

**The Public Theatre**  
Case Study by Norman Frisch  
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Introduction: Context

Since it opened in 1969, The New York Shakespeare Festival's Public Theater has provided occasional, but crucial haven to more than a handful of important "downtown" New York theater ensembles. Along with space in the stately, cavernous, city-owned building, founder Joseph Papp and his successors JoAnn Akalaitis and George C. Wolfe offered staff resources and – perhaps most importantly – access to larger and wider audiences for small, artist-run troupes including Joe Chaikin's Open Theater, Mabou Mines, and Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theater, among others that blossomed in the surrounding neighborhoods below 14<sup>th</sup> Street during the '70s, often having tiny or no performance venues of their own. As real estate in those Greenwich Village, East Village, SoHo and Chelsea neighborhoods became ever-costlier in subsequent decades, The Public became an increasingly crucial platform for ensembles (both informal and officially-constituted) whose aesthetic and audience identities were anchored in the area.

[Parenthetically: The New York Shakespeare Festival is the corporate and official name of the organization founded by Joe Papp. Over the years, NYSF has operated many programs, launched many seasons of work, and animated a number of different venues throughout New York City: The Delacorte Theater in Central Park, at Lincoln Center (prior to the founding of the Lincoln Center Theater Co.), on Broadway, mobile stages, at Joe's Pub, and – most visibly in recent decades (since the opening of *Hair* in 1969) – at The Public Theater (the former Astor Library in New York's East Village.) Aside from the summer season at the Delacorte, The Public now constitutes the organization's primary performance venue and home base, encompassing six theater spaces. As a result, people now use "The Public" and "NYSF" as virtually interchangeable terms. Nevertheless, The Public Theater is a large and expensive-to-operate building, while NYSF is the not-for-profit producing institution.]

In late 2005, Oskar Eustis succeeded George Wolfe to become the fourth Artistic Director of The Public Theater and The New York Shakespeare Festival. Having spent the prior decade as director of The Trinity Repertory Theatre (one of the few major regional theaters still employing an ongoing ensemble of actors), and having begun his career in the mid-'70s as the director of Redwing Theater (a tiny and highly experimental troupe based in rural Minnesota), Eustis brought to his powerful, new position at The Public a lifelong appreciation of and commitment to ensemble process. Early in his tenure, he declared The Public's intention to deepen and broaden institutional support for ensemble theater activity in a variety of ways, and almost immediately began making good on that promise.

The Under the Radar Festival – an Arts Presenters initiative, under the direction of Mark Russell, that had begun its life in 2005 at Brooklyn's St. Ann's Warehouse – had by 2006 been invited by Eustis to become a resident, annual project of The Public Theater. A two-week international showcase of innovative and often under-recognized artists and

ensembles, the Festival coincides each January with Arts Presenters' annual New York City Conference and has developed a consistent and loyal audience among both national and international presenters and the local theater-goers.

Intended to promote stronger and broader ties among the regional theater, presenting, and artist-run sectors of the not-for-profit performance world, Under the Radar (UTR) has, since 2006, quickly become an integral element of The Public's artistic vision and evolving aesthetic identity. Eustis and The Public appear to have fully embraced the values of international and inter-sectoral cooperation and interdependence articulated by Arts Presenters and, by hosting the Festival (albeit for only two weeks each year), have taken on a highly-visible leadership position in those realms, even within the recent period of dramatically declining resources for both organizations.

UTR Festival Director Mark Russell's name now appears high on The Public's artistic masthead, and both he and Festival Associate Director Meiyin Wang are included and consulted NYSF institutional matters far beyond the scope of the winter Festival, in particular those touching on relationships with independent theater ensembles. Nevertheless, The Public's ongoing commitment to UTR is tentative -- dependent on continuing support from Arts Presenters and a handful of key, New York-based foundations -- and extending no more than two years forward at any given time. Indeed, the financial health of NYSF -- already shaky when Eustis came aboard in 2005 -- has declined steadily since that time, and very little about its programming in future seasons can be taken for granted.

