Melanie Joseph:  
Hi, everybody. My name is Melanie Joseph and I'm moderating this panel this morning. And if you'll forgive me, I had to prepare some notes because I'm a woman of a few million words and we only have an hour.

I'm especially pleased to be moderating this panel and that the TCG Forum has decided to include a look at some of the ways international programming functions in theatres. Given the emphasis that we put on the relevance of our work in our communities and the societies we live in, this seems like a particularly important time to be thinking about internationalism and international programs in our theatres, I think.

It seems that many of us are—in fact, it is—I do find that many of us have a sense of bewilderment and even frustration at the ways the reputation of this country has declined in the past years; and even worse, there seems to be a growing apprehension at the increase of anti-American sentiment all across the globe. So it seems now more than ever it's imperative for us to climb out of our cubbyholes and present ourselves as the diverse nation we really are, and that we can't be represented by one regime, or one ideology—that really there are many of us here, with many different ideas. And that there are different ways we can interact with other countries outside of bringing them another Starbucks franchise or sending in the military.

So since I consider every single one of us here a collaborator in art-making—it doesn't matter if you're a playwright or a board member, it doesn't matter, we wouldn't be able to make art without all of us collaborating—and there are few gestures more potentially resonant than sharing the making of art with other people, I think this is a particularly resonant panel to be undertaking. And how we engage our audiences and communities in this sort of thinking is absolutely essential to the vitality of how our country will position itself in creating a future around the world. And in turn, that obviously addresses the resonance of our work in our communities.

I'll just give you a little background. I'm here as a member of the TCG board and I'm also the chairperson of the International Committee of that Board, and I'm also the president of the U.S. chapter of the International Theatre Institute, which is reposed within TCG programming. I come to TCG as the artistic director of the Foundry Theatre here in New York City, and what we do is commission, develop, premiere and often tour new works. And also we regularly host public dialogues with what I consider public thinkers from other constituencies so together we can ask what it means to be a citizen in our communities. And over the past few years we've been widening our lens to include more international programming in our seasons. In 2005 we presented the Moscow New Generations Theatre production of K.I. From "Crime", which we did entirely in Russian with no subtitles, here in New York City. And it was actually—I have to say with continued surprise—the most successful production we've ever had. It was sold out beyond sold out. And in fact we were able to extend it without Equity interference because this was a Moscow company. So that's another little tip you should think about. [laughter]
And we've also commissioned a new work from a company in Brazil called Vertigem Theatre in Sao Paolo, a really really important and interesting company in that country. And currently we're preparing to take a delegation of 30 U.S. artists to the World Social Forum in Nairobi. Just to give you some background on why I'm here.

And before we get to the very interesting case studies of my colleagues, when we spoke about this panel between ourselves we realized there are so many ways to think about international programming and international work, and while these are three case studies, I think it might be interesting to go through a little list that I made of different ways that we know work has been going on in this country.

So, there are: international festivals in many cities across this country, and you might want to think about whether there's one in your own; plays can be presented in their original languages, with surtitles, the way I think you probably went to New York Theatre Workshop and saw Martha Clarke's piece yesterday; there's also the possibility to translate commissions of plays from other countries and produce those translations. And right now at P.S. 122 here in New York, there's a really interesting Argentinean festival going on, a young dramaturg-producer named Shoshana Polanco—and she did this on her own, because there wasn't really a place she could go with this project—she had four contemporary Argentinian plays translated, she then selected four directors or interesting companies here in New York to perform them and is producing those plays right now at P.S. 122, and then there's a theatre in Buenos Aires who will bring four American directors to direct translations of American plays in Argentina, in Buenos Aires. So it's really interesting, another model. There's the concept of co-productions of a shared work with a company or a producing company in another country, that then gets done in the same way we do it here in the States, that gets done in one country and another country. A theatre could bring an international director or designer—or producer or administrator for that matter—to work on a given project in their theatre. These are all models that have been taken on by many TCG theatres. And speaking from experience, it's incredibly satisfying to do this.

And also, just as a side note, these kinds of endeavors really provide a fantastic opportunity to collaborate with an expatriate community in their own city. To either bring a work from their native country or translate one, or create one. And in a country like ours, there's so much we can learn about theatres from other places, just from reaching out in our own cities to the expatriate communities, to those particular communities in our cities. So I think that's another way to think about international programming.

