick

¹⁴ Costanza-Chock, Sasha. 2018. "Design Justice: Toward an Intersectional Feminist Framework for Design Theory and Practice", p. 23. "Design justice is a framework for analysis of how design distributes benefits and burdens between varied groups of people."

¹⁵ <https://massculture.ca/mc-gatherings/massey-commission/>

To let go of the habits that reify and perpetuate the old system and embrace ways of being that will shape a future world, we need to heal, learn, experiment and practice. While policies and resources make change possible, practice is what makes change sustainable.

The global social justice movement that was amplified following the murder of George Floyd in the US on May 25, 2020 has accelerated the urgency to create a new social contract that addresses the pervasiveness of racism and other social inequities woven through our social fabric. In Canada, the legacies of colonization are still unfolding. And if we weren't aware before, the pandemic has shed light on any lingering ignorance. A health crisis. A policing crisis. A housing crisis. An economic crisis. A crisis of wellbeing. A crisis of spirit. A crisis of care.

The need for a revolution couldn't be more of an emergency.

In the arts, the call for a cultural transformation, built on the momentum of the #IdleNoMore, #metoo, #blacklivesmatter and Indigenous resurgence movements, has helped to centre and lift up the work of women, Indigenous, Black, POC, and other equity-seeking artists. However, it's important to acknowledge that, for those in power, equity-seeking artists and their work have also become a new kind of cultural capital, ready to be leveraged through very fresh 'Diversity, Equity and Inclusion' strategies. This *might* be a step toward the kind of long term transformative change we are seeking, if it manages to resist becoming a passing fad, acting as a kind of public relations campaign in a moment of social justice consciousness.

The work of building a culture liberated from the historical colonial ethos Canada is embedded in is a project for a generation, or more. It involves working at the levels of self, structure, system and culture. It involves visioning a cultural democracy capable of reflecting a culturally pluralistic citizenry in a post-colonial society.

For many arts organizations, the work of dismantling systems of oppression has only just begun. Relationships that bridge class and power divides are nascent. As are collective learning processes focused on embodying more inclusive, equitable cultures. Institutions will not likely lead the way toward the new world because of how entangled they are in the dynamics of the world that made them.

The pursuit of reconciling historical inequities through diversified representation and policy reform has been a focus for many arts and culture organizations through the pandemic. This alone will be a failing strategy for our sector if the goal is long term systemic change. Elizabeth 'Dori' Tunstall, Dean of Design at OCADU made this case elegantly in her recent keynote address at CPAMO's May 2021 *Gathering Divergence Festival*. As the first-ever-in-the-world Black female Design School Dean, she referred to herself as a "supertoken", invited as a Black woman into a dominantly white institution. Diversity, she says, is being invited to the party. Inclusion in being invited to dance the dances the host knows - the foxtrot, the waltz. Equity is

to make room for the dances she knows and to make dancing them a part of the culture that all members of the institution participate in.

What her metaphor illustrates is that requesting better representation in a system designed to enact the same dynamics of oppression inherent in a wider system of heteropatriarchal white supremacy is an incomplete recipe for change. And in fact, becoming a "supertoken" inside organizations where real cultural shifts are not consciously in progress, leaders of colour and other equity seeking individuals may find themselves more subjected to harm than empowered to lead change within the dynamics of elite social control so deeply embedded in the governance of the arts industry and its institutions. This was plainly evident throughout the aforementioned festival where many Black artists and arts administrators spoke of these challenges¹⁶.

To really do the work of the revolution, we need to look beyond strategies of diversified representation and policy reform and work at the level of culture. We need to re-shape our ways of being together across our differences, divesting ourselves of the human hierarchy so present in our society. Resmaa Menakem, healer, best-selling author and trauma specialist reminds us that: "Because culture lives in our bodies, cultural practice trumps all things cognitive - ideas, philosophies, convictions, principles and laws."

To work at the level of culture, we need to engage in embodied creative processes that work with the materials of meaning-making - rituals and symbols, codes of behaviour, communal language and storytelling, rules of belonging. This is what helps move us to new horizons.

This is the work of the artist.

Through the transformative power of their creative practices, artists are especially and uniquely capable of catalyzing the kind of systems change we need right now by leading at the level of culture change. To do this well, artists need to uncouple themselves from the concepts, structures and dynamics that are producing current systemic harms. Liberating ourselves from a system of oppression that we periodically benefit from is a significant act of resistance. And it is particularly difficult to enact either because of how precarious our professional artistic lives are to begin with, or because of our relative privilege within it. We rely on every and any small benefit afforded to us by the system. We work ourselves regularly into states of burnout. We never say no because we can't. We focus on artistic activities that have the best chance of being funded and promoted. We hang on tightly to the belief that over time it will get better and even easier but it doesn't. The return on our emotional, spiritual and creative investment is shockingly unacceptable.

¹⁶ https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLNajDhwBk9buksi1X0cQA1_OsROsA1Fk5

To transcend these dynamics where we artists are too often exploited in our own industry, we will need to experiment with new ways of working that are better aligned with the world we want to live in.

