

Changing the Performance

A Companion Guide to
Arts, Business and Civic
Engagement

Julia Rowntree



CHANGING THE PERFORMANCE

Changing the Performance: A Companion Guide to Arts, Business and Civic Engagement is a manual for arts practitioners concerned with the relationship between business, the arts and wider society, and particularly those engaged in fundraising.

Julia Rowntree gives a fascinating account of her experiences forging the business sponsorship campaign at the London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT). Faced with a funding crisis in the early 1990s, LIFT responded with a radical experiment in business arts relations – the LIFT Business Arts Forum – in which young students and people from private and public sectors are invited to attend the theatre together and imagine how they might do their work differently as a result of this shared experience.

This book proposes that fundraising for the arts is much more than simply a function for generating income. It fulfils an ancient social role of connection across levels of power, expertise, culture, gender and generation. Rowntree describes why these dynamics are vital to society's ability to adapt. Raising intriguing questions about common ground between artistic, social and commercial innovation, this book offers a new model for the theory and practice of financing the arts.

Julia Rowntree led the London International Festival of Theatre's sponsorship campaign from 1986–95 and since then has led three LIFT initiatives in business, arts and civic relations – LIFTING London, the LIFT Business Arts Forum and the Lecture Series *Imagining a Cultural Commons*. Consultant to a range of organizations on civic and arts development issues, she advises and lectures internationally.

‘Rowntree’s pioneering work conceptualising and realising the LIFT Business Arts Forum is just beginning to be recognised by the arts sponsorship mainstream. She was first in the UK to explore the impact of changing consumer and business values on the world of arts fundraising. Her leadership of the LIFT Business Arts Forum has taken practice in this field in the UK ahead of the game and her story needs to be heard far and wide.’

Clare Cooper, *Co-Director,
Mission, Models, Money programme*

‘This inspiring book is about much more than how art engages with business. For any manager in any organization wishing to understand how change really works – and sticks – this book is a must. For anyone taking their first steps in unfamiliar worlds, Julia’s story of success and failure offers companionship and much food for thought.’

Sally Bibb, *Director, Group Sales Development,
The Economist Group*

‘An intractable and perplexing challenge: to engage arts and business in true learning partnerships. This volume demonstrates how interdependence in the cultural commons not only achieves innovation in both arts and business, but also brings their joint force to bear on public discourse and social adaptation.’

Shirley Brice Heath, *Professor at Large,
Brown University*

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Business and Civic Engagement

JULIA ROWNTREE



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To my colleagues,
family and friends
young and old

Without realising it, the individual composes his life according to the laws of beauty even in times of greatest distress.

(Kundera 1984: 49)

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ABBREVIATIONS

A&B	Arts and Business (formerly ABSA)
ABSA	Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts
ACE	Arts Council England
BSIS	Business Sponsorship Incentive Scheme
BT	British Telecom
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport
DTI	Department for Trade and Industry
EIU	Economist Intelligence Unit
<i>FT</i>	<i>Financial Times</i>
GBN	Global Business Network
GDP	gross domestic product
GLA	Greater London Assembly
GLC	Greater London Council
GM	genetic modification
HP	Hewlett Packard
ILEA	Inner London Education Authority
IP	intellectual property
IP	Internet protocols
LAB	London Arts Board
LIFT	London International Festival of Theatre
LWT	London Weekend Television
M&S	Marks and Spencer
NESTA	National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts
NYOBC	New York Outward Bound Center
RSA	Royal Society for Arts, Manufactures and Commerce
SADC	Southern African Development Community

STSI	Academy of Music and Dance
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
UPS	United Parcel Service
VA	Visiting Arts
VfL	Vision for London

INTRODUCTION

Why this book might change the way you think

New opinions are always suspected, and usually opposed, without any other reason but because they are not already common.

