

The logo for Theatre Communications Group (TCG) features the letters 'TCG' in a large, bold, serif font. The letters are white and set against a dark grey circular background. This circle is part of a larger, light grey graphic consisting of several overlapping, curved bands that create a sense of motion and depth, resembling a stylized 'C' or a series of concentric arcs.

# TCG

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THEATRE COMMUNICATIONS GROUP, INC.

## CENTERPIECE

### FOCUS ON:

## GOVERNANCE

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## LEARNING PERSPECTIVES

## FROM BEYOND THE BOARD ROOM

BY NANCY ROCHE

The *May Centerpiece on Governance* focused on trustees' professional development opportunities. "Learning Perspectives from Beyond the Board Room" is a description of two of those experiences — the TCG National Conference and the Trustee Residency Program at the O'Neill National Playwrights Conference. If a theatre lover's dream is to talk and breathe theatre with theatre makers and theatre workers, then participating in these events felt like an entry into a magical world.

In June, the TCG National Conference in Philadelphia on "The Role of Live Theatre in a Digital Culture," attracted a record number of 700 participants, including 54 trustees representing 44 not-for-profit resident theatres— all drawn to a heady mix of professional artists and theatre managers, an agenda of intellectually exciting speakers and an Open Space agenda created by conference participants. The conference immersed us in both product and process. Opportunities for learning, the kind that comes through osmosis in such a stimulating environment, abounded. The conference provided us with four days of discussions, performances and meals with managing directors, artistic directors, actors, directors and designers — at last, we can attach names and faces to this remarkable cast.

Descriptions of a few National Conference highlights are drawn from the reporting of Jerry Meyer, Trustee, Long Wharf Theatre, New Haven, CT; Andrew Michael, Trustee, Contemporary American Theater Festival, Shepherdstown, WV; and Jaan Whitehead, Trustee, Living Stage, Washington, D.C. Also included is the address given by A. E. "Ted" Wolf, Board Chairman of Philadelphia's Wilma Theater, at the Trustees Breakfast held during the conference. For full coverage of the conference, see the September issue of *American Theatre*, and for complete texts of the plenary session speeches and notes from the Open Space sessions, visit [www.tcg.org](http://www.tcg.org).

The Eugene O'Neill Theater Center National Playwrights Conference nurtures developing playwrights. Held in July in Waterford, Connecticut, it also welcomed eight trustees as part of a pilot Trustee Residency program. The trustees, members of TCG's National Council for the American Theatre, enthusiastically embraced this new opportunity to know the artists and to share in their work. Reporters Liz Fillo and Ann Gilbert capture the essence — even the exuberance — of this experience.

Governance *Centerpiece* Curator: Nancy Roche, Trustee, Center Stage, Baltimore, MD. Copyright ©2001 by Theatre Communications Group, Inc. All articles reproduced by permission of the authors. No portion of this publication may be reproduced in any form, or by any means, including photocopying, without written permission from the publisher or author. Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 355 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017, telephone (212) 697-5230, fax (212) 983-4847, website: [www.tcg.org](http://www.tcg.org). Ben Cameron, Executive Director; Joan Channick, Deputy Director; Christopher Shuff, Director of Management Programs.

# OPENING NIGHT AT THE TCG NATIONAL CONFERENCE

**T**CG's National Conference kicked off with a celebration of its 40th Anniversary by presenting the first TCG Awards — honoring the luminaries who are the not-for-profit theatre's founders, leaders and funders. AT&T and The Shubert Foundation received the TCG Awards for funders, in recognition of their leadership and sustained, outstanding support of American theatre. Zelda Fichandler and Lloyd Richards were the recipients of the TCG Awards to individual practitioners, recognizing their pioneering work and lifetime achievement. All recipients received a bronze award statue, "The Spirit of Irreverence," that TCG commissioned from noted theatre artist Ralph Lee, along with an award certificate. Individual practitioners also received a \$5,000 prize. To cap off the awards ceremony, Darko Tresnjak was presented with the \$10,000 Alan Schneider Director Award for mid-career, freelance directors.

