

THIRTY YEARS FROM NOW

An ongoing, multi-media arts process devised and directed by John Clancy.

30YFN is a theatrical, cross-disciplinary process that engages young artists in a larger dialogue about the future, heightens and increases their awareness of current events and trends and most importantly, creates an ongoing vehicle and vessel for their voices to be heard.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I believe we are on the cusp of enormous changes. The next generation will be faced with unimagined challenges and opportunities and how they address these issues will quite literally determine the fate of the world. The pace of change is so rapid on so many fronts: cultural, technological, geo-political, environmental, that it can feel overwhelming and at times inevitable. What we must remember is that the future is made by individuals and their individual choices. This project is a visionary mechanism to empower young people to focus on their own development over the next three decades while gaining a broad range of knowledge about the global, national and regional development that will occur over the next 30 years.

Anyone over 40 knows how quickly 30 years can pass. Anyone under 20 believes 30 years is, quite literally, more than a lifetime. The dual purpose of setting the span of time studied at 30 years is to initially shock the young participant into seeing how relatively soon 2036 will be reached and then to let them see that there is still time for their choices and actions to utterly change that future.

I believe there is the potential for enormous impact by connecting arts organizations and young artists in a project that is driven by the young artists and focuses on their actual futures. The arts organizations can make available their expertise and experience to a new generation of artists and audiences while the young artist is exposed to a professional environment and given the guidance and tools to create a work of art that explores an issue of vital personal importance. Great, visceral art is determined by its relevance and there is nothing more relevant than your own life.

By unleashing the transformational power of the arts onto a young person's real-life choices, supported and guided by arts professionals, 30YFN gives the individual participant a unique opportunity to "flash-forward" and see the future while there is still time to change it.

PILOT PROJECT

In January, 2006 I was invited to create a project with students at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey. This became the pilot project for 30YFN. Working with a group of young actors, a local band and the university's television and film department over a period of 30 days, we developed, rehearsed and performed a multi-media theatrical event that explored, questioned and debated what the world would look like thirty years from now. The experience was extraordinarily powerful for the

participants as it allowed them to speak with their own voices about both their collective and individual futures and to begin to think in a focused and realistic way about the next stage of their lives. Taking on topics such as prejudice, terrorism, the loss of privacy, environmental disasters, parenthood, disease and death, this ensemble of young, confident people began to grow sober and serious. As Casey Clark, age 19, described the experience:

I absolutely loved the entire process. The writing of our histories and background, it really made me think and question my own existence in the future; it was kind of scary, but I loved that it made me really sit down and focus on what I can feasibly "see" as a future for myself.

This is, for me, the key to the entire project and the reason I believe the project has a larger scope than just a one-off theatrical event. Using the techniques we developed in rehearsal and broadening the research and development stages, 30YFN can serve as both a massive archival project that captures and makes available the voices, dreams, fears and visions of the next generation while at the same time provide a dynamic vehicle for a focused conversation between the members of the next generation. Most importantly, it creates a mechanism for a young person to look ahead in an imaginative, yet realistic way and begin the process of shaping his or her life.

In the initial research stage, the project participants interview civic and cultural leaders and experts in the fields of new media, environmental studies, international relations, new technology, etc. The interviews are videotaped and used as the core source material for initiating dialogue and discussion. Each participant is also asked to write a short monologue placing himself or herself in the future, thirty years from now. In this monologue they look back on their imagined past from their imagined future. These are tales of survival, tales of triumph, tales of regret. Participants write about wars won and lost, marriages ended, children raised and dreams realized. The monologues give a personal and emotional aspect to the project and serve as the most direct tool for the participants to realize that thirty years is a relatively short time and the life choices they are making now matter greatly. The monologues give the participant a unique opportunity to assume a maturity and ownership of their lives and to speak of regrets and mistakes not yet made. I envision collecting these monologues and making them available to other participants to read and perform becoming a key part of the larger project as it begins to create a dialogue between young artists about both the limitations and extraordinary opportunities that lie ahead for them.

The initial rehearsal process is a series of intense, wide-ranging guided conversations. The participants are introduced to various topics and discuss, debate and express their opinions. As Anwar Counts, age 20, remembers it:

We had our rants and raves, debates, disagreements and flat out arguments. Nevertheless, everyone respected everyone: opinions, religious/social beliefs, political stances, ethnic backgrounds, histories, futures and whatever else. This got us to grow accustomed to each other and to the common themes that came up in the exercises.

These conversations are taped and in the pilot project we used the edited transcripts to re-create the feeling of actual conversation onstage. This dialogue can also be used for archival purposes.

In the pilot project at Rowan the eventual artistic expression of the piece was primarily a theater piece with music and movement, however I can envision the same process resulting in a film, a concert performance, a series of art exhibitions or even a website. It is vitally important to leave that decision in the hands of the young artists as it is their vision that is being expressed.

PROJECT POTENTIAL

I believe 30YFN has the capacity to serve as a cultural, educational and archival resource of great impact, both for the individuals involved and for the eventual audience. The young artist is empowered and connected to other young artists across the region, beginning relationships and collaborations that can continue past the duration of the initial project. Also, young audiences are both educated and entertained as well as being inspired to think about their own futures and the many different paths that lie ahead of them. Most importantly, 30YFN is a project that takes the young artist and the young audience seriously, acknowledging that the next thirty years will be a time of tremendous challenge and change and that they are the ones who will lead us through them.

I consider myself a performing artist; however performers very rarely have the opportunity to create the text from which they Act. This production was unique in that I couldn't bring portions of myself to the role; I needed to bring the whole thing. In both of these ways this performance left me changed. Vulnerability is the directly compelling force behind all stage acting. This performance has helped me to start down a road of greater vulnerability and extreme internal challenge in my staged roles as well as in my life.

By Craig O'Brien (Rowan Ensemble 06)