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‘Actors as Important as Sputniks?’

The Relationship between Training and Subsidy
in the Australian Performing Arts
since World War II.

Rachel Landers

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of History
University of Sydney
August 2001

'Actors as Important as Sputniks?'

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Acknowledgements

This thesis has been a good companion to me. There have been times when I found nothing more enjoyable than to sink into its sprawling mass, climb up one tentacle after another, dig away at the detritus and barnacles stuck to its bulk and finally heave it up off the ocean floor into the light. The person I have to thank the most for its existence is my indefatigable supervisor Richard Waterhouse who pointed me in the direction of some dusty warehouses in Canberra where lay, like buried treasure, the papers of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. He has been a glorious navigator, intelligent, thorough, adventurous and patient, especially at those times when I would jump ship, trusting always that I would find my way back and get back on course.

I thank too the keepers of those dusty warehouses, the men and women at the National Library in Canberra who cheerfully hulked all those archive boxes to and fro, so I could scabble through their depths and for their tireless work in copying and sending the booty back to Sydney. My gratitude also goes to the Librarians of the Australian Archives, also in Canberra, who helped me discover the rich trove of material about Australia's early involvement with UNESCO. Most of all it goes to Virginia Kirby the Librarian of the Australia Council who provided me with literally kilos of material about the Council and who dug up the 2000 pages of the IAC Inquiry transcripts from a back room and let me copy them for free.

To those who have given love and support over the years I am enduringly grateful. To my lovely family Michael, Suzie, Odette, Jenny, David, my Nana (who told me "of course" I'd finish it) and most of all my clever and discerning Mother Lizzie. Her passionate lifelong quest fighting injustice has always filled me with enormous pride and I can only hope that some of that has seeped into this tome. To my dear friend Chris Mead who set out on his own thesis a few years ahead of me and who relayed back weather reports, dangerous shoals and potential gales ahead. That he became Dr Mead blinked like a friendly lighthouse and helped me through some dangerous final straits into safe harbour. Enduring gratitude to the gorgeous Sara Grenfell who is exactly the sort of best friend and fellow buccaneer a girl needs during a PhD - intelligent, funny and groundlessly optimistic. I thank Julian Knowles who assisted in the early days when my sails became hopelessly entangled and provided sound advice about how to set them straight. To Dylan who gave me the courage to enter uncharted waters and revealed new horizons. And finally to Jonathan who in the end made me realise it was I who had the strength to bring this ship to shore and complete the journey on my own.

Abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Commission
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACFTA	Australian Council for the Arts
AETT	Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust
ATA	Arts Training Australia
CAE	Council of Adult Education
DPWR	Department of Post War Reconstruction
IAC	Industries Assistance Commission
ITI	International Theatre Institute
MOB	Major Organisations Board
MEAA	Media and Entertainment Arts Alliance
NIDA	National Institute of Dramatic Art
STC	Sydney Theatre Company
STCSA	State Theatre Company of South Australia
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
URTC	Union Repertory Theatre Company

‘Actors, as Important as Sputniks?’
The Relationship between Training and Subsidy
in the Australian Performing Arts
since World War II.

Introduction

It was Hugh Hunt, the first Executive Director of the Australian Elizabethan Trust (AETT), who discovered on a trip to Soviet Russia in 1957 that the performing arts and actors in particular were as vital to, and as well subsidised in that culture as the space race. It was his fervent hope that in Australia our actors and performing arts would become as ‘Important as Sputniks’ as they were to the Russians and that the Federal Government would release a flood of funds to support them commensurate with that given to Defence or Health. At the time, there seemed little chance of this occurring. Simultaneous to Hunt’s trip abroad, Australian actors and their union Equity were involved in a bitter and ultimately unsuccessful dispute over Television quotas with the Menzies Federal Government who were busy vilifying them as communists. It was true however, that Government subsidy for the performing arts had only begun to trickle in three years earlier coinciding with the establishment of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust and Hugh Hunt and the other members of the Trust Executive had always said that the ‘Making of Australian Theatre’ would take many years to come to fruition. Therefore, it seems logical or at least possible that if one fast forwards through Australia’s cultural history we might find evidence of Hunt’s vision for increased support and an improvement in status of the performing arts and its practitioners.

In a few years time it will be the fiftieth anniversary of government subsidy to the performing arts in Australia, so the present would seem a good point to look at the contemporary performing arts industry and examine the fruits of the AETT’s seeds. One can ask again are actors now as important as Sputniks (or Submarines or Hospitals) in Australia? Was Hunt’s vision realised?

The answer to this is yes and no. Yes if one is training at one of our generously subsidised Government performing arts institutions and no if one is attempting to actually gain work or sustain a career as a professional actor. At the end of 2002 the most prestigious of the drama schools, the National Institute of Dramatic Art, will extend its existing multimillion dollar facility and open a 25 million dollar extension. This extension will include two contemporary theatres, a soundstage studio, post-production facilities, rehearsal rooms, a performing arts library and scenery and wardrobe workshops. The Director of NIDA stated that when these new facilities open, the institute would be “the best in the world”¹. Conversely, by last estimates, the average earnings of actors were calculated to be about \$11,000 per annum which meant the acting profession had “become one of the country’s lowest paid professions”². So, while actors may receive the equivalent training of Cosmonauts or officers at Duntroon or medical doctors, after they graduate their earnings remain below the poverty line.

How this paradoxical relationship came about is intimately linked to the slow and careful construction of subsidised ‘legitimate’ culture in Australia after the Second World War. It is also intimately linked to the entry into this country, in the era of post-war reconstruction, of certain ideologies promoted by International and Australian UNESCO, which mirrored ideologies contained in 20th century acting methodologies. These ideologies placed the function of legitimate drama over other of the performing arts and carried with them an urgent moral imperative to train both audiences and artists alike to properly receive, promote and interpret this legitimate culture which in turn reflected the tastes, beliefs and values of the dominant elite. The inculcation of these

¹ Mike Safe. ‘Hope and Glory’. *The Australian*. August 11th. 2001. p. 20.

² Karen McGhee. ‘Fame Without Fortune’. Employment Section. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. September 23rd. 1995. p. 25A. It is often very difficult to obtain an accurate gauge on average actor earnings because of the variations in the ways in which they are calculated. A recent 1999/2000 Australia Council report provided a figure of \$19,400 per annum as the *median* earnings for actors in 1995-6. Hans Hoegh Guldberg. *The Arts Economy. Three Decades of Growth in Australia*. Australia Council. 2000. p. 42. However this figure *did not* exclude earnings from “related arts work’ and ‘non-arts work’ as did the more detailed Australia Council report published in 1994 upon which the figure

ideologies into Australian society however, was a strained and protracted process and did not gain momentum until the establishment of the AETT in 1954. Even then, this organisation launched to assist the performing arts in Australia to be self-supporting, had to undergo a radical transformation in its original aims in order to become the vehicle to disseminate these ideologies on a national scale.

While the primary focus of the thesis is the subsidised performing arts in Australia, it opens with an examination and overview of the impact of international actor methodologies and their influence upon institutional actor training and legitimate performing arts culture from the beginning of the 20th century. The purpose of this is to make suggestions regarding the critical role these pedagogical systems had in the transformation of certain forms of the performing arts from sites of entertainment to sites of high educative, moral and therapeutic value. The purpose of this overview is also to suggest that two essential elements in the methodologies have been adopted, inherited and are utilised by the contemporary Australian legitimate performing arts industry. The first is the adoption of an educative and moral vocabulary inherent in the methodologies which is critical in arguments to justify why certain forms of culture should receive government subsidy and others not. The second is the inheritance of certain paradoxical conditions that accompany the introduction of such ideologies into a developing performing arts industry. The initial indication of such conditions came with the rise in moral status of the actor from artisan to artist at the beginning of the 20th century, which was in inverse proportion to their ability to control a market that was increasingly characterised by over supply and widespread unemployment. The emergence of this same kind of paradoxical relationship between image and industrial practice can be detected in Australia as coinciding with the earliest attempts to construct legitimate culture in the post WWII era utilising the moral and educative vocabulary of the methodologies.

The bulk of this thesis concentrates on the under-investigated operations of the AETT from its inception in 1954 to when it was replaced, as the principal distributor of Federal subsidy to the performing arts, by the Australian Council for the Arts in 1967. This period saw the creation of a model of the therapeutic/educative performing arts that has come to underpin and orientate all the subsidised (and thus legitimate) performing arts institutions, companies, funding bodies and training facilities in contemporary Australia. The period also saw the AETT initiate, construct and facilitate almost all the major performing arts organisations that exist today including the Australian Opera, The Australian Ballet, The Australian Ballet School, the State Theatre Companies and the National Institute of Dramatic Art. Through the construction of these institutions one can chart the entry of the methodologies into Australia. While it is always difficult to chart the practical consequences of an ideology, much less irrefutably prove that it is responsible for creating a specific industrial landscape, there is enough evidence to suggest that it had a dramatic and causal effect not only on how industry practice developed but upon how legitimate culture is sanctified and disseminated in this country.

Towards the end of the thesis there is an examination of the consequences of the therapeutic/educative model (that was first inherited from the AETT by ACFTA in 1967 and then by the Australia Council in 1973) for the contemporary performing arts industry in Australia. The results are less than edifying and reveal an industry racked by extraordinarily high unemployment and low earnings, whose practitioners do not represent the make-up of the population. This situation is continually exacerbated by the proliferation of subsidised performing arts training facilities that produce more and more highly qualified and effectively unemployable graduates every year³. The results also reveal that, despite large increases in subsidy over the last fifty years, attendances at subsidised performing arts performances are falling. Between 80 to 90 percent of the adult Australian population demonstrate a resistance to, and lack of interest in attending, the

legitimate performing arts despite almost fifty years of initiatives to educate them about the importance of their participation. Those that do go remain (as they were in the 1950s) primarily white, wealthy and well educated. Perhaps more important is the fact that these conditions and practices go, for the most part, unreported and have to be prised out of government surveys and reports that are intent on disseminating an inaccurate portrait of the industry as experiencing unprecedented levels of participation and growth. However, it would be incorrect to surmise that this dysfunctional cultural environment was the results of accidents and mistakes in cultural policy or that these 'problems' can or should be 'solved'. The model of the therapeutic/educative performing arts, as will be shown, works extremely well.

³ Liz Mullinar, "considered to be Australia's leading casting director", estimated "that for every twenty young hopeful {actors} receiving some form of training... only one goes on to make a living out of that profession". *ibid.* p. 25A.

Chapter 1.

Plans For A Theatre School

The purpose of the school would be as follows:-
To provide a course which will train actors and actresses in their professions, for stage, television and radio. A Diploma of Acting will be awarded to successful students of this full-time, two year course.