In a night that celebrated artistry, lighting designer Jennifer Tipton gave the keynote address. Tipton is one of the most respected lighting designers in the country. She has worked in theatre, opera and dance with top directors. On the

faculty at the Yale School of Drama, she has influenced a generation of lighting designers.

Tipton trained as a dancer and came to New York with that in mind. Once there, however, she took a job as a rehearsal director and fell in love with light. Her first job as a lighting designer was with the Paul Taylor Dance Company where she still works today.

Tipton reflected on technology's impact on her work. Computers have expanded the range and speed with which designs can be created. New colors and new kinds of lights have changed the palette of lighting. Today, young designers can work as fast as they can think.

Although stressing that technology can spur creativity and change, Tipton cautioned that artists need time away from technology to think, to feel and to maintain their individual creativity. Technology is part of the craft; it is not all of it. Tipton closed her address with the idea that an artist is not just making art, but making a life in art — a fuller view of the work than technology can offer.

## **SIDEBAR: ONE TRUSTEE'S PERSPECTIVE ON OPEN SPACE**

**BY ANDREW MICHAEL**

**The Open Space format was an interesting choice for a conference as large as the recent TCG National Conference in Philadelphia. Did it work?**

The Open Space format allowed a large number of topics and issues to be put on the table — or in Open Space speak — "in the marketplace." Many of the topics were global: "How do you make theatre relevant in a digital age?", "Does theatre need a national ad campaign?" and "Is the model for theatres and their boards the right one?" Some topics were very specific: "Does Washington need a theatre public relations alliance?", "A gathering of development directors," and "How do you manage a capital campaign?" The format truly gave participants the challenge and power to design the conference.

Reviews seem to be mixed. My feeling, which was consistent with TCG's evaluations from the attendees, was that too much of the conference was conducted in the Open Space format. While I enjoyed the sessions I attended and found them to be productive, the number of sessions of interest to me were limited. Comments from TCG's post-conference surveys also indicated that future participants would prefer a mix of Open Space sessions and scheduled discussions led by experts. Open Space for such a large gathering is, logistically, a difficult proposition. This led to some early frustration for the participants, but the sessions ran smoothly once they adjusted to it.

Overall, I think the goals of the attendees were met. It was risky to devote so much time to Open Space, but without risk, little is achieved.

*Andrew Michael serves as a Trustee for the Contemporary American Theater Festival, Shepherdstown, WV.*

# THEATRE AS RENAISSANCE

## DOUGLAS RUSHKOFF'S SESSION

**D**ouglas Rushkoff examined the balance between connectedness and reflection during his session. Question: Given the digital nature of our 21st-century culture, what is the role of theatre? If we were unsure of Douglas Rushkoff's opinion, the title of his address at Friday morning's first plenary session tipped our hand, *Sacred Time, Sacred Space: The Role of Live Theatre among Dead Media*.

Douglas Rushkoff is a youthful hipster. Short, thin, wiry and wearing plaid pants and an undershirt showing under a white shirt, he looks like he could be fifteen. His demeanor suggests that he has a personal history that would be fun to know more about. He grew up on TV, movies, video games and pop culture. In adult life, he started out as theatre director. Afraid he was turning into a psychotherapist, he left the theatre. During the last decade, he has written seven books about new media. Currently, he is a commentator on cyberculture and an adjunct professor of virtual culture at NYU's Interactive Telecommunications Program. Rushkoff models the effects of the "rapidity of digital culture" that he discusses. His delivery is energetic, sharp and rapid fire.

To the audience's surprise, he compared the sixteenth-century Elizabethan Renaissance with our own time. Rushkoff proposed that if a "renaissance" is a short moment (maybe 100 years) of reframing reality, then we are now experiencing such a moment as fully as the Elizabethans did. Rushkoff also views a "renaissance" as a rebirth of old ideas in a new context, and he made the comparisons to the present obvious. For example, the Elizabethans circumnavigated the globe, painted three dimensions using forced perspective and manipulated numbers and space with calculus. Similarly, contemporary society asserts its mastery of the globe by dropping the atomic bomb and rearranges time and space with holograms, fractal math and the computer/Internet. Rushkoff believes that a "renaissance" is an opportunity to renegotiate consensus reality.