Part Three: Artists as World-Makers

"Art is an effort to create, beside the real world, a more humane world."

-André Marois

To reimagine Canadian culture, what I'm proposing is the centering of the individual artist and their honed ability to experiment with emergent artistic practice as an organizing strategy during this transitional time between worlds. Returning to my earlier question, if artists were ambitiously mobilized to engage fully in the transformative potential of their creative practice, could they lead the way toward a new world? If we put more of our attention on individual artists concerned with emergence, and less on the system concerned with the emergency, could we better catalyze change?

Artistic process is, by its very nature, emergent. It is a process capable of world-making because it explores horizons of possibility in ways that engage our fully embodied sensory capacities, including our imagination. Creation processes value integrated forms of knowledge production, including intuition, perception and emotion. As such, these are processes capable of working on our ways of being, as well as on our ways of thinking and doing, all within the volatile conditions we find ourselves in - those of complexity, disconnection and uncertainty.

Processes that prioritize felt-sense experience have been increasingly subjugated by our hyper-rational, data-driven culture of information overload. As such, they feel less and less familiar in our society as processes that support our collective evolution. However, these processes are integral to the creation of meaning, which in turn, catalyses change. As Seth Godin puts it in his 2015 audio book *Leap First: Creating Work That Matters* - "to create meaning is to change something for the better." A meaningful artistic experience can move us toward new understanding, engagement and action.

Because of our practiced ability to create meaning, we artists can, and often do, disrupt old interpretations of a shared reality. We tell new stories, offer up new metaphors, and re-situate familiar ideas in unfamiliar contexts. Through our processes of creation, we artists also spend time imagining futures that don't yet exist, priming the public imagination with an expanded set of possibilities for our shared existence. Artistic experience invites a plurality of interpretations to emerge, contributing to the socialization of experiential knowledge about our collective existence. This is a fundamental tenet of a democratic society.

When artists engage in processes of creation, something comes into existence that didn't exist before. Something new is invented. This process, according to Arts Action Research, is "a unique combination of vision, creativity, intuition, and collaboration balanced with craft, technique, accountability, disciplines and use of time and resources. The artistic process is, without qualification or quantification, the most effective planning, problem-solving, decision-making, relationship-building process available to anyone."¹⁷

Artistic processes are focused primarily on invention, rather than innovation, though the two are often confused. According to Julia Kaganskiy, director of NEW INC., the New Museum's art, technology and design incubator in New York City, "invention prompts us to imagine how things could be, offering new propositions that aren't bound by the realities of how things are."¹⁸

Innovation, however, is "bound to what already exists". It is about optimizing, replicating and scaling and it is deeply tied to organizing principles of efficiency, growth, competition and maximizing profit. Innovation does not set out to build a new foundation for a new world. It proposes improvements built upon existing structures. How can we address imperatives of decoloniality, health and wellbeing, and environmental and social justice using the same tools and processes that created the conditions we find ourselves in to begin with? Audre Lorde said it best: "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."¹⁹

Kaganskiy goes on to say that focusing on innovation in a time of great change and disruption can limit our potential to explore, inviting only incremental change, rather than the paradigm-shifting change that really opens us to new possibilities.

Innovation, it seems, is a strategy connected to the emergency while invention is about the revolution.

If we want to disrupt and re-imagine, rather than optimize and improve the current system of cultural production, could we lean into processes focused on bringing something into existence that didn't exist before? In this moment of disruption, can we soften our attachment to production in order to experiment and learn? Can we stop working toward world premieres and openings as though they are an end game where art stops evolving? Can we hit pause on our impulse to innovate and instead steep ourselves for a moment in the chaotic realm of artistic creation?

Artists are already experimenting with new ways of doing things. We are inviting new rituals, practicing new ways of collaborating, testing new rhythms, and investigating new organizing

¹⁷ Dunning, Anne and Nello McDaniel. Edited by Catherine Holecko. *The Emerging Narratives in the Arts*. Arts Action Research. 2021.

¹⁸ <http://magazine.art21.org/2017/09/13/invention-vs-innovation/#.YZwVZb3MKWC>

¹⁹ Lorde, Audre. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Ed. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press. 110- 114. 2007. Print.

principles. These experiments are happening right now in studios and rehearsal halls, living rooms and parks, all in service of culture change.

Artistic processes are not always (or often) optimizable and repeatable because they are so relational and conditional. However, this makes them particularly relevant as catalysts for transformational change in a highly complex, transitioning world. As artists know, every creation is unique, embedded in a unique set of relationships and circumstances. To navigate the unknown terrain of making art, artists often form communities where mutual support, learning, dialogue, exchange and a sharing of resources occurs. From this initially chaotic, unstructured space, new insights emerge.

This is heartening because to transition to a new world, we need a new 'how' - an ontology - that is aligned with our reclaimed understanding that we are relational beings that belong to and are part of a larger natural planetary system. Unlike a strategy, model or framework, an ontology is connected to the nature of how our reality is organized. Said differently, it is a way of being, expressed through culture. It is a set of values and principles, enacted in a multiplicity of ways. Unsurprisingly, multiplicity, this available abundance of perspectives, collides head-on with our conditioned Western ways of knowing. But if we continue to pursue the singular, objective truths, promised by Western Enlightenment thinking, we will miss the plethora of possible pathways to a new world. Even in spite of notable counter-narratives within, truths, in the plural, remain antithetical to the Western project at large.