The purposes {of the school} must be governed by one consideration - that at a time when great numbers of semi-educated people are being exposed to a flood of entertainment calculated to appeal to their baser instincts and deliberately aimed at the lowest denominator of human intelligence, education of the taste of future audiences and practitioners in the field of entertainment is of prime importance.

The acting talent of the students would be further developed with particular use of Stanislavsky's method and with reference to contemporary dramatic material.¹

'Educating the Taste of Future Audiences and Practitioners in the Field of Entertainment'

In order to chart the impact of the phenomenon and proliferation of contemporary actor methodologies upon actor training and the performing arts from the beginning of the 20th century it is best to begin with an overview. This overview is essential because it enables one to identify the tendency in academic and practitioner discourse on the subject, to treat each of the methodologies as discrete innovations contributing to the story of modern theatre practice, rather than seeking out what makes them analysable as a whole. It will be demonstrated how this tendency obscures the immeasurable influence the methodologies have had upon institutional performing arts training and upon what constitutes legitimate subsidised culture. It also reveals how this discourse has failed to account for the disjuncture between the ideological precepts of the methodologies and the industrial realities of the performing arts.

¹ *Plans For A Theatre School: National Institute of Dramatic Art. Sydney 1958.* AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 21. p. 1.

An examination of the divisions and limitations of current discourse leads to a proposal for a more interdisciplinary approach to the subject.

Part two of the chapter begins, by locating the elements that unified the various methodologies. These included, firstly a common origin, secondly, that they could all only function from within a closed system of belief, thirdly, that they were all expensive to run and needed subsidy, and finally and most importantly, that they all shared the same moral and therapeutic ideological framework. This section then provides an explanation of how this ideological framework has come to underpin current performing arts practice and looks at its relationship to certain modern social theories pertaining to the arts. Part two concludes by investigating two apparently antithetical historical examinations of the acting profession in the mid to late, 19th century. This reveals the manner in which theatre history has failed to account for the emergence of a paradoxical relationship or disjuncture between the industrial realities and the ideological representations of the acting profession. This failure was principally owing to the fact that theatre historians have for the most part overlooked the development of a climate able to engender such a paradox, which was necessary for the methodologies to proliferate.

Part 1. Overview

The understanding and nature of the acting profession, amongst industrialised nations from the early 20th century on, has been profoundly influenced by the advent of methodologies devised to systemise, detail and provide instruction on the actor's art. What made these acting methodologies distinct from earlier speculations, descriptions and prescriptions of the craft of acting was that unlike those, these were "models and recipes of both *being* and *behaving* in life as well as on the stage"². Timothy J Wiles, one of the few Performance Theory Academics to speculate on the philosophical (if not practical) implications of the methodologies³ on contemporary theatre, succinctly explained that,

² Timothy J Wiles. *The Theatre Event: Modern Theories of Performance*. The University of Chicago Press. Chicago and London. 1980. p. 4.

³ Wiles referred to these acting discourses as theories rather than as methodologies. This was more than a matter of semantics. In labelling them as theories, Wiles reproduced the conventional reading of them as abstract entities. While he did situate them in their historical context, his emphasis was on examining their utility as modes of thought as they pertained to a theory of performance, and paid scant attention to the wider material consequences of their implementation on particular arts industries.

Earlier styles of acting, such as the one proposed by Hamlet to the Players, sprang from the mimetic tradition which sees art as a reflection of reality; these styles indicate what men are and hence how they may be faithfully copied in art. The innovation of modern acting theory, beginning with Stanislavsky⁴, is to move art from reflecting reality to being a kind of reality of its own, capable of affecting the “real world” of which it is a *part*, not a *copy*. Modern performance theory proposes models of what men *ought to be*, and hence how they might be enacted in life.⁵

These acting methodologies came to underpin and orientate virtually all contemporary actor training (both government and private) in industrialised nations and contained prescriptions and ideals for modern theatre practice. As a canon, they had at their centre, the work of the great contemporary theatrical innovators beginning (as noted above) with the Russian actor/director Stanislavski and included, amongst others, the methodologies of Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski⁶. This canon also contained a mass of variations, extrapolations, derivations, deformations and alternatives of the masters work, that clustered around and continually emerged, making the field of discourse about actor methodology and practice a huge, dense and unwieldy subject. To complicate matters further, this vast realm of frequently contradictory jargon, ideology and debate did not necessarily appear neatly in sets of published texts that could be laid side by side for analysis and discussion. The ideas, practices, teaching methods and belief systems contained within them could travel by anecdote, teacher, student and workshop without ever appearing in written form. They could cross continents and be adopted (rarely in their original form) by acting schools, theatre companies and government arts organisations, decades before they appeared in print or indeed decades after the primary source faded into obscurity and/or legend. Like an elaborate system of Chinese whispers they could distort, reform and shift into quite distinct entities, at times so

Alternatively, the term methodology, as associated with pedagogics, seems to me to be a much more successful description because it not only combines issues of the analysis and evaluation of subject matter and methods of teaching, it also encompasses the broader definition, the science of method. This encapsulated perfectly the explicit intentions of the authors and disseminators of acting methodologies, like Stanislavski, to not only teach the art of acting but also to create a life in and from art.

⁴ Note on spelling. I use the European spelling - Stanislavski. Americans however, tend to use ‘y’ instead of ‘i’ – Stanislavsky.

⁵ *ibid.* p. 4.

⁶ For the most comprehensive collection of these innovator’s methodologies see Alison Hodge (Editor) *Twentieth Century Actor Training*. Routledge. London. 1999. In addition to those above it includes the theories, training exercises and/or production techniques of Stella Adler, Peter Brook, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Joan Littlewood, Jacques Copeau, and Lee Strasberg.

different to the source material that they produced yet another spate of methodologies. These would attempt to either re-establish the original model, unify the differences or, as was more often the case, create new hybrid forms that in turn generated their own reactions⁷.

An Example

While the intention of this chapter is to focus on the unities rather than distinctions and disagreements between acting methodologies (which were extensive), it is useful to provide a specific example of the kind of convoluted pedagogical/historical paths a methodology can lead.

The National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA), the oldest government actor training facility in Australia, recently provided each of the first year acting students with a 12 page document entitled *Acting Classes*, which detailed a series of technical exercises that represented the methodological focus of the year's work. On the first page it was stated, "these exercises and explanations are a supplement to the work given in acting classes. They are intended as a guide, and relate to the fuller clarifications given in class"⁸. On page 5 there was a description of an exercise entitled Private Moment and on page 8 one called Effective Memory. There was nothing that distinguished these two exercises from those that surrounded them, but together they in fact represented the key element in one of the most ferocious debates within the canon of acting methodologies. While the document had no author, it was clearly presented as being *based* on the work of Stanislavski. This in itself was not surprising while the school teaches a number of different acting techniques and methodologies, the one of most significance influence, as stated in the syllabus, was that of Stanislavski⁹. However, if one were to read the three texts purporting to represent the whole of Stanislavski's acting methodology, the 'System' –

⁷ Lawrence Parke described this process as self perpetuating – "{Acting teachers} continued to drift further and further into their own systems, their own approaches and their own terminologies... that drift continues to this day, with the people taught by those early teachers and, later, the people they taught, as they too turned to teaching, still drifting ever outward along separate networks and tributaries of widening differences". *Since Stanislavski and Vakhtangov*. Acting World Books. Hollywood California. 1985. p. 7.

⁸ 'Acting Classes'. Document provided to 1st year Acting students. National Institute of Dramatic Art. 1996.

⁹ National Institute of Dramatic Art. *Syllabus*. NIDA Publications. 1999.

*An Actor Prepares, Building a Character, Creating a Role*¹⁰ - it would be difficult to find a match between the basic sequential exercises laid out in instruction manual style in the *Acting Classes* document and the dense, semi-fictional narrative prose contained in Stanislavski's own texts¹¹. The principal reason for this difference was that the document *Acting Classes* was not in fact based upon those texts, but upon the book *Respect for Acting* (a set text for first year acting students) written in 1973 by the American acting teacher Uta Hagen¹². Hagen's book contained many similar exercises to those in the document. However, the Private Moment and Affective Memory¹³ exercises she details, were in fact derived (but not referenced) from the actor training methodology known as 'The Method', taught by, amongst others, Lee Strasberg, who ran the New York Actor's Studio from the 1950s on¹⁴.

Strasberg described The Method as "a continuation of and an addition to Stanislavsky's 'System' in Russia"¹⁵. This rather innocuous definition stood in stark contrast to the enormous body of primarily practitioner generated discourse, characterising Strasberg's Method as a complete misreading and/or corruption of the System. The impressive number of texts devoted to the specific subject of debunking the Method and re-presenting the correct tenets of Stanislavski's System were all fairly

¹⁰ Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*. Methuen. London. 1980. *Building a Character*. Methuen. London. 1980. *Creating a Role*. Methuen. London. 1980.

¹¹ Stanislavski's prose style owed more to the 19th century than the 20th. His methodology was expressed in a semi-fictional form in which the inexperienced actor Kostya keeps a kind of diary of his experiences and dialogues with the visionary and brilliant director Tortsov through the first years of his training as an actor. Both characters were in fact, as explained by the translator Elizabeth Hapgood, Stanislavski himself – this gave him, "the freedom of speech, especially about the faults that harass actors, that he would not have if he used the names of actual players". 'Note By the Translator'. *An Actor Prepares*. Methuen. London. 1980. pp. i-ii. This form of dialogue between novice and teacher echoed the kinds of Socratic dialogues that were the popular form of many earlier treatises on acting. One example was Denis Diderot's famous tract *The Paradox of the Actor*. Hill and Wang. New York. 1957. In this text a dogmatic 'first' argues against the idea that an actor must feel emotion to express emotion; with a docile 'second'. An example more recent to Stanislavski was William Archer's *Masks and Faces: A Study in the Psychology of Acting*. Longmans. Green and Co. London, New York. 1888. Archer presented a completely antithetical argument to Diderot. Based on interviews with British and French actors of the day, he found that many did feel their parts and this was no impediment (if controlled) to a good performance. He inverted Diderot's dialogue, replacing the first and second with, "a trained psychologist and a experienced and versatile actor". p. 3.

¹² Uta Hagen. *Respect for Acting*. Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc. New York. 1973.

¹³ While the spelling of the exercise differs in the NIDA document - 'Effective Memory' and Hagen's text - 'Affective Memory', they were both identical.

¹⁴ One of Hagen's detractors (another acting teacher) referred to her book as, "a total waste of time. It's simply warmed-over Method as rehashed by Hagen and her husband, Herbert Berghof". Don Richardson. *Acting Without Agony: An Alternative to the Method*. Allyn and Bacon Inc. Boston, London, Sydney, Toronto. 1986. p. 6.

