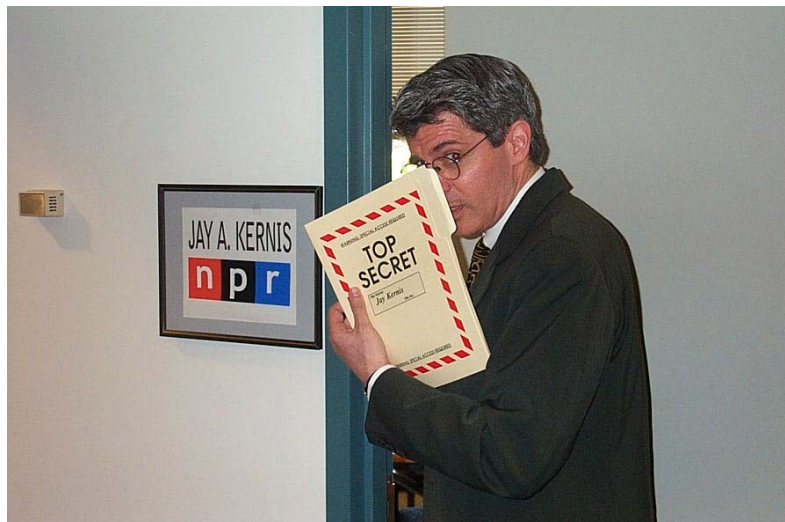




The Transom Review

Vol. 1/Issue 5

Elements of Creativity by Jay Kernis



This is an ode to fear and ambition, by Jay Kernis, creator of *Morning Edition* and *Weekend Edition*, late of CBS "60 Minutes" and now back at NPR as Senior Vice President for Programming. Ten days after his return, in May 2001, he read this litany at the Public Radio Conference in Seattle. He was asked to write something about Creativity for a panel on what is now known unglamorously as "Content."

ELEMENTS OF CREATIVITY

PRC/SEATTLE 5/01

I fear.

I fear and sometimes it's very useful.

I fear that the idea or the story or the program won't be good enough.

I fear I'm not smart enough.

I fear that I'm not smart enough to understand what the story is supposed to be about.

I fear that I will miss the point, that I've chosen the wrong people to interview, that they will lie to me and I won't catch it, that I haven't done enough research, that someone will get the story before me, that the alarm will NOT go off and I'll be late, that the guest won't show up, that the host will show up early, grumpy, hating the story and the guest to be interviewed.

I fear that the script will contain an error that will cause me humiliation and bring shame to the organization. Thank God hosts know no shame.

A haiku to a producer's FEAR, in 17 syllables:

*The work is so hard.
Sounds float like silver petals.
No one can hear them.*

I fear I will lose the tapes or the discs.

I fear that what I create won't be understood by the audience.

I fear that what I do will cause the listener to leave the radio in the kitchen and take a shower.

I fear that other participants in a story will phone or email afterwards to explain that it would have been a great job--if we had just discovered that our main character was wrong and the opposition was right.

In George Orwell's novel "1984", Winston Smith is taken to Room 101, to confront his worst fear. A chambered, mask-like cage is attached to his head and if the little door is opened, two rats will attack his face.

Radio producers visit Room 101 with some regularity, except the rats sit waiting—in our headphones.

I fear I will disappoint those who believe in me.

I fear losing my hearing, my sight.

I fear, therefore I am.

So I push harder, get up earlier, rewrite more often. Rethink. Rework. Not more than you do. More than I used to. I have a Plan B, and a Plan F.

When I was a kid, I feared what the other kids thought of me.

But not so much that it prevented me from raising my hand and speaking out loud.

I learned the value of signing up, getting out there, stepping up to the plate. That there was *worth* in wanting something more. Something different. Something that meant something, for God's sake.

So I learned how to get past the receptionists and the gatekeepers.

How to avoid the people who thought they were being paid to say no.

- Having nothing to fear didn't quite work for me, Mr. Roosevelt.
- Taking the other road has made all the diff-er-ence, Mr. Frost.
- I tried to move with the cheese, Dr. Johnson.

The revered philosopher of 20th Century culture and applied Judaism, Mel Brooks, has given us a useful idea of the kind of ambition necessary to do what we do. He recently said: Don't tiptoe into show business. Jump into it. Make a noise.

So today, I make noise for all of those people sitting out there in the dark. And I do it for you. And I do it for me.

And today, I don't fear the trying.

I don't fear the blank page or the blank screen.

I don't fear the tough question.

I don't fear the air.

I just fear a little bit of everything else, OK?

About Transom



What We're Trying To Do

Here's the short form: Transom.org is an experiment in channeling new work and voices to public radio through the Internet, and for discussing that work, and encouraging more. We've designed Transom.org as a performance space, an open editorial session, an audition stage, a library, and a hangout. Our purpose is to create a worthy Internet site and make public radio better.

Submissions can be stories, essays, home recordings, sound portraits, interviews, found sound, non-fiction pieces, audio art, whatever, as long as it's good listening. Material may be submitted by anyone, anywhere -- by citizens with stories to tell, by radio producers trying new styles, by writers and artists wanting to experiment with radio.

We contract with Special Guests to come write about work here. We like this idea, because it 1) keeps the perspective changing so we're not stuck in one way of hearing, 2) lets us in on the thoughts of creative minds, and 3) fosters a critical and editorial dialog about radio work, a rare thing.

Our Discussion Boards give us a place to talk it all over. Occasionally, we award a Transom.org t-shirt to especially helpful users, and/or invite them to become Special Guests.

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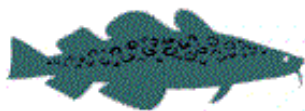
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ATLANTIC PUBLIC MEDIA

Atlantic Public Media administers Transom.org. APM is a non-profit organization based in Woods Hole, Massachusetts which has as its mission "to serve public broadcasting through training and mentorship, and through support for creative and experimental approaches to program production and distribution." APM is also the founding group for WCAI & WNAN, a new public radio service for Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket under the management of WGBH-Boston.

This project has received lead funding from the Florence and John Schumann Foundation. We get technical support from RealImpact.



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