It is fundamental to a cultural democracy that the world we all belong to be reauthored through diverse expressions of the human experience.

Part 4: From Emergency to Emergence: Detaching from the Current System to Build the Next One

"We are addicted to the highway because that's all Modernity can offer us. We need to become fugitives."

-Bayo Akomolafe

Our challenge, as artists, will be to become fugitives of this system of cultural production we are all embedded in. We will need to examine the habits of being we've adopted to survive in the old system, resisting conditioned tendencies that no longer serve us. Our near impossible task is to balance our competitive pursuit of scarce resources with the work of collective advancement.

We need to work together to create a new vision for a world that doesn't yet exist. It is not enough to agree on all the ways the system is broken, creating harm and producing all the same outcomes it was designed for. If we want to do the work of transformation, we need to

stop trying to 'win' in a game designed to make sure most of us lose. This is, after all, how the system keeps us under control and on the periphery. Instead, we must direct at least some of our scarce emotional, spiritual and creative resources toward a collective horizon. And we need to do this together, across a spectrum of power and privilege.

To dismantle the oppressive design of the current system, we artists need to soften our grip on the imperative of production, shift our relationship to time and deepen our engagement in creative processes capable of re-making our world. (Doesn't that sound wonderful?) We need to experiment with processes of creation that centre new values and then contribute our learning into a collective body of knowledge. We need to first get lost in the chaos of not knowing, creating the conditions for a new systems design to emerge.

By insisting on space for creative experimentation and discovery, we can challenge familiar norms and disentangle ourselves from the concepts embedded in the current system. This is what we need to do to heal from the harms of an old world and expand into new possibilities.

We can turn away from notions of 'artistic excellence' and instead imagine new ways of understanding how art creates meaning in our lives. We can challenge concepts of explicit value, public impact and evaluation when we engage with ways of knowing beyond what is measurable. We can mitigate the damaging effects of unrestrained extraction, progress and growth by committing to the work of reconnection and reclamation, imagining a sustainable world. We can challenge the logic of hierarchical power and dominance that holds the old system in place by continuing to engage equitably across differences as an essential condition of a healthy, creative environment and therefore a healthy ecosystem. We can tell a new story about the essential role of the arts in society.

This is the work of the revolution. And it's already underway.

This work is not unprecedented. Throughout all of human history there are examples of countercultures, organized resistance and mobilization in times of crisis. We, as artists, need to claim a place of greater agency because the world needs us right now.

Governments and funders are actively deploying resources with a consciousness that the world of tomorrow needs to be different from the world of today.

The mistake our system of cultural production keeps making over and over in this emergency is excluding a focus on radical experimentation with art-making practices as a lever for systems change.

Artists are languishing! And what is not good for artists is not good for art.

All of us working in the system of cultural production - funders, producers, policy-makers, presenters, researchers, educators, donors - need to ask: What interventions can we make that will radically mobilize artists to do their most important work? Where, within the system, could these interventions most effectively disrupt the status quo and seed change?

One possibility is that various actors across the system of cultural production could direct more programs and resources toward experimentation and discovery over production and distribution. What could we learn if we took the time to understand *how* artists are working and what they are discovering, rather than simply what they are making and how successful it is in the cultural marketplace? And what could these lessons offer society at large, as we all grapple with the existential challenges of our time?

Another unexplored opportunity is to leverage the advantages of the arms-length funding model in Canada that allows for the distribution of funds to individual artists and informal structures (groups, collectives and networks) unconstrained by the more formally (and colonially) structured charitable, not-for-profit model. The structures of the old world are the disabling constraint of the emergent ways of the new. We need to limit funding that amplifies and perpetuates old world models and instead prioritize and grow pools of funding for supporting process-based research and experimentation uncoupled from ultimate goals of production and distribution so we can learn. Arts funders can participate in this work by directing internal resources toward better understanding the role and impact of artist-led activities within the ecosystem, analyzing data collected from funding applications that, to date, remains inert as a catalyst for shared understanding or change.

Finally, we need to create new social support systems for artists so they can pursue careers that have a chance of being viable. Having time and space to run the business of our careers is paramount to having one in the first place. Until artists are compensated for their work in a way that adequately supports both the direct and indirect costs of making it, we will continue to endorse a stratified system where only those with economic privileges can be artists. Social support such as a guaranteed basic income will better enable artists to participate equitably as engaged citizens in the important conversations about how our sector and our society is organized.

This is how we invest in a cultural democracy. This is how we build back a better Canada.

Attending radically to all the ways that artists are experimenting with art-making processes right now is my hopeful proposal for 'bringing to light' new insights that can help guide us into a post-pandemic world. From these artist-led discoveries - grounded in values of care, creative possibility, social justice, interdependence, and sustainability - a new world will emerge.