Views from the Top: Industry Trends
Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism
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Moderator:

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Panelists:

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Kevin Klose, president and CEO, National Public Radio
Doug McLennan, editor-in-chief, ArtsJournal.com; NAJP 1996-97 mid-career fellow
Steve Proctor, deputy managing editor, features, *The Baltimore Sun*
Kit Rachlis, editor-in-chief, *Los Angeles Magazine*
Jim Warren, deputy managing editor, features, *Chicago Tribune*

Oroza: If we had to have a headline for the conversations we've had the last couple of days, it would be: "The arts: Our newsrooms are in crisis, and the arts journalists are particularly vulnerable."

But I'm looking around and I see 105 pretty smart people, and maybe it's because I am at Berkeley, but I think maybe we can take it back. Maybe we can do something about this.

On this panel, we have some distinguished editors, publishers, people who have been dealing with these issues for a long time. They are going to help us come up with some strategies, figure out what we need to do to fulfill our calling, and see how we can make arts journalism count in this country and take on all these people who say, "It's not important, we can't afford it." Let's see what we can do.

Klose: I am the president and CEO of National Public Radio. We are rethinking some of our cultural presentations, the way we cover and the way we present art and art news and what art is and what culture is in this country. We are doing that because we are an organization that provides programming to 650 independent, community-based, autonomous nonprofit stations—most of whose licenses are held by universities and colleges across the country. The last third of the licenses are held by community foundations, which evoke and reflect the values, the perceptions and the realities of every community of America.

What we can do at NPR is provide a unifying fabric of presentation of national and international news, threaded and interwoven with local news. We do that, and after 32 years, we've hit a place in society that is unique. I've been at NPR for three and a half years, and in that time, our audience has grown. Our weekly audience has grown from about 12 million a week to about 20 million a week. Every time it goes up, it stays up. It went up after 9/11, for obvious reasons. It stayed up, because that is the unifying power of radio.

Radio is intimate. It is the most creative, the most imaginative of the mass media, because it's a medium you cannot see: you can only imagine it. That's why Susan Stamberg says you can paint the best pictures of all on radio. Radio has a unique intimacy with every individual. Public radio has a uniqueness inside that, because it doesn't promote itself and doesn't advertise itself. You aren't going to see any public-radio billboards on Highway 101. We're talking about real news and real talk on KQED, or any of the other stations hereabouts.

When people find public radio, it is a personal discovery of their own. It becomes a personal, specific relationship that plays exactly to the strengths of public radio. The people at NPR, and the member stations, have viewed sound as a serious engagement that had no limits: using sound, the human voice, the spoken word, non-spoken communication, and silence as a way to communicate.

The geniuses at NPR do that everyday, produce programming everyday, in the context of the newsmagazines "Morning Edition" and "All Things Considered." They are the second- and third-most listened-to radio programs in America today. "Morning Edition" has an audience of about 10 to 13 million weekly, and "All Things Considered" has an audience near 10 million weekly. The audiences overlap. These national presentations stand on these two very tall poles in the tent. No other public-radio program comes anywhere near the power and the community that is created by these two major newsmagazines.

Part of our effort at NPR is to rethink and reshape our cultural programming. We want to see how we can get more access to those extraordinary places where people come and listen, and interact, and think, and take away ideas, and contact, and are touched in their brains and in their heart in very particular ways. That is the power of public radio.

So we are rethinking our cultural presentation. We are rethinking how we describe and interact with the news about the world of art and culture. And we are also doing several other things to expand the horizon in which we have always operated. Part of the challenge of radio is that because it is a

virtual medium—it's here, it's completely ephemeral, and then it's gone—it's very hard to recapture, unless you go to a web site, and even then you have to click around to find the stuff. We are trying to make the web site easier: that is part of our presentation.

We are expanding the envelope in a variety of ways, and I want to describe them. We have just signed an agreement to take ownership of a property in Culver City where we will create a West Coast production center. We now have a small bureau here in San Francisco, which operates out of KQED, staffed by six or seven or eight people. We have eight people in Los Angeles. We have one in San Diego. We have two or three people up in Seattle, and that's it for the West Coast. This time next year, the West Coast production center will have about 50 people in it, and our eventual goal is to have more than 100 people. That will give us the intellectual and creative opportunity to discover, and cover, and report on culture and arts and news in the West in a whole new way.