Another way is theatres do, and can, continue to reach out to U.S. artists, independent artists, who are already interested in collaborating abroad. I find myself that many individual artists are really the first phalanx of outreach and they bring back information and other interesting artists to the attention of TCG theatres. I think this is an extremely useful initiative and model, because there is almost no funding whatsoever from the corporate well for festivals there are, but from the foundations and government there's veritably no funding for international work. It's rather shocking. And in fact, the more we take on these projects, the more we might be able to change the thinking within our own country.

And then there's some smaller initiatives that I think people can consider that are kind of not such big deals. One of them is when you travel abroad, which many of us do, what
theatre do you see in the cities you go to? Are there ways you could reach out to members of communities, to members of the theatre community in other cities, and meet your compatriots? What sort of work is being done in those places? How can you be a sentinel to bring that information back to your own theatres?

And also, since I've noticed many of our larger theatres often organize travel junkets to go to London to see what's going on in the West End, etc., it might be interesting to think about organizing a trip, for instance, to [other] amazing theatres—there's an amazing theatre festival in Bogotá, Colombia. It's one of the most important festivals in the world. What if we start organizing our patron or board junkets to go to Bogotá, or the ZIFF Festival in Zanzibar, or on and on. There's all sorts of really interesting places outside of London where there's fantastic [theatre]—[for example,] the Golden Mask Theatre Festival in Moscow—there's so much going on.

And then finally, I think it's important to think about ways our theatres can provide more meaningful and genuine hospitality to the international artists who regularly visit our theatres, our cities. They often get lost in the process. When I go abroad I can't believe how immediately people organize my schedule to meet this person and that person, and they ask what kind of work I do so they can hook me up. This is just done pro forma—it's shocking. And I don't find that happens here. So a lot of times international artists will come, and they have three or four places to go, like ITI, that set them up, but I think we can take more initiatives in our own cities to think about how we can host those people and really make them feel welcome in our community.

There are just some of the ways to think about international programming and international work. Just as a way to widen the lens of our thinking and the world we sit in.

I'm delighted now that we're going to hear from my colleagues. Each of them has a case study that they can tell you about. We're going to hear from my colleagues, five minutes each. We're going to try to stay on time, and then entertain questions. I really want to encourage you that if a question comes up—I always like to interrupt people, but I don't think we have time—so if a question comes around anything anyone's saying, please write it down so you don't forget it, because I'm eager to hear what your inquiries are about.

So, I want to introduce my marvelous colleagues. This is Ping Chong who will speak first, from Ping Chong & Company. I'm not going to read their bios, they're in the program and they're amazing. This is John Eisner from the Lark Theatre. And this is Joy Zinoman from the Studio Theatre in Washington. And without further ado, I give you Ping Chong.

Ping Chong:
I want to say that Melanie did a great job of giving you an overview of possibilities in international work. There are others too, but if we have time we'll get to them.

I've been doing international work since really the beginning of my career, both working with Meredith Monk, with my own work, touring, among other things. But today I'll just speak of the last and most relatively, the biggest collaboration I've done recently, which is with the Kennedy Center. Last fall the Kennedy Center did the largest performing arts festival from China in the history of this country, for very obvious reasons I think you're
all aware of. I also recently came back from Baton Rouge—I'm in residence there making a new work—and they have an initiative all across the board of [Louisiana State University] to engage with China, for example. Also for obvious reasons. When the Kennedy Center decided to do the largest performing arts festival from China in 2005, I was invited to collaborate with a mainland Chinese company from Xian, China, which is literally in the center of China. It was with a puppet theatre company the likes of which you cannot imagine in this country, because there's a hundred people in this company. And the first puppet show I saw there had an orchestra, a Chinese orchestra and singers. For a puppet show. So we made several trips to China to see if this was a plausible idea, because I was leery of—even though I'm Chinese—of the cultural differences, and the short timeline when I was approached about this project. I've done a lot of puppet theatre works and they take a lot of time to realize, and so I was nervous about it. But eventually Alicia Adams of the Kennedy Center convinced me to do this.