(Locke 1690)

I live on a wide street. Bordered by a mix of Victorian mansions, 1930s and Arts and Craft houses, local shops, a factory and a petrol station, the road narrows as it opens out on one side to a park. For years on my way to work I walked down the same side of the street leading to the underground station. In the spring of 1994, I was faced with a mid-career crisis in need of radical solutions. The question that vexed me was how to build more equitable relationships between the worlds of arts and business. A wholesale revolution was required, but I had little idea of where to begin. One morning, mulling over new directions to be taken, I decided to cross the street to walk to the station on the other side. I found that the world looked astonishingly different. The morning sun shone on that side. Unfamiliar plants grew in front gardens – grapes hanging on a vine and an olive tree – surprising sights in south London. The more familiar side of the street looked oppressively crowded, everyone jostling for a place on the narrow pavement. Simply by striking out towards the local common, several things happened. The horizon suddenly expanded bringing with it a lightness of spirit.

The difference of perspective seemed out of all proportion to the scale of the move made.

Crossing the street to view the daily round from the other side, from outside the situation, made it look different and a small shift had made a huge one. If a change is needed, I discovered it helped literally to move my feet and disrupt the habitual path. The crowded side of the street may represent the most direct route, but sometimes it is a matter of survival to take a non-direct route to one's destination. The aim of this book is to encourage you too to cross the street in search of a larger horizon and to think about your role and the role of the arts, particularly the theatre, in today's world.

The steps I took that morning deeply affected how I came to approach the work of securing sponsorship from businesses for LIFT, the London International Festival of Theatre. LIFT is a leading contemporary arts organization in the UK and has, since 1981, brought more than 4,000 artists from around 62 countries to perform in theatres and outdoor locations across London. Through bringing new ideas and new kinds of performance to London, LIFT has contributed significantly to opening up new horizons for artists and audiences in Britain. My work at LIFT began in 1986. My role was to find ways in which LIFT could encourage businesses to sponsor performances in the Festival. Within a short space of time, political changes and globalization of the economy forced changes in approach. Conditions over which there was scant control demanded continuous innovation and adaptation. Constant renewal of the values that inspired both LIFT and my own changing role alongside colleagues has been required. This book relates the intertwined stories of an individual, an organization and external events over a near 20-year period.

This book is partly about fundraising, because that was the starting point for my own new departure. It is a historical document about LIFT and my part of the organization's fundraising picture. It is also about more than that. It is about how, through the prism of LIFT, attempts have been made to make sense of complex, interrelated challenges facing the world.

You may question where your own role and practice relate to economic and political issues such as globalization of the economy,

growth in privatization, the growing power and impact of multinational corporations – even the future of democracy and life of the planet. You may feel that these topics do not affect you directly in your daily work. On the other hand, it could be that this book changes your mind and that you will find new ways to contribute to wider debate by viewing your role anew.

If you work in an arts organization, you do not need limitless resources to survive, but without adequate funding its potential will never be fully realized. You apply to funding bodies that demand boxes to be ticked. You seek support from businesses that demand short-term promotional advantages. You persist with attempts to retain the interest of individual supporters. You say to yourself: surely there must be a better way to approach this juggling act.

There are no short cuts or quick fixes but I believe that this effort can be different and thus more interesting and fulfilling. I have even come to think that the work of building support for the arts plays a broader role in social survival than when I began work in this field. The thesis here is that the arts fundraising process is not just about raising money but also plays a vital role in social adaptation and resilience. This is because it can open up channels of communication, human connection, reflection and critique across conventional boundaries of power, expertise, culture and generation. I believe that the proximity between arts and business encouraged in the UK over recent decades paradoxically places the arts in a better position from which to critique the commercial values that precipitated that proximity in the first place.

The new way of thinking is not about offering superficial marketing opportunities to businesses, nor is it an opportunistic ploy to meet the demands of public policy. And it is not a patronizing attempt to bring the arts to the unenlightened. Instead it is a wholehearted effort to develop mutual understanding between the arts, the commercial and civic worlds. The aim is to deepen self-understanding in the world of the arts as well as in commerce and communities. It seeks a three-way flow of inspiration, learning and public collaboration.

The money benefits are indirect but nonetheless real.

This book has few easy answers to the ever-heavy burden of raising funds. It is hoped instead that it offers ways out of dark dead ends and courage that the work is worth attempting again and again and again. It is also a reminder that it is only via alliances between those with resources and those with the power, motivation and time to start new conversations that change is possible.