This circumstance has proved both a challenge and a boon to New York-based theater ensembles seeking shelter under the umbrella of The Public Theater. On the one hand, mounting even six or seven medium-to-large scale productions of its own in the course of a fiscal year (including the two summer shows at the Delacorte in Central Park) is increasingly difficult for NYSF. On the other hand, it has five fully-functioning theaters available year-round within The Public Theater (in addition to Joe's Pub, now permanently functioning as a commercial, but curated, space on the ground floor of the building), and a desire to maintain a "critical mass" of both subscription and non-subscribed production activity within the building, in order to retain audiences and continue to bring in new ones. In this particular respect, The Public is fertile ground for independent ensembles of note that may have access to funding and production resources, but without venues of their own. That is, The Public continually has under-utilized or unoccupied performance spaces available within which ensembles might propose co-production projects.

Although the East Village has been transformed in two decades from a neighborhood of renters to (increasingly) a neighborhood of owners, and from a neighborhood of immigrant and artist communities to one of young(ish), "upwardly-mobile" professionals, The Public is (and always will be) surrounded by the ever-expanding NYU campus, and an enormous "permanent" population of students and faculty members, which essentially never ages. Therefore, a "youth audience" -- and an unusually sophisticated one, by national standards -- remains permanently at the center of The Public's aesthetic and organizational and marketing vision.

So in this respect, the continual presence within The Public of UTR Festival staff and of guest or resident ensembles embodying a youthful aesthetic represents an important “gateway” to younger audiences for the organization. While one audience may be flocking to the building to see Kevin Kline play *King Lear*, another equally important crowd is lining up to buy tickets to the latest play by Suzan-Lori Parks or Stephen Adly Guirgis, either of which is likely to be a co-production of NYSF with another, smaller theater organization, of the sort described in more detail in the next section of this case study.

In this section that follows, we shall look at The Public Theater’s current relationships with a handful of New York-based theater ensembles, exemplifying various modes of organizational collaboration and possible indicators of things to come.

Information collected herein has been gleaned through interviews with artistic and administrative leaders of the following organizations:

The Civilians (Steve Cosson, Artistic Director)

LAByrinth Theater Company (John Ortiz, Artistic Director; Philip Seymour Hoffman and Jon Gould Rubin, co-Artistic Directors)

Nature Theater of Oklahoma (Pavol Liska and Kelly Copper, co-directors)

Ontological-Hysteric Theater (Richard Foreman, Director)

The Public Theater / New York Shakespeare Festival (Oskar Eustis, Artistic Director)

The SITI Company (Anne Bogart, Artistic Director)

The Under the Radar Festival (Mark Russell, Artistic Director; Meiyin Wang, Associate Director)

The Wooster Group (Elizabeth LeCompte, Director; Cynthia Hedstrom, Producer)

### **Overview of current partnerships**

The Public Theater now supports and presents a sizable number of ensemble theaters in a variety of modes and relationships. Many of these, it must be noted, are companies of the highest order – unarguably among the finest in the nation, and ranging in age from 7 to nearly 30 years in operation. Most have several distinguishing characteristic elements in common:

- they are all based in New York City;
- they are all “artist-driven / artist-run” ensembles, still under the leadership of their founding members;
- although each troupe had its own, small “home base” of operations – a tiny theater,

- loft or office space – none has its own permanent venue (either leased or owned) of larger than 100 seats;
- each has a well-developed, distinctive, loyal and enthusiastic audience-base – the core of which was formed before the group’s arrival at The Public -- composed largely of young people and older “bohemian” theater-goers (-- or what is generally in New York City called “a downtown audience.”);
  - they all have a track-record of being written about consistently in glowing -- or at the least, very respectful – terms by local and national theater critics;

With the exception of LAByrinth Theater (which has always been a script-based or “playwrights” company), all of the rest are “process-driven” ensembles, in which the group’s projects are primarily rooted in a methodology, rather than a text by a single author, or derived from a single source. Even the works of Richard Foreman’s Ontological-Hysteric Theater, although composed by the distinguished author/director/designer prior to the rehearsal period, are texts arrived at via an elaborate methodology, rather than a conventional playwriting process.