We are talking not just about the coast, and about Northern and Southern California—although these audiences comprise almost 15 percent of our national audience. Public radio is a huge reality in California, in part because of its great diversity, but also because California is at the forefront of this very information: it's using information, discarding information, soaked in information, grasping the reality of this nation. So we are going to be in California in a different way. We want to connect with you all in different ways, and we want to find ways to realize extraordinary stories and to use radio to do it. Ultimately, art is powerful, culture is powerful, it is political, and it is a debate every step of the way.

Finally, art is local in nature, because the people you depend upon to touch are local. Where is the audience going to come from? It ain't going to fly in from Peoria. It might, if we can get it out there. But by and large, it is going to be a local issue.

I would say to everybody who is interested in projecting the power and the reality and the importance of art in this culture and society: Interact with your public radio station, whether you are from the written press or not. Because the local public station is more likely to be in contact with, and have the capacity to present in an imaginative way, the reality, the power, the enthusiasm and the excitement of the arts, whether they be the lively arts, or arts on a wall, or arts in a gallery, or arts in a garden.

I think there is a lot of terrible criticism in the print media of local art, and I find it snide. It isn't engaged the way it should be. Go to your local public radio station. You will find people there who are burning with their knowledge of the power of the spoken word, burning with their knowledge of encounters with human beings, in the context of their daily lives.

And that's the kind of art you all are talking about. That's what the people in these panels are trying to present to you. Public radio can do it in a way that nobody else can. We are there for you at a national level—every local public radio station is community-based, community-supported, in an absolutely counter-intuitive relationship. If you could get *The New York Times* for free on your doorstep, would you pay for it? Maybe you wouldn't pay for the arts section: maybe you would pay for the A section. Maybe you *would* pay for the arts section. The point is, if you get that kind of quality everyday for free, why would you pay for it at all?

But people by the millions are supporting their public radio stations—voluntarily. That evokes the reality of the power of public radio. But ultimately, national radio can only present a national fabric. Seventy-five percent of what's on the air on public radio, 75 percent of that audience bill, is what is produced locally. *There's* your place to go if you are going to present the arts.

Harris: This panel is called 'Views from the Top,' but for me, it is the view from the outside. I used to be at the top [as chairman and publisher of the *San Jose Mercury News*], but I quit. Ileana Oroza called the other day to ask if I would tell hard truths, and also offer suggestions. I will try to do both succinctly.

I will start with the hard-truth part of it. What is happening to you, and to your fellow journalists, is a function of what has happened to the companies that you work for, which—like almost all other companies in almost all other institutions in our society—have been impacted for the worse, in some very sad ways, by two powerful and related forces in our culture: One is commerce, the other is competition. And those two forces, as they have affected news organizations, have changed substantially.

Maybe two of the defining questions for journalistic organizations are: *To whom* are we responsible, and *for what* are we responsible? Those two questions draw very different answers today then they did, say, 30 years ago. I do not have an idealistic view of the world 30 years ago, but I do know that the general answer was quite different then.

It seems to me today that for too many of the leaders of our institutions, the answer is that they are responsible to a variety of commercial interests. They are responsible for satisfying those commercial interests, be they the investors, or people with stock options, or whatever. And from that, those twin definitions of responsibility form, and flow out of, priorities for the organization. From the sense of what you are responsible for, and to whom you are responsible, flow the priorities that eventually affect you.

One of the consequences of the ascendancy of commerce is that there has been a heightened priority attached to financial results. And sadly, over time, those have become financial results measured first in the short term, and secondly measured peer-to-peer, company-versus-company. In the good times, when the economy is roaring, that is not much of a problem. In the bad times, when the economy is weak, as it has been for the past two years, it is enormously problematic. It forces people—here, I talk about section editors, producers, people at the mid-level—to make choices. And most of those whom I know are women and men of good will, and their instinct is to make the choice that is least harmful. But a series of choices, each of which is least harmful, in the aggregate produces a very harmful result.

There is also a problem in job definition. If the nature of your job as a manager, the way you are evaluated as an editor, is the skillfulness of your trimming, you begin to define "doing your job well," almost subconsciously, as "doing the very best job you could, under the circumstances." And that is a very damaging thing for a profession or for a society, because then we slip into a world of relativism, in which there are no absolutes. When most of us came into the business, what attracted us to the business was a different sense of responsibility, part of which was to be a chronicler of the times. And I would like to talk about that, just for a moment, as it relates to the specific work that you do.