Although the pervasiveness of technology has changed today's audiences, Rushkoff argues that theatre remains our most potent medium. The 21st-century audience is distant and suspicious. During the session, Rushkoff cited several examples of programming that successfully engages today's elusive audience. For instance, a show like *South Park* reassures viewers because it is transparent about its tools — characters are roughly drawn cartoons. *The Simpsons* attracts young audiences because it contains patterns and connections to pop culture within its plot. With methods that are obvious and available, a production such as *The Lion King* offers safety to an audience that is afraid to be seduced by realism.

Today's audience doesn't want to accept that what's happening onstage is "real." Yet, they do want the actors to believe in what's happening. Theatre, asserts Rushkoff, is the most transparent of contemporary media; audiences are reassured when we balance transparency with exposed artifice.

Most significantly, Rushkoff believes that theatre offers the opportunity to enhance the possibility of the moment. Recall the proscenium stage — theatre creates perspective. It is not about the creation of illusion, but the creation of truth. In other words, Rushkoff concludes, theatre is a "renaissance."

# PLUGGED IN, SUPER-EMPOWERED AND OVER-CONNECTED

## THOMAS FRIEDMAN'S SESSION

**T**homas L. Friedman, foreign affairs correspondent for the *New York Times* and author of *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*, talked about his perspective on the forces of technology (the Lexus) on our daily lives and culture (the olive tree).

Friedman began with the idea of globalization: a new international system affecting everybody. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the international system has redefined itself. Instead of a divided world (whom you are divided from, using "wall" as metaphor), the international system has become an integrated world (whom you are connected to, using the World Wide Web as metaphor). Friedman proposes that if power during the Cold War was state based

— countries allied against other countries, then the new globalization is premised on three kinds of power dynamics: country to country, country to multinational corporation and country to “super-empowered people.”

What does Friedman mean by super-empowered people? In a world integrated by the Internet, everyone is connected, but no one is in charge. Any individual with access to the Internet can become super-empowered, with the capacity to act upon the world stage, effecting either positive or negative change. With equal impunity, an email campaign can either force legislation for social justice, or empower a terrorist. Witness the two Filipino graduate students who caused billions of dollars of damage in twenty-four hours with the “love bug” computer virus.

Friedman believes that the new globalization has two kinds of people, “wall people” and “web people.” The wall people see the world divided into friends and enemies. Friedman cites the Bush administration as an example of wall people. Their favorite movie might be *A Few Good Men*. In contrast, the web people see the world in terms of AOL “buddy lists” — people who are members and who are not members of the network. Friedman suggests that their favorite movie might be *You’ve Got Mail*.

According to Friedman, the “digital divide” is both good and bad. Eskimo villagers connected to the Internet become part of the global culture, but risk losing or forgetting their own culture — and succumbing to what Friedman calls “turbo evolution or Social Darwinism on steroids.” How do we manage to disseminate information that saves cultures without simultaneously destroying culture and becoming one big Florida strip mall? The new globalization also causes rampant consumerism. How, Friedman proposes, can we learn to do more things with less stuff?

Friedman’s theory is that the “real Y2K virus” is over-connectedness. We are online all the time. The Internet has become the “evernet.” Very soon, every electric device will be online. Our challenge is to manage the social implications of connectedness. Friedman concluded his speech by pointing out that he preserves his time to create by carrying neither pager nor cell phone: “I don’t want to live my life like a computer server.”

*Contributions to this report have been made by Jerry Meyer, Trustee, Long Wharf Theatre, New Haven, CT; Andrew Michael, Trustee, Contemporary American Theater Festival, Shepherdstown, WV; and Jaan Whitehead, Trustee, Living Stage, Washington, D.C.*

# WHY TECHNOLOGY MATTERS

## THE TRUSTEES BREAKFAST ADDRESS

BY A. E. “TED” WOLF

**F**irst, I would like to tell you something about myself so that you will have a point of reference and get a feel for where I’m coming from, which is relevant to the points I would like to make:

### 1. My Undergraduate Education

My original intent was to focus on math and engineering, but I felt that they lacked warmth and feeling. So I switched to English literature — better, but lacked introspection. Then, I added philosophy to get closer to “the meaning of life” — a question and a quest with no final resolution — but worthy of contemplation!