The job of the next generation of those facilitating links between arts, commerce and communities will be to find ways to answer the question as to why all of us need to rediscover routes to public collaboration rather than simply producing art or events for consumption. In so doing, arts organizations will also find routes to their own renewal. But they may need to question their artistic emphasis, organizational ethos and structure. After all, in the words of craftsman, David Pye: 'Art is not a matter of giving people a little pleasure in their time off. It is, in the long run, a matter of holding together a civilization' (Pye 1978: 9).

Perhaps you are an artist, administrator or fundraiser who has been working for some years to keep your arts practice afloat and flourishing. Perhaps you are someone with this role in a large organization with a sense that all is not right with your world. Perhaps you are a policy-maker keen to be responsive to the changing needs of artists and arts organizations. I encourage you to read the whole of this book, which is reasonably short. But you are doubtless extremely busy and may wish to dip into it before reading it all. If you would like to get a sense of the new way of thinking, then I suggest you look at pages 101–38, 151–67, 211–end.

If you are a fundraising veteran you may be looking not for new ways of thinking but to see if your experience chimes with what I have learned over the years. In this case, I suggest you look at pages 25–37, 38–58 and then go to pages 103–38 and 171–end for indications of a different approach.

If you are working in a country where the free market is in its infancy and the only possibility for engaging businesses is on a commercial footing, then pages 25–37 are for you. Nevertheless, a glimpse at new ways of thinking might enable you to be a catalyst for the wider civic conversations outlined in pages 59–86.

Your primary interest may be historical. If you wish to learn more about the interplay of my own story, of LIFT itself, of a new

departure the LIFT Business Arts Forum, and how this interplay relates to world events, key parts of the book will be pages 13–37, 38–58, 59–86, 103–38, 139–68, and 216–end, plus the timeline in Appendix one.

Finally, if you are interested in learning more about questions of globalization and the importance of considering the arts fundraising role in this context, then the last section, from page 216 is for you.

Part one, *Opening a Window on the World*, gives a picture of the development of LIFT, the Festival's international and local vision and its engagement with a younger generation of theatre-makers. This part explores how LIFT was resourced, learning the language of business to build a sponsorship programme from scratch. It describes how working principles emerged from engagement with commercial sponsors. It ends with the wider civic partnerships generated in the early 1990s as a result of political changes in London and in response to failures of the market to manage regional questions. Set in an economic era of market fundamentalism, this history gives a flavour of the status quo that came to spark a revolution in approach.

Part two, *Strategic Conversations*, starts with a crisis and embarkation on a journey of discovery as to why the theatre and new forms of civic conversation might be a matter of survival in today's world. It relates the stumbling steps taken towards a new form of relationship with business, one based on co-learning and critique rather than brand promotion. The result was LIFT's invention of the Business Arts Forum, detailed here. Chapter eight describes findings from two periods of research, one in the UK and the second in the US. Both involved a foray into businesses, public sector and community organizations to assess potential for connections to be made across sectors and generations in the Forum. Lastly, this section reveals why, faced with finite natural resources and the resulting need for fundamental structural change in society, culture, values and beliefs may determine survival.

Part three, *Imagining a Cultural Commons*, begins with how LIFT forged ways of collective learning across cultures of many kinds and how this painstaking work informed evolution of the Business Arts Forum and provoked questions as to why diversity of gender and

generation are implicated in the processes of learning and adaptation. This part takes a closer look at a changing economic and environmental context in which the future is far from certain. Commercialization of areas of life previously held in common, such as intellectual copyright, water and genetic material, has pushed cultural tensions to breaking point worldwide. Speculation is made about the role of the theatre as a space beyond the market or the state in which to reflect on and communicate about issues of common concern both locally and globally.

In the final chapter, qualities of neighbourliness are put centre stage and attention given to the significance of the LIFT Business Arts Forum in this context. Social adaptation inevitably spans generations. Consideration is given here to questions of succession.

Experience of fundraising at LIFT and the search for different forms of engagement with businesses and public sector organizations provide the basis of this book but it is a useful guide for anyone needing to structure new alliances across conventional lines. The majority is written in narrative form. Boxes have been used for summaries of principle or approach, and quotations and figures introduced where I have found these useful to my own understanding. Appendix one provides a timeline of LIFT adaptations, events in London and the wider world. Appendix two gives a summary of events seen by LIFT's business supporters in the 1995 Festival. Appendix three shows a diagram of key LIFT adaptations in relation to sponsorship and the Business Arts Forum.