Increasingly as a profession, we are better and better—or at least competent in a sustained way—in covering stories that break, and less and less good at stories that ooze. And yet the most important stories are those stories that ooze, the broad social change in our life. And I would say that the ultimate oozing story is the culture writ large.
—Jay Harris

When I was a youngster growing up in Washington D.C., there was a disc jockey on a black radio station who would say repeatedly through the night that it is not the direction of the waves that counts, but the motion of the ocean. I am reminded of that, because increasingly as a profession we are better and better—or at least competent in a sustained way—in covering stories that *break*, and less and less good at stories that *ooze*. And yet the most important stories are those stories that ooze, the broad social change in our life. And I would say that the ultimate oozing story is the culture writ large.

I think that one of the problems that you face, that we all face, that our whole society faces, is that it seems that we have lost part of the definition, or the appropriate definition, of the word "culture." And so there are many people who think that culture is things that "artsy" people do. Culture is actually in the larger sense—that which we *are*. It is constantly oozing, if you will, and it seems to me that if you are a responsible and dedicated chronicler of the times, covering it is one of your highest responsibilities and greatest challenges.

I would like to argue something that at least some of you would agree with: You need to make the argument to those for whom you work, those whom you cover, and most of all the people whom you serve, that covering the arts is really more than covering entertainment. Now, "Star Wars" is entertainment, and "Spiderman" even more so in some ways, but I will include them in this definition. I think that art is frequently the first clue, and maybe the best detector, of the motion of that ocean which is our culture and how it is changing. And I think that frequently, too many stories about the arts, or the decisions to trim the investments we make in covering the arts, are viewed only in terms of art as entertainment, art as "how many people see or do a particular thing."

We are at Berkeley—there are many ways of "taking it back." I am old enough, traditionalist enough, to still believe in the power of ideas and the marketplace. And it seems to me that one of the things that we need to do is to find a way to make the case articulately to our colleagues, to our bosses and to our communities that the coverage of art is central to understanding the evolution of our culture. And there are many examples that one could turn to, from jazz and free-verse poetry, to Jacob Lawrence and the Harlem Renaissance, to the publication of "The Grapes of Wrath" or "Our Town."

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I want to conclude with a contemporary example. Yesterday, on "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer," there was a news report—not an arts report—on a musical now being performed in New York called "Urinetown." And I

was struck that it was done, if I recall correctly, by the business and economics correspondent for "NewsHour," who had been trying to work it, he said during the piece, into his Enron story, but could never find a way to do that. That piece was about more than just a play people pay too-high prices to see when they are in New York: it is an insightful commentary on something that is oozing in our culture. So I would encourage you to take what you do seriously enough to make the argument that you're not just writing about a movie or a dance or a performance of whatever sort, but instead, in the best of what you do, in the most important of what you do, you are writing about something much more important than that which is entertaining. You are writing about the way in which we can come to know ourselves better—which, I think, is what arts journalism at its best is capable of doing.

Warren: I'm the deputy managing editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, in charge of all our feature sections. I previously was the Washington bureau chief, so I've probably got less experience in this area than most of the folks, though I had a brief period running our main features section before going to Washington. Now, I've been given this big magilla of an operation of 140 full-time employees and about nine or 10 different sections.

Let me start by mentioning the recent Pulitzer Prizes and National Magazine Awards. Even factoring in the incredibly incestuous nature of journalism-award competitions, I do think that you saw a growing gap between the haves and the have-nots, particularly among the mainstream media: small groups of papers and magazines doing superior work, and most of the others exhibiting a mushy mediocrity.

The *Tribune's* own exhaustive nationwide search last year for a new theater critic—because our star guy, Richard Christiansen, at age 69 was retiring—resulted in our hiring not one, but two candidates because they were so good. And at a rather substantial expense, two big salaries. I think that was admirable, but sadly atypical. Same goes with several lengthy investigative series in the arts that we did in the last two years: "Jelly Roll" Morton getting screwed out of royalties; a big series on the theft of art by the Nazis; previously unheard Louis Armstrong tapes, which resulted in a collaboration between us and Nightline; and finally, on how a very shadowy network of dealers controls a high-end slice of the musical-instrument world.

Broadcast television—the key medium in our society, I think—will remain a disaster area, especially on the local level. But I think niche cable networks may well continue to offer substantial relief, as well as alternative non-English media. The mainstream print medium's focus on the more superficial elements of popular culture will unavoidably be driven by television, be it puffery for the latest blockbuster flick or word of a star's divorce or a rapper's drug addiction. Entertainment, rife with its press releases and its

junkets and its freebies, will continue to be much easier to cover than arts and culture, which are harder and deeper and more nuanced.