And when I met the company, I basically said, "Look, I don't work traditionally and it's important that I may be doing things you're totally unfamiliar with, and are you game?" Now, they were bringing stuff from Shanghai, from Beijing, from all the major cities, Hong Kong—and Xian, although the most historically important city in China, is only the 13th largest city in China, which is 7.5 million people. [laughter]

Once I agreed to do that, we also needed a partner to actually build the show, because this is a very large show. And we had worked with the Seattle Repertory Theatre before. Also, I should mention that this is a very rare project—obviously, with China—but very rare in the history of this country. We had worked with the Seattle Repertory Theatre before, and so we approached them. Because the Kennedy Center was producing this, commissioning me, but they have no space to build anything. So we definitely needed a host theatre to build the show. And so since we had already worked with the Seattle Repertory Theatre before, we approached them, they agreed, and we started to work with Seattle Rep. Finally we also wanted obviously to bring the show to New York, and the New Victory Theatre, whom we also had worked with before, came in. So that's largely the project that happened. The Chinese also brought money to the table. So it was the Chinese, the Seattle Repertory Theatre, the Kennedy Center, which was the primary collaborator; we also brought in three puppeteers—one of them a puppet designer from a wonderful Seattle puppet theatre, the Carter Family—to join this collaboration, because we wanted an exchange on that level. So I think that gives you some sense of something we recently did. Okay, is that five minutes?

Joseph:
You have one more.

Chong:
Okay, five minutes! Let me see. The other thing I wanted to echo is the fact that being in China, the hospitality of the Chinese was extraordinary. And it was troubling to us because we knew that they were coming here, that it wasn't going to be reciprocated in the way they were taking care of us so well there. We as a company did everything we could to make them feel at home beyond the call of duty. And that's very important. Because when we think about international collaboration, they're not going to be interested in us if we're not interested in them on every level—not just the artistic, but the human level.
John Eisner:
So I'm John Eisner and I run the Lark, which is a play development center in New York City. I think that Melanie and Ping have reinforced all of this, the philosophical underpinnings for international work. When we talked about this conversation it was contextualized in such a way about how can the larger community of theatres in the United States figure out ways to engage outside American culture, or to connect American culture to other cultures, and that this might be an opportunity for people to start to ask questions and get some ideas. So I guess I want to mention I guess why we do this international work, a couple of examples of how we do it and then really the key challenges. And why—you know, we didn't start out to be a company to do international work. We're a lab for new voices and new ideas. We don't produce work, although we just counted up, and this year 45 plays that were developed in our company had 56 productions in the United States. Yet we don't produce. But without that space, for—Liz Lerman, who's kind of a hero, and next to the Shakespeare on the shelf for our company—with that time to really talk about process and support artists and thinking about what it is they're trying to say, there is no product in the end. And our key understanding of what it means to support the thinkers and theatremakers of the future is connected to the diversity of the people at the table when the work is being made, and the kind of respect that happens when people are creating work from different perspectives and different cultures are together with each other and asking each other hard questions.

And to be in New York City and not to encounter an enormous number of opportunities—not only a lot of resources, but a lot of opportunities—to look at diaspora communities here and their correlative, their related communities, internationally...there's enormous opportunities and it was unavoidable. And to give a list of some of the relationships we've had: We've done translation exchange work in China, Turkey; we have a whole seven-year-old South Asian diaspora initiative, which is not international at all, it's really about diaspora community members around this country; we've done a certain amount of Latin American work, specifically with a big thrust in Mexico, we have a seven-year relationship with Mexico doing exchange work with artists; we have a very significant thrust in Eastern Europe with some ideas for the future, but specifically right now around Romania, with a lot of help from TCG because our New Generations fellow is a Romanian playwright; Japan; Francophone Africa; the Netherlands, we've had a three-year grant to bring a Netherlands artist here each year to work with our artists; Wales; and a Middle Eastern diaspora initiative with a number of theatres around the country this year. In fact, mostly what we do is try to partner around ways to get theatres to work on voices they might not otherwise engage.

So just to slightly echo Melanie's list of ways of working: The ways we've worked are: short-term residencies, which means bringing a writer here or sending an American writer to another country for a week with some finite specific set of goals, and this always is about engaging people from our country and their country in a dialogue about the meaning of the work; long-term residencies, like Saviana Stanescu, our Romanian resident, who we've worked with for two years, and then we created a two-year fellowship with the company in partnership with TCG; sequential residencies, which are
probably the most effective thing, which connects to what Ping was saying about how nothing happens until you actually start to build trust and make connections, and so really for us it means a lot to be able to have an artist visit two, three, four, five times, that's really when the best work starts to happen; translation tour—we did a great project, we did it a couple of times, with a Francophone African writer and translator to the Mark Taper Forum—to the Minneapolis Playwrights Center and to New York, where we had different directors and different writers working on the translation of the piece, and each manifestation was so incredibly different that it completely exploded our idea about how we in America project what we actually are receiving from other countries; theme-based labs, bringing writers together to work on a theme—freedom of expression, citizenship, we have a lot of specific ways we've done that; and partnerships with institutions or even individual artists in other countries to talk about issues of theatre that matter and to bring them and put them around the table here at our organization.