In the following section of this study, a handful of ongoing theater ensembles are discussed as examples of those appearing in recent years as visiting or resident companies at The Public.

Before beginning that discussion, however, allow me to define a few terms and the ways in which I’ve employed them, within the context and for the purposes of this limited overview of The Public Theater’s institutional partnerships.

When referring to the *presentation* of an ensemble (for instance, by the UTR Festival), I am describing an engagement in which a company is paid an agreed-upon fee (usually “plus expenses”) for performing an already-existing work for a limited period of time. Normally, some of this fee precedes the engagement, and the remainder is paid to the troupe upon the completion of the engagement.

A *commission*, on the other hand – which may be linked to a presentation and precede it – is an agreement by which a presenter (a festival, or producing organization, etc.) contributes a fee towards the creation of a work, in advance, before it even exists – thereby helping an ensemble fund the creation process. These often take the form of *co-commissions*, in which a consortium of presenters bands together to collectively support the creation of a new work, usually in exchange for the right to premiere the production within each commissioning partner’s “home market” (be it a nation, a region, or a particular city).

A *co-production* – often the platform on which The Public constructs its partnership with New York City-based ensembles – is a relationship in which both parties (often a troupe and a venue, for instance) share the costs of opening and running a production (creation costs, technical costs, space costs, marketing costs, etc.) and in time share the income generated by the run, along agreed-upon terms. In some instances, the majority of the box

office income may accrue to the venue, in others to the troupe; and often the percentages will shift, as certain invested costs are recouped by each party. Two parties share the costs, the risks, and the eventual profits or losses.

In an instance in which the work of an ensemble is incorporated into the subscription season of a host venue, the terms of a co-production agreement are often more generous towards the ensemble – because advance / subscription income is being generated by the venue before the opening of the production, and the financial risk for both parties is often less. We will look at examples of this in the sections to come, when The Wooster Group's *Hamlet* or LAByrinth Theater's *Othello*, for instance, have been incorporated into The Public's annual subscription season, thereby lessening the need for NYSF to create a full year of productions "from scratch." In the case of the Wooster *Hamlet*, this involved a production that had already run in the city several times, in other venues, over a period of two years; yet Artistic Director Oskar Eustis felt strongly that most of The Public Theater's audience had yet to encounter the work, and might do so only if the show (so to speak) "came to them." The LAByrinth *Othello*, on the other hand, is a much-anticipated new production that will have its American premiere at The Public in the autumn of 2009, and may serve to encourage theatergoers to subscribe to The Public's season in order to assure themselves access to the very limited number of tickets that will be available for the limited run of performances.

With these terms in mind, then, let's look more closely at the on-going relationships of six New York City-based ensemble theaters to The Public Theater, where each has presented work on more than one occasion within the past several years. These ensembles are discussed below in order of the intensity of their involvement – both in terms of frequency and fiscal partnership – with The Public and NYSF. There are five categories or models of partnership:

### 1 – LAByrinth Theater Company

On one end of the spectrum, LAByrinth Theater Company – an ensemble dedicated to new play development – has been the sole officially designated "Resident Ensemble" of The Public for the past five years, having initially been invited into the building by Artistic Director George C. Wolfe. Since Eustis' appointment, at least one LAByrinth production has been included in each of The Public's annual subscription seasons, alongside runs of two to three additional LAByrinth productions in various Public Theater venues during the course of the year. Almost all have been premieres of new works by American writers, featuring a growing cadre of associate ensemble members that now numbers over 100, many of whom are artists of color. To date, LAByrinth has produced 50 new American plays and has received 12 Drama Desk Award nominations, eight Lucille Lortel Award nominations, two AUDELCO Award nominations, a Drama League Award nomination, an Olivier Award nomination, an Edinburgh Fringe First Award, and the 2002 Jujamcyn Theaters Award for outstanding contribution to the development of creative talent for the theater.