I've tried to alter, a little bit, the way we do some of these things, and it has caused some problems. Last week, all the Hollywood publicists were yelling bloody murder because—recreating something I did in my earlier tenure running a feature section—I essentially decided to ban hotel-room interviews with actors. Now, there are some cases in which you just can't avoid it. But two weeks ago, we took a pass at Mira Sorvino, who was sitting there in the goddamned Ritz-Carlton or something in Chicago, who was willing to give us 20 to 25 minutes. I said "no," and they were furious. And that resulted in a big, big meeting last week, with veiled threats of pulling their advertising, blah blah blah.

Basically, we are telling the publicists, if you can't figure out something interesting with us, screw it.
—Jim Warren

But I did that, and I am doing it out of a belief that readers are much better served, in theory, if we get some of these people out doing something interesting. It started with me sending a freelancer eight or nine years ago. Peter O'Toole was in town with his autobiography. And we said "no" to the hotel-room interview. We took him on a Saturday night to Comiskey Park, to a Chicago White Sox game. In Comiskey Park, there are exploding scoreboards: a guy gets a home run, the exploding scoreboards go off. And for 10 minutes, O'Toole is on this rant about the Nazi rallies in Nuremberg and how this reminded him of it. That made that piece. Similarly, we took Andie MacDowell to a church a couple of weeks ago. And we've done similar things, like taking authors dancing. But basically, we are telling the publicists, if you can't figure out something interesting with us, screw it.

Of course, there will be some instances where it is just impossible. We sent a guy to wherever George Lucas and everybody was talking about "Star Wars." We're not *The New York Times*. We're not going to get the special, special interview. If there is something so big it would be absurd for me to say, "No, we are not going to do that," we'll consider it.

Also, we put interesting people together. The last one I ran, in our main feature section eight or nine years ago, John Updike was in town, and again, we refused to do the hotel-room interview with Updike, who was there to receive some award. We had known that the then-coach of the Chicago Bulls, Phil Jackson, is a very, very well-read guy, and a big fan of Updike. Updike turns out to be a big fan of basketball. So we stuck them in his white stretch

limo in front of the Drake Hotel, and got them up to Deerfield, Illinois—the god-awful suburb of Chicago where the Bulls practice—and put a tape recorder down between the two of them, the basketball coach and famous author, and just let them talk. And it was far better than anything we could have gotten in the hotel room, particularly in this case, since Jackson kept correcting Updike on particular characters in his books.

Now, there are also flaws. A month ago, I came up with the idea of doing virtually that same thing again, this time with Wynton Marsalis, and the current coach of the Bulls, Bill Cartwright, who was a graduate of the University of San Francisco and who's a big jazz fan. So after a huge hassle—this stuff is administratively very challenging—we got Marsalis up to the Bulls training facility. Turns out the Bulls' plane was late coming in. Cartwright walks into the room, announces he's got to look at videotape for that night's game, and blows off one of the world's most famous musicians. We are going try again with him.

But the notion, again, is to bring in a little bit of creativity. The establishment outlets will struggle mightily to report the dramatic diversity within their communities, including that in the arts. The mainstream will generally not acknowledge those forms until they have so obviously infiltrated the popular culture that even 50-year-old male newspaper editors with receding hairlines who live in the suburbs—even *they* will acknowledge that something is happening in their communities.

> A few of us do very well covering the arts as entertainment and as a cultural influence. But the reality is that all too many arts reporters and editors verge on the clueless when it comes to economics and any vaguely sophisticated understanding that they are covering a mammoth industry rife with its share of scoundrels and scalawags.
> —Jim Warren

Let me close by saying my main hope rests on economic necessity. While editorially I think a dramatically improved understanding of economics would help arts journalism, many news executives—faced with declining circulation, viewership, and listenership—may mull improved coverage of the arts not out of any high-mindedness, but only out of desperation that it

provides a vehicle to lure more consumers. There could be no starker incentives.

Finally, having spent eight years as a Washington bureau chief and being plopped into this new realm last fall, I am struck by the apparent failure of much of the mainstream's arts coverage—and here I include us, NPR, *The New York Times*—to report on the arts as business. A few of us do very well covering the arts as entertainment and as a cultural influence. But the reality is that all too many arts reporters and editors verge on the clueless when it comes to economics and any vaguely sophisticated understanding that they are covering a mammoth industry rife with its share of scoundrels and scalawags. On that score, I don't think that arts journalism can do anything but get much better.

Kit Rachlis: I'd like to change the conversation a bit and suggest that there is a fundamental contradiction occuring with arts criticism in this country right now, which is that the quality of criticism is considerably higher than it was 25 to 30 years ago. If you walked into any newsroom 25 to 30 years ago, the reigning ethos was that anybody could be an art critic. So it was often the dumping ground for the drunks and the incompetents. It was the gulag of the newspaper world. In the hierarchy of newspapers, it ranked somewhere near the women's pages. Investigative and political reporters were on top, sports reporters were right behind, but cultural writing was, for the most part, at the lowest point of the hierarchy. If you wanted to rise at a newspaper, being a cultural reporter was not the place to be.