**The point:** Regardless of original intent, change can and often should, take place.

### 2. My Military Service — U.S. Navy during the Korean War

Here I was. A wet-behind-the-ears Harvard graduate in the humanities — obviously, the perfect candidate for

communications or staff duties. Yet, that was not where the action was on an amphibious attack ship. I stood top deck watches and led the landing craft to the beach as a Boat Group Commander. I became fascinated with bureaucracy and organizational dynamics — specifically, the leadership aspect of management — while carrying out complex missions with ill-equipped, poorly trained personnel.

**The point:** In spite of background and educational bent, be prepared to move into something entirely different.

### 3. My Business Career

I started in a small, privately held box company, only to experience the severe limitations for success in that endeavor. I engaged in a search for an alternative field, but the search was not successful until the following guideline was created, “no further searching in areas which have anything to do with anything we’ve done before!” Sounds crazy, but it worked. The result is a high-tech, New York Stock Exchange company started from scratch.

**The point (of this and the other areas covered here):** Life (I'm now age 71) has taught me to be acutely aware of the danger of thinking that familiarity leads to safety and security. And don't shy away from the new, the unfamiliar and the adventure with uncertain outcome. (Another way of saying: "the greatest risk is not taking one.")

This is not to say that during this life of evolution, change, risk, experimentation and adventure, there were and are no constants or basics. There are the important human things such as: values, priorities, attitudes, relationships (I just celebrated my 50th wedding anniversary).

So there are changes, challenges, problems, opportunities and adventures — and simultaneously there are constants, consistencies, basics and standards. These two seemingly incompatible dimensions are actually quite compatible — in fact, they are mandatory collaborators in the constant search for the future. They must co-exist!

Now, where is all this leading relative to the theme of this conference: "The Role of Live Theatre in a Digital Culture?"

I am involved, as many of you may be, with several arts, cultural and educational institutions facing up to the effects and impacts of technology on their traditional missions and activities. They handle the situation in many different ways with varying degrees of success or failure.

This "confrontation," if it can be called that, has several different aspects. (This is the part of this address you should follow, for it is where the "meat" is.)

1. How has the advent of technology affected and changed audiences (clients, students and markets) and what does this mean to us — the providers of entertainment and education; products and services? If our "customers" have changed or are changing, should we change, and if so, how?
2. Should we, "the providers," use this new technology in the design and presentation of our products, productions and services? How should a theatrical production be changed, affected and redesigned to use this new technology, if at all? Will this erode the integrity of our art and our craft? What will any of these changes or adaptations do to our ability to attract audiences? And what audiences will they attract?
3. Can and should we use this new technology for areas and activities that transcend the principal activities of our theatrical mission — areas such as community involvement, education, promotion and outreach, including putting our productions on the Internet or television — thus, significantly moving beyond the "limitations" imposed by the number of show times and the number of seats in our theatres?

I am influenced, in considering these questions, by a discussion that took place at a recent Wilma Theater board meeting, that focused on the "unfair disadvantage" that a relatively small, regional theatre has in its ability to attract world class talent to perform on its stages. We simply can't even remotely approach the levels of compensation that can and will

be paid to those performers by Hollywood and television, Madison Avenue, and even Broadway, for much less time and effort.

Why is this? Simply because their audiences and their exposures are so much more extensive. Should we care?

Well, I think so, especially since I feel that in so many instances the dramatic qualities and production values of what we do are clearly superior to those of our competitors in the "mainstream."

I don't know how many of you are old enough or were interested enough in Marshall McLuhan, who said the famous quote: "The medium is the message." He meant that the method of communication was important, very important — not necessarily in place of the content, but along with it. And, in effect, he was warning our society that we were not doing a very good job of understanding or adapting to this phenomenon. He felt that those who would adapt to it and use it best would be the "winners" (whatever that means), and in some ways, the others would be left behind.