Before becoming the resident ensemble of The Public, LAByrinth had operated for over a

decade as an itinerant company, housing productions in one venue after another throughout New York City. While its reputation among artists and audiences grew, LAByrinth became somewhat notorious for being “hard to locate” or “difficult to follow” in the years prior to “settling down” at The Public. Now in its 17<sup>th</sup> year, LAByrinth has launched a determined effort to locate and acquire a building of its own in the years ahead, where it can consolidate its office, rehearsal, storage and performance space needs. Nevertheless, LAByrinth’s triumvirate of artistic directors (John Ortiz, Philip Seymour Hoffman and Jon Gould Rubin) have become very close friends and collaborators with Eustis, and have functioned as informal “associate artistic directors” of The Public during the past several years.

## 2 – The Civilians

The Civilians – a small ensemble that develops original music-theater works based on interview and “found” materials – has throughout its relatively short life been continually engaged in “development” or “laboratory” processes sponsored by The Public through its Public Lab and New Work Now! programs. Supported by an Arts Presenters ETC grant, one of The Civilians’ recent works, *Paris Commune*, enjoyed a three-week “workshop” run at The Public in the spring of 2008, with a subsequent run of the completed work anticipated sometime in 2010. More on this troupe follows shortly.

## 3 – The Wooster Group and Ontological-Hysterical Theater

In the autumn of 2007, an extended run of The Wooster Group’s *Hamlet* – a multimedia “deconstruction” of Richard Burton’s 1964 stage performance, directed by John Gielgud and subsequently recorded by Canadian television – was incorporated into The Public’s 2007-2008 Subscription Season. Although the production had already enjoyed more than eight weeks of sold-out performances at a mid-sized Brooklyn venue, both The Woosters and Eustis believed that there remained an “untapped” Manhattan audience for the work, and an important symbolic gesture to be made by the presentation of this work by Public.

In a similar vein, Richard Foreman’s Ontological-Hysterical Theater will premiere a new work, *Idiot Savant*, in The Public’s 2009-2010 Subscription Season. Although its home base (like The Wooster Group’s) is located just a short walking distance away, The Public is able to offer the company spaces with three to five times the capacity of its own venue, along with access to a wider and broader audience. Richard Foreman was a frequent resident artist during the later years of Joe Papp’s time at The Public. He directed a tremendously successful *Threepenny Opera* for the NYSF in 1976 (first at Lincoln Center and later at The Delacorte), several productions of works by other playwrights, and a handful of his own productions, prior to settling his troupe into a permanent home in the nearby Saint Marks Church. His upcoming return to The Public reaffirms publicly (as did The Wooster residency) the value placed by The Public on its support of the Downtown avant-garde tradition.

#### 4 – SITI Company

The Public's relationship with SITI Company, whose work has been presented during the annual Under the Radar Festivals, is of a different order, although not necessarily less useful or effective. While not incorporated into its Subscription Season, a different kind of platform has extended to many such companies by The Public, on a project-to-project basis.

At the time of its inclusion in the 2006 Under the Radar Festival, SITI's *Radio Macbeth* was barely hatched – an extension of work on two earlier SITI projects (*War of the Worlds* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and intended for future touring. In principle, it might (like the Wooster *Hamlet*) have eventually found its way to a longer run, upon completion, in a Public venue – SITI does not have its own performance space. But the immediate aim of the January 2006 performances was to launch both national and international touring for the 2006-2007 season and beyond.

SITI, of course, is a long-established troupe, under the direction of Anne Bogart, an internationally known director and theorist. But Under the Radar has just as carefully presented and launched some of New York's most obscure and youngest ensembles.

#### 5 – Nature Theater of Oklahoma

Nature Theater of Oklahoma (based in New York City) was formed by a young director not yet graduated from Anne Bogart's Directing program at Columbia University – Pavol Liska. Liska and his colleagues were at the heart of an earlier, imploded ensemble that Russell had presented at PS122 during the 1990s. After leaving the world of theater for a time, Liska and company re-emerged on Under the Radar's 2007 program with new work, new performers, and a radical new methodology.