Though I think the professionalism and the quality of criticism is much higher now than it was 25 years ago—you can't be a movie critic now without knowing about movies, which was not true then—the effect that you all have on the culture is far less than critics had 25 years ago. And I mean *far* less.
—Kit Rachlis

However, though I think the professionalism and the quality of criticism is much higher now than it was 25 years ago—you can't be a movie critic now without knowing about movies, which was not true then—the effect that you all have on the culture is far less than critics had 25 years ago. And I mean *far* less. There are a lot of reasons for this.

One of the principal reasons, particularly in the popular arts, is that you are grappling with—whether you are talking about movies, or pop music, or TV—among the most sophisticated marketers in the entire world, for whom critics and arts journalists and feature writers are simply the extension of their marketing arms. That's how they view you. The whole point of movie studios (and I live in Los Angeles, so I am extremely cynical about this) is to marginalize and corrupt all of you. When [*Newsweek* reporter and 1996-97 NAJP alumnus] John Horn broke the story of Sony putting the fake quotes from the people who [pretended to love the movies], this was the ultimate dream of the studios—the fake critic was exactly what they wanted. They didn't need any of you. What they wanted to do was manufacture their own critic and have him or her say what they wanted to say. I think it is quite cynical. It is quite deliberate. To try to write about this in the face of that kind of marketing means that you are less and less important. It doesn't really matter whether [*New York Times* film critic] A.O. Scott trashes "Star Wars": it's not really a part of the conversation. You guys are less and less a part of the conversation.

The second thing is: Arts journalists are partly responsible for this. The kind of language that too many critics write in is a language of a very rarified nomenclature. Just take art critics, or most rock-'n'-roll critics. For most lay-readers outside the field, it is extremely difficult to read. It makes references that most people don't understand. It makes allusions that are not explained. It becomes a private language.

The third thing is: We live in a culture, a newspaper culture and a media culture that is entirely interested in "what's in and what's out," "what's up," "what's down," a culture for whom the actual conversation is not very important.

All these forces combined have made the critic's job much more marginalized than ever before. I wish I could leave you on an optimistic note—I just don't have much hope for it. I believe in great cultural criticism. The first thing that I did when I became editor of *Los Angeles* magazine was create an arts section. The average length of the pieces in the arts section is between 1,500 and 2,000 words. I believe seriously that even if a conversation only takes place among a handful of people, it's really important to do, because eventually, it expands. But I also fear that it's in the face of a huge wind, a huge storm, forces that have made most of what we do less and less important.

Doug McLennan: I run a site called ArtsJournal.com, and we look at 200 publications and try and find some interesting thing from them to put up everyday. Some days, that's really hard; a lot of days, that's pretty easy. One pet peeve of mine is those zippy little titles that they call our sections. You know, "Time Off," "Going Out"… When I was setting up ArtsJournal and

trying to find the index pages for where the arts stories were, one of the hardest things to find on the web sites was where arts stories actually lived. In some publications, it still is really difficult to find arts stories, and that's too bad, because they should be more accessible.

The way that we do general news, the way that a newspaper or a media company covers the community in which they live: it's through a political lens, it's though a business lens, it's through a celebrity lens. Why isn't it through a cultural lens?
—Doug McLennan

I want to refer to something that Jay Harris said earlier, which was that arts coverage—at least in a lot of places that I look, anyway—is marginalized as a satellite event in a publication. And it isn't part of an ongoing conversation that we have about the communities in which we live—which is too bad. The way that we do general news, the way that a newspaper or a media company covers the community in which it lives: it's through a political lens, it's though a business lens, it's through a celebrity lens. Why isn't it through a cultural lens? Because coverage of the arts shouldn't just be a *Consumer Reports*.

And what I see in so many publications is that it *is* a *Consumer Reports*—it's listings, it's "You should check this out because it is a good show about this..." It's got to be more than that. The guide aspect of it has to be a component, certainly. But if you are going to have a conversation about culture that matters, it has to be way more than that. It has to make connections to every aspect of the news.