The challenges are that there's so little money; a lot of the choices are made are based on opportunity, where the money is. And that's not necessarily useful in terms of mission. I guess another big challenge is knowing what you're actually getting into. And the biggest one is staying on mission.

Joy Zinoman:
I'm over-stimulated. [laughter] I'll just briefly that Melanie's production of K.I. from "Crime" will come back in what I have to say, but it was brilliant. And Ping Chong reminds me that 20 years ago, in 1986, I was hired as a translator, theatre consultant, for the very first group that came from the People's Republic of China after the Cultural Revolution, and traveled with those artists who had been working on pig farms, these extraordinary Peking Opera performers, and how different things are 20 years later. Hospitality and exchanges and money and the ebb and flow.

But I'm not here to talk about any of that today. I think I've been asked to come to talk about the case study of an entire season of Russian work, which the Studio Theatre did two years ago. I'd rather start with talking about what the creative impulses are to do that kind of thing. Why would someone do that and what does it mean to do that? It's very hard to talk about creative impulses, but I do believe—like Jim Nicola in talking about his grandmother—that most of them are personal. And that the authenticity of a personal impulse to do work is very important and that's a good thing for people to understand. But for me, I'm going to just try to mention four or five or maybe six things that led to this long two-year adventure.

A planned trip to Russia, Lithuania, kind of a roots trip to the home of my ancestors. My own once-a-decade desire to do a Chekhov play, to finish them all before I die. [laughter] A chance encounter with someone, a conversation, getting a travel grant, going to a museum show. And then because we had just finished a large expansion and a complex of four theatres, we very much had the feeling we didn't want to withdraw artistically at all after this great effort. Kind of like what I understood Michael Kaiser to say: a time to be bold. And so to look for some kind of event where all the theatres could be in play together and where we could sort of make an event out of an entire season. Not something we usually do.

In the end, conversations in our literary committee began with a question, a kind of seeking in a conversation about Russian literature. We were talking about Tolstoy and
Dostoevsky and Chekhov and short stories and...everyone at the table accepted the primacy of the Russians as profound writers in the 19th century. We’re all deeply influenced, in our theatre and in literature and novels, by that writing. And we said, does anyone know what's been going on now? Can anyone mention one name of a contemporary Russian writer of the last 50 years? And no one—and these were some very sophisticated literary people—could mention one name. We said, what's been happening, now, 15 years after a kind of repression which affected writing though not production of work in Russia? We wondered, what were people doing during this long period in the Soviet Union? There was a lot of production but not much writing. Where were the writers? Were they coming back again, did they have things they'd been squirreling away for all those years, and just, what was going on with our contemporaries? Where was the new writing?

So I think all of those things led us to a kind of impulse. Let's do it! Not really knowing what we were getting into. Let's see how many contemporary Russian plays we can find, and can we get them in translation, and what else is surrounding, and let's have a very broad view of international exchange, of this season.

So I want to jump to the end and say what was the result of this. In the end we produced three contemporary Russian plays. And our goal was to collect 100 of them. That was nuts! [laughter] But we probably did have over 50 in the end, and that's one year of searching for contemporary Russian plays. That was a really challenging part. We did a play called Terrorism by the Presnyakov Brothers—extraordinary personalities. We did a play called Black Milk, a great play about contemporary Russian society in the era of commercialism and rapid industrialization, by Vassily Sigarev, and we did a play called Russian National Postal Service, a quite beautiful middle-period play by Oleg Bogaev, which was also a U.S. premiere. And we found out there's a big center at a university at Yekaterinburg of young writers, it's a place that young writers go, and they hang out and they write together, and there's a mentor and lots and lots of work comes form that place.

So, how did we gather these plays? What on earth do you do? And we had no idea. We just made it up as we went along. We found out, first of all, that the Royal Court had a translation project which they'd been working on for a year. And that's just because the British Council gave them a lot of money and they were interested in opening up to Russia. And they took the money and went to Yekaterinburg and got a lot of writers and started a very active translation project, most of it translated by a young British woman named Sasha Dugdale.