Experience related here has been at a specific time and in a specific place for a specific aspect of the contemporary performing arts. You may learn through this book however that when facing the unknown it is only through looking anew at one's specific surroundings and learning from the specific experience of others, that renewal is possible. In the course of my work, I never found a book that brought together the range of questions I wrestled with day to day. Rather, this has been a continual process of experiment and reflection on both failure and success. It is through the theatre itself that I have learned what does and does not work. This book will be helpful to others working to support contemporary performers or visual artists who question established structures and

ways of communicating. It is a personal story offering ideas for shaping partnerships and funding strategy in other fields such as health, youth arts enterprise or social entrepreneurship. It will also be of interest to people in business and policy-making rethinking ways of maintaining long-term trust and connections with the communities they serve.

You may be a lone operator or you may be an individual working for a large organization. You may be a practitioner, producer, development manager, board member, policy-maker or student. Whatever the case, seeing a way clearly to generate support or find fresh inspiration is extremely hard. A formulaic or well-worn approach that reinforces the status quo may run counter to your instincts, background or the culture of your organization, or even undermine your chosen art form or practice. Indeed a sense that things are not right is a signal for steps to be taken in a new direction. Experience shows that the task of securing funds cannot be seen as separate from the artistic practice itself. It is a social, political and aesthetic process needing strong ideas to connect with supporters both inside and outside your organization.

The book is a reminder that money is not necessarily the only thing preventing you from doing what you want to do. The philosophy, ideas and intentions contained in the search for money are ultimately still more important. Paradoxically, by leaving an immediate search for money to one side, on the other side of the street as it were, new possibilities emerge. By focusing on a horizon that is bigger than the direct financial needs of all parties, there is a chance that those needs become lighter, that the search for money itself will change in tone, become more interesting and thus achieve new outcomes. It may not be easier, but it will be less burdensome and more effective in the long term. As Czech political pioneer, Vaclav Havel, advises in his essay, 'The Power of the Powerless', everyday acts of seemingly small significance are the first and most effective way to counter all-pervading regimes from which there appears to be no escape (Havel 1978).

For policy-makers and students of arts administration, cultural enterprise and cultural policy, issues of funding and critique are the focus of wide-ranging study. It is hoped that the experience

recounted here will give practical information for studies in a range of fields from the impact of globalization on communities to studies of theatre, cultural policy, organizational learning, social innovation and corporate social responsibility.

You may be reading this in Britain, Europe, the USA, India, Africa or elsewhere. Ways in which resources are secured for the arts differ greatly from country to country, even from city to city. This story comes primarily from London, among the world's richest, most culturally dynamic and best-resourced cities, where access exists to a range of private and public funding sources. It is often assumed that lessons in resourcing the arts are to be learned from the major capital cities. Many ideas in this book have come from places that might be considered as operating far outside the mainstream. Indeed, LIFT's original inspiration was the degree to which Britain could learn from other cultures and cultural perspectives. A belief that fostering Britain's international connections was a matter of survival took me into the world of the theatre. What I hope this book might do is help to foster a confidence in generating support for living arts practice wherever you are based, because, wherever you are, you probably explore the same questions of tradition, modernity, difference, authenticity and survival. Just as many ideas have been borrowed from different sources along the way towards this book, you should find here something to adapt to your particular art form, culture and geographic location. Or you might simply take reassurance from the fact that resourcing the arts is a challenge in London too and that you are not alone.

Underlying the strategic issues of contemporary arts and business are more timeless themes. This dimension of the book encourages you to think beyond your professional role to explore roles and responsibilities that derive from identity, gender and stage in life. Such an examination can help point to new ways of seeing your role and its interplay with the life of any organization in which you are involved. For example, many observers have commented that individuals spanning boundaries of business, arts and communities are predominantly, though of course not exclusively, women. This is not without significance. There is growing evidence from other eras that women have played a role in facilitating

connection and experiment across social boundaries at times of great economic and socio-cultural change. Sometimes, by changing the conversation, they have laid the foundations for social innovation. In the story you will read, old and young, men and women have played their part in enabling all involved to learn in different ways.

Behind everyone's work there is a personal story: daily exclusion from nursery school for bad behaviour gave me early experience of seeing the world from an outsider's perspective; being picked on for having red hair made me detest assumptions based on appearance alone; coming from a family of doctors bred an instinct for diagnosis and the dilemmas of public service. A language degree in the 1970s and a passion for the arts led to LIFT after ten years producing animated feature films and commercials. This mix of cultural and commercial experience equipped me to interpret between the worlds of arts and business. Understanding the language and motivations of both fields enabled me to direct the gaze to a rapidly evolving horizon on which both destinies depend.

Few work in the field of contemporary arts simply to make money. Motivation comes from a wish to enable and resource emergent ideas and artistic practice. It comes from a sense that, however small an interaction, the facilitation of new conversations and new ways of seeing is worth undertaking. You are invited to cross the street and, through my experience, see your work in a way that will make the task of securing resources a lighter and more meaningful one. It is my belief that art is a matter of survival, but raising funds for it should not constitute human sacrifice. I hope this book can help you and your art survive and flourish to reinvigorate the public sphere and keep critique and re-creation of reality alive. Broader survival and the rediscovery of public collaboration may just depend on it. Let me begin with where all this began: LIFT.

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PART ONE

Opening a Window on the World

The London International Festival
of Theatre

*The mind is but a barren soil; a soil which is soon exhausted,
and will produce no crop, or only one, unless it be continually
fertilized and enriched with foreign matter.*

(Reynolds 1774: 99)

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ONE

STARTING BY NOT KNOWING

Over the past 20 years, LIFT has radically, and sometimes roguishly, redefined what we think of as theatre and much of the experimentation in this country can be traced to its influence.

(David Benedict, the *Observer*, 2002)

In 1979, it was received wisdom that British theatre was the best in the world. With no international theatre visiting London on a regular basis there was little chance to learn otherwise. When two young women straight out of university, Lucy Neal and Rose Fenton, visited a theatre festival in Portugal, what they saw became the spark for the London International Festival of Theatre – soon to be known as LIFT.¹

Fenton and Neal had grown up in a tradition where the text was everything, Shakespeare the point of reference for all other theatre. There was nothing to beat Britain where theatre was concerned. When they took their own production to the student drama festival in Portugal, they witnessed cultures and traditions that were more visual, more physical, more musical than their own and with stronger traditions of ensemble working. It dawned that in some parts of the world, theatre is not even called theatre, but is more akin to wordless spectacle or religious ritual. Only in English is the word ‘audience’ based on auditory perception; in Italian, for

example, it is 'spettatore' or spectator; in French it is 'public' or member of the public; in the drama and dance traditions of Africa, the relationship between performer and audience is closer to celebrant, communicant, participant or co-creator (Harding 2002). Fenton and Neal resolved to bring fresh ideas and a greater range of experience and ways of being to audiences in Britain. They would start an international festival in London.

With clipboards for their office, wages from waitressing and bicycles for transport, they set out to discover how they should begin. They admitted they knew virtually nothing, so asked advice from anyone who would give it. More experienced members of the theatre world were generous with their advice if sceptical about the venture. They doubted that such an influx of new ideas could sustain interest; moreover the inexperience of the two young women was palpable. Few believed that contemporary theatre in foreign languages would have an appeal for London audiences – especially not at the height of summer in theatres with no air-conditioning.

In 1981, the first Festival proved the doubters wrong. A dazzling production from Brazil, *Macunaíma*, had the public queuing round the block. The box-office takings for the theatres presenting this and other Festival shows were higher than at other times of the year. The sceptics had to eat their words. London audiences were hungry to have their eyes opened to theatre from elsewhere.

It was *Macunaíma* that got me hooked.

Macunaíma is a legendary hero of the Brazilian Indians. The play told the story of his journey from the Amazon jungle to the sophisticated seductions of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. I watched enraptured as a whole city was conjured from newspaper, its sights and sounds brought forth by performers wielding pneumatic drills at one minute to become towering skyscrapers the next. *Macunaíma's* fear and naivety led him to encounter both danger and magic among the clamour of the streets and markets. The fields and streams beneath the city were brought silently to life as a woman walked across an empty stage holding in her hands a bowl from which fluttering fragments of green paper fell to make a fountain. *Macunaíma* became lazy, lecherous and wily, his loss of innocence making it difficult to return to the Amazon yet leaving him confused