*Poetics* (after Aristotle) was Liska's graduate school "thesis production" – a response to his initial career success staging "reinvented" classic plays, and to observing Bogart's SITI Company at close hand for several years. The show -- an extreme and wordless choreographic text on the nature of action and acting – proved an enormous "word of mouth" sensation at The Public, resulting in several dozen touring invitations for the fledgling troupe, both in the U.S. and abroad. "No Dice" (the tiny ensemble's next production, also showcased in Under the Radar) was a close examination of John Cage's theories of chance-selection, located in a world of temp-worker fantasies.

Nothing like SITI Company in character or appearance, Nature Theater of Oklahoma (or OK Theater, as they have come to be called) is indicative of the emergence in New York City of a post-SITI, post-Wooster, post-Foreman generation – having methodically absorbed the lessons offered by those master ensembles, but responding in a new language, unique unto itself and eschewing mimicry. For this new generation, Under the Radar has represented a critical new platform; and through the Festival, The Public maintains an on-going "open door" policy towards these young artists.

In the space of only two years, since its first performances at Under the Radar, OK

Theater has been transformed from an entirely obscure, completely unpaid East Village troupe of six malnourished young artists, to one of the nation's most widely-toured experimental ensemble theaters. In 2008, the company won a Village Voice OBIE Award for its Under the Radar performances and spent 40 weeks on the road with three different productions, touring the U.S., Canada, Europe and Asia. In 2009, it will present three new works at three different venues in New York City. The troupe now has a handful of fully-commissioned new works in development for 2010 and 2011, and has become fully self-supporting and salaried year-round – all largely a result of its Under the Radar exposure at The Public.

### **The Public Theater's goals for Ensemble Theater presentation**

#### Audiences

All of the ensemble leaders interviewed – from Civilians, LAByrinth, OK Theater, Ontological, SITI, and The Wooster Group – were absolutely certain that their performances at The Public had brought a wider audience to their work, not only in numerical terms, but also in the sense that individuals who would not have located the company's work at its accustomed venue(s) were encouraged by The Public to “give it a shot.” At the same time, Eustis is equally convinced that large numbers of first-time visitors to The Public have followed their favorite artists and ensembles to the downtown venue – a classic “win-win” model of organizational collaboration.

The ensemble directors – even those as distinguished and experienced as LeCompte, Foreman, and Bogart – all acknowledge presentation by The Public as a highly effective and widely recognized “seal of approval” – and no less so now than during Papp's lifetime. And for Eustis, presiding over a rapid diminishment of resources and numbers of fully produced presentations annually, these co-production opportunities represent a number of very positive prospects.

Firstly, he cites a “democratization” of audiences via this steady stream of ensemble collaborations, both inside and out of the Under the Radar context, and The Public's increased ability to address a wider variety of tastes, backgrounds, ages and income levels. Through various surveys and marketing initiatives, The Public has determined that a large percentage of its “new” audience members to the downtown theaters (not including the Delacorte/Central Park venue) enter via these ensemble presentations.

#### Redressing an balance of power

Secondly, Eustis professes a greater level of comfort with the more balanced power mechanics that accompany co-producing partnerships. Refusing the role of “taste-maker” and “impresario,” he prefers the peer-to-peer, artist-to-artist comradeship that collaborative models afford. In fact, in an effort to deepen the relationships even further, Eustis often volunteers his talents as a dramaturg to the project at hand – rarely becoming the dramaturg-of-record, but enjoying his role as “visiting dramaturg” to many of these ensembles during their period of residency, allowing him to enter the room as a fellow

collaborator, rather than as a “Big Daddy” producer (in the Pappian mode.)

Indeed, in the case of The Civilians’ *Paris Commune* – which centrally references the birth of European socialism following a popular urban uprising, and the spontaneous “people’s theater” performances that followed in the streets of Paris – the source material was so close to Eustis’ heart that he indeed soon became the project’s principal dramaturg (*on the record*) early in its development process, and remains so to this day.