And then we found that of course what really matters is individual relationships. This production that Melanie talked about, K.I. from "Crime", was also very significant in our search, because the lead actress—and it's almost a one-woman play—Oksana's husband is an American named John Friedman, very important for anyone who's interested in Russian work. John Friedman is married, he's an American, to this very very wonderful contemporary Russian actress. But more importantly, he's lived in Moscow for 17 years, has a gigantic interest in contemporary Russian theatre, is a theatre critic of the Moscow Times, a translator himself. So you have a person like that, right, you find someone like that who is really in that society, that you can communicate with, and then you start communicating. Like crazy.
I also, because we're in Washington, was able to develop a really good relationship with the cultural attaché at the Russian Embassy. And she was marvelous in terms of introducing me to scholars in Russia, people at the Golden Mask, this big kind of "Tony Award" organization in Russia. And lots of others. Scholars, individual people, everybody has a friend, and yes you can stay at their dacha, you can meet them. And you've got to pursue every single one of those to get to where are the plays, who's translating them, can we collect them, can we get them?

And then I was very honored and pleased to get a TCG travel grant and spent a month in Moscow going to the theatre every single night. And going to the theatre in other languages is great. You really don't have to worry about understanding anything—it works very well for you.

But that was very very important. And those relationships which we had made, plumbing every single contact, every friend of a friend, every Russian artist you could find that could trust you. So we got a lot of plays and we read them through a regular process in any theatre and decided on those three. We also did, in this expanded notion, the U.S. premiere of Brian Friel's play *Afterplay*, which is actually an Irish play but is about a meeting between Sonia and Andrei, two Chekhov characters, 20 years later in a glass gazebo in Moscow. So is that a Russian play? No, it's from a Russian source, it's an Irish play. And then we did a production of the little-seen Chekhov's *Ivanov*, in David Hare's translation. That was really the reason all along, to justify that production.

But we also brought a wonderful artist, Mark Jackson, from San Francisco, and his wife, and got together a group of young actors in Washington and Mark's wife did a month-long workshop in Biomechanics, which is a constructivist theatre training technique. And used that physical-theatre training technique with these actors to do a production of a play called *The Death of Meyerhold*, which Mark Jackson had done to great acclaim in San Francisco. So, brought him to collaborate and do that work again, based on the work of Vahktangov, a contemporary of Stanislavsky.

So those were three very different approaches that went into this season. There was this English/Irish translations of peripheral or authentic Russian work. And of course the three contemporary Russian plays new to the United States. I guess that's way way way too much detail, but I would just say that it's important to make it up as you go along. It's important to follow every single connection and relationship. It's important to begin with a commitment and a drive to explore. That's what it takes, and it takes a lot of time, so you have to be willing to devote that kind of time. And then from a practical sense, everything in the theatre that year related, you know. The annual gala had a Russian theme, the P.R....and there was a lot of publicity locally and nationally about this Russian season. So the degree to which the theatre also creates events in which artists can work I think was satisfied by the idea.

I think my time is way up, thank you.

**Joseph:**
I think it would just be worth noting a couple of thoughts that come to me from what my colleagues have said. One is that in terms of support for international work, there's almost none in this country, but what's amazing and what I wish was in this country is that the cultural departments—I mean, the Dutch government, the Romanian
government, the Brazilian government, I mean, on and on—the British Council—there are so many international governmental organizations that support their artists’ work abroad. God knows it’s a mystery to me that nobody would think about it here, except for USIA is one, but that’s a CIA relationship so it’s complicated. It is. So it’s just a piece of information that I think is in all of our heads that may not be in all of yours. That’s one.

The other thing it occurs to me to say is that I think if you were to go to P.S. 122 and see any of these Argentinean plays, the audience is almost exclusively under 30. It’s amazing. And I find in my own experience that doing international work, of course depending on the nature of the play, but doing international work has a relationship to a young audience that I think many of us don’t realize, because I think that the global community, as it were, is its most present in a younger constituency, a younger audience. That was another thing that occurred to me.

And the third thing was that it’s easy to think about “this is my international play this season,” you know what I mean? And also one of the things you should know is that almost the only funding in this country is from the Soros Foundation, from Open Society Institute. But we get our travel grant, re-granting money from them. And that’s why also you’ll see a lot of Romanian directors, Hungarian directors, etc. being brought in. Because there is support in this country for Eastern Europe. So you’ll see a proliferation of Eastern European work over the last 10 years, primarily—not because there isn’t interest, there’s tremendous interest—but also it’s permissible because of their funding.