¹⁵ Lee Strasberg. *A Dream of Passion: The Development of the Method*. Bloomsbury. 1987.

similar in argument¹⁶. They all asserted that Strasberg's Method was incorrect because it was derived not from Stanislavski's texts, nor his teachings, but was acquired second hand by him and other Americans from a number of Stanislavski's students who emigrated to the USA after a Moscow Art Theatre tour to New York in the 1920s. These ex-students (including Richard Boleslavsky¹⁷ and Maria Ouspenskaya) went on to teach various members of the 1930s left wing Group Theatre Company, whose members included Elia Kazan, Lee Strasberg, Harold Clurman¹⁸ and Stella Adler. However, according to this argument, it was discovered in 1934 by Stella Adler on a trip to Paris¹⁹, that Stanislavski had altered his methodology subsequent to these students' departure from Russia and thus the System they had disseminated was at worst wrong and at best unrepresentative of the whole. The Affective Memory exercise that Strasberg refined through his Private Moment exercise was, according to Stella Adler via Stanislavski, only "to be used in special cases when everything else failed and was by no means a "tenet" of the System"²⁰. According to some practitioners, Strasberg simply refused to accept this²¹. Others stated that he produced the rationalisation that Stanislavski had gone back on his own teachings²² and/or blindly persisted in pursuing his own interpretation of the absolute truth of acting²³. Strasberg was accused of a panoply of sins, which included, "giving actors and teachers the right to practice medicine and psychoanalysis without a license",

¹⁶ Charles Marowitz. 'Stanislavsky and After'. *The Act of Being*. Secker and Warburg. London. 1978.

¹⁷ Richard Boleslavsky. *Acting the First Six Lessons*. Dennis Dobson. London. 1949.

¹⁸ Harold Clurman directed Uta Hagen in a number of productions in the 1940s and her own technique was greatly influenced by him. While Clurman famously broke with Strasberg in the 1950s, Hagen mentioned nothing of this split in her book *Respect for Acting* so it is impossible to determine whether she agreed or disagreed with it. As tends to happen, her work represents a hybrid of various methodologies and ideas. Hagen. *op. cit.* p. 8.

¹⁹ The author/teacher to make the most of this discovery was Robert Lewis in his series of public lectures that were published as *Method or Madness?* Samuel French Inc. New York, Toronto, London. 1958. He included the 'chart' that outlined the true 'System' that Adler had purportedly got from Stanislavski that 'proved' the Method was wrong. pp. 23-31.

²⁰ One of the most recent rejections of Strasberg's 'Method' can be found in Richard Hornby's *The End of Acting: A Radical View*. Applause Books. 1992. This book was described by the theatre critic Forster Hirsch as, "a call to dislodge the Strasberg method from its stranglehold over the teaching and practice of acting in America. Other texts that reiterate the argument above include, Charles Marowitz. 'Stanislavski and After'. *The Act of Being. op. cit.* Lawrence Parke. *Since Stanislavski and Vakhtangov. op. cit.* Don Richardson. *Acting Without Agony. An Alternative to the Method. op. cit.* Ned Manderino. *All About Method Acting*. Manderino Books. Hollywood, California. 1985.

²¹ Lawrence Parke stated that Strasberg's response to the call to abandon teaching 'the Affective Memory' technique was to cry "I never will". *Since Stanislavski and Vakhtangov. op. cit.* p. 6.

²² Marowitz. *op. cit.* pp. 11-12.

²³ Don Richardson. *Acting Without Agony. An Alternative to the Method. op. cit.* pp. 8-12.

robbing the “theatre for several generations of variations in styles”²⁴ and “crippling ten actors for every one that it aided”²⁵. Were these accusations true²⁶? And by connection were these exercises, that came from Russia to New York and eventually to NIDA in Sydney, via Stanislavski, Boleslavsky, Strasberg, Hagen and finally the acting teachers at the Australian acting school, simply wrong?

Returning to Stanislavski’s own texts for clarification offers minimal assistance. His first book on the System was only published two years before his death in 1936 and did not substantially contradict Strasberg’s teaching, containing as it did a chapter on Emotion Memory²⁷. While Stanislavski could not have known there would be such a gap between the publication of the other two instalments (1949 and 1961), the first book contained no warning that it was in fact only part of his System and that it must not be read in isolation. This was in spite of the fact that, according to Strasberg’s detractors, Stanislavski knew from Adler, two years before the first publication, that a group of Americans were disseminating an incorrect version of his methodology. Furthermore, while System purists have made much of the fact that the Stanislavski’s two later texts focus upon physicality and external influences (as opposed to the internal), there was also nothing within them that contradicted or dismissed the assertions of the first. There was also evidence in some of his correspondence that these texts, dictated²⁸ at the end of his life may have reflected an idealised notion of theatre and theatre training rather than the absolute truth of what he achieved in his lifetime²⁹. In a letter to Stalin, two years before his death he wrote,

I want to devote all my experience, all my knowledge, all my time and health, my final years, to the creation of a genuinely creative theatre. In my search for ways of

²⁴ *ibid.* p. 4

²⁵ Marowitz. *op.cit.* p. 12.

²⁶ A recent collection of essays deals exclusively with the origins, veracity and repercussions of the debate. The first essay details the history of the anti-Strasberg phenomena. David Krasner. ‘I Hate Strasberg’: Method Bashing in the Academy’, in David Krasner (Editor) *Method Acting Reconsidered*. Macmillan. London. 2000.

²⁷ Stanislavski. ‘Emotion Memory’. Chapter IX. *An Actor Prepares. op. cit.* pp. 163-192.

²⁸ It was possible that these three texts were not verbatim Stanislavski. The first and possibly second books were dictated by Stanislavski in Russian to Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood who then automatically translated them into English in which they were all first published. The final book, published in 1961 were translations of Stanislavski’s notes which were edited by Hapgood.

²⁹ A more detailed discussion on the historical context of Stanislavski’s methodology appears in Chapter 7.

creating such a theatre I have turned to the young and a few months ago founded an Opera-Dramatic Studio to this end and am working on a second book in which I want to pass on all my experience and all my knowledge. However, one of the most important ways forward is the preservation and development of the creative riches accumulated by the Art Theatre. A certain section of the company treats these riches in an off hand manner: for them greater creativity, which places greater demands on them as people as artists, is an unnecessary nuisance³⁰.

Perhaps the great irony of this clearly self-renewing³¹ debate was that the potency of Stanislavski's System and the speed with which it became the ubiquitous training methodology of the 20th century, had little to do with the accurate dissemination of its contents. The popularity and spread of this methodology owed more to the fact that it provided a legitimising and moral framework for the acting profession and contributed to a developing respectability of the industry. This same principle applied to those methodologies that were regarded as being antithetical to Stanislavski's System such as the work of his student Meyerhold or that of Bertolt Brecht for which there existed a similar (although less extensive) proliferation of contentious debate³².

Despite the fact that the methodologies seem at best to represent a fairly amorphous collocating set of training systems for the actor, their significance as a whole cannot be underestimated. Apart from their overt impact this century on the training, professional practice, working conditions and conception of the function of the actor, they were also explicitly connected to the emergence of the modern theatre company structure. In addition, they contributed to the development of, and relationships between, other contemporary theatre professions, such as the director and the theatre administrator. Furthermore, the ideologies contained in, and associated with, these methodologies spiralled out, affecting not only the behaviour and role of the audience, but also

³⁰ Letter, Stanislavski to Stalin. Autumn 1935. *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters*. Selected, edited and translated by Jean Benedetti. Methuen Drama. Great Britain. 1995. pp. 353-4.

³¹ Presumably NIDA students (who have no way of discerning from the material they are given in class that their acting exercises were part of a convoluted and contentious international debate) could go on and become acting teachers and reproduce the material they themselves were taught and thus continue to be in conflict with anti-Method, anti Strasberg, Stanislavski purists.

³² Most of the debate regarding Brecht was focussed on his apparently anti-Stanislavski methodology detailed in his 'Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect'. in *Brecht on Theatre*. Edited and translated by John Willet. Methuen. London. 1964. pp. 136-147.

contributed to the construction of contemporary subsidised and legitimate performing arts culture.

Acting Methodologies as a Phenomenon

The decision to explore the methodologies as a total phenomenon challenges the common preoccupation, of academics and practitioners alike, of regarding each of them as distinct and discrete innovations contributing to the progressive narrative of the acting profession and the modern theatre from the beginning of the 20th century. Treating them as a totality also enables one to generate a series of important yet rarely asked questions, which do not appear in the bulk of academic and practitioner discourse. For example why, given the fact that the institution of theatre is thousands of years old, did it become not only necessary but also essential that the actor in the 20th century had a specific and structured theoretical (and moral) approach, to his or her craft? How did these methodologies differ from earlier training models? From what ideological, aesthetic and philosophical assumptions were these methodologies generated? What were the practical implications of the methodologies on working conditions, employment, the status of the actor, and the industry itself? Why, given that most theatre academics and practitioners agree that the acting methodologies have had a significant influence on modern theatre, was so little research done on investigating the relationship between the ideological prescriptions of the methodologies and their effect, or lack thereof, on industry practice? Or to put it another way, was the kind of actor and the kind of theatre, to be trained and produced via the methodologies, in evidence in industry practice? And if not why not? Given that virtually every actor training institution operating in industrialised nations, whether government or privately funded, subscribed in part to one or other of the methodologies, could one assume that the industry to some degree reflected the practices and philosophies emanating from them? Moreover, if the industry did not reflect them in practical working conditions, did they embrace them as kinds of utopian but impossible goals? Did this, in turn, contribute to the construction and perceptions of what constituted the legitimate actor, theatre and performing arts culture in modern society and thus deserved to be subsidised by the State? And if the methodologies did function as a sort of ideological belief system, how did this disjuncture between training

ideology and industry reality, not only maintain itself but go unrecognised and thus unexplored?

Academic and Practitioner Discourse

The tendency not to analyse acting methodologies as a whole and in relation to industry practice existed not only in sources that dealt specifically with actor training, theory and technique, but also in those concerned with theatre history and performance theory. The material can be separated into three autonomous realms that, quite surprisingly, seldom overlap. One, the Academic; two, Governmental/Institutional; and three, Practitioner oriented/originated. Each of these realms contributed to the manner in which acting methodologies have come to be situated in contemporary arts practice.

Academic

Academic theatre discourse can be divided into two broad areas - the empirical and the theoretical. The separation, often but not always discrete, reflected the divisions between the different disciplines from which they emerged³³. The empirical was most often located in non-vocational, more 'traditional' disciplines - such as History, English or more contemporary courses such as Theatre/Performance Studies (which did have a substantial theoretical stream). This material ranged from documentary style histories of theatrical epochs³⁴, styles of performance³⁵ and the careers of significant theatre practitioners³⁶. More recently, historical analysis has included subjects such as the concrete realities of theatre practice, such as theatre buildings, attendance, content, working conditions and the effects of political, legal,

³³ It is important to note that even if institutions present a course that deals with both the empirical and the theoretical they are presented, more often than not, as separate subjects. An interesting analysis of the lack of correspondence between cultural and media studies and the approaches used to frame public policy in Australia can be found in Stuart Cunningham's *Framing Culture; Criticism and Policy in Australia*. Allen and Unwin. Sydney. 1992.