I leave it to you to determine in your own minds, how that proposition is turning out.

But to get back to what, if anything, we can and should do about our "unfair disadvantage"— I feel strongly that we, who represent so many and varied organizations, and from so many parts of the country should, energetically and enthusiastically, not only tolerate and consider the uses of technology, but also that we should absolutely experiment, apply and implement every possible avenue of every aspect of relevant technology in every single area of activity in which we are engaged. (Half-hearted gestures are a no-no!)

If we do not do this; if we forgo the risk and the challenge, then we will never be able to advance beyond the discussions that will take place in this very conference over the next several days.

If, on the other hand, we do accept the challenge, take the risks (and there truly are risks, as some of these efforts will fail for a variety of reasons) and apply and implement the technology, then we will learn vast lessons about our futures and our new opportunities. (And to be fair, new problems.)

This action will also help to bridge at least two gaps with which we must deal:

❖ The gap between art and technology

*and*

❖ The gap between "our" generation and that "younger" generation we are all working so hard to attract to our endeavors.

And imagine if you can, how exciting and fascinating, not to say controversial, these TCG conferences will be in the future.

*A.E. "Ted" Wolf serves as Board Chairman for The Wilma Theater, Philadelphia, PA.*

# THE TRUSTEE RESIDENCY PROGRAM EXPERIENCE

BY LIZ FILLO

I am driving, during the middle of the night, to spend a week in Waterford, CT, at the first Trustee Residency Program held at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center National Playwrights Conference. What am I doing? Why did I agree to do this? Would I rather stay at home in our paradise in the woods, sitting on our deck sipping wine, listening to the birds and watching fireflies? You bet!

I find my way to the kitschy New England B&B where we're staying. The next morning, we gather and drive to the O'Neill Center — a collection of eclectic buildings with a quarter mile sweep of lawn to the Long Island Sound. It is camp-like, easy and relaxed, with incredible views and invitations for lying under majestic trees. A collection of artists — writers, actors, directors, designers and dramaturgs — all focused on and immersed in this thing called THEATRE. Jim Houghton, Artistic Director of Signature Theatre and new Artistic Director of the National Playwrights Conference, welcomes us. He quotes predecessor Lloyd Richards, "One day here is like a week in the theatre." And it is, with 15 playwrights, 15 new plays and 15 staged readings. Jim wants to broaden the community by bringing trustees into the mix to observe the development process behind a new play and, in turn, to demystify the role of trustees for the artists.

## Day One:

**9:15 a.m.** First reading of Lee Blessing's new play, *Black Sheep*. The director, actors, dramaturg, designers, stage manager and trustees sit around the table. Playwright reads the play. This is rarely done. The playwright's vision comes through his voice. How does the actor feel? Illuminated? Frustrated? Maybe both? But the actor sees the arc of the whole play, not just his or her role.

**2:30 p.m.** Designers' session with Gina Gionfriddo, who is working on her new play *Guinevere*. Playwrights almost never work directly with designers. These designers try to understand her vision, and in turn, probe and question her, forcing her to articulate and illuminate that vision. She sees her own work in new ways.

**5:00 p.m.** We attend wine reception with the playwrights at Eugene O'Neill's childhood summer home, Monte Cristo Cottage. And yes, there is the room from *Long Day's Journey Into Night*.

**8:00 p.m.** Staged reading of *Lucy and the Conquest* by Cusi Cram in the amphitheatre: complete with

folding chairs, summer, bugs and distant thunder, uh...no, that's part of the sound design. Good work from a young playwright.

## Day Two:

**10:30 a.m.** Design workshop with the O'Neill's group of set, lighting and sound designers. A full, open and stimulating give and take with trustees. We learn about their frustrations, successes and the unique challenge here. In their real life, these designers solve problems. At the O'Neill, they don't want to solve problems. Instead, they want the playwright to learn more about the text he or she wrote. The playwright needs to create the "character" of the play, to give the designers a foundation — a reality upon which to work. The designers' job here is to use a minimum of production elements to understand and inform the play.