But what I was going to say is that I think that—and I find this abroad a lot—I don’t think that theatres, at least, it hasn’t been my experience, and I’ve been really lucky to travel all over this last three years to about eight different countries on four different continents, it’s kind of been an amazing good fortune for me. And I don’t find that anybody thinks, "oh, this is our Mexican play," or "this is our such-and-such play." In fact, the idea of internationalism in some ways, and particularly this is the case with younger artists, it’s not really a separate concept. Because some of the plays that Joy was talking about in Russia, they are so hip and awesome and those writers are young and fierce and on the Internet and talking to my two colleagues who are 27. And you know, I think there’s a vitality outside of the idea of thinking about international work as a something. There’s a vitality that can permeate lots of ways to shift a consciousness, I think.

Are there any questions? Oh boy, here we go. No? Okay, well I have a question for you, if I may. How many people in this audience have done, in any way, international work in their theatres? Ah, it’s a good percentage. Has anybody got a good story to tell?

**Audience Member:**
I’m [Brad Whidden] from Gallaudet University, the deaf university in Washington, D.C. And they had, three years ago, a huge international deaf cultural festival. Deaf people from all over the world, from about 50 different countries. And they had a theatre festival as part of the cultural festival and did it in their languages. American Sign Language is different from the sign language of every other country in the world.

**Joseph:**
Of course.
**Audience Member:**
And there were no captions anywhere. So deaf people *could* understand through the body language, through gestures. They could understand each other's language without subtitles. It's been done twice. This big festival called Deaf Way. And again, funding was a problem. They got some federal funding, so they were lucky, but... And they were hoping to do it every year, or regularly, but it didn't work out mostly because of funding.

**Audience Member:**
I've got a story. My name's Gordon Edelstein and I'm artistic director of Long Wharf Theatre. Shortly after I arrived in my job, about five years ago, Long Wharf had collaborated with the New Haven Festival of Arts and Ideas, as we do most years. We were housing a play by a Palestinian company from Ram Allah. And this was five years ago, also, when in some ways the Arab point of view was even more silenced, even less heard in America. And I arrived as the controversy was beginning, and it was genuinely shocking to me. This was a company-created show called *Alive in Palestine*, about the experience of Palestinians who are living in Ram Allah. And it was absolutely shocking to me the level of controversy, before any had seen or read the show, that was created, how many members, particularly the Jewish community, were up in arms demanding we not do the play, criticizing doing the play, saying this play [inaudible].

It was fortunate because I'm Jewish and I also, you know, I identify Jewish. So easier for me to negotiate and navigate the controversy. But it showed me the unfortunate truth is that a lot of people agree in freedom of speech as long as you agree with it. And the whole point of a festival of arts and ideas is that you get points of view you wouldn't normally hear—that's why you do it. That's why you go to Romania, why you go to China. You want to hear stuff you wouldn't ordinarily hear if you went to Manhattan Theatre Club or Long Wharf Theatre. And eventually it had quite a happy ending. We found ways to bring a dialogue and bring people in. A lot of the fear came in some ways from ignorance, as it usually does, and that was partly the fault of the festival. They hadn't anticipated this. But it showed how threatening ideas from other cultures can be.

**Zinoman:**
If I could just say that we often have this idea that other cultures are only places where there are other languages. And we feel very close to people who speak English. And I think language has not been mentioned as a gigantic issue in international work. Just a very short anecdote. I've just come back from England, and I met with a lot of people, including I had tea with Caryl Churchill. Here were are, we supposedly speak the same language. I tried to adopt a Czech accent for more of the time I stayed in England. That is to say, our colleagues who share the same language, the contemporary bitterness and difficulty of communicating across cultural lines is not only in the obvious extreme cases that you mention, Gordon. But I think this notion that Melanie alluded to, our relationships with everyone are ripped right now.

**Joseph:**
I actually had someone say to me in Colombia—they were greeting me and feeding me—he's a director, and he said: "I have to say this to you, that we actually cheered when the towers came down." And I was stunned, I was stunned. Because this was a colleague. How could that be? I said, "Well... I didn't cheer." And I realized it's really deep, this inability of... it's very deep and it's very scary. And I think we of all people—and I hate to preach about it, because I hate to preach—but I think we of all people are one
of the few passageways where we might be able to change people's thinking. And I did with that guy, I did. I basically had a really long conversation with him and it was intense. But Joy is right—it's not just other languages. We are really out of the loop in terms of the way people are communicating between themselves and the rest of the world. And the longer we stay out, the harder it's going to be for us to be invited in.