### **The next generation**

Lastly, Eustis views the ensemble theater-making process as being the most historically successful crucible of young talent, both onstage and off. While ensembles are continually forming and dissolving, and while individuals often pass in and out of ensemble membership -- or, with increasing frequency, maintain “one foot in” an ensemble while a second career blossoms in the larger entertainment industry – Eustis professes a deep faith in ensemble training as the primary font of each new generation of fully-dimensional, civically engaged, aesthetically sophisticated emerging theater artists.

In Europe, he observes, state and civic repertory theater companies have traditionally absorbed the outstanding graduates of the national theater schools, completing the young artist’s training with a period of apprenticeship and maturation in an ensemble context. In the U.S., on the other hand, university-based training has promoted an individualistic and “every person for herself” attitude among young artists, with no clear developmental path offered to them upon graduation, and no on-going training implicit in their chaotic career trajectories.

Therefore, Eustis views exposure to the work of outstanding, on-going theater ensembles as central to the education of young artists, and to the national effort of promoting a deeper and more disciplined “other-centered” or civic-minded theatrical aesthetic among young artists and audiences.

While not desiring to “scavenge” talent from resident ensembles, Eustis feels strongly that performers like those of The Wooster Group, SITI Company, LABYrinth, The Negro Ensemble Theater, Mabou Mines, and Ontological-Hysteric (to name but a few Public-presented companies) deserve (if they so desire) opportunities to assay classical world theater and classic American repertoires, and to be exposed to larger audiences, both across the U.S. and abroad. He cites James Earl Jones, Tim Robbins, Joan Macintosh, Austin Pendleton, Laurie Metcalf, John Malkovich, Lili Taylor and the late Ron Vawter as indicative of ensemble-trained actors who went on to have distinguished careers, simultaneously inside and outside their “home” ensembles. This, he asserts, is an ideal model to which young artists might – and increasingly do – aspire, in part because of the platforms offered by The Public and other regional theater and arts center venues to the country’s finest ensembles, established and emergent.

## **An ideal project model**

An “ideal” ensemble partnership project in Oskar Eustis’ view is LABYrinth Theater’s forthcoming production of *Othello*, which will open The Public’s next subscription season in October 2009. Featuring LABYrinth Artistic Directors John Ortiz (as Othello) and Philip Seymour Hoffman (as Iago), alongside a sizable cast of LABYrinth associate artists, and directed by longtime LABYrinth mentor Peter Sellars, the production is a co-production of LABYrinth, The Public, and several major European and Asian theater festivals – insuring that it will have both a long period of development and an extended period of touring performance, reaching audiences around the world. And unlike other “star-driven” Shakespeare productions built around “pickup casts,” this *Othello* marries a classic text with LABYrinth’s long-cultivated developmental, multicultural and multiracial aesthetic -- bringing two great contemporary actors to roles that might have eluded them in another context, surrounded and supported by long-time colleagues.

In this sense precisely, Eustis sees his ambitions for such artists and ensembles as closely paralleling those of NYSF founder Joe Papp, who in his day cast and presented established and promising artists of color, highly idiosyncratic actors and performers in danger of being “lost to Hollywood” in major classical roles before wide audiences – often free of charge – and so transformed the American theater landscape, and the expectations of many young theater artists in the 1960s, ‘70s and ‘80s regarding the roles and repertoire available to them.

To Eustis’ mind, LABYrinth is the Negro Ensemble Company or Mercury Theatre of our time – seminal ensembles that rerouted the direction of American theater in decades past. And OK Theater might prove to be the Open Theater or Living Theater of today; or SITI Company the Group Theatre of now. In this sense, they are integral to his vision of the future of The Public – not its only agenda, but a central one.

## **The future**

On the other hand, the bond linking The Public to each of these “resident” ensembles – long-term or short-term – is temporal, idiosyncratic, and highly personalized. Each relationship is based on Eustis’ or Russell’s aesthetic attraction to a company’s work, sense of comradeship with the artists, and the ability of each organization to benefit immediately from the partnership.

Aside from The Public’s five-year engagement with LABYrinth Theater, each of its ensemble relationships is currently crafted and extended solely on a project-to-project basis.