**1:15 p.m.** The "all conference" hour is a Houghton initiative. The entire conference gathers each day to hear about and to discuss topics — but not always revolving around theatre. On this day, however, it is the trustees who are the topic. There are eight of us, facing this artistic community. Who are we? Where do we come from? What do we do? Jim moderates. We tell them about our fiscal responsibilities, our passions for theatre and our appreciation and admiration for what they do. They like us, they really like us! Conclusion from all: it is WE, not us and them.

**2:30 p.m.** The Critics Institute session is another component of the O'Neill, and it is a four-week intensive program. The title of this session is "Apples and Oranges." We do some of our own critiquing and learn that critical review is, by necessity, comparative. Interesting.

**8:00 p.m.** Lobster dinner in town. Jim Houghton arrives with 6-year-old daughter, Lily. We read astrological cards with her and play "telephone." In this game, the phrase that starts and goes around the table isn't the same phrase at the end. And, I wonder, is writing a play like playing "telephone?" Is the work the playwright creates the same work after going through director, designer, actor and audience member?

## **SIDEBAR: THE LUXURY OF FREEDOM**

*More on the O'Neill Experience*

**BY ANN GILBERT**

Those of us who are used to being scheduled have difficulty being unscheduled. Except for the all conference meetings and the scheduled roundtable discussions held each day at 1:15 p.m., we are free. We can attend readings, rehearsals, tech rehearsals, schmooze with the participants in Blue Gene's Pub, read scripts of plays given staged readings, contemplate the vista on the porch of the mansion, lie on the hammock (often in demand), or walk down to the Long Island Sound beach at the end of the property and explore the adjacent Harkness State Park. It takes 48 hours to get used to this type of freedom. At the end of our week, we realize that the luxury of free time and the fluidity in our schedules are part of the process.

We are envious of the trustees who will attend next year. Full of enthusiasm, we will return to our communities and boards to share our experiences with theatre-going friends, fellow trustees and theatre staffs. Back in our everyday routines, we will close our eyes and dream of the grassy lawn, clapboard buildings and a place devoted to the art of theatre.

Eight trustees participated in this pilot Trustee Residency Program. They included: Liz Fillo, McCarter Theatre Center, Princeton, NJ; Ann Gilbert, Round House Theatre, Silver Spring, MD; Judy Hansen, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Milwaukee, WI; Martin Massman, Mark Taper Forum, Los Angeles, CA; Jerry Meyer, Long Wharf Theatre, New Haven, CT; Chrissy Ripple, Hartford Stage Company, Hartford, CT; Nancy Roche, Center Stage, Baltimore, MD; and Judy Rubin, Playwrights Horizons, New York, NY.

Participating trustees would be delighted to talk with trustees interested in the July 2002 program. In addition, O'Neill Managing Director Howard Sherman and Artistic Director Jim Houghton plan to talk about the program at TCG's Fall Forum for trustees in New York, November 16–18, 2001. We urge you to share in the fun.

*Ann Gilbert serves as a Trustee for Round House Theatre in Silver Spring, MD.*

### *Days Three, Four and Five:*

More of the same happens: Friendships form, trustees and artists are at ease with one another, discussions transpire under those majestic trees, challenging and stimulating roundtable sessions occur and rehearsals are observed and old connections are discovered.

Staged readings go up every night. "Our" play, *Black Sheep*, has its final staged reading on our last night. We feel tremendous ownership, having followed it from first reading to performance. We LOVE it — our laughs are the loudest, and our claps are the strongest. On our last day, the trustees gather to assess this trustee residency experiment. We all agree it has been a rousing success. As much as we all thought we knew about theatre, we all learned. We had much to take back to our home theatres. Were there things we would change? A few. Things we wouldn't? Yes. Would we all be willing to leave our assorted paradises to travel to Waterford, CT, for another week at the National Playwrights Conference? You bet!

*Liz Fillo serves as a Trustee at the McCarter Theatre Center in Princeton, NJ.*