Audience Member:
We at Florida Stage had a world premiere called *They Came by Boat* the week Elian Gonzales came into Miami. And we watched in our own audience the tide turn for and against the Cuban issues in South Florida. And it initially resulted in a discussion in our audience—a woman said that she didn't want to hear any more about Cubans. We said, "Well, why?" She said, "Because they're immigrants and I'm not, and I don't care." It became quickly evident that she was only second generation. And that discussion resulted in a talk about how we all came by boat to our country. And it opened a great dialogue within our community, with our audience and with artists we might not have collaborated with in another situation.

Joseph:
I think it's vital for us to be the flash pots, you know? If we're not doing things that strike a nerve, why are we doing it at all? It's too hard to do this if it isn't resonant and meaningful and if we aren't striking a nerve and there isn't some response, I mean, I'd rather watch TV! There's some really good TV to watch. [/laughter]

Eisner:
I'd like to say there's a slightly different way of looking at it too, which is just that you get frustrated by how similar American work can become. And what does it take to provoke our writers or our creators to think in new ways. Gordon came on the trip we went on to Romania in May, and has a great story that I think you told to the *New York Times* or something, about the way he was as an American director functioning with a Romanian actor, and just even the way in which the creation of work gets framed differently is almost as powerful as the larger philosophical containers we try to put it in.

Joseph:
Listen, we are framed—we all know this—we are framed as the superpower. We have the most money, we have the most military, we have the most everything. So it's in our DNA to think that we've got the most answers. We don't even think about it most of the time. And then we get out there, and we go, "Holy smokes! People are doing this? I never thought of that!" And you're surprised. You know?

Audience Member:
I run a children's theatre in Honolulu and we've been for the last three years not doing individual work, but collaborating to help a group in Samoa that wanted to start a children's theatre. Theatre is not really the Polynesian way to communicate, they have dance and other things. Theatre as a word is kind of new. Samoa is actually part of America, but they really have their own identity.

And so we're helping them start this theatre, but they're really clear on what they want from us and what they don't. And they have a different process that they use, they really use a lot of dance in their theatre work. And they work on issues. They're not necessarily using playlets, they're devising and...it's really interesting for us to work with them.
because they tell us sometimes when they don't want us to do something. "No thanks, we're going to do this now." They just recently came to Hawaii and did a festival where they presented something they are doing, and the Samoan community in Hawaii is really interested in them. So this is more of not just production but sort of a collaboration. And now they're thinking and we're thinking of these other countries in the Pacific that are interesting in having us help them. You know it's not about help. It's just really kind of saying to them...and they do their own. But it's really getting interesting. Because we have a lot to talk about in the Pacific, and we don't have a lot of theatres in the Pacific.

Joseph:
It's interesting to ask, and I ask myself this: Why is culture in this country so separate, whereas in the rest of the world it isn't? How did that happen to us, and how do we change that? In most of the rest of the world, there's a ministry of culture, there's the British Council, etc. There's so many, there's so much more of a knitting of culture into the politics and the societies everywhere else in the world but here. It's peculiar and I don't get it. Something to ask ourselves.

Audience Member:
To what extent do you find in other countries where the government has a ministry of culture that there is message control?

Joseph:
It depends from country to country. I don't find that at all in Brazil. I didn't find it at all in Colombia. I don't find it in Canada. I mean, it's not—they don't think about culture as something separate, so funding for it to do itself is not such a strange concept. You know, it's not just an arm of the state. Because it is an arm of the state...I don't mean of the state...it's part of the world, you know what I mean? In Uganda, after 25 years of Civil War, in 1986, when Museveni was marched in and took over, got rid of all the dictators, the second ministry he set up was the ministry of culture. Because it wasn't possible to imagine that not being supported the same way that water was, and electricity. So I think that's more often the case than repressive regimes. Obviously in Iran it's very difficult. There's no dancing, so how the hell does contemporary dance get done? So that's a big issue.