Somebody on the earlier panel was talking about the Jewish Museum show in New York, and how all the coverage seemed to happen in front of it, without the writers seeing the show. But how can you expect to have anything more if there isn't an ongoing conversation that makes the media able to put a story like that into context? What happens is that something happens in the arts that everybody wants to know about—like the [1999] "Sensation" show at the Brooklyn Museum of Art—and it immediately gets polarized into "this corner" and "that corner." We go to the suspects that we are familiar with, and it becomes this conversation that isn't a conversation anymore: it's just a lot of yelling.

If there were some sort of conversation along the way, when something controversial happens, you would have context in which to put it. And what I see, as I am looking out over a lot of publications, is that there are very few places in which those conversations are going on that make the context of arts and cultural reporting meaningful. Often, we don't treat cultural news or cultural coverage in the same basic journalistic way that we do for other kinds of news.

Somebody was talking about the ethics of how we cover things—it's different in the features and arts sections than it is anywhere else. And part of it is, I think that in smaller communities, people feel that if they are not boosting the arts, writing about the positive things that happen, that they are somehow damaging the arts. I think what it actually does is it devalues everything else that you write, because people are very sophisticated these days about the media messages that they get. They know that people are constantly feeding them something that they want you to pay attention to. Very quickly, you get to know the message behind the message that they are trying to give you. And if the message is always positive in some way, then you're going to distrust it.

I spent a year in China and spent a little time editing at *China Daily*, which we called the "good news" newspaper. An earthquake would happen, or a riot, and you would never hear about it. But six months later, you would hear about the solution to the riot, or the way we managed to fix the buildings after the earthquake. In other words, you couldn't say that something was bad and unresolved: you had to report that something had been solved. And so often, that's what cultural coverage seems to be.

The last thing that I want to say is that it's hard for readers to tell when a publication has changed its focus. You don't know that editor X has left a publication, because the same people are still writing, the same bylines are still there. But you start to notice, over time, that the focus of that section has changed somehow.

We all bitch about editors. I used to be a classical music critic, and I did my share of that as well. But it's interesting to me how there are publications where there are very talented people, but you have the sense that the coverage drifts along. Even if they are talented, even if they can say something important or interesting within a piece, it is without some kind of focus, without somebody back there directing things—and I'm not saying, "Go do this story, go do that story," but asking the questions or pointing the attention in some way. And you end up having cultural coverage that lacks context.

What an editor does is help to direct the context and listen to the writers and the people in the community who are out there paying attention. Unless

there is somebody thinking about what things mean in a much wider way than a critic covering a very narrow specialty, you don't end up having good coverage.

We don't expect that a visual arts critic can come in and cover visual arts without any experience. But there is no stricture like that for editors. Editors are moved from one beat, to another beat, to another beat, without any knowledge about what they are doing. And if they don't have that context, then what the hell are they doing there?
—Doug McLennan

So, I would say it's not just that we don't have good critics at smaller publications—it's that we don't have good editors. We don't expect that somebody can come in and just cover politics without knowing anything about it. We don't expect that a visual arts critic can come in and cover visual arts without any experience. But there is no stricture like that for editors. Editors are moved from one beat, to another beat, to another beat, without any knowledge about what they are doing. And if they don't have that context, then what the hell are they doing there?

Steve Proctor: As Jay mentioned, there really has been a fundamental change in American newspapers that has made them a lot more bottom-line-focused. I think that has been felt all throughout the newspaper, particularly in the arts and features sections. I do think, though, that you can make very powerful arguments for the sustenance of art coverage. I want to talk about a couple of those to start with.

One is that a lot of cities—and I will use Baltimore as an example—are really struggling to maintain some life in the downtown area. And one of the few things that keeps a city like Baltimore alive and vibrant is that we are blessed with a really strong cultural community: a wonderful symphony, terrific art museums, a fabulous theater scene. And I think that a person in upper management who is looking to sustain the metropolitan newspaper ultimately might be persuaded that arts coverage is important not just to the commerce with the reader, but also to the sustenance of Baltimore as a place to live. And I think that if Baltimore isn't a wonderful place to live, the newspaper ultimately won't survive.

Secondly, every newspaper I know of is desperate to get more women and younger people to read it. I think a strong argument can be made that coverage of the arts is a way to do that. Every study you look at will show you that the decision-makers in most households about where to go and do things are women. If you provide better coverage of the arts, I think there is a strong chance you will attract more women readers.

The equation is a little more difficult with younger readers, because 18-year-olds, in particular, don't look at a major metropolitan newspapers as—if you will pardon the marketing phrase—a brand that they associate with what they are interested in. But I think that potential spin-off publications aimed at younger readers could be very beneficial to the franchise of a newspaper.