LABYrinth, now 17 years old, is about to undergo a two-year transition in leadership and structure, alongside the establishment of its own operational base and theater venue. *Othello* – as “ideal” a model as it may be -- actually represents a mutually agreed-upon “beginning of the end” of the intense relationship between LABYrinth and The Public, as the two theaters begin to disentangle the threads of their mutual dependence.

Likewise, The Wooster Group -- whose *Hamlet* at The Public proved an entirely successful collaboration, in the estimation of both organizations -- is about to occupy for the long-term a new, similarly-sized venue being custom-built for the Group in the midtown Manhattan Baryshnikov Arts Center. The troupe will perform there annually and have a hand in curating the new venue during its periods of non-residency, effectively negating any further need for collaboration with The Public.

The Civilians, on the other hand, have experienced tremendous growth of commissioning and touring opportunities in recent years, with the success of its initial handful of productions and the emergence of composer Michael Friedman as a significant player in the realm of American musical theater. While The Public has had a hand -- sometimes a strong one, sometimes less so -- in the development of each of the troupe's projects to date, The Civilians now require more than project-to-project support. The company is intensively searching for ongoing institutional support in the form of a "home base" and a sturdier fiscal "umbrella." This represents a next stage of commitment that Eustis is not yet ready to extend to any ensemble, leaving The Civilians to pursue their quest for an alternative institutional "home." *Paris Commune*, the work recently supported by The APAP/NET Ensemble Theatre Collaborations Project, developed at The Public over several years and dramaturged by Eustis, is slated for presentation at The Public sometime in 2010 -- but it, too, might by that time mark the "beginning of the end" of the presenting partnership, should another organization step up to offer The Civilians an ongoing home.

### Conclusion

In brief, The Public is committed in the long-term -- or at least for the length of Oskar Eustis' tenure as Artistic Director -- to supporting the work of artist-run ensembles (especially local ensembles) in whatever mode and for whatever length of time seems appropriate and mutually beneficial in each instance. Although viewed as an institutional responsibility and as an element of The Public's aesthetic mission, ensemble partnership has not been translated by The Public Theater into any sort of structural commitment on an extended or ongoing basis.

The Public's Ensemble partnerships will continue to be framed, for the foreseeable future, on a project-to-project, season-to-season basis. And while such collaboration and support is plainly welcomed by the ensembles interviewed, it does not address the deeper need of some companies for the long-term promise of a physical and fiscal "home."

Even the commitment to hosting the Under the Radar Festival is reviewed annually by The Public's management and board; so while the model seems to work well now, there is no guarantee of its continuance in 3, 5, or 10 years' time.

In this respect, The Public affirms an ongoing commitment to "the field," to its audiences, and even to the next generation of theater artists, rather than to any *particular* troupe of artists or partnership model. The intensity of The Public's and Eustis' commitment far exceeds that of all but a very few large producing or presenting theaters

in the U.S. – but whether it will ever prove to be “enough” to meet the needs of its ensemble partners is a matter still unknown.

**Norman Frisch** is a veteran dramaturg, performance curator and producer. During the 1970s, he studied at The Yale School of Drama and worked with experimental theater laboratories in Poland, Denmark, and Wales. During the following decade, he began his long-standing collaboration with director Peter Sellars, and served for a number of years as a dramaturg and administrator for The Wooster Group at The Performing Garage in New York City. In the 1990s, he worked as a curator and producer for several important urban arts festivals, including The Los Angeles Festival, The International Festival of Arts & Ideas in New Haven, The Arts Festival of Atlanta, and the London International Festival of Theatre. Frisch has lectured and taught at NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts, Trinity College (Connecticut), Yale University, and at DasArts (Amsterdam). He has recently served as a dramaturg for productions by The Builders Association (New York) and MotiRoti (London), and organized “Show People: Downtown Directors and the Play of Time,” a multimedia exhibition at New York’s Exit Art. He currently curates film and performance programs at the Getty Villa Museum in Los Angeles.