Eisner:
That's a very interesting distinction, because there was theatre in the pre-democratic Eastern Europe that exists in Belarus right now. The guy from Belarus that came to the TCG conference a couple years ago, basically he has telephone conferences, meets for coffee with people and they give him their phone number and basically he calls them once a week and tells them where to show up for an hour so they can do theatre before the police show up. It's fascinating the way it works in certain parts of the world.

It's fascinating in Mexico, when we were asked to bring American writers down there, they asked us to bring the most pluralistic sampling so we could crack Mexicans' notions of the similarity between people who are writing in the United States and because they're trying, from the government side, which is where that money's coming from, they're really trying to look at how to make a more pluralistic participation in culture there, because it hasn't been.
In Romania, they're 15, 16 years out from a revolution and they're actually trying to understand how culture fits, and the youngest generation of artists is making theatre that is almost anti-theatre. They're so trying to understand what their culture is about that they're not sure. The government is actually paying to make sure culture is maintained, and they don't even have as clear a mandate as the Mexican government does.

**Zinoman:**
I don't want to disagree with Melanie too much publicly...

**Joseph:**
Are you kidding? Go ahead! We have to be a flash pot!

**Zinoman:**
I'm not sure I would agree that everywhere outside the United States culture is integrated. I think there are other frames. I think there's a political frame which we can think about what we see. There's an aesthetic frame with which we can view what we see. I think there's a traditional frame versus a modern or contemporary frame. I think many countries in the world are struggling with a movement from traditional art to contemporary art and whether or not there is a good continuum, or whether or not they have to jump from traditional forms. I lived in Asia for 15 years and I know that is very much an issue in many countries.

So I think what's more interesting sometimes is not how it relates to us or our politics, but rather what's going on here, what's going on in this country, what are the struggles of these artists. I think not that we can learn a lot—a huge amount about what's going on in another place, with a different language, with a huge vast culture. But in looking at that we can learn some things about ourselves. It's a cliché: When you go abroad you learn things about yourself. But I think it might be more interesting sometimes to say, what is the political life of these artists in this country? What are the aesthetic conflicts going on? What is the relationship between tradition and modernity in this country's search and the search of the artists in this country, rather than just sort of taking our political frames and putting them on top.

**Audience Member:**
There are many groups trying to be more hospitable to international visitors. The League of Professional Theatre Women has, thanks to Joan Channick and Joanne Pottlitzer, who I'm sure you're familiar with, and Martha Coigney, who is a member, have an extensive international committee. And we go out of our way not only to invite the work and people here, but to welcome and to embrace them in our theatres around the city.

**Joseph:**
I think we have time for one more question.

**Audience Member:**
I'd like to hear you talking about how your own work has been changed and influenced by your international collaboration. The arts are so much better supported in other countries, methods are different, process is different. What's been the impact as you come back from those experiences on your ongoing work here?
**Chong:**
I'm thinking about the different collaborations I've done. I would say it's not so much I've been influenced by where I've worked so much—because usually I'm invited to make work, and in *Cathay*, the production I did with China, when I went to see their work I tried to integrate what they did into the work. Like, the company in Xian had a particular shadow-puppet technique which was very interesting and I haven't seen it in this country. But it was not possible to duplicate that for our production because of logistical things for the production we did. But it's something I'll keep in the back of my mind, for example, as something I could work with in future.

The company I worked with in China have not...I don't know about other puppet theatres, but this one was working in a fairly traditional style. I would guess, for interesting reasons, that the children's part—they have four troupes. They have a shadow-puppet troupe, they have a rod puppet troupe, a children's puppet troupe, and a music and drum troupe in the same company. That's why there's 100 people in this company. And they don't really work in a contemporary way, except for the children's troupe, which is really interesting, the children's troupe is always the most innovative. But I didn't actually get to see that in action. I would say in that case it was about the techniques they used that could be of interest to me, for example. And also just to see a puppet show with a live orchestra was a revelation, because I've never seen that before.

But lots of times when I work collaboratively, I learn more about, for me it's learning more about culture and difference and how I can relate better each time I work with a culture. That I think is more what I get than necessarily aesthetic ideas from them. I have a particular way of thinking and seeing which I can incorporate outside things, but I would say the learning for me has more to do with how to relate to people different than myself, and to be sensitive to that. Both internationally but also in my work, I've always been interested in different cultures. So I've had a lot of learning that's been going on for me. But it's really about, for me personally, it's about how do we get past the differences and figure out a way to work together.

**Joseph:**
I think we have to wrap up. And I thank you so much, and I thank the panelists especially. [applause]