A lot of newspapers are not doing much with their arts coverage beyond reviewing and previewing. While I am a strong believer in the importance in the criticism and reviewing, I think that's first base as far as arts coverage goes.
—Steve Proctor

I think that all of us who are involved in arts coverage have to look at ourselves a little bit as to why arts coverage may not be as valued at the newspaper as it ought to be. One of the reasons for this is that it's too one-dimensional at too many places. A lot of newspapers are not doing much with their arts coverage beyond reviewing and previewing. While I am a strong believer in the importance in the criticism and reviewing, I think that's first base as far as arts coverage goes.

What you really have to attach much more energy to as arts writers, is, for one thing, covering the cultural landscape. I talked in the beginning about this: being part of a vibrant city, covering the institutions as institutions, the struggle to get money, the importance of adding new things. For instance, if your symphony takes a tour of Europe or Japan—as our symphony is about to do—I think it is important to write not just about what the program is going to be, but to write about how touring is vital to the health of a symphony, and how it is economically important for a symphony to tour and record, and to maybe throw in some stories that make for interesting cultural A1 news, like "Why is it that Japan has become the world's largest consumer of classical music? What is that about?"

Those are the kinds of things that put the arts and culture on Page One, and that change the nature of the newspaper in a way that is fundamental and important. Every newspaper is struggling with the notion that the front page is often death, dying, crime—you know, bad things. And if that cultural vitality of a city is on the front page of the newspaper, that can make a big difference. To the extent that arts editors and writers are able to provide that, it creates a great argument for spending more on covering it.

Secondarily, I think there are not enough stories of deeper meaning being done in arts sections in America today. I think it's very superficial. The fundamental reason why artists create art is because they have some idea they want to impart to the culture, or something to say to the culture about who we are. And you can count on one hand in most papers how often they're getting at a story that goes to the deeper idea of the artist. What is it the artist is talking about? What is it that they want us to talk amongst each other about? At the *Sun*, I like to try to make the coverage, from the criticism on up, idea-focused. I would like it focused not on the event, but on the idea of the person who is putting the event on. What is it they want to talk about? What do they want us to think about? For instance, I'm not that interested in a review of the newest reality-TV show. But I *am* pretty interested in a story that looks at why we as a culture have become so fascinated with reality television. It points to some vacuum in our lives that we are filling up with desperate little games on islands far away.

Those are the things we have to address as arts critics and arts writers if we want to get more money out of management. The bottom line is: We have to do better work, work that is more substantive and thoughtful and that gets out onto the front page. Even if it doesn't get out onto the front page, we have to present a Sunday arts section that has work of real substance in it. I think if we did more of that, we would have fewer blows inflicted upon us.

[Audience member]: One of the big issues in newspapers is at the editing level. I agree with Doug that one of the biggest problems is that the people who set the agenda not only don't think strategically: they don't think, period. About a lot of things.

The first thing we really need to do as newspapers is put more thoughtfulness into editing positions. One of the fundamental failings of a lot of newspapers is that they want to cover what has already been covered elsewhere. I don't say this to disparage any of the pop critics in the room, but I do think that newspapers have to have a special place in their hearts for the high-end arts. They are the last bastion of people that cover it with any degree of seriousness.

And I think you have to be open to discovery. I don't think the high-end editors of the newspapers think about it a whole lot, strategically or

otherwise. So if you are the arts editor at your newspaper, if you are in the arts department, you pretty much have free rein to do what you want to do. I don't think that anybody at the upper levels is going to pay a whole lot of attention to it. As far as the specific details of what you assign or don't assign, you have a lot of freedom. It's just not well exercised.

[Audience comment contesting implication that reviews are the appropriate place to expound about reality television]

Proctor: I didn't mean to suggest that it couldn't be done in a review. I *do* think it is difficult to do in a review of 12 inches. And I think editing is a series of choices, so you have to make the choice to cover a few things extremely well, or at least to pick your spots where you can do something substantive.

What I see happening at a lot of places is that everything is just a 15-inch review. I think it is very difficult to get very deep on that level. That was my point—not that it can't be done in a review. I apologize if implied that.

[Audience question about how arts editors make the case to numbers-conscious upper management for increased arts coverage]

Warren: This is a source of tremendous frustration for me. There are so few industries in this country that are as bad as newspapers in terms of the lack of decent research about what their consumers like and don't like—whether you talk about *The New York Times* or the *Chicago Tribune*. People in television—those people know the next morning that half of Tom Brokaw's audience left after he did his story on such and such. We don't have any clue. There has been no research done on the *Chicago Tribune's* features section, and we have the reputation in the business for being one of the smartest operations around. No research in five years, except for occasional focus groups, where we run out to the suburbs and watch some nut-case guy take the rest of the group down some weird path.

In a time of tremendous economic anxiety, top management errs on the side of caution again and again. One thing I have been struck by is how little it takes for one reader of our paper to get everybody scared. It could be one lady in Lake Bluff, Ill., who was furious with a piece I assigned the day before the Bears/Eagles game last fall. I raised the question, "What is the deal with Soldier Field's bathrooms? They are the most disgusting men's rooms." So our main features section, the day before the game, had a story that everybody on the radio was talking about: What is the deal with the goddamned men's rooms? One letter from a bluenose in Lake Bluff, made it to the CEO of the [Tribune] company. Finally, it makes it down to me, and it has been signed off on by a whole bunch of guys with lots of stock options, and I am nervous.

The point is, it doesn't take much in this climate to exacerbate that tendency toward caution. And that is just awful. We just cut out a lot of comics for space reasons, and there are few things that have as much of an emotional connection to readers as those. We were all nervous after a week or two. My subordinate who was overseeing it got over 250 e-mails, half of them clearly orchestrated by the artist—how else would they know my name? And my view was, "Hey, we sell about 680,000 copies a day, a million on Sunday. That doesn't strike me as too formidable a response."

But real data is absent, whether you are talking about the Martha Stewart column we run on Sunday or one of your high-profile local columnists. A lot of our decisions are driven by a mix of fear and anecdote.

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by a mix of fear and anecdote.
—Jim Warren

[Audience question about recent changes in NPR's cultural coverage]

Klose: We've been doing two types of cultural coverage. One, there's been a cultural unit in the news division, which has been making content for the newsmagazines. I consider that separate from the arts and presentation division, which we call the cultural division. So it's already a weird division, the way people think about it.

Our main classical music program, "Performance Today," has the largest national audience for cultural programming of any nationally produced and distributed classical music show in the country. Listenership to that program—and the ways in which stations use it—has been a very confused and contradictory picture. We put a lot of resources into producing it on a very high level. There are a lot of stations that play it at 10 p.m., when there is almost no audience they can actually reach. And we are not in the business of doing elitist presentation. We are not in the business of doing shallowing and narrowing. We want to make sure that what we produce can be accessible to the stations in ways that can help them touch their audience in a meaningful and wide context.

So for "Performance Today," we are probably moving toward less talk. It is a two-hour show, and it's like, 12 minutes, 12 minutes, 12 minutes. It is hard to stay with that show, in my estimation, because a lot of the music is interrupted by a lot of conversation by Fred Child. We are going to ask Fred to do cultural news so we can do segments that stations can use on the news

side, so they can have enormous contact with the audience and refer it back to the music stream.

At the same time, there are a number of stations—in California and in Colorado—who are experimenting with creating a high-end-quality, classical music stream that will play 24 hours a day, "C24." It's a stream with very high presentation quality—not just needle-drop, but actual live production, aggregating the very best performances from around the country and around the world. And it could be produced as a 24-hour stream, and member stations can use it as flexibly as they wish to. They can come in and out as they wish, because we believe that is very helpful to the way the stations present their content to their audiences.

On the jazz side, we have had extensive conversations with our jazz member stations. The trend in public radio, at least among the NPR stations, has been to reduce music presentation in the morning hours because the news and talk formats are so powerful. Nobody in American broadcasting is doing news and journalism on the air like we are, so people need to go there, because they can't find this stuff anywhere else. So we are talking with the stations as well. There also are efforts to create a jazz stream that stations can come in and out of, and to take the knowledge we have from the presentation side of NPR, the arts and performance side, and bring it over into an arts-information desk that will operate and record on arts as a business, on arts as a creative power, on arts as part of what the community is. Our idea here is to help our member stations together create a wider presentation of arts and cultural encounter in their community.

[Audience question about regionalization of NPR]

Klose: NPR now has 750 employees. Almost 600 of them are in Washington D.C. Getting access to how the rest of the nation is thinking, I think, is going to be eased. We are going to have more producers, more creative people, more journalists, more contact, more editorial strength out on the West Coast. It's a little bit like the national bureaus of *The New York Times*. They have discussions, sometimes struggles, and sometimes fights. It is historical, and has been written about plenty of times.

But when you are on the scene, you know more. We have more journalists coming across the West, to the Mountain West, to the Northwest. We will have more access to them, and to what's going on at our member stations, and what they are reporting. From them, we can bring a more powerful diversity of arts and culture to the national shows, and therefore link together the network of conversations that goes across public radio everyday.