³⁴ For example; Rush Rehm. *Greek Tragic Theatre*. Theatre Productions Studies. Routledge. London, New York. 1994. John C. Coldeway. (Editor) *Early English Drama: An Anthology*. Garland Publishing. London. 1993. Sheridan Morley and Rith Leon. *A Century of Theatre*. Gatefold Paperback. London. 1999.

³⁵ Margaret Eddershaw. *Performing Brecht*. Routledge. London, New York. 1996. Kimberley W. Benston. *Performing Blackness: Enactments of African American Modernism*. Routledge. London and New York. 2000.

³⁶ James Inverne. *The Impresarios*. Oberon Books. London. 1998.

moral and economic factors on theatre practice³⁷. While this later form of theatre history did sometimes note the significance of acting methodologies and or the rise of the director in the 20th century³⁸, they did so unproblematically and positivistically. These texts rarely questioned the contexts from which the methodologies arose in any detail, and they tended to be accepted uncritically as steps in the 'progress' of modern theatre.

Theoretical academic discourse tended to be situated in structuralist and post-structuralist influenced disciplines such as Fine Arts, Performance/Theatre Studies and Gender Studies. The analysis often utilised conceptual frameworks of semiotics, literary criticism and/or post-modernism and functioned in a much more ahistorical manner. This discourse, which included the work of Keir Elam, Patrice Pavis and Herbert Blau³⁹, proposed the notion of a meta-theatre or a meta-performance as a model of analysis, and was often involved in debates about the definition of the dramatic text. It questioned what one should read from a performance, the play text, the space, the actors body or the complex interplay of sign systems between space, actor and audience⁴⁰. This discourse could also concentrate on notions of ideology, representation, sexuality, and gender⁴¹. While it did sometimes engage in comparative analysis of the methodologies of Stanislavski, Brecht, Artaud or Grotowski it was only usually done in a conceptual vacuum. Such analysis tended to remove both practitioner and methodology from their historical/material contexts and consequently excluded issues such as working conditions, economics and

³⁷ Iain Mackintosh. *Architecture, Actor and Audience*. Routledge. London and New York. 1993.

³⁸ Susan Cole. *Directors in Rehearsal. A Hidden World*. A Theatre Arts Book. New York. 1995. Phillip. B. Zarrilli. Anne Bogart (Editor). *Acting (Re)Considered. Theory and Practice*. Routledge. New York and London. 1995.

³⁹ Keir Elam *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. New Accents, Methuen, London and New York. 1980. Patrice Pavis. *Problems of a Semiotics of Gesture*. Poetics Today. 1981. Herbert Blau. *The Audience*. The John Hopkins University Press. Baltimore and London. 1990. What was most fascinating in these examples of theoretical discourse was their preoccupation with segmentation and coding of the various principles of performance – 'communicational', 'representational', 'logical', 'fictional', 'linguistic', 'structural' - in order to render the elements as analysable quantifiable units - a preoccupation that was echoed in some of the actor methodologies themselves.

⁴⁰ For example, Alan Read's view that, "{Historical} writing offends the corporeality of theatre by its limited range of representational forms, which, though dependent on manual dexterity, are slight in comparison to the performer's flexibility". Alan Read. *Theatre and Everyday Life: An Ethics of Performance*. Routledge. London and New York. 1991.

⁴¹ Examples of these texts also include. Colin Counsell and Laurie Wolf (Editors). *Performance Analysis: An Introductory Coursebook*. Routledge. New York and London. 2001. Lizbeth Goodman and Jane de Gay. *The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance* and *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance*. Routledge . New York and London. 2000 and 1998.

the industrial realities of the experiences of those employed in, or attending the theatre. For example, a text such as *The Grotowski Sourcebook*⁴² would include detailed essays from critics and practitioners on the nuances of the Polish directors theatre work, but would not provide information on how much the actors in the company earned.

Government/Institutional.

The government and institutional discourse that circulated around the methodologies functioned primarily as a means of disseminating information about existing actor training courses and industry conditions. While at times this discourse included critical explorations of work conditions and training requirements, expertise for such debate was sought exclusively from the practitioner and not the theatre academic⁴³. Such discourse included anything from an Actors' Equity survey of 600 actors' training experience for the Trades Practices Commission (in a case for increasing the minimum wage), to publications from Arts Training Australia, an advisory body that liaised between the industry and government training institutions⁴⁴. It also included mission statements from subsidised theatre companies, or training outlines (such as the one that appeared at the head of this chapter) from various vocational actor-training institutions⁴⁵. Such material revealed clearly the manner in which the methodologies were regarded both by institutions and government bodies as unproblematic entities. For example, the Equity survey above was part of a project conducted under the auspices of the Entertainment Industry Employers Association, the Equity section of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance and Arts Training Australia. The project was concerned with establishing Live Theatre Performer

⁴² Richard Schechner. *The Grotowski Sourcebook*. Routledge. New York and London. 2001.

⁴³ For example, the section entitled 'Training: A Vital Issue' in the 1976 UNESCO Report *Entertainment and Society in Australia. Part B. The Performing Arts*, offered no more than a cursory summary of existing drama schools. There was no discussion of what was taught at them besides 'drama' and no analysis of how they functioned in relation to the industry. UNESCO Publications 1976. pp. 114-116.

⁴⁴ Arts Training Australia. *National Vocational Education and Training Plan for the Arts and Cultural Industries*. Arts Training Alliance Publications. March 1994.

⁴⁵ John Clark. Director of NIDA. 'Report on a study trip, November 1971 to January 1972 made with the assistance of the Australia Council for the Arts. March 25, 1972'. *The Work of the National Institute of Dramatic Art, in Relation to Canadian, British and some European Schools*. Australia Council. The sole comment upon the teaching methods of the acting course of NIDA was that they did "not vary significantly from other schools; {sharing} a strong emphasis on technique and craft skills in movement, speech and acting, and a balance between formal teaching and performance in the organisation of the timetable". p. 1.

competency standards and recording the level of training/skills of Australian performers. It was commissioned in part to provide “input for the industrial parties in their negotiations to re-structure industrial awards” and did not link analysis of what was actually taught in various drama schools to the effects it may have had upon the industry as a whole. The focus was upon skills and not acting methodologies, which were not mentioned⁴⁶.

The above should not be regarded as an exhaustive description of the academic and institutional responses (or lack thereof) to actor methodologies and actor training. However, these texts did reveal an absence of critical analysis about the repercussions of how the various methodologies have shaped the training practices of institutions, how they have interacted with industrial practice and how they have contributed to the construction of what constitutes ‘legitimate’ culture. Amongst these texts, there existed virtually no comprehensive attempts to connect and analyse, the historical, political, economic and social contexts from which the methodologies were disseminated, and the types of the institutions, work practices and ideologies that these methodologies inspired and initiated and the subsequent effect they have had on performing arts industries. What was lacking was the necessary theoretical framework to tie together the practices of theatre history, performance theory, actor training, government arts policies and conceptions of culture with the realities of content, employment, work practice and economics. Such a framework becomes necessary in order to uncover and unravel the links between the material machinations and philosophical precepts of contemporary actor methodologies on the one hand and on the other, the historical, cultural and social changes in the performing arts cultures of industrialised nations.

Practitioner Discourse

One possible reason for the absence of the kind of critical analysis noted above, could be that that it was a reaction to the insular nature of the jargon-saturated texts that emanated from, and were orientated to practitioners themselves. This discourse included the methodologies and

⁴⁶ Ian Predl and Associates. *Live Theatre Performers: Skills Analysis/Skills Audit Project*. Media and Arts Alliance Archives. October. 1992.

interpretations of them, and were primarily orientated to instructing the acting teacher and/or actor as to the utility of particular models (exercises, systems, ideologies) of actor training they offered or critiqued. These texts tended to exclude the non-practitioner (for reasons detailed below) and simply accepted the validity and necessity of a methodological basis for actor training. As was shown, debate in these tracts was situated around whether one methodology was more useful than another or focussed on issues of interpretation, such as the texts that advocated or debunked Strasberg's Method and called for a return to the original methodology of Stanislavski.

Theatre academics and critical theorists may have been further wary of applying practical and critical analysis to the phenomenon as a whole because of the substrata of non academic discourse that orbited around practitioner discourse. This included manifestos for the theatre⁴⁷, vocational guides, auto/biographies of stars, and anecdotal guides. More recently there have been a spate of texts focussed on Dramatherapy and Psychodrama⁴⁸ as well as psychological treatises orientated to determining the generic psychological profile of the actor,

Like the pearl, the embryo actor comes into being through some physic discomfort which forces him to reject the world accepted by the majority of people for a smaller world of painted canvas and artificial light in which individuals speak not their own words but the words of others and act out interpretations of Passions not their own.⁴⁹

Part 2. Elements that Unify Contemporary Acting Methodologies

The first factor that unified contemporary actor methodologies was the identification of Constantin Stanislavski as the original architect of the modern conception of actor training. He was referred to, as the 'father' (Benedetti⁵⁰), 'the master' (Copeau and Lewis⁵¹) and 'the great reformer'

⁴⁷ Julian Beck. *The Life of the Theatre: The Relation Of The Artist To The Struggle Of The People*. City Lights. 1972.

⁴⁸ Ann Cattanch Chesner, Sue Jennings, Steve Mitchell and Brenda Meldrum. *The Handbook of Dramatherapy*. Routledge. London. 1993. Marcia Karp, Paul Holmes and Kate Bradshaw Tauvon. *The Handbook of Psychodrama*. Routledge. 1998.

⁴⁹ Yoti Lane. *The Psychology of the Actor*. Greenwood Press Publishers. Westpoint, Connecticut, 1960. p. 25. Also Brian Bates. *The Way of the Actor: A New Path to Personal Knowledge and Power*. Century. London, Melbourne, Auckland, Johannesburg. 1986.

⁵⁰ Jean Benedetti. *Stanislavski*. Methuen. London. 1988. p. 2.

(Grotowski⁵²) by other practitioners. Even those who took issue with his ideas and/or sought to revise them, such as Brecht and Meyerhold, promoted the idea that Stanislavski was the first to formulate, systematise and transcribe a consistent acting methodology. The general view amongst practitioners and interpreters of his work, was that, “Constantin Stanislavski must come first in any history of theatrical innovation that unites acting practice with philosophical implications” because of his development of an “acting methodology which also referred to larger concerns beyond theatre practice”⁵³. Practitioners and academics alike regarded Stanislavski’s methodology as the unproblematic genesis of modern performance theory and theatre practice. As was the case of Darwin and Freud, if antecedents were cited (which was infrequent - most methodologies regarded their history as beginning with the 20th century), they were done so in a causal and linear sense directed toward the vortex of Stanislavski’s methodology⁵⁴. Likewise, it was from the perspective of that vortex that all subsequent methodologies conceived of themselves and were seen to emerge.

The second common element one can identify, was what can be described as the ‘closed’ nature of the methodologies and the discourse surrounding them. Most of this material was orientated specifically to improving and developing the actor’s skills, away from the theatre and the audience, often in a space (workshop, institution, laboratory, class) free from the pressures of public criticism, completed product or commercial necessity. All the methodologies characterised the actor as best being able to improve his or her skills away from the realities of the working environment, whether this was the theatre, the film set or the television studio. Many of the methodologies, starting with Stanislavski, overtly disparaged these environments, suggesting that they interfered with the actor’s ability to learn and create,

The conditions of our theatre activities, the publicity attendant on the actors’ performances, our dependence for success on the public, and the desire, that arises from those conditions, to use any means to make an impression. These

⁵¹ John Rudlin. *Jacques Copeau*. University of Exeter. From the series *Directors in Perspective*, Cambridge University Press. 1986. Robert Lewis *Method or Madness?* *op. cit.* p. 23.

⁵² Grotowski. *op. cit.* p. 24.

⁵³ Wiles. *op. cit.* p. 13.

⁵⁴ An example of this can be seen in Daniel Meyer-Dinkgrááfe’s book on the history of acting techniques. *Approaches to Acting: Past and Present*. Continuum. New York. 2001.

professional stimuli very often take hold of an actor even when he is playing a well established role. They do not improve the quality of his acting, but on the contrary, their influence is toward exhibitionism and the strengthening of stereotyped methods.⁵⁵

The acting teacher, Uta Hagen also endorsed this view,

The American theatre poses endless problems for an actor who wants to call himself an artist, who wants to be part of an art form... The only place where I have found a degree of fulfilment is at the HB studio, where I am both a teacher and learn from others.⁵⁶

These views were in marked contrast to attitudes of many actors at the end of the 19th century. William Archer's book *Masks and Faces*, which was based on dozens of interviews with French and British actors, showed that they rarely conceived of their performance skills as existing apart from their audience. It was on the stage before a paying audience that most of them stated that they learned, tested or refined their craft,

Mr John Clayton... assures me that if tears do not arise spontaneously to his eyes the effect of his acting is distinctly diminished. There are passages in *All For Her ...* (as many playgoers will remember) where he used to produce upon his audience that highest emotional effect which is expressed, not in immediate applause but breathless tearful silence. Mr Herman Vezin is equally decided in his opinion. Tears come readily... and when they fail to come, he is conscious of the diminished hold on the audience. He adds that Charles Kean, with whom he was long and intimately connected, used to paraphrase Churchill's couplet, and say, 'You must feel yourself, or you'll never make the audience feel.'⁵⁷

To some extent, this separation of subject (actor) from object (the theatre/the audience) was necessary in contemporary methodologies because it enabled them to quantify, elevate and measure the ability of the actor within a profession in which status and employment were based on highly qualitative judgements⁵⁸.

⁵⁵ Stanislavski. *An Actor Prepares. op. cit.* p. 30.

⁵⁶ Hagen. *op. cit.* p. 9.

⁵⁷ Archer. *op. cit.* p. 64.

⁵⁸An interesting example of these kinds of qualitative judgements surrounding an actor's career arose in the recent court case to determine a damages award for a young Australian actor, Jon Blake, who was permanently brain damaged in a car accident in 1986. The film producer and director Dr George Miller told the judge that "good acting" was *not* a factor in determining success and that it was in relation to the fact that Blake had "star charisma as a leading man" that his potential earnings should

As often occurs within closed systems of discourse (like those espoused by certain religious or political groups), the specificity of the jargon and the particular appeal the methodologies offered to participants, made it difficult for those outside, to both assess the meaning and the effectiveness of the processes prescribed. The methodologies offered not only the notion of a pure space to learn one's art, but also the possibility of tangible goals to participants not available in the apparently arbitrary nature of the industry. In addition, like belief systems, the methodologies all stressed the difficulty, the commitment and the discipline required to achieve these goals (thus suggesting the difficulty one outside the process would have in comprehending them), and indeed further suggesting that they may never be attained. All the methodologies contained the disclaimer that simply adhering to their instructions/training systems would not guarantee talent, genius, brilliance, or star quality. This intangible element was a gift and/or innate and could not be defined⁵⁹. This intangible element was unanalysable and thus impossible to critique, an element that further excluded those outside - the uninitiated - and had the effect of surrounding the methodologies with a kind of mystical and impenetrable fog.

An example of this can be discerned in the academic Timothy Wiles' work on modern theories of Performance when he concluded, after a comprehensive and rigorous analysis of Stanislavski's acting system, that it culminated in a "philosophical failure"⁶⁰. While he may have been accurate in his estimation, such a conclusion failed to account for why it became the ubiquitous training model for actors by the late 20th century. Because Wiles viewed it as a logical and coherent open system he failed, as

be considered. He added that female actors tended to have a "shorter working shelf-life" than males because their sexual charisma was thought to decline after they lost their initial bloom of beauty. Producer Hal McElroy added that Blake was a "very determined, ambitious and intelligent young man with extraordinary good looks - {like the} smouldering stranger down the street, blessed with mysterious qualities that female audiences found attractive and male audiences found admirable without being threatened - prerequisites to achieving superstardom". *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 14th September, 1994. p. 5.

⁵⁹ An example of this can be found in an article describing what the staff of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and Julliard School in New York looked for in the auditions for the yearly intake of student actors. Both schools, which had a "commitment to Stanislavsky-based work... that informs {the student's} development in acting", stated "we haven't got a concept of the group ... other than the fact that we want them to be good actors in their own way...the intake is enormously varied... age, class, schooling; none of that we take into account. We're looking for good acting." Peter Lavery. 'Actor Training at Juilliard and RADA'. *Australasian Drama Studies*. October 1991. pp. 107-113.

⁶⁰ Timothy J Wiles *The Theatre Event: Modern Theories of Performance op. cit.* p. 36.

have many academics, to perceive that what had partially allowed the methodologies to function and proliferate was that they tapped into and supported other sets of illogical beliefs that were held by participants. The clearest example of this was the repeated representation in contemporary methodologies of the actor as a degraded yet special individual outside society, both a soothsayer for and danger to civilisation. These representations were issued as self-evident, motherhood statements and without substantiation, but were clearly designed to appeal to the 'converted', such as John Harrop's pronouncement in his book *Acting*,

In very practical terms, if the actor is not to limit the possible range of the emotional palette, expressed in choices of character and action, he or she must keep open, flexible, and not be restricted by or to any particular sociopolitical structure. This liberation of self will tend to put the actor on the side of liberalism of life; feeling, immediacy, anti-authoritarianism, pro-people rather than politician; pro-gypsy rather than government. The actor defiantly wears the baton sinister of society's bastard's love child. Danger comes with this territory. The danger to society is equalled to the danger of existing outside society. The sacrament of self-expression carries the sanction of self-destruction. Cast with us out of paradise, the actor is at the forefront of the eternal quest for answers. The quest that ends in death. The actor knows both too much and too little; has a glimpse of the mystery that is out of reach. Charged with carrying the insupportable burden the priest has resigned, the actor must remain vulnerable to ultimate feeling while needing to deaden its pain. It is small wonder that the actor, denied the wine of bourgeois sacraments, has sometimes recourse to other less religiously sanctioned stimulants: both to induce and endure a deeper religiosity.⁶¹

While there was historical evidence that suggested societal antipathy in certain periods toward the acting profession,⁶² most of the evidence for this existed before the 20th century, and there was little to indicate this contempt was any greater than for other working class occupations⁶³. Again however, what was of importance was not the accuracy of this

⁶¹ The validity of this description can be challenged if one replaces the word 'actor', in John Harrop's definition of the contemporary performer, with the name Ronald Reagan, Arnold Swartzenegger Laurence Olivier or Glenda Jackson, all of whom are or were highly 'respectable' and very much pro-government. This statement also bares no resemblance to the acting industry of the 1990s, about which it was supposed to be written, In the course of a week, a professional actor may appear in a dog food commercial, do a voice over for a documentary, and rehearse a commercial play. John Harrop. *Acting*. Routledge, London and New York. 1992. p. 115.

⁶² Mendel Kohansky. *The Disreputable Profession: The Actor in Society*. Contributions in American Studies, Number 72. Greenwood Press. Westport, Connecticut. London, England. 1984.

⁶³ Anthony P.M. Coxon and Charles L. Jones. *The Images of Occupational Prestige*. The Macmillan Press Ltd. London and Basingstoke. 1978.

image but the utility of the representation that championed a protected actor in a sacred space, which was essential for acting methodologies to function and proliferate.

What also distinguished and unified contemporary actor methodologies from pre-20th century conceptions of the craft of acting, was the problematising of the actor. In earlier training practices, the novice actor was seen as incomplete, lacking knowledge, skill and experience. These were to be provided through apprenticeship, and/or mentorship where the emphasis was on repetition and mimicry. The actor was seen to be moving toward accomplishment through a process of accumulation. Contemporary methodologies, on the other hand, characterised the trainee actor as over - endowed, full of bad habits, blocks, unwieldy emotions, undisciplined, reliant on unstable elements such as inspiration, or self belief. Uta Hagen warned that, “self-glorification and narcissism block the spontaneous behaviour, the genuine give-and-take of any actor. Guard against it the way you would any other destructive disease”⁶⁴. The actor of contemporary actor methodologies was unable to walk, talk and breathe, let alone perform, without rigorous, disciplined and extended observation and counselling. The acting teacher Michael Chekhov explained that, there were, “certain actors who can feel their roles deeply, can comprehend them pellucidly, but who can neither express nor convey to an audience these riches within themselves. These wonderful thoughts and emotions are somehow chained inside their undeveloped bodies”⁶⁵. Stanislavski was even more emphatic - “An actor, like an infant, must learn everything from the beginning, to look, to walk, to talk, and so on... We all know how to do these things in ordinary life. But unfortunately, the vast majority of us do them badly”⁶⁶. The role of the teacher/director was thus to strip away the damaged or diseased parts of the actor to discover a neutral core. Jerzy Grotowski explained this process in his own methodology,

Here everything is concentrated on the “ripening” of the actor which is expressed by a tension towards an extreme, by a complete stripping down, by the laying bare of one’s own

⁶⁴ Hagen. *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁶⁵ Michael Chekhov. *To the Actor*. Perennial Library, Harper and Row, New York. 1953. p. 2.

⁶⁶ Stanislavski. *An Actor Prepares*. *op. cit.* p. 101.

intimacy - all this without the least trace of egotism or self-enjoyment.⁶⁷

More often than not, the blocks, damage and problems of an actor were not necessarily eradicated through learning. Even the trained and professional actor could easily return to this debilitating state. Perpetual vigilance and renewal were essential and the process was never complete. Whereas once the novice actor moved via experience (usually professional experience) toward mastery and the possibility of being the master' (from ingenué, to lead) now the actor was in constant need of training, observation and assistance. The role of the teacher also altered, as did that of the director who became increasingly a pedagogical figure. The skill required was no longer necessarily the ability to act or perform oneself, but rather the facility to constantly observe, interpret, give feedback, and the ability to mould and orient the actor.

There was a similarity between the relationship of the teacher/director with the actor as there was between the psychiatrist and the patient. Timothy Wiles provided a succinct description of the similarity of the theories of Stanislavski and Freud,

Both the psychoanalytic and the acting technique ask the subject to search in his past for causative incidents and to re-experience the emotions surrounding them. Both methods encourage concentration upon the physical and sensory details surrounding these emotions, such detail enhances the felt quality of emotion. And both methods assume that the reliving of a past incident through emotions in the present will cause a result in the same present. For Freud, the results cure a consciousness of past trauma which rids the subject of the fear attendant upon it in the present... In regard to repression, Stanislavski would concur, for he says that actors are ashamed to display their most intimate and secret traits unless they may hide behind the mask of a characterisation.⁶⁸

This relationship was also reflected in the guru-like status accorded to many of the founders of the methodologies, discussed below.

What contemporary acting methodologies also had in common with psychiatry, was that they were expensive. Without exception, all the theatres companies they emerged from, or the type of theatre they

⁶⁷ Grotowski. *op. cit.* p. 46.

proposed the methodologies would be best enacted in, required enormous sums of money and could not exist without substantial subsidy.

While Stanislavski, who was from one of the wealthiest families in Moscow, was determined that The Moscow Art Theatre (MAT) would be a public company rather than one he financed, it was his wealthy friend Savva Morozov who provided the capital to subsidise the theatre for the first five years. Despite this subsidy, the MAT, begun with Nemirovich-Danchenko, did operate for the first fifteen years with commercial imperatives. However, when Stanislavski started introducing his System into the theatre company's activities, it began to make the endeavour commercially untenable. When Stanislavski set up the first theatre studio to encourage young actors and directors in his new rehearsal techniques he had to pay for the venture (and purchase) the theatre himself⁶⁹. When the System was introduced into the MAT as the process of rehearsal, Nemirovich became disturbed about the vast amounts of time it consumed and the corresponding amounts of money it absorbed. Rehearsals for the play *A Month in the Country*, the first done purely according to the System, were "painfully slow {and after} eighty or ninety rehearsals there was {according to Nemirovich} little to show"⁷⁰. It was no accident that the widespread dissemination of the System through Russia, both as a training practice and rehearsal technique, did not occur until it became, through Stalin's patronage, the official acting technique of the State and was provided with unlimited financial resources from the mid 1930s on⁷¹.

Similarly, Bertolt Brecht's company the Berliner Ensemble, where he refined his theories of acting for the 'epic' theatre, was enormously costly. The large company was permanently employed and could rehearse some productions for up to nine months⁷² and perform them as little as two or three times per week. The Company structure was not commercially viable and only existed because of the subsidy provided by the East Berlin Politburo of the Socialist Unity party from 1949.

⁶⁸ Wiles. *op. cit.* pp. 27-29.

⁶⁹ Benedetti. *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters. op. cit.* p. 211.

⁷⁰ *ibid.* pp. 264 and 275-6. This is compared to the, approximately, maximum 20 rehearsals (about 4 weeks) for most plays – both commercial and government subsidised - that open in the West.

⁷¹ *ibid.* p xiv.

⁷² Carl Weber. 'Brecht and the Berliner Ensemble – The Making of a Model'. Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks (Editors) *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*. Cambridge University Press. 1994.

The methodologies often made a virtue of the fact that their respective quests for the 'truth' in acting were unhindered by economic restraint. Jerzy Grotowski's text *Towards a Poor Theatre*, perhaps the most influential recent acting methodology, espoused a form of training and theatre that valued only the relationship between the actor and the spectator. All other elements of the theatre, costumes, props, make up, lighting and sound effects and a separate performance area could be eradicated as the superfluous "artistic kleptomania" of the "Rich Theatre"⁷³. But Grotowski's theatre 'Laboratory' in Poland, described by the director Peter Brook, as "perhaps the only avant-theatre whose poverty is not a drawback", was in fact extremely expensive to run. While the company numbered only a dozen in total, they were permanently employed, housed and fed, provided with rehearsal and performance space and allowed to rehearse without time limit. The company only performed occasionally to a handful of audience members⁷⁴. The Laboratory was only able to function by means of continual subsidy provided by the State though the municipalities of Opole and Wrocław.

Many contemporary drama schools, which were inspired by or taught variations of the methodologies, were similarly costly to run. John Clark, the head of the National Institute of Dramatic Art, explained that it had to be accepted that professional actor training in Australia was "very expensive, as it was in Canada, England and Poland. It requires an unusually high staff/student ratio if the best possible teachers are to be engaged to cover the wide range of specialist craft skills involved in acting, technology and direction"⁷⁵.

All contemporary acting methodologies finally shared at their core the notion of an ideal quantifiable subject in a 'true' or 'pure' state, which was predicated on this subject's existence in a utopian but nonetheless pursuable future⁷⁶. Adherence to Stanislavski's System would allow one to access the immortal powers of beauty, truth and art not unlike the way in

⁷³ Grotowski. *op. cit.* p. 11.

⁷⁴ *ibid.* pp. 12 -13.

⁷⁵ Clark. *op. cit.* p. 6.

⁷⁶ Grotowski believed that his theatre laboratory that made 'methodological investigations' into acting bore many similarities to the Bohr Institute of Physics. Grotowski. 'Methodological Exploration'. *op. cit.* pp. 95-99. Stanislavski regarded his 'system as the 'science' of acting and Brecht believed he was producing a kind of theatre for 'the children of the scientific age'. *Brecht on Theatre. op. cit.* p. 183.

which adherence to Brecht's theatre would allow one to access the revolutionary spirit and through this be given the means to transform society.

Timothy Wiles noted that Stanislavski's technique of affective memory evoked the past of a character, actor and audience and Brecht's 'defamiliarisation' process orientated them toward the future. What conjoined the two was that they (like all the methodologies) expressed, "dissatisfaction with the present and a belief that the theatre's affective or even "therapeutic" value {lay} somewhere other than the here and now"⁷⁷.

The belief in the transformational and therapeutic qualities that contemporary actor methodology could bring to the individual, to the stage, to art, and to the world, saturated all the discourse on acting methodologies. These convictions ranged from the utilitarian,

Actors preparing a role need to use their powers of observation and creativity. When performing the role on stage in front of an audience they need a whole range of presentational skills and plenty of self-confidence. Directors and drama teachers often use games and exercises in the rehearsal/workshop situation to develop such skills, which are not only relevant to the drama and theatre world. If 'all the world's a stage' and everyone, at some stage, is faced with situations which call for self-confidence and effective presentation (eg. a job interview or committee) meeting then they too could benefit from preparation through the use of similar games and exercises.⁷⁸

To the grandiose,

Theatre - through the actor's technique, his art in which the living organism strives for higher motives - provides an opportunity for what could be called integration, the discarding of masks, the revealing of the real substance: a totality of physical and mental reactions. This opportunity must be treated in a disciplined manner, with a full awareness of the responsibilities it involves. Here we can see the theatre's therapeutic function for people in our present day civilisation.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Wiles. *op. cit.* p. 111.

⁷⁸ Christine Poulter. *Playing the Game*. 1987. Higher and Further Education Division. Macmillan Publishing Ltd. London. 1987. p. 2.

⁷⁹ Grotowski. 'Statement of Ethics'. *op. cit.* pp. 212-3.

This therapeutic/transformational function of contemporary theatre was succinctly put by Stanislavski himself when he stated that, “the difference between present and the past is that our ‘today’ is looking to art for the master-key to life, while our ‘yesterday’ was looking to it only for entertainment”⁸⁰.

This characterisation of Stanislavski as a kind of Patriarch of contemporary acting methodologies was reflected the manner in which he was regarded as both the ‘founding father’ and as a ‘religious leader’. His successors and followers have bestowed both conceptions on him, the latter being initiated by Stanislavski’s own lifelong commitment of the elevation of theatre to a ‘Temple of Art’. The frequency with which Stanislavski equated the theatre with the Christian church and the actor with the priest made it fairly simple to grasp that he was not simply promoting a set of practices but a particular ideology and morality as well. In addition to this, Stanislavski felt it was the duty of the theatre to transform the uneducated classes.

The year was 1917, a year of staggering events: first the February and then the October Revolution. The theatre was given a new mission: it was to open its doors to the masses, to those millions of people who had hitherto never had a chance to enjoy cultural entertainment... Naturally enough, the routine and the atmosphere in the theatre changed at once. We were compelled to begin from scratch - to teach these new spectators, primitives as far as art was concerned, to sit quietly, not to talk, to come on time, not to smoke and not to wear their hats in the theatre.⁸¹

Stanislavski was not alone in this role. One of the great ironies of contemporary acting methodologies was that despite each espousing a commitment to elevate the actor from mere performer to creator, they were remembered for their figureheads⁸² who were directors⁸³. These,

⁸⁰ Konstantin Stanislavsky. *Stanislavsky on the Art of the Stage*. Translated by David Magarshack. Faber and Faber. London, Boston. 1950. p. 104.

⁸¹ Konstantin Stanislavsky. ‘Revolution’. *Selected Works*. Translated by Olga Shartze. Raduga Publishers. Moscow. 1984. pp. 224-228.

⁸² In the case of Brecht, recent research has revealed that the ‘cult of personality’ surrounding him both before and during the Berliner Ensemble days, enabled him to frequently take credit (and copyright) of other’s work. John Fuegi. ‘The Zelda syndrome: Brecht and Elisabeth Hauptmann’. *Cambridge Companion to Brecht. op. cit.* pp 104 –116. and John Fuegi. *The Life and Lies of Bertolt Brecht*. Harper Collins. London. 1994.

⁸³ The exceptions to this were the Method actors such as Marlon Brando and James Dean who eclipsed the fame of the Method’s founding father Lee Strasberg. This was possibly because the Actor’s Studio was not associated with any theatre and offered only classes. They also offered tuition free to the

often charismatic, figures presented themselves as being at the ideological forefront of development in the theatre often battling against what they saw as the repression of true theatre and/or the edifice of convention.

The type of ideology promoted by contemporary acting methodologies, characterising art as a sacred and powerful force enacted by the carefully trained and elite few for the purpose of educating the unenlightened masses had a long and complex lineage. The ideology was related to a plethora of theories of mass culture as social decay which Patrick Brantlinger, in his book *Bread and Circuses*, termed as “negative classicism”⁸⁴. Brantlinger’s analysis revealed clearly how such theories, like those of Marx, the Frankfurt school - Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse - and of modernists such as Eliot, were used to sanctify the dissemination of high culture by both the left and the right. Thus, Stanislavski’s paternalistic, messianic and conservative notion of elite art could rather paradoxically function successfully during the proletarian Russian Revolution that was supposedly antithetical to such attitudes. Positioning the methodologies within this “negative classicism” will be shown, in the following chapters, to be enormously useful for calculating the ideological impact they have in the construction of contemporary arts cultures.

Methodologies as Ideologies

Characterising the methodologies as ideologies requires further definition. Ideologies are complex phenomena to grapple with historically. Even the term ideology should be viewed as problematic. Historian Michael Bristol observed that,

The term ideology has an invidious and unsavoury character. Ideology is always the ‘other’. It is the term we apply to the articulated self-understanding of any cultural or social group whose goals we dislike. Denunciatory usages of this kind are natural enough, but not very helpful... Nor is the obverse sense in which ideology means simply any more or less systematically and widely held world view. To

famous. Strasberg. *op. cit.* p. 50. Other authors of methodologies had been actors, such as Stanislavski. However by the time he was working on his ‘System’ in earnest, he was regarded solely as a director. This was also reflected in the roles he gave to the ‘first’ and ‘second’ in his books – the wise, experienced director imparting knowledge to the novice actor.

⁸⁴ Patrick Brantlinger. *Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay*. Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London, 1983.

refer to cultural differences, mental habits, or the diversity of world views as ideologies simply evacuates the critical force of this important concept. I take the position that ideology differs both from knowledge *and* from malicious deception. Ideology is false consciousness or distorted communication that nevertheless has a functional equivalence to truth.⁸⁵

Bristol, in examining the institutional apparatus of Shakespeare in contemporary America, further refined his definition, via Durkheim and Marx.

Religion is regarded as a contradictory phenomenon, in which a powerful truth (the perception of social injustice and the desire for redress) is united with an equally powerful untruth (God exists and He will redeem all the injustice in some other world). This is, I believe, the paradigmatic instance of an ideology. In other words, the ideological is what makes possible the integration of the functional and of the dysfunctional elements within a social reality. This may also be understood as the integration of the aesthetic and the anaesthetic functions within the sphere of cultural production.⁸⁶

Bristol came to this definition of an ideology whilst seeking an explanation for Shakespeare's centrality in American culture and the apparent anomaly this represented, "in that it {entailed} respect and admiration for an archaic world-consciousness deep inside the American project of *renewatio*"⁸⁷. One is presented with a similar anomaly or paradox within the contemporary acting profession. On the one hand, from the beginning of the 20th century, there has been huge growth in the institutional acceptance of acting methodologies. This acceptance has assisted in raising the status of the actor to artist and educator and the status of the theatre to being the most sacred and socially 'relevant' of the performing arts. On the other hand, this 'growth' has corresponded with the industrial decline of the acting profession and the theatre. From the mid 19th century on, the status of the actor in the West, in ideological and moral terms, began rising, but in socio-economic terms it marked the start of a process of steady decline for the majority of the profession. From the early 20th century there was gradual but consistent drop in theatre attendance, a loss of a cross-class audience base and a continued movement away from

⁸⁵ Michael Bristol. *Shakespeare's America/America's Shakespeare*. Routledge. New York. 1990. p. 9.

⁸⁶ *ibid.* p. 10.

⁸⁷ *ibid.* p. 2.

ensembles and stock companies in the West which had, to some extent, provided actors with career security. In the early 19th century the acting profession in England, and by extension Australia and America, was governed both economically and socially by familial and/or guild principles in which an actor's most common experience was to be part of a permanent company for their entire working life. Even after the dismantling of the stock system in England, the actor could maintain a degree of artistic autonomy. As theatre historian, Michael Baker, described it,

The Victorian theatre was undeniably the actor's domain at a time when actors were not generally conspicuous for either their education or their professionalism. In his capacity as performer and manager, the actor both formulated artistic policy and carried it out. He cast the play, directed it and even rewrote it at will, with very little or no reference to the author (Shakespeare included). It was a system of play production geared almost entirely to the actor's requirements, and in particular to the leading actor whose supremacy in the theatrical hierarchy ensured that even classical drama became little more than a suitable vehicle for projecting his own talent.⁸⁸

Baker has been criticised by historian Tracey Davis in her book, *Actresses as Working Women*, for concentrating his analysis on the upper end of the profession, leaving out the experiences and difficulties of the mass of actors (particularly women) in the lower socio-economic range. She did, however, agree that up to the early Victorian period, actors of both genders worked within a system based on "ancient customs of apprenticeship"⁸⁹. It was an environment that privileged individual expression, experience and seniority "in which everyone knew everyone else in London and managers had to scour the provinces for talent"⁹⁰.

By the late 20th century, the acting profession was one racked by debilitating problems which exceeded even those determined by the most insidious of capitalist market forces. Suffering from massive unemployment (anything from 90% to 95%⁹¹) the industry was constantly

⁸⁸Michael Baker. *The Rise of the Victorian Actor*. Rowman and Littlefield. Croom Helm. London. 1978. p. 36.

⁸⁹Tracey Davis. *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture*. Routledge. London and New York. 1991. p. 49.

⁹⁰ *ibid.* p. 48.

⁹¹ This figure is quoted frequently by practitioners. A recent Australian Bureau of Statistics Census also supports such an estimate. Of the 30,000 actors who are members of Australian Actors' Equity

oversupplied. In addition, professional actors, despite their overall rise in qualifications also saw the emergence of employment structures that increasingly limited their ability to control their access into the market and virtual disappearance of the ability to determine artistic output. In contrast, 19th century theatre papers were crammed with advertisements placed by actors announcing their availability, or with actor-managers (admittedly primarily men) mounting self-promotional seasons, productions and/or tours. Between the actor and the role today could lie not only the agent and the director, but also the casting agent, the casting consultant, the artistic director, the producer, the executive producer, the administrator, the funding body, the studio, the publicist and indeed even the advertising executive. Running concurrent with this was the constant proliferation of training opportunities for the student actor. The number of both private and government funded institutions specifically designed for actor training which embrace one or more of the methodologies, increased every year⁹². If one added the growing number of graduates with the number of actors who entered the profession each year without training, to the existing oversupply of professional actors available for work, the equation was clear that the overall employment opportunities for the profession would continue to decrease.

While contemporary acting methodologies did not cause these industrial set backs, they would become progressively entwined with them through

now the Media and Arts Alliance- both 'paid up' [approximately 10,000 - MEAA 1993 membership numbers] and 'resting' (an Equity estimate of 20,000 - which can imply they are unable to pay the annual union dues) only 1217 of them [about 4%] were able to state that they had received work as actors in the two weeks prior to the Census. The Census was criticised by the arts community as ignoring the often irregular nature of the actor's employment and led to a further survey on part time involvement in various arts professions, thus arguing that many more actors were employed in the course of the year. However, while each two weeks may have different actors working, there was no reason to believe that in any two weeks there were more or less than 1200 actors working at any one time - thus the figure of 4% remains accurate. Even if one discarded the non-paid up members, the figure of employment comes out as just over 10%. For all figures, including the part-time employment survey see, *Employment in Selected Culture/Leisure Occupations Australia*, August 1991. Ian Castles, Australian Statistician. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Catalogue No. 6273.0.

⁹² Such institutions, it can be argued, find themselves in perpetual growth because they respond not to the demands of the industry but to the number of individuals seeking opportunities in this profession. While this may be explicable for those private organisations it does not explain why government funded vocational actor training institutions which state they orientate their courses according to industry needs, continue to produce an increasing supply of actors for an oversupplied industry. Unless of course the industry needs an oversupply to suit the nature of its market which in turn contradicts the government institutions commitment to elevating the status of the actor. In Australia in the 1990s there were 12 government funded drama schools offering 3 year degree or diploma courses. These schools produced almost 300 graduate actors every year. 'Lowdown's 1992/1993 Guide to National Tertiary Education in Performing Arts'. *Directions. Arts Training Australia*. 1992.

the 20th century. The principal causes behind the radical shifts in market conditions began decades before Stanislavski's first experiments to develop a systematic approach to what he regarded as the science of acting. Industrialisation, deregulation of the theatres, the dismantling of the stock system, a massive rise and movement of the population into urban centres, and a broadening of the repertoire, from the mid 19th century on all contributed to the creation of a profession, in which "competition was fierce and unemployment rife"⁹³. However, what was also significant about this period was that it was also the first to see the development of a radical disjuncture between the manner in which the actor came to be represented and the realities of the profession. It was a disjuncture that would come to have enormous significance on how the ideologies of contemporary acting methodologies, promulgated by the theatrical innovators of the 20th century, were predicated on the notion of 'doublethink' - function and dysfunction.

Through an examination of the work of the two theatre historians, quoted above, who focus on the 19th century profession, Michael Baker and Tracey Davis, one can further highlight the development of this emerging disjuncture between the image of the actor and the realities of the profession. A comparison of their work also reveals the difficulty theatre historians can encounter in charting the functions and practical consequences of an ideology.

Davis and Baker

Both Baker and Davis concentrated their research on the experience of English actors during the period roughly spanning the mid to late 19th century. It was an illuminating site, not only because of the radical changes the profession underwent, but also due to the prominence and impact that the English stage had during these years on both the Australian and American theatre scenes. For Baker, what was of most consequence was implicit in the title of his book, *The Rise of the Victorian Actor*. Baker charted what he perceived as the growing respectability of the acting profession and its increasing association with middle-class values. This corresponded with the movement away from the generic, ancient and frequently clerical perception of the theatre as a site of

⁹³ Davis. *op. cit.* p. 48.

subversive danger associated with sexual perversion, seditious lower class activities, prostitution, adultery, illegitimate children, intemperance and political subversion. For Baker, the profession came to successfully resist the degrading attacks of clerical anti-theatricalism, whose “hostility was traditional and fundamental, based upon time honoured scriptural claims, which had been employed against theatre throughout its history”⁹⁴. The theatre did this, he argued, by beginning to embrace and promote itself as an avatar of the morals espoused by the church itself.

As noted above, Davis was highly critical of Baker’s text. She agreed that, “the expansion of the theatre industry, changing attitudes to the theatre, and the gentrification of the upper ranks of the profession”⁹⁵ meant that “overall, the theatre gained a reputation as a truly artistic pursuit and a respectable calling”⁹⁶. Nevertheless, she emphatically rejected Baker’s thesis and did “not accept... the myth of the rise the Victorian actor”⁹⁷. The basis of Davis’s rejection rested on two related factors. First, the narrow and unrepresentative sources Baker used for his analysis:

Baker’s argument rests only on the information about the most successful performers in legitimate lines of business (especially serious drama and comedy) based in the West End of London. The circumstances of the majority (including performers who were lower paid, non-legitimate, provincial, or female) are almost entirely left out of the equation.⁹⁸

Secondly, Davis criticised his failure to perceive that, despite this apparent improvement in image and status for the Victorian actor, it only applied to those actors who were “highly paid, legitimate, successful, male, {and} West End... {and that} the majority of women employees remained stigmatised”⁹⁹.

Davis’s work was rigorous and comprehensive. Utilising a general framework of socialist feminism she wove multiple methodologies with a number of distinct disciplinary approaches, to uncover the realities of working experiences of the mass of Victorian female actors,

⁹⁴ Baker. *op. cit.* p. 51.

⁹⁵ Davis. *op. cit.* p. xiii.

⁹⁶ *ibid.* p. 49.

⁹⁷ *ibid.* p. xiii.

⁹⁸ *ibid.* p. 4.

On stage and backstage, theatres became analogous to the industrialized factory, growing increasingly specialized in what they offered. As in textile and heavy manufacturing trades this involved newly mechanized procedures, required highly specialized labourers, diluted the skills of the majority, induced a greater intensity of labour, and increased the scale of production. Great competition existed between closely complementary enterprises, but in the employment sector, this only affected the hiring of star performers. In contrast to the handicraft system of manufacturing where membership in a craft was strictly controlled through a journeyman process and apprentices learned all aspects of the trade while working toward full competence, capital-intensive industrialized processes discouraged entry control and used unskilled labour without offering any prospect of further training... Unskilled young adults could easily slot into the production process, but for the vast majority of recruits there was nowhere to go - neither up the hierarchy nor into a more demanding line of business - so the system that took them in regularly spat them out permanently when mature.¹⁰⁰

Davis also uncovered the existence of extreme double standards and complex ambiguities for women on the Victorian stage,

No matter how consummate the artist, pre-eminent the favourite, and modest the woman, the actress could not supersede the fact that she lived a public life and consented to be 'hired' for amusement of all who could command the price.¹⁰¹

Despite this, Davis failed to account adequately, or at least explore in detail, the function of the very real and ever widening contradictory gulf between the overall improvement in the ideological representation of the profession as a whole and the realities of their day to day experiences. Her research exhaustively explored *how* there was gradual division of the profession into "the respectable performing classes and the vast pool of labour whose names were never recorded on playbills"¹⁰² and *proved* that mainstream historians largely ignored this latter group, she did not explain *why*. She did not investigate thoroughly, the complex interplay between the function and ideology of the dominant elite group and the consequences these things had on the aspirations of those excluded and

⁹⁹ *ibid.* p. 49.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.* p. 49. Davis's comparison between the changes in the textile industry and the acting profession have particular resonance in Chapter 7, in which a comparison is made between Taylorism (that emerged out of the textile industry) and Stanislavski's 'System'.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.* p. 69.

¹⁰² *ibid.* p. 49.

the social perceptions of theatre. Davis established beyond question that, the “circumstances of women’s work conspired with socioeconomic circumstances to prevent women performers ‘rise’ to social or cultural transcendence”¹⁰³, but did not explain why so many women of this era (and indeed men) were attracted to a profession that was rapidly becoming oversupplied and increasingly insecure.

Even with conservative statistical figures that Davis adjusted herself, the rate of increase of the number of female actors in the profession between 1861 and 1911, was 709%. In partial answer to this rise, Davis noted that the acting profession held the allure of social mobility and economic wealth. She also observed that acting could appear to be an attractive alternative to the constraints and drudgery of the restricted domestic and work spheres open to women of all classes at this time. However, Davis qualified the power of these attractions with data that demonstrated that success in the acting profession was in fact experienced by only a minute few and even those successful women remained stigmatised. Davis’s thesis thus rested on the premise that the ideology of a rise in status of the Victorian actor was a misrepresentation and one which obscured and hid the insidious erosion of conditions of the majority of actors.

In part, this was due to Davis’s argument that, “because the theatre was an essentially public medium, and social art involving the communication of ideology through living images, it tends to convey the ideology of the group that is dominant as producers and consumers of the images”¹⁰⁴. This view made her research archaeological in nature and Marxist in flavour, which led to her to focus on putting to one side the misleading superstructure of ideology and revealing the truth in the realities of the base. In doing so her work took on the characteristics of what Bristol referred to as, the “ideological *exposé*,” which had a tendency:

To concentrate on the element of error or untruth in the positions they analyze... {and} usually do not explain why essentially false beliefs can appear plausible to those who adhere to them. Nor do they give any indication how ideological convictions can be in contradiction with social reality and at the same time enable the groups who possess

¹⁰³ *ibid.* p. 147.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.* p. xii.

these convictions to function adequately within that social reality.¹⁰⁵

In Davis's work such an 'exposé' had the additional problem of creating the impression that deplorable working conditions for female actors existed because of the misogyny or unchecked industrialisation of the Victorian past. Her work did little to suggest the possibility of an unchecked continuity of such practices, that a greater concentration on the disjuncture between ideology and practice might have supplied. On the contrary, her first chapter promoted the idea that the position of actresses (and actors) would improve with the advent of standardised training in the 20th century and once women (such as Ellen Terry) started to receive the kinds of social accolades of their male counterparts. Davis also argued that, "as long as the public regarded the theatre... purely as a source of entertainment and did not take it seriously as an educative moral forum operating for the general good, performers were denied the appreciation granted to architects, sculptors, painters, and musicians"¹⁰⁶. The problem with this argument was that it was based on the premise that once theatre was recognised as such a moral forum and began to offer standardised training, which it was and did from the late 19th century on, then the experiences and conditions for the bulk of the profession would improve, which they did not. Many of the difficulties that beset the Victorian performer, recounted by Davis, and specifically those that came to have a such a debilitating effect on women, did not cease to exist in the 20th century. The oversupply of actors, the extreme paucity of roles available to women, sexual harassment, casting couch procedures, unequal pay, an emphasis on appearance and youth, remain realities of the profession today.

While Davis was correct that Baker's primary sources were unrepresentative of the majority of actors, Baker did in fact accurately reflect the ideological changes in the status of the actor in the public domain and particularly the media. He also provided a number of clues as to how this paradox between image and industrial reality began to co-exist.

An examination of the tone of the plethora of theatrical papers that sprang up during the Victorian period thoroughly supported Baker's

¹⁰⁵ Bristol. *op. cit.* p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ Davis. *op. cit.* p. 5.

notion of a rise in the status of the actor. These papers, ranged from the earnest and informative, such as *The Era* and *The Theatre*, to the titillating, such as *The Dramatic World*. What they all had in common, apart from a fondness for gossip and anecdote, was a commitment to proclaiming the acting profession as noble, refined, sublime and, significantly, an important and positive voice of moral education for the mass. They also frequently referred to, and rebutted the older and now unacceptable anti-theatrical attacks on the profession. By the 1860s, *The Era* was able to publish an entirely sarcastic “Topic of the Week” with the heading “Theatre-Going And Its Dangers’ that began: “Once more the faithful are summoned to array themselves against the Stage and to avoid the Theatre as dangerous to body and soul”¹⁰⁷. The November 1894 edition of *The Dramatic World* carried the editorial titled “Art Demoralised”,

Art! What a glorious and voluptuous dream! Does its sound not fill the sensuous air with celestial music? Conjuring up in the mind a fountain, bubbling with a rich perfume, which steeps the soul in rare rapture!

Tis true that there are various divisions of art, but verily, is not acting hailed as the Sovereign of the Hemisphere? And to-day what a Queen she is. No regal hand was ever more proudly more proudly potentate in command; no Queen, however beloved and majestic, possessed such completely loyal subjects. Why is this so?

Because in her reign she has laughed to scorn the old prejudices against the drama. She has hitherto proved that acting is a true and magnificent art, that art is a God who spreads more education and culture than all the teaching or preaching in the universe, and is determined that heartless cant shall never make an artistic calling a martyr to this land’s hypocrisy.¹⁰⁸

For Baker, the anti-theatrical clerical campaign in fact had some justification and had acquired urgency during the Victorian era. He argued that the competition between the church and the theatre was very real, “in light of the rapid growth of a huge industrial proletariat which had little or no contact with Christian teaching but was subject to all the attractions of an expanding entertainment industry”. It was feared by Victorian Churchmen that, “this uneducated and irreligious mass” signalled that “the stage’s influence rivalled or even outmatched religion’s in the battle for hearts and minds”¹⁰⁹. In Baker’s view it came to

¹⁰⁷ *The Era*. Sunday, January 19th. 1868. p. 8.

¹⁰⁸ *The Dramatic World*. November. 1894. p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ Baker. *op. cit.* p. 51.

be recognised, by a combination of social reformers, the media and a group within the elite of the profession itself that, “as a result in the decline of the churches influence... the theatre {had} enormous potential as a moral and educational instrument”¹¹⁰.

Baker also pinpointed that this recognition required a fundamental shift in the comprehension of acting itself. If a tenet of anti-theatricalism lay in an attack on the duplicitous nature of performing, a sort of Hamlet-like suspicion of the ‘tears for Hecuba’, the acting profession needed to defend itself by promoting the possibility of a congruity between the actor’s feelings and that of the character. This innovation, that was born out of and led to great contention and debate between those who advocated non-identification, such as Denis Diderot, and those who supported it, such as William Archer - became a major preoccupation for theorists in the 20th century¹¹¹. This preoccupation with problematising the actor’s process began to subsume discussions regarding the actor’s practical problems such as employment, surplus and product.

Importantly, Baker ultimately cast “the general willingness of the profession to accept these socio-moral strictures” in negative terms. He argued that, “the source of the Victorian actor’s growing respectability was also the root of his artistic weakness. In striving to combat the moral bogey which burdened his professional image, there was to be no room to develop an individual artistic ethic”¹¹². Thus, in some ways, although by a fundamentally different set of premises and via different data, Baker and Davis concurred that the changes in the acting profession during the mid to late 19th century were not beneficial to actors. For Davis the mass of performers (especially women) became compromised by a series of radical alterations in the industrial environment which, coupled with free market principles and Victorian misogyny, led to an environment that favoured only a male elite. For Baker, even this elite had lost their artistic autonomy. