



Grantmakers in the Arts  
2003 Conference

## THE EDGE

### Proceedings from the Conference

October 19-22, 2003  
W Hotel  
Seattle, Washington

### THE EDGE OF A NEW ECONOMY

#### ABUNDANCE: A CREATIVE DIALOGUE ON MONEY

*Off site: Seattle Art Museum*

ABUNDANCE is a community arts performance project, gathering stories and exploring ways that people of different classes, races, and ages negotiate economics in their daily lives. The heart of ABUNDANCE is a series of nation-wide interviews with millionaires and minimum-wage workers coupled with a year-long New York-based civic dialogue group including participants ranging from undocumented workers to the very wealthy. Culminating in a tragic musical comedy that premiered in New York in January 2004 after a seven-city national tour, the project made possible an exchange historically marked by silence and shame on both ends of the economic spectrum.

This session will feature OBIE-winning theater artist Marty Pottenger describing her project, reading from the work in progress, presenting a nine-minute video from the New York dialogue group. Participants had the opportunity to engage in some simple and non-threatening group exercises. There also was time for questions and audience discussion about the important issues raised in this groundbreaking performance piece.

*Session Designer:* Judi Jennings  
*Kentucky Foundation for Women*

Janet Sarbaugh  
*Heinz Endowments*

*Presenter:* Marty Pottenger  
*Terra Moto Inc.*

*October 20, 2003, 3:00 p.m.*

**JENNINGS:** I'd like to introduce Marty Pottenger. All I can say is two years ago I saw Marty's performance in Washington D.C. at Dance Place and it was the most transformative performance I had seen.

She's also been working on a project in New York, the City Water Tunnel. The city of Manhattan has been doing a huge capital public works project, they're building a new water source under the island of Manhattan, bringing water from upstate. And this crew of mostly Irish Americans and Caribbean workers were down in this 25-foot circular tunnel digging, and making this tunnel for years and years, their whole life. She became a member of the crew and really brought art to them, and them to us. It was wonderful, and I can't wait to hear your performance!

**POTTENGER:** Great. I just want to welcome everybody. Marty Pottenger, I've lived in New York City since 1975 and I come out of a good and different past, I was in construction for 20 years working as a carpenter. I'm also working in New York City as a trades activist.

I decided that art really was powerful. In '98 I stopped teaching shop and decided to see what would happen if I tried to make a living as an artist. At that point I was living on very little money, like 250 bucks a week more or less. And I was also doing shows and stuff so I was getting extra infusions of cash on occasion.

But it's gone well. It turns out there's a lot that can happen without a lot of money. Working as a carpenter really informed this process called "Abundance" which you read about in the program, and which I've been doing for four years. I've worked for a lot of poor people, I've worked for a lot of wealthy people.

My own background in terms of economics but also class, spans the gamut. My grandfather started out as a salesman of biblical encyclopedias, which in the twenties hopefully wasn't quite the con artist job it is today. But he was so good at it that he ended up being a partner owner in the company.

I grew up with this sense that there was this wealthy grandfather and grandmother that we had to treat in a certain way because they had that money, and maybe you were going to get some of it.

I feel like the toxic cancer, the part that's the bad part of economic inequity, how it corrodes your personal relationships with each other, which you all are varied versions of frontline troops in some ways, to engaging people around those issues.

I felt like it really informed my early life, I really got a chance to see the corrosive nature of that, that they weren't just my grandmother and my grandfather, they were my grandmother and grandfather who had money.

In our own family, sometimes we had lots of money, but we also had very little money at times. I got to experience something that people who are raised poor have a good sense of, but that people who are not raised poor have very little clarity on, and that's that you can do a lot without money, that you actually do survive. People choose to come to together, people choose to turn towards each other, and there's a sense of connection that is a part of not having so much.

I'm doing carpentry jobs. I'm working in people's closets. I'm not dealing with people who've got money, probably everybody here's had some relationship to a contractor or carpenter at some point, right? Or at least a *Reader's Digest* fix-it book.

In a kind of gross generalization way, I came away with the sense that everyone has three pairs of shoes, that some people's shoes cost 500 bucks apiece and some people's cost 15 bucks apiece.

But there's a three pair of shoes metaphor that's run through my life in that there's tremendous flow in this country, of money, but when you get down to it, there's only 2.2 million people who have assets of a million dollars or more when you don't count real estate. To me that's a phenomenally small number of people. That's about the population of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

It looks so different. Where we live, where we go, it looks completely different. In the life I lead in New York City, in Manhattan, it looks like there's millions and millions of millionaires. I mean it does to me. And you all have different relationships with that end of it.

I felt in a world where you've got an abundance of data on money, you have an abundance of conversation, supposedly, about money. You've got constant radio stations telling you stock reports, you've got news stations, you have every TV station, every magazine. You've got magazines, books, best-selling books, you have specials, you go to talks, you have newspapers, whole columns in the newspapers, page after page where people go, right?

In actuality there's almost no human conversation about it whatsoever. It's an amazing situation! It's very odd. A huge amount of social attention, just energy and attention, is focused on making money and talking about money. There's almost



a parallel silence and almost a negative, anti-energy sucked into not talking about it. It's a deep and profound taboo, in particular in the United States, but everywhere. That was very interesting.

In terms of your work with art and artists, storytelling is something that I think we're just born doing. I think theater is and song is, it's something that is in our genes, a part of our human makeup.

I'm going to flip back to something I said about five minutes ago, but the rest of that thought is, how can we get smart about something that we're not allowed to tell stories about? How can we in our own lives, our own finances, how as a culture, as a community, as a city, as a constituency, as the people of this church or this synagogue, how can you all get smart about money, if you're not allowed to talk about it?

I'm at the end of four years on this project, and I'm at the beginning of probably another few at least. I started out with some premises in the project, I called it the Abundance Project. I was very inspired by a quote that I first came across, by Bishop Desmond Tutu, and it said, "We have a word called *ununtobotho* and it describes the essence of being human, a sense of generosity, a sense of connectedness, a sense that I cannot be human unless everyone around me is, as well."

And I thought that would be so great to have a word in English that meant the essence of being human and what we're like in that sense of connection that we're born with.

I decided to hypothesize that there was plenty. Do you all know *Harper's* magazine? No one ever talks about it. I mean no one talks about it! I love it, I'm a subscriber. It's so odd that there's this pretty good magazine that no one ever speaks of. It's taboo.

For all of you who know it, they have these indexes in the front page. They say, we spend like \$12 billion on mascara, and we spend \$95 billion on movies or whatever. That informed abundance really got me. I started getting this information about the kind of money that was flowing through us, the levels of money.

Another thing happened, Kofi Annan at the UN came out with a statement saying that in his estimate, it would take \$40 billion for everyone on earth to have food, water, healthcare, education, shelter and clothing. We don't talk about it that much, it's very hard to find on the UN site, so I think that he was browbeaten into lowering it.

At the same time we were bombing Kosovo. I was doing theater, I was traveling to Yugoslavia at the time to write a play called *Just War*, interviewing men who participated in the war. So I happened to know that we spent \$40 billion doing that, in a matter of 70 days or something. It just happened to be this interesting juxtaposition.

I thought, oh my God! We were reading, *Harper's*, and I'm thinking, that's what we spend on ChapStick for God's sake.

One of the wealthy people I interviewed said, it's a lot harder to give away than it is to make. I think that's an interesting thing.

I'm going to say things that you don't agree with, that's fine. I'll tell you my assumptions going into the project now which will help give context to this. So I don't need you to agree with me at all, it's just a part of the conversation.

I've had this incredible luxury -- I raised about \$160,000 for the project. We were going for 250 I think, and we got up to 160 and then as everyone else does, in your life, you kick off. You take the shovel and you dig the first shovelful of dirt. And that came from people such as you, mostly from foundations. A little bit from the NEA, but mostly from foundations.

I think we're living in very exciting times. We're living in a time when, does anyone else here know about a group called Responsible Wealth or a group called United for a Fair Economy? United for a Fair Economy is headquartered in Boston, and they have an offshoot that Warren Buffet -- Mr. Buffet to me -- and Bill Gates, Sr., Mr. Bill Gates, Sr. to me, and George Soros started called Responsible Wealth and they're fighting the repeal of the estate tax.

**FOCKE:** There will be a conversation tomorrow morning with Bill Gates.

**POTTENGER:** Oh, Senior's coming? Oh good! I met him twice, it's a cool thing. They shouldn't let a performance artist from New York City into his life.

They started a group called Responsible Wealth, and over 800 billionaires and multi-millionaires signed a petition and published it in the *New York Times*, and are putting money and energy into stopping the repeal of the estate tax, and basically insisting that they be taxed at a minimum of 50 percent upon their death, by the government.

There's several pieces of that that are truly revolutionary and truly a sense of a new



historical period for all of us. This is your business, so I won't even go into them, but there's a lot of points in that line that say we're in new ground.

The keynote speaker today talked about the younger donors coming in. I've gotten to talk to some of them about how they're thinking about it. I think there's just a social conversation that is not located in any one particular economic group about what were we going to do. Globalization is helping people focus, both locally and globally. I think it's helping people think in big pieces. Abundance is a very big piece.

It's a bit of a love song to the United States. It's been my experience that no one does anything to anyone outside their kind of family that they aren't already willing to do to each other. In a way, Abundance was the best way for me to think about, as an artist, the effects the United States was having globally and internationally.

The show Abundance is in part a love song to the United States, a kind of tough love song. It's a historical overview. There's this rich old, 90-year-old white billionaire who has multiple sclerosis who is one of the lead characters, Lazarus. He has a man servant, an African American man named Job. And there's a lot of Bible stuff in the show that I didn't expect.

Lazarus collects American history paintings. He owns "George Washington Crossing the Delaware." We get to see United States history during the show. Lazarus has given a couple hundred million to a University to set up a museum of his collection. That's the pretext for one of the storylines in the show.

Let's go around the room now, and I'll ask you to introduce yourselves.. Your name, where you're from, and one thing you knew about money when you were five years old.

**JEWEL:** My name is Jewel. I'm from San Francisco, but I'm originally from Boston, and I knew by the time I was five that there were a lot of toys I was not going to have because we could not afford them. Particularly the jumping things. I can see it still. *[Laughter]*

**ABRAM:** I'm Kerry Abram, the Durfee Foundation. And Durfee's in Los Angeles, I'm out in Berkeley, California. But I can remember in my family it's not polite to talk about money. You don't ask how much things cost. It's not polite.

**AUDIENCE:** I'm \_\_\_\_\_ from Los Angeles, I'm in Minnesota now. When you're five, it's hard to remember, I'm not sure how cognizant I was of

money, and I remember not understanding the difference between money and a checkbook. But I do know that it was this thing that made my parents worry.

**BOOTH:** I'm Lonnie Booth, I live in Cambridge, Massachusetts. And I didn't think I had a memory, but of course one popped out as you asked the question. My parents were divorced and the economic situation of the two of them was very different. My mother married someone who was wealthy and doing quite well. My father suddenly looked like he wasn't as prosperous. And I was going back and forth on Sundays to my father's small apartment, and the house that I lived in. So I had some sense of difference.

**KOHLER:** My name's Prudy Kohler, I'm from San Francisco, originally from Los Angeles. The thing that I remember, that I knew when I was five was that you were never supposed to put money in your mouth. *[Laughter]* For a number of reasons.

**POTTENGER:** That's a new one! I've heard from like 500 people and you're the first person who said that. That's a great one. You can see where this is going. It's powerful stuff. I think we all knew that but nobody's ever thought to have that be what they said.

**BUZZUTO:** I'm Lexie Buzzuto from the Wallace Foundation in New York, originally from Baltimore, Maryland. My memory of money when I was five is from the tooth fairy. A big deal, and I remember wanting a gold coin. *[Laughter]* I don't know where I got that. And the tooth fairy gave me a silver dollar. I was disappointed that I didn't get the gold coin.

**GIBSON:** Sandra Gibson with Arts Presenters based in Washington, D.C. and I grew up in a rural community in Ohio with West Indian parents who immigrated to the United States. My dad collected silver dollars and he always polished them shiny. We were told money was dirty, don't put it in your mouth, and it didn't grow on trees.

**POTTENGER:** One of the women was from Zaire in my dialogue group which I'll tell you about in a second. And we went around and asked everybody, what's a saying from your culture about money. We had to do the whole translation thing. Bulolo was her name, and she said, "When you go out of your house, money is not lying on the ground." And it's exactly the same thing except without the trees! *[Laughter]*

**KROMER:** My name's Megan Kromer, I live in San Antonio, from Pittsburgh originally. And I knew by the time I was in kindergarten, so



maybe six, I knew that men could pull it out from behind their ears. And neither my aunts nor my grandmothers could bring money from behind their ears.

**POTTENGER:** That's an old Minnesota trick. [Laughter]

**ATKINSON:** My name's Alice Atkinson, I work for the City of Ventura in California, and grew up in Ojai, which is right nearby there. Probably my earliest memories of understanding money was that my parents opened their own business right around the time I was five. My dad left a very stable job with the government to open a business. So our family went from a sense of being very stable to some instability, with being independent small business owners. That's one of my earliest memories.

**SILZLE:** I'm Barb Silzle with the Leeway Foundation in Philadelphia. I was raised in a little town, Sparkmore. Perhaps my earliest memory of money is that my dad worked very differently for his money, or our money, than my friends', or other townies dads' did in that community, which had a small college, and was a very intellectual community. My dad was a real working, like a salesman guy. My perception was he worked really, really hard for his money. A very different way of going about work.

**ALTER:** I'm Linda Alter and I'm from Philadelphia. I was born and raised there. My parents were both school teachers, and I remember that my father wanted to work harder at something else because that wasn't enough.

**WARLOW:** I'm Melissa Warlow, I'm from Baltimore. I was born in Baltimore, and I knew that five cents a day, a nickel a day, would feed my popsicle habit.

**POTTENGER:** Yes, yes, yes. There's a lot of research about giving money to churches, God, popsicles, candy, cotton candy.

**EIDMAN:** I'm Diane Eidman, I'm from the Altria Group in New York City, it's based in New York City. I think my earliest memory of money was that you had to work really hard to get it. Because I didn't see my father too much because he was always working, he worked seven days a week. So I was always frustrated because I wanted to see him more. I knew that to make money I had to work really hard.

**FRESHLEY:** I'm Kathy Freshley, I'm from Arlington, Virginia. I was born in Rochester,

New York. My father was a truck farmer, and one of my earliest memories was that he would come home from the market around 7:30 every day except Sunday. If it was a good day he was home around 7:30, and he would walk in the door, and he would throw up in the air all the money, because most everything then was a cash transaction. It was this idea of your labor connected directly to this sense of happiness which was great.

**MCENTIRE:** Frank McEntire, Salt Lake City, visiting from Houston, and my first memory is almost the opposite of yours, and feeling badly about it. Because my mother was a single parent with two kids when I was five, and worked a split shift as a car hop at the drive-in in Wichita Falls. The ice cream truck would come by during her nap time almost every day. And I just had to have that ice cream, so I remember waking her up to see if I could get into her purse, open her little coin purse and get the money for ice cream. And feeling guilty, but *overridden by lust*. [Laughter]

**POTTENGER:** A situation we all find ourselves in daily. [Laughter] That could be a book, *Overridden by Lust*. [Laughter]

**FOCKE:** I'm Anne Focke and I live in Seattle. Started in southern California and moved up the coast. I have complicated memories because I'm not very good at pinpointing times. This is a memory of something I was told about that I had done when I was probably about five, maybe four. Maybe I was six or seven when I heard about it.

Apparently I had a little red jacket, a little red coat, and I would go up to strangers and ask them for pennies. [Laughter] It was always a story that embarrassed me. But apparently everybody thought it was cute. [Laughter]

**POWELL:** Hi, I'm Patrice Powell at the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, D.C. And I grew up in a very small town. My real memory is having coins in a handkerchief as part of going to church, and church collection.

But what I remember in terms of my consciousness of money was a family argument, well more or less a discussion. A sermon at a country church had to do with Pastor illustrating that I have nine ears of corn and I'm going to put one over here. I have ten apples, I'll put nine over here and one over here. The concept had to do with tithing. I didn't know that word, but I heard my parents and other adult family members arguing after church about tithing. I remembered I could understand it because of the sermon using produce to demonstrate that maybe the fruit of your labor was nine for yourself and one for the Lord.



**HAMILTON:**

I'm Victoria Hamilton. I'm the opposite of Anne, I grew up in Tacoma, Washington, and I work in San Diego. I have two memories of money. One is you put it in a piggy bank. And the other is it doesn't taste good. *[Laughter]*

**ROBINSON:** I'm Joyce Robinson with the Marie Walshe Sharp Art Foundation. I come from Colorado Springs. This was told to me by my mother and dad. He was a concert cellist with the Cincinnati Orchestra. When I was three I went over to a neighbor and picked a flower and brought it to the house. My mother said, "Where did you get that flower?" and I said, "Next door." And she said, "You can't take things, that's stealing. You have to do something for her, you have to pay for things that you get, or you have to do something for it."

So the next day I came home with another flower, and my mother said, "That's it, we're going next door." And she took me next door and said to the neighbor, "I am so sorry. I wanted you to learn about the fact that she took this."

And the neighbor said, "She didn't take it. She came over and rang the bell and sang a song to me. *[Laughter]* And when she finished singing the song, the neighbor said, 'What would you like?' And I said, 'That red rose.' And she went out and picked it and gave it to me. So that was always a story that to this day I remember about the value of money.

**SOMERS:** I'm Carolyn Somers, from New York, Mitchell Foundation. I swallowed a penny once. *[Laughter]* My very first memory. Gone, the penny was gone. I was very young. I knew I wasn't supposed to.

But my other memory is a little later. I remember getting a little money when you went on vacation on a trip, and that was your spending money. It could be 50 cents, whatever was age-appropriate. And I always came home with some toy or item and I still had my 50 cents. I don't know how I did it unless I conned my sister into it. *[Laughter]* But they always said that I came home with the money I went with and the item. *[Laughter]*

**POTTENGER:** One thing that I remember, being not even two and finding coins in the sofa in the living room accidentally and it just altered everything. Like everything cracked open. How could this be? How could something that clearly adults were so focused on, just be here unclaimed? *[Laughter]* Unclaimed silver money. It just seemed impossible.

One of the things I asked after our go-around – that was lovely – is to give you a moment to reflect, and say is there anything about that memory that you've all shared that informs your life today, that upon reflection you realize it informs your life today? Any piece of that earlier experience? Beth?

**BETH:** As we've gone around it's just triggered so many other money moments! *[Laughter]* And my dad was an incredible saver. He never made more than \$12,000 in his life in a year, and we used to do those Christmas Club things. I'm an incredible saver. I'm trying to instill that in my kids, to always save. There was this saving mentality from an early-on age, with nickels and dimes.

I never made the connection that that was a real strong value with me. It's like a judgmental value, you must work hard. I hadn't really connected those thoughts until now. I always thought, I'm not sure I work hard enough! *[Laughter]*

**POTTENGER:** I like the word that you used, judgmental value. I've never heard somebody who said that before because there are a lot of judgmental values about money in this country. One of the lines from the play is, somewhere along the way it became said that the poor deserve to be poor.

I try to use the power of theater, the incredible power. I really do. I wrote this article for Yale's *Theater* magazine. I learned that you could be edited, and an okay article could be edited to be a bad article. *[Laughter]*

I said, Oh please don't let it have been at *Theater* magazine! Of all the places to have to learn that lesson! But I learned that lesson, that I have to write really good ones, and then go from there.

**AUDIENCE:** There was an interesting debate, talking about Mother Teresa, and whether she is a saint because she promoted poverty within the areas. She promoted poverty, and that brings you sainthood. Is that a good thing? Do we want the poverty to grow?

**POTTENGER:** I learned something about women. I met this woman in New York who was helping Dorothy Day, a fairly powerful Catholic woman who was in a Mother Teresa line of work. I met someone who actually spent a lot of time with Dorothy Day as a helper when Dorothy Day was old.

She was there the day that Dorothy Day met Mother Teresa.. Apparently she walked out of the meeting and she said under her breath with this woman standing right next to her, "Oh, a



cupcake!" [Laughter] And she's like, "Thanks to her there's a cupcake!"

**AUDIENCE:** Mother Teresa used the word abundant in defining charity. She said, "Charity is not giving from our abundance but from our poverty."

**AUDIENCE:** When I thought about my own experience, I thought, even though I grew up in a relatively small and very low economic community, generosity was important, so you never really had a sense that people were poor or underprivileged.

I remember my mother would say, "You can't get anything with a closed hand." Some saying she would say like that. It's important to keep. Even now she says, "You have to keep money in circulation." If somebody gives you something, you don't forget to give somebody else something. Keeping money in circulation, and a generosity of spirit was very important at that time in the community.

**POTTENGER:** A couple more thoughts about connections.

**ROBINSON:** I think that experience stuck with me about service, that we are just stewards. The money isn't ours. It's just we have it, we don't have it. We have a lot, we don't have it. It's what you do with it.

We were an artist family, my dad as a cellist didn't have much money, but I didn't know. Our house was the hangout of all the kids. I don't know where they got the money to give us kids sodas or something. But I think it was driven in to us that we are stewards.

**JEWEL:** I remember a thing about a pogo stick that happened as I came home from my grandmother's house. I thought these toys were mine because they were all downstairs in the family room. I started playing with them, and my grandfather came home and said, "Put those down! Those aren't for you. I'm just holding them" for his coworker or something. And he said, "Why would I buy all those things?!".

It was very clear to me that I would never be getting all these toys. I was profoundly disappointed, because I had found this treasure, and I don't think I felt the lack of things, because I don't think kids necessarily do. But the disappointment stayed with me, that sense that my family would not buy those things for me, and that somehow they could be easily taken away.

This feeling of disappointment comes back to me whenever something happens that's disappointing to me. I see a pogo stick. And an emotional commitment, not to be in that position of disappointment, ever.

**KROMER:** I had another early experience that shaped what we see now, or what we see now helps me remember something from long ago. I spent five years working at a foundation, listening to people talking about money all the time, and I realized how little I understood about it. I left and then studied more about money.

I looked around and I realized that in San Antonio, which is rather a small town, very provincial, there are not women making decisions about money. Yet they are shouldering the entire brunt of trying to find ways to make ends meet.

There are so many single mothers, so uneducated, working so hard. But there are a few men making all the decisions in town about money. So that's going to change soon.

**POTTENGER:** As soon as I heard that New York City was building a 64 mile long water tunnel, under the five, well, four boroughs – they were not going under Staten Island – and that it was as deep in the ground as the Chrysler Building is high, so it was 800 feet down in the ground, and that it was going to take 60 years to build it. Construction was started in 1970, it wouldn't be completed until 2030, and the design plan started in 1952, I knew that they were making art.

When I started, 20 guys had died building it at that point. I knew that the men working on that tunnel – and I knew it was probably mostly men – were making art.

Part of that project was getting a chance to see the art they were already making, that you and I would never get to see. The project was a kind of multi-arts, community arts project, and involved a photography exhibit in the lobbies of the theaters that the play showed at.. It was a one woman show.

It was filled with photographs that they had taken. Nancy Cruikshank, the geologist, had taken all of these black and white portraits of the sand-hawks, the miners, and I asked her to take some more of the DEP, her colleagues, the Department of Environmental staff..

Ed Lochstaff? Something like that. Ed Lochstaff was an independently hired safety inspector from another company, who was hired to come



and do safety inspections, and he took these beautiful Miracle photographs.

And Ted Doughy was a resident engineer working for the DEP, and he took these very formal, no people in his photographs, very formal, but beautiful stunning photographs. So we had all their photographs.

It's just the story telling culture. Both the Caribbean culture and the Irish culture are very storytelling cultures, so there's a lot of that going on.

I do think that theater in particular has a power to completely transform an experience. If we're one point, going through our life this way, if you change an infinitesimal location, you're going in a very different way. You're headed out, as time goes by, you are headed out in a very different way. You were headed out this way, now you're headed out this way. You change a little more, now you're headed out that way.

I also love the story – this is back to Warren Buffet and responsible wealth – that it takes an oil rig in the middle of the ocean, a huge ship like that, it takes a long time to make a turn.

I feel that's a really nice metaphor for us right now in the United States and in the world. It's taken us a long time to make a turn, but we're making the turn, and it's a big turn. And it's a new turn and it's a very exciting one.

I don't know that the ever increasing wages of economic inequity as it plays out on the people on the have-more and the have-less end, is inherent or essential to the recipe, but that's what we're having right now.

And some of the assumptions I made when I came to this project were that we're all on the same team, that there is no baddies, as my nephew Will would say when he was four. You know I'd explain something to him, I'd tell him about my friends. He'd say, "Are they goodies or baddies?" I'd say, "They're baddies, Will, they're bad. No, I'd say, There's no baddies Will, we're all goodies." So they're all goodies. There's no baddies, we're on the same team.

The system we have now is actually useful as a construct to assume that it's the best we've been able to come up with. The economic system we're functioning with is, if all is taken into account, historically, who we are, what our history is, the European settlement of the country, the loss the Native American population endured. Slavery, all that. Take everything into account, along with the role of desire. Desire has been such a profound

motivator for all human history, way, way, way, way, way back. A prettier carving. A tastier piece of salt cod.

The system we have is the best one we've come up with so far. There are things that we don't like about it now, but the one thing I think we can all agree on is that we'd like to see it go better. Everyone I would interview I decided to assume would like to see it go better.

It turned out I was too scared to interview the billionaires, but that was my original conception. In ten cities across the U.S. I'd interview one billionaire and one minimum wage worker and I would ask them, "What is enough? And what is enough for you?"

I came up with a series of questions which I'll be asking you. You'll also get a chance to answer them for yourself, in your own mind, not necessarily publicly.

This is a nice story for you to leave with, about Roger Bannister. He's a runner. He's English. And he ran the first recorded four-minute mile. I'm sure that plenty of Native Americans and other people were running four-minute miles, but they just haven't been recorded. He ran the first recorded one.

Why he's one of my most favorite stories is because within six months of his running it, three other human beings ran one too. As soon as I heard that story, I knew something about our nature that I didn't know before that. That was a big thing in my life to realize that within six months of someone running a four-minute mile, three other people ran it.

Abundance is my four-minute mile. The premise of Abundance is that there is enough. That there's more than enough, and that it's completely doable in our lifetimes to see that everyone has the basics. Everyone everywhere has the basics. Giving people a chance to think about it, to tell me, what have I been drinking, you know, boy you are an optimist, and, no way, and interview over! *[Laughter]*

So I went around and interviewed people. I think the most property somebody had was \$300 million.

I got to interview people more than once. I could do it again if I had time. I don't think anybody refused me a second interview. Some people I just didn't have time to keep up with.

I told everyone that I would never accept money from them, no matter what. That what they were





giving me was much more valuable than money. And that was accurate.

I interviewed the minimum wage workers and I learned a lot just doing that. It was a pretty profound experience. I learned a lot about the effects that having a lot more in an iniquitous society has on someone.

It's upsetting! It's terribly upsetting and it's a conversation that I don't think you all are beginning to have yet, but you're living it. We all have more in this room. We all have a lot more. One of my questions is, what is a lie you tell yourself about money? First thought?

**AUDIENCE:** I don't need it. You do need it!

**AUDIENCE:** You always need more. If you think you need more. You're always looking. You need more.

**POTTENGER:** I don't have enough.

**AUDIENCE:** I go back and forth on this one: you don't need it to be happy. *[Laughter]*

**POTTENGER:** You and a lot of other people! That was the one question that I almost had 50/50 answers on. You know, very few questions glue to each other, but that one, almost, it was like 40 percent and 40 percent of people said that I don't have enough and that I have enough.

I wanted to see how far we can get with a dialogue among people from different economic situations, about things among themselves. In the United States.

So for a year, 2002, every month, a group of between four and fourteen people, but the same people, met for four hours. We answered a different question of my Abundance questions. I have a Web site called [abundanceproject.net](http://abundanceproject.net), and it has some of the questions on it. It has lots of stuff about the project. It has some of the art that the people made.

But I figured out two things. One is the only way people could come was with the strength of relationship. The group included undocumented workers working in New York City, it included millionaires (if you included real estate it included millionaires). It didn't include people who had a million not in terms of real estate. But it included people who made \$250,000 a year. Not a lot of them.

The most regular attendee on that end of things was someone who made \$100,000 a year. He had three kids. And he was a Rabbi. It wasn't an accident that he was the only person of that have-

more end that was able to come and stay. Because I think there was something that he was drawing on culturally about his connection to community, his picture of the world. He had enough that he could actually get himself to the room and participate on a regular basis.

But most people in that category came once. It was a very warm reception. Everything that they were terrified of, they had to face in coming. That people wanted their money, that it wasn't fair that they had it, just all the issues, is like having to carry the burden of it on yourself.

I have a million funny stories that we won't go into. One was about the vice president of the Bank of Staten Island. I never got to meet him, but he went where I think all of them would have gone which is hysteria on the phone. "How in God's name would you expect me to come? How could that ever turn out well for me? How would I get out of there alive?" *[Laughter]*.

We met and we videotaped some of them. I didn't videotape the interviews, I know our people. So no interviews on the have-more end, you know the extreme end, the millionaires. But I took what I call heart snapshots, and remembered stuff, which is how I work as an artist anyway.

We did look at those, and we made art every time. I realized that making art was the only way. The people came on the strength of relationships. Some of them knew me and that got them there. And other people knew someone else. But no one came who didn't know somebody that they trusted enough to get there. So in reflection it's kind of obvious. But they needed the strength of relationship to get there.

And then we made different forms of art every time. We're going to do one thing right now, a very simple thing called a word aria. I'll tell you a couple other things. One month I asked them to bring in their financial papers of their lives. Whatever they wanted to. Like IRS forms, credit card bills, collection notices, receipts, bank statements, whatever they wanted, mortgages, deeds. And they made collages out of them.

The energy in the room was like heaven cracking open. Because I learned that almost every single person I met lives in fear of some physical location in their house where they keep their financial papers. I call it the radioactive drawer. *[Laughter]*

There's this, across class, economic thing, a deep-seated fear and anxiety that people live with about being attacked on the basis of their money handling. It's an actual real worry. As you all



know from being grantmakers, as soon as they became the artists, these were their materials. For the first time in their life they weren't afraid of these things. They were in charge, and these were their materials, and it switched things completely.

So that was a powerful one. There are little QuickTime movies on the Web site from that workshop where people talk about what they made and how they thought about it.

I'd like everyone to take the thing that they knew when they were five? Take that in your mind. We'll do a word aria. There's some of these in the show, I'll end today's session with one of them. And edit it down to one sentence, or a phrase, but no longer than a sentence.

So take a moment to just pick out the sentence. It could be as revelatory as you want it to be, or as vague as you want it to be, but take the sentence in your mind.

I'll share my first that I made up right now, so that you get a sense. "The change in the sofa, I thought it was a mistake." Something like that. "The change in the sofa, I thought it was a mistake."

Details are really lovely when you're doing this kind of thing. "The silver change in the green sofa, I thought it was a mistake." That pops it a little more. It's simple. "The silver change in the green sofa." You could even say, "I was two. The silver change in the green sofa, I thought it was a mistake." No longer than that. Questions?

So let's go around, Julie you want to start out? What I figured out with the word aria was that you could do one word arias. I could have said take one word out of that, and then we're going to go around and say it. But for this group we're going to do the phrase instead. But just so you get a sense of how I thought about the stuff.

And we'll do it like a choral poem. So us listening to her when she does hers, like in theater. The power of theater is in part the fact that we're all connected so deeply in this moment of listening, that we're actually affecting what's happening. So we get to do that here as well.

You get to listen to how she said it and add yours, take that as an energy, as a pace and quicken it or slow it down. I'm not trying to intimidate anybody, just have fun with it. We can all say it like a conversation and it will be just perfect.

Why would I need a pogo stick anyway?

Don't talk about money, it's not polite.

My mother, perfect between a dream and today.

I have two worlds.

Money gets touched by lots and lots of hands so don't eat it.

Silver dollar from the tooth fairy.

Buffalo nickel in your mouth? It doesn't grow on trees.

The giving or taking makes you no more or less \_\_\_\_\_.

Hard work and dedication don't always lead to financial reward.

Proud to work hard.

He worked hard every day, every day nothing to \_\_\_\_\_.

Small change can buy colorful, wonderful things.

Time is so fleeting and money always got in the way.

Dancing in the green rain.

The ice cream man I can't remember, reminds me of my mother.

Asking for pennies in a great coat can be plenty embarrassing.

Promise to give, not argue how much.

Placing pennies in a pink piggybank.

You cannot give more than you receive.

Rephrased, I cannot give more than I receive.

You have to be careful with money.

**POTTENGER:** I was two. The silver change in the green sofa; it must have been a mistake.

Right. Very nice, you get the picture, right? Would you all remember that. remember what you just said, I'm going to refer to it later on. I'm going to ask you to recall it. So don't upset yourselves now.

I always say when I give these talks, I'll try to fashion questions that would let people feel the heat in a group, but keep them short of an epileptic seizure. What can I ask in a group?

One of the word arias I've done was at the University of Rome in Italy and it was incredible because it was all in Italian. And no, I do not speak Italian. I didn't look like a good bet when



I started talking, I was a guest artist from the United States. 12 people showed up. And I thought, I'm not going to do what they ask me to. I'm going to use my head here.

I just started talking about theater and about art and about my work and about other people's work these days in the United States. And I learned that in Italy it's like a web of connection over text-type, on the telephones. Within five minutes ten more people were there. Five minutes and another ten people were there. Within 25 minutes we had 83 students for the next three hours. It was incredible. It was a growing multitude of people.

One of the questions I asked, is how much do you owe – feel free to answer this in your mind – how much do you owe; how much do you own. How much do you owe, how much do you own. In a funny way what I'm doing in these workshops is I'm letting people use the collective strength of us, rather than the isolation that we all live with in these issues, to actually even answer those kind of questions.

I'll read a real quick excerpt. I then asked people to go around and say, but don't tell us what you were answering. They could say one, they could pick one, follow me? People went around and said a figure, and either they said how much they owed or how much they owned, but we didn't know which they were choosing. They weren't supposed to tell us which they chose. So it's a way that they themselves can use the power of the group, but they don't end up having an epileptic seizure.

The show opens with this old gentleman in a wheelchair. "I... love...you. I love... you. There, I've said it. I love you. Not individually, but uh... But you, the whole, whole of you. So beautiful. I've been waiting all my life to tell you. I know you've watched me since you were young. Child! Hesitant, unpredictable, impetuous, sulky, triumphant, rude, proud. Or humiliated. I... find... you... irresistible.

I've never grown tired of loving you. Oh I've despaired, I've raged. I've turned my back a thousand times. But I always turn around to see what you're up to, what you've made of things. I couldn't imagine my life without you. At my side or at least nearby, puffing yourself up for no reason whatsoever one moment, acting with courage and determination the next. Just... look at you! So faulty. So feeble. So expectant. Delight!"

That's as nice as he gets. He's a toughie. And I'm sure you all know lovely toughies.

This is a five-actor play. I'm not in it. I'm often the only woman, the only actor in my plays, one-woman shows. But for a lot of reasons I wanted this play. So that's part of my project. The interviews, the dialogues. These things are part of my project.

I'm trying to help start a national conversation within a different context about money. Making connections to chambers of commerce, to boards of trustees, to minimum wage rights groups, to living wage groups all over the country and basically adding the weight of my shoulder to this movement that's out there well before I started "Abundance" and continuing well after.

So it's a five-actor play. I'm writing it and directing it, and it's got an eight city tour and we start the tour in a week in D.C. So I'm not supposed to be here, to say the least.

Part of my strategy was to make it a play that I'm not in, so a community college, or an arts center can take it on themselves and produce it and cast it and direct it and do their own version of it.

We're going to start raising money again so that we can publish the play and publish a workbook about the workshops. How I figured out getting the chamber of commerce and the living wage campaign to sit at the same table and actually have a productive time doing it.

The making of art is integral. The brilliance. You just heard that. That's who we are sitting in this room. No discussion about money would have made that as clear about who we really are here. How smart, how wise, how lived, how worn-out and how hopeful we are in the room.

I feel like the making of art by the people in the room having the discussion is integral in something as powerful and as confusing and as frightening as this, is an essential ingredient. I've just figured out these different ways to do it, trying to build on that.

Here's an interview that I thought you all would enjoy:

"When I agreed to come, I knew I was supposed to be willing to talk about what I owe and what I own."

This is an actual interview.

"We bought our brownstone in Brooklyn for \$420,000. We now owe, refinanced in 2002, \$650,000. It's valued at \$1.2 million.

We bought the rental house in Miami by his parents as a favor to them. It was so close to



their property and who knows who would have bought it? It cost us \$435,000. We owe \$380,000; on the market its value is \$900,000. One bank has a lien on it now.

Oh there's my husband's condominium apartment in Manhattan. He had it before we were married. We currently owe \$120,000 on it. It's worth approximately \$250,000.

It sounds like so much, but really at this point when you add it all up we're hurting here. We can't even afford to eat out. Personal debt, oh Jesus, I don't know. I mean I'd like to think it's \$50,000, but I don't know all the credit cards... We paid off some credit card debt when we refinanced four months ago.

Oh, I sold my 401K at a huge penalty, \$25,000 out of \$55,000 just to pay off the payments on the mortgages and everything else. And to be honest that \$50,000 credit card is more like 75. It's staggering.

Now I'm completely depressed again. The fact that we haven't declared personal bankruptcy, I think I could go toe to toe with anybody on Wall Street.

I just started working one hour a day in the after-school program, \$15 an hour, I mean it's not for the money obviously, but it keeps me from thinking how fucked up my life is. Indiana Jones doesn't know shit, I'm living the Temple of Doom!

We make a hundred dollars a month more on the condo and lose \$850 a month on the rental. If we had to sell it I don't think we could face his parents. Every month I find money from somewhere to pay off the loans.

I swear I just want to kill myself. This has taken everything out of me. I'm so tired..."

So that's a story that doesn't get out too much. That's what I got to see by growing up in my family. That's what I got to see by doing carpentry for 20 years in New York City. It's just like everybody's fucked up about money! *[Laughter]*

Yes, just so fucked up! There were people who hired me and like dug me down to some stupid idiot price on this beautiful desk for their new office. Then they would not think a thought and drag in a rug for \$10,000 that they just bought on sale? And they want me to appreciate it! But why not appreciate it. It's a nice rug. That's how dumb we are. *[Laughter]* And I'm that dumb too. I'm that dumb on both ends too. I mean, it's just phenomenal!

So, the rest of the questions. Let's do this one thing that's quite fun and I want you to know how to do it before you leave here.

Things I've noticed the last four years. I've told you my assumptions about the project. We did the word aria, Roger Bannister, dialogue...

I won this award for City Water Tunnel. I don't know what would happen with this. I want this to be a film, or a TV special. Something where the conversation could get out because people want it so bad.

Like I said, growing up, there was no word for the word "sexism." It was everywhere. I said it's like the color blue. It's like growing up without the word for the color blue. *[Laughter]* It's like, there's the sky, there's your eyes, there's your dress, there's the ocean, there's your everything and there was no word for it.

We're wired to use language. Not having that word, we couldn't think past it. Once we had that word it was like "Voom!" We're off! And we went off in many different directions. It was an interesting thing once we got that word.

But we don't have those words yet for this. We have words like you said, judgmental values. Judgmental value words. Words that make people quiet. Words that communicate it is not safe.

I organized my building. One of the things this project taught me. I organized my building in 1980. And it was horrible. I don't recommend it. You know, I'm kind of making a joke, but, oy, oy, oy! Eight years. You know, bad times. Rough times, rough times.

We bought our apartments for like \$240 apiece. And now, the apartment I have is worth \$500,000.

So one thing I learned from working on Abundance is that I have \$500,000 which I didn't really get before, you know? I didn't really get that I had that money. That's not how I thought about it. I thought that's where I live. I didn't think, I actually have access to \$500,000. I have to split with somebody, but still, I have \$250,000. That's a hell of a lot of money. You know, I don't have any savings, but I have \$250,000.

Already I'm in the top, you know, I'm way up there in the top percentile. No health insurance but I'm in the top percentile. That's the United States! It's an interesting country to be a part of. We've really a shot at the whole goofiness of it. I'm sure you all have relatives that have nothing and I'm sure you have relatives who have more.



One of the things on the show we're doing is going through the economic quintiles. Because I wanted people to leave Water Tunnel knowing, how do you build a water tunnel? Water comes out of your faucets, how's that happen? Who does that? How do you do that? How do you finance that? How do you pay for a 60-year public works project? Where's that money come from?

I want people to leave the show knowing that if your household makes more than \$72,000 a year, you are in the top 20 percentile of the country. If your household, you and your partner combined, make more than \$72,000 a year, you are in the top 20 percentiles in 2003 right? Who knew? I figured it was like \$400,000 or something, would put you in the top 20, right? It's \$72,000. And \$15,000 or less puts you in the lowest 20 earning, lowest earning.

You know the language is great. One of my questions is, "What's the time in your life you felt the richest?" I'll give you a moment. What's the time in your life that you felt the richest?

Of course people say, Do you mean money? And a lot of my questions are designed so that it actually tries to leave doors open rather than shut, so that your mind can go to work wherever it needs to go. Not where I'm driving the car, you get to drive the car.

So 15 is 20 percent, you can always say bottom 20 percent, the lowest 20 percent. Where do we get the language? How do you think about this so you're actually describing reality? Why would there be a judgment? There's tremendous clarity, richness, connection. Any of you here who have friends, neighbors working, there's just like wealth and connection and power and intelligence in that community that you don't see in any of the other groups. So how do you use this language?

The next one is 15 to 27 is the next 20 in this quintile, it's \$15,000 to \$27,000 per household. So 40 percent of the country's households have less than \$27,000 a year in income. Over half the returns filed for the IRS every year are for less than \$20,000. The next quintile is 27 to 44, \$27,000 to \$44,000. And then \$44,000 to \$72,000. And then \$72,000 and up.

Four percent is \$147,000 to \$373,000 I think. The one percent is anything over \$373,000. I personally know a lot of people who are there or very close to it.

So the distortions, right? We need information here. We need it in the context of theater so we can actually retain it. So we can hear it and retain it.

During one of these workshops, someone went around at the end and said what she got out of it was she realized, she pastes economic illiteracy on herself every morning and every night. She doesn't want to feel what it feels like to notice this stuff. She feels like she can't afford to feel like what you would feel facing it. Like looking at what's before her. I thought that was a great insight of how it feels to have an investment in not seeing and in not looking.

I think that's why in the piece nobody's to blame, that there's no enemies is really important. Because as soon as you go looking for that you're going off the edge, the cliff to nowhere. You really are.

You all should know that better than most of us. Because you're actually getting to travel a very intricate country, and negotiate it.

Let's do the paired listenings. I was going to ask everybody, let's see how many folks we've got: two, four, six, eight, ten, twelve, fourteen, sixteen, eighteen, twenty.

So if you're sitting, I'll explain it. Panic, panic! First I'll explain.

I'm going to do a couple of the questions. And you are going to get to talk to one another. I'll ask the questions. We'll just do a few. I'm just going to say them and you think to yourself in your own mind but then I'll ask the next one. If you want to share, we'll do that a couple times if you want to, okay? If you raise your hand, you can share with the group what you thought...

So we already did what's a lie you tell yourself about money and people kind of jumped in. What's a significant memory connected to generosity in any way at all?

I'll tell you, almost every person of extraordinary wealth I interviewed was unable to answer that question. I think it's possible that they were all unable to answer that question. So 30 people were unable to answer that question which, I did not assume they were not giving money away, but I assumed they'd have an answer.

A couple of rabbis have been helping me with this project. One of them, Rabbi Brad, said, "But I have people, and they're crying watching the trees be planted or the children come off the airplane, whatever it is. Just sobbing. And they've given all this money."

I said that I think it's like asking that question in front of another person who's not of that same group, it's just so scary to go to that place in front



of someone. It's very, very private terrain. Don't talk about money; it's not okay to talk about money.

Does anybody want to share?

**AUDIENCE:** Someone of extreme wealth gave our foundation a lot of money once. I can't say their name. But we're the only one that knows. And I think for a very wealthy person to want to give anonymously is an incredible act of generosity.

**AUDIENCE:** I have a friend who's a theater director, and he recently went to South Africa with a group. He went because he's working on a project with this theater company and he's an artistic director. While he was there the theater company couldn't pay paychecks anymore, and so he didn't have any more cash. He went to the ATM to get some cash, and no cash, no paycheck, not going to get a paycheck. Hopefully he'll get a paycheck sometime.

In the meantime when he came back, he brought with him all these presents for me. You know, here's a sculpture, here's this or that. Now he gave me the presents before he told me about not having any cash. At some point I heard about his not having any cash. I'm just overwhelmed with this, you know, how could he do that and what it means...

**POTTENGER:** I see those people... Crying, crying... There's a lovely Arabic saying that crying cleans the windows of your soul, or the eyes of your soul or something like that.

But the work we do is very deep and we need to make room for that, for people to actually go to the places where we go when we experience deep things. And big things.

If this was our question today, you know just that question, I would encourage people to think of their own instances of generosity, times that they've actually been generous as well, as well as the other way around. It's all such rich ground.

**AUDIENCE:** I think it's easier to remember when people are generous to you. Trying to go through my memories it's like, when have I been generous? But I can remember being a recipient.

**POTTENGER:** That's funny because I get some of both. I remember one time somebody needed \$100 and I had \$110. You said about flow, you talked about giving and all that. That's what I thought of when you said that.

And this is the great thing about not having money, it's not going to make much of a

difference. I gave \$100 and I didn't notice it at all. I mean I truly didn't, I truly had \$10.

If you think about it, on the have-more end, you just get more and more scared in some ways. Things become more and more confusing about what you can live without, what you can live with. I didn't finish that thing about 2.2 millionaires, not counting real estate in the United States, which to me is an extremely small number.

What I learned, and I even called my brother who works at the Yale Legal Clinic up at Yale University. I said to him, I've been working on this project for four years, and can you just try to help me think this through.

I said, how can it be, how can there only be 2.2 million millionaires? I thought it would be, like, 20 million. I just thought it would be such a bigger figure.

I'm thinking, Detroit suburbs, New York suburbs, Pittsburgh suburbs. Suburbs alone, San Diego suburbs.

**AUDIENCE:** You were giving two numbers. You said 1 percent of the people who file their taxes are making...

**POTTENGER:** \$373,000 or more as income.

**AUDIENCE:** And there's also 1 percent...

**POTTENGER:** Who are millionaires.

**AUDIENCE:** If you don't include real estate.

**POTTENGER:** If you don't include real estate. That's the thing. It's just so much fun but it's also so painful to press your face against that kind of confusion and hold it there until you stumble to the next tiny little concept or question.

But what I got out of it was there's this flow of money through the United States. It really is everybody has three pairs of shoes in some way. There's no place where people are given a chance to say what is enough.

What is enough for me, you know? Because if I made, if right now somebody gave me \$10,000 I could spend it tomorrow. I could spend it tomorrow! I know exactly what I would spend it on.

If somebody gave me \$100,000 I could probably spend it tomorrow too, to tell you the truth. And it's set up like that. I would buy a nicer pair of shoes. I will take a vacation for another week,



instead of just one week. I'll do two weeks or I'll take a train. It goes on and on and on.

And that's how it works. It's interesting. That's how it works. That's what we're living in. Where we're staying here, well, not here but you know that W place. Last night, I got in in the middle of the night.

Where is my room? I said, for those prices, I'd like someone to show me to it, you know? *[Laughter]*

So my room has a Dwell magazine in it, D-W-E-L-L. I was looking at it last night just to try to like curve on towards resting...

I was in construction, I built really high-end things for people. It's so easy, you know, why not build your own house. Of course it's fun. It's human. It's fun to think about, where would I like to live if I could live anywhere? What structure would I like to be in? What reflects my nature, my personality? What would make me happy?

That's why I got to the no enemies thing. I mean no baddies. No nothings. This is like opportunities right?

But at what point do we get to say two things. Enough, that's enough for me. Nothing as far as I've heard, little in society's gearing us that way, one might have noticed. Quite the opposite.

This is where Bishop Desmond Tutu comes in. The thing about ununtobotho is it speaks of a connection that's thinner for us. It's not absent. I think it's inherent. We feel it when a friend is ill, when a child is in the middle of something, when someone dies. That moment when you're that deeply connected to another human being.

It's all there. We're intact. It's not like we've dwindled in our spirits. But our access to it is diminished, mostly throughout our daily way.

But that sense of connection brings me back to Kofi Annan's \$40 billion. Now obviously it would cost a lot more. I'm going to stand by his estimate for how much it would cost to have it happen, but not make it happen. Making it happen is like a profound question for human intelligence at this point. How would you make it happen?

Then I go back to one of my zillionaires saying, It's a lot easier, a damn sight easier to make than it is to give away, let me tell you that right now.

But I interviewed this one guy who's building himself a \$10 million mansion. It's a story that I'm sure you all live with all the time but, he's an Irish Catholic guy, raised working class. It's kind

of cute, he tells me that he's living in this little house at the end of the road, and I'm like, wow that's an interesting thing.

But then you've got to talk to other people too about these people, because it turns out he's divorced from his wife and they just put in a hundred maple trees, built this huge mansion, then they got divorced, but each maple tree was like \$50,000.

So he is living in a little house. But his wife is living in this huge house that he and she put together, right? And now he wants to build a \$10 million house for himself on four thousand acres? Four thousand acres, that seems like a lot.

He's asking himself, how can I justify that? How do I justify it? People have so little. I mean he's talking to me too, you know, some people open those kinds of doors.

And he called a couple friends to ask them for their help thinking about it. Like an honest discussion among people at that level of resource. One said, "What the hell are you worried about, I have 10,000 acres. Four thousand acres, ha!" The other man he called for help had 40,000 acres. We need to get the conversation going here. People really want that conversation.

**AUDIENCE:** I have a tiny story. When my husband got his first job out of college, we were grousing all the way to his parents' home. I think it was \$7,000 or something like this. Almost 40 years ago. So we're happy that he's got this first job out of college, and delighted, but we were not too happy about the salary, etc.

We went to his parents' house and his father was sitting him down. Tell me about the job and how much you're getting paid. Jerry told his father how much he was making. His father sort of sat back in the chair very proud, and said, You know, that's more than I've ever made in my life.

It made us very ashamed because it made us aware of how they had raised three children, had a house, had a really very community oriented, very committed life, a good life. And they did it on such a little amount of money which we of course never knew. I mean, we never talked about money and Jerry never knew how much money his father made. It was one of those revealing moments in our lives.

**POTTENGER:** There are a couple more questions. What's a significant memory connected to greed in any way at all. Your own, someone else's, or something you read in the newspaper?



Another question: What's a time in your life growing up that you were furious over economic inequity?

What's one thing in your life that would be different if you knew from this moment on, all of us sitting here together, that you personally would always have enough?

This one I'd love if people want to say some thoughts they have if they like, get some of that?

So a significant act of generosity in any way.

**AUDIENCE:** I've loaned money to friends and family. We've only been able to do it when we had the money to loan. And usually I don't get it back. But I never let myself think that I didn't expect it back.

I really like the way you put it and what you said about it. It changes my perspective. If you have it to loan and you can afford to loan it, I think I will from now on say that I won't get it back. And that's fine.

People have loaned me money and not expected to get it back. Sometimes they have and sometimes they haven't. But it will change my perspective on what I do.

**POTTENGER:** I was trying to figure out how to deal with homeless people asking for money and I found it irritating. I mean I developed different cranky relationships with the homeless people who are in my neighborhood regularly. I was trying to be real and not patronizing and figure out what I was going to do.

I decided I couldn't think here. I realized, I can't think about this. That's not a place I can think. And so I said, well, if you can't think then, choose a structure, create a structure and just follow it, and then, do the opposite, try out different things. Try to jiggle things around.

So for six months I gave a quarter – this is like years ago – for six months I gave a quarter to every single person who asked. No questions, no nothing, I gave a quarter. Then for six months after that, I didn't give any money. I didn't give any money to anybody that asked.

It gave me so much to give the goddamn quarter, and it took away so much to not, in some way. I still don't give the money. I had the real living experience. This is why we need to start getting resource in on this. We can't rely on our own active intelligences yet in this area.

Anybody about the "enoughedness"? About if you had enough? Any thoughts about the one

way your life would be different if you knew for real you'd always have enough?

**AUDIENCE:** There is a certain level of anxiety about other people having to take care of me when I'm older.

**POTTENGER:** Yeah, yeah. It keeps a lot of things going in this society that people look at that. You know, we settle for a lot of things because of that fear. Anybody else?

Okay, well let's do the paired listening. This paired listening, you don't have to participate... I mean, you will be sitting with someone else. You don't have to say anything you don't want to say. You can talk about laundry, you could talk about going home. What you're looking forward to. Whatever you want.

The offer I'm making is that you get to use the time for three minutes each. You get listened to by the other person. They don't interrupt you. They don't say anything. If you say "Chicago" they don't say "I have an uncle in Chicago." That's a conversation! That would be a conversation and they're lovely to have.

Much of what we think of as listening is actually waiting for your turn to talk. So what this is, is an attempt to actually build a muscle that is a part of our beings but is rarely used, which is that of just aware listening, and that means you don't actually talk, you actually aren't following your train of thought with the other person's train of thought. You're not bouncing your own experiences off their details. You're actually offering them your attention.

You know that thing that you do when you can't figure out a problem at work and you grab somebody else and you say, Listen can you come here a second, I'm just trying to figure this out. You're not even saying anything to them, you're just standing there, and them being there, paying attention to you, gives you enough weight. You actually are using what they've got.

I think it's again back to the theater thing, what happens in a theater. It's an interesting thing. I'll tell you a good thing before I forget about theater.

The power of the theater only became clear to me when I realized that I can't think of a more torturous thing than theater when it's going badly. I mean, there is nothing as painful as bad theater! You are literally engaged in something that evades all our attempts to screen out. I mean you can screen out a lecture, you can screen out a sermon, you can screen out your husband, your wife, your kids. I mean we are very capable of





screening, it's something we're really able to do. We can think quiet thoughts in the middle of a screeching subway. Yet, in a theatrical experience, you always can't reach for something to separate yourself.

What about the phenomena of opening the candy wrapper in a theatre? What is it that's such a noise? Twenty rows in either direction, of people who are completely engaged in something, and the next thing you know, they are ready to kill someone. *[Laughter]*

That's interesting. And that is how I figured out to make theater my life. I figured out that there's something happening in theater that is so powerful. I think I understand more of it now, five years later, but I still don't quite. There's a lot more to go but there's something we're doing that is very real. We're doing it by sitting there.

My Water Tunnel show is a one-woman show, I can say whatever I want, I'm the only one up there. And so, I learned... I did a show, I did a month run which was just such a gift... On West 42nd Street, off Broadway, Judith Anderson Theater, in '98. And every night, eight performances a week, I learned so much. My God, what a gift!

One night, I went on, and had a three minute longer description of some technical aspect of building the tunnel, quite technical, as technical as I got. I knew when I did it that three minutes in theater time is like three hours in human time.

I could feel the entire audience walking on a very sound bridge with me, throughout the entire technical text. I could see no one was falling off. A hundred people or something? No one was falling off. I knew why because I knew that this was an improvisation. I knew there was somebody in the audience, probably more than one person, who was an engineer.

I knew that because they were there, I would say what I would say. I knew because they were there, not only was I improvising the text, three minutes of the text, which like I said is a long time, but the whole audience was walking on the bridge of their collective knowledge as engineers.

So then after my shows, I would meet people, they would come and talk to me afterwards. And so, two of the original designers of the tunnel from the 1950s were in the house that night. I did not know it. I mean I knew it, but I did not know it.

It just happened that the engineers came in, they were old guys. They came, and then right behind

them was Philippe Petit, the French tightrope walker, and his wife. I was just saying to the engineers, I knew you were here. I knew you were here. I didn't know who you were, but I knew you were here.

And I said, because that thing I did was not a normal thing for me to do, that was just because you were here. And they were like, Oh, that was so great, that was so great. Then Philippe, this French guy from right behind was like, Oh yeah, this is so interesting, you know? *[Laughter]*

Philippe Petit totally put himself in that frame. We are very interested in rigging. We are very technical. That was a very good part. And I realized we were also using his and his wife's knowledge in that bridge we built together.

It's an interesting thing. This paired listening, you don't have to say anything you don't want to say, but it is a chance to actually exercise a muscle which is a hell of a muscle, I'll tell you that right now. It's something I actually practice outside here, it's something I do regularly in my life.

But what you're going to do, there's simple guidelines, ground rules or guidelines and one is that whatever you say to the other person – I'm going to ask you to choose somebody you don't know. You're going to talk to somebody you don't know. And whatever you say is confidential.

If it's your turn to listen then zip! As my little nephew said to his father one time: Zip it! Zip it! ZIP IT!! *[Laughter]* I was so scared of what my brother was going to do because we grew up in a pretty rough household. That's like whoa! That was in the Natural History Museum in New York, those places are dangerous places for heavy family interaction. But anyway, my older brother just cracked up laughing. And I was, Oh, we are in the new millennium.

But any way zip it! ZIP IT!! *[Laughter]*

You get to look at the person as if you like them. Or your best effort in that direction. If you're a head-nodder, that's fine. You'll notice it's not the most useful thing to do, but don't be hard on yourself because then you're also taking your attention away. You know, if you're feeling like you're not doing a good job, that's about you. What we're going to be trying to do is pay attention to the other person.

So as your mind wanders off to Chicago and your uncle and whatever else, you're going to gently take your attention's hand, your mind's hand and gently walk it back to this other person.



That's the task at hand and it's both a very simple thing to do and it's a very challenging thing to do. Some of you will probably reflect on how odd it is that we don't do this more often. That we have gotten where we've gotten in life and in our human history without really exercising this muscle that much.

If it's your turn to talk, then just say whatever you want to say. I'm going to ask you a question. It's not going to be complicated. You just get to talk about it, you get to follow your mind. It's not a conversation. You get to follow where your mind goes.

It may go on something that seems very unrelated. Fine, there's no particular task, but you get to do something that would be nice for everybody to do a little bit more in their lives. You get to see where your mind goes with it. And you get to do it with someone else's attention which does help the process, help you go where your mind goes.

So it's all confidential whatever the person says, even if they say, I can't wait to go on vacation when I leave here. I'm going to Houston, Texas. As you say goodbye tonight or when you see them tomorrow or the next day, you don't say, Have a great time in Houston. That was their time and that's where it stays.

Confidentiality; look like you like them; no referral; that's kind of the same thing. You don't need to speak. I guess that's it. Okay are there any questions about that? It will be three minutes and three minutes.

When you find your pairs, you just sit together, and then I will ask the question. We will decide who's going to listen first, and who's going to talk first. One person's going to raise their hand so I understand everyone is ready. And then I'll ask the question.

**AUDIENCE:** And then it will be a different question for the second person?

**POTTENGER:** No it will be the same question, same question.

**AUDIENCE:** Because I fear if I were the first person listening, I'll be thinking about the question.

**POTTENGER:** Yes, yes. You'll get to do your question. And that's where you take your mind and just walk it back to the other person. Very challenging, very challenging.

**AUDIENCE:** Can we have a different question.

**POTTENGER:** I ask the same questions. I let each person answer the same question. If you find there's something we've done here tonight that you want to go back to, that wasn't the one I asked, then feel free. Probably tell the person what you're doing, but you don't have to, it's your time. ...

All right, raise your hand if you're going to listen first. If you're going to pay attention first, raise your hand if you're the one.

So, I'm going to time three minutes. For some of you it will seem like an eternity. For others it will fly by in a second.

Ready? And so this is the question. What is one thing in your life that would be different if you knew from this moment on, everyone everywhere would always have enough. Not more than enough but enough. We would still have lots of other problems to solve and challenges to deal with, but everyone would have enough food, water, healthcare, education, clothing and shelter.

So what's one thing in your life that would be different if you knew that was true. Okay? Go.

...

**POTTENGER:** Please feel free to thank the person for their attention. Come on back to the chairs.

So two things. I'll just read a slight excerpt. We have about eight more minutes. This is near the end of the play.

What is your earliest memory connected to money in any way at all? What is a saying from your culture that has to do with money? How much do you have? How much do you owe? How much do you need? What is a lie you tell yourself about money?

What's one thing in your life that would change if from this moment on everyone everywhere would always have enough? I wouldn't feel guilty. I'd be sillier. I'd look people in the eyes. I'd faint, cry, laugh, take a vacation. Stop everything I've been doing for the last 25 years. I'd lose weight, quit my job, learn the tango, merengue, waltz, two-step, sing, play the violin. Fresh squeezed orange juice. Take a deep breath. I'd be sillier, funnier. I wouldn't change a thing.

That could never happen. You're out of your mind! What the hell is that supposed to mean! *[Laughter]* I don't know, I can't even contemplate it. I'd wonder what took so long. I'd have children. I'd paint, draw, write poems, plays, music, sail, do



archeology. Marry the woman of my dreams and live happily ever after. Cry, sit down. Don't know what to say. Jump for joy. Kiss everybody in sight. Laugh until I cry.

You're kidding. It couldn't happen. Boy are you an optimist! Fantasy, complete, fantasy. Don't even want to go there. What have you been drinking? What a great question? Wow, gee, damn, gosh, damn, whoa, whooah. Nothing for the first time in my life. *[Applause]*

One of the things that I learned that should be important to you all as grantmakers in the arts, is the only question that glued answers together was what's a lie you tell yourself about money? About 40 percent of the people said, I don't have enough, that's a lie. And another 40 percent said they do have enough.

And the other question that had glue in it, was that one. And over 50 percent of the people I asked, maybe even like 70 percent actually, said that they would make art. I don't know if you picked it out from that word aria.

But I fight tears sometimes because people who never make art in their lives, would sit there, you know rich people and minimum wage workers.

Like Karl Marx said, I'd be like a worker in the day, a poet at night. He said something about that. A worker in the day and a poet in the afternoon and something else at night. I realized that my question offered me a chance to glimpse something about what human beings outside of the economic irrationalities, how we would be spending our time. And I hadn't predicted it.

I knew that to talk together we needed to be making art or that it would go a lot better if we did, because we were constantly in dialogue groups blown away by each other's brilliance. You could just look at their faces, they couldn't believe that people were saying what they were saying or drawing what they drew, or made the poem.

We have one more thing. Everyone take a moment and remember what your phrase was. Something that you knew when you were five years old. Can you remember just generally what your phrase was? Think about it. Take a few seconds to think about it. To get it back.

Everybody hop on your feet, we're just going to stand in a circle like you are already. And think about what's one thing that you enjoyed playing when you were ten years old. Something you enjoyed playing or doing when you were ten years old.

And I'm going to ask you to come up like, with a five second, you know... gesture, you know, like climbing trees or playing catch, or playing. Whatever you've got.

So help yourself. Just figure it out and act it out, okay? I'm going to give you just a little bit of time to work on it, and then we'll be doing a closing.

So turn your backs to each other so you can actually have a little privacy. *[Laughter]* No one's here now. You really are alone. And you can practice to yourself there. Practice something you enjoyed doing or playing when you were around ten years old.

Practice the gestures, all you shy, inhibited people. Okay great. So turn around. Come around. And let's just see your gesture. Let's see your physical gesture. Why don't we start going the other way. You first?

**AUDIENCE:** I was in fear of doing that. *[Laughter]*

**POTTENGER:** Nice. Try it again. Feel free to edit how many times you want to jump and how you want to end.

Nice, nice... Big finish, big finish, okay. Again, go wild!

**AUDIENCE:** I'll show you what I loved to do, what I loved to do when my mother wasn't around. *[Laughter]* I didn't want to practice. *[Applause]*

**POTTENGER:** The air piano. *[Laughter]*

**AUDIENCE:** We actually had one. I couldn't play it. So that's all I did. *[Laughs]*

**POTTENGER:** Figure out how to do that like in half the time. Do it again. Don't do it too fast, just figure out what you want to do in half that time.

So remember your phrase. Remember your phrase that you said. And I'd like to ask you to combine it with a gesture. You're going to combine the phrase and the gesture. And you may say the phrase at the beginning of your gesture, you might say it toward the middle, you might say it at the end, right? However you want. But I'm going to ask you to all turn around, your backs to each other, and practice. *[Laughter]*

Practice where you want your gesture to come, your phrase to come, and then we'll go around and then we'll bid each other a very small farewell.

Be careful with money.



I cannot give more than I receive. I cannot give more than I can receive.

Placing... pennies...in a pink piggy bank.

Promise to give, not argue about how much.

I... have... two... worlds.

**POTTENGER:** You got that word? Worlds?

My mother, perfect between a dream... and today.

**POTTENGER:** A dream and...?

Today.

**POTTENGER:** And today.

Dancing in the green rain.

The ice cream man I can't remember, reminds me of my mother.

There are more reasons than one I dropped out of the theater. *[Laughter]*

**POTTENGER:** Feel the water.

Hard work does not always end in financial reward.

**POTTENGER:** Finish your swim. *[Laughter]*

Thank you.

He worked, he worked all day, all day, and into the night.

Proud to work hard.

Whether you are giving or receiving doesn't make you any more or less... lovable! *[Laughter]*

Asking for pennies in a red coat is a little embarrassing. *[Laughter]*

It's like patting your head and rubbing your stomach at the same time or something. *[Laughter]*

Buffalo Nickel in your mouth. It doesn't grow on trees. *[Laughter]*

Silver dollar from the Tooth Fairy.

**POTTENGER:** You could have painted a little longer. *[Laughter]*

Silver dollar from the Tooth Fairy.

Money goes through many hands. Don't eat it! *[Laughter]*

Don't talk about money. It's not polite.

But I'd never stop. What did I do with the pogo-stick anyhow? *[Laughter]*

**POTTENGER:** Silver coins in the green sofa... I was two. Silver coins in the green sofa, it must have been a mistake. I was two. Silver coins in the green sofa. It must have been a mistake. *[Laughter]*

So great, let's have a quick seat.

You know normally we just go around and say a quick word of appreciation. It's already 5:36, so I thought it would be nicer to do this kind of delightful ending than that. But feel free to deepen the connections we've made here today with each other during the time here.

I'm here until tomorrow afternoon, so feel free to tell me any insights or thoughts or questions you have. We didn't end up with a question and answer period, but you know, what the hell. We'll get it the next time. Okay? It was great. It really was. *[Applause]*

**AUDIENCE:** What are the cities that you are touring to?

**POTTENGER:** I have a Web site with that information:  
[www.abundanceproject.net](http://www.abundanceproject.net).

We open in D.C. November 1st and 2nd at Dance Place. Then we go up to Providence, Rhode Island, Carriage House the next week. We go up to Burlington, the Flynn Arts Center, the next week. We go to Chicago NPN conference for just act one performance on November 18th. We go to On the Boards here in Seattle the first week in December. We go to Houston, Texas, Diverse Works the second week in December. We open for three weeks in New York at Dance Theater Workshop in January and we close at the Painted Bride in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania the last weekend of January.

So great. So thank for all your work too in your lives and treading and traveling the waters that you all are treading and traveling to make this all work.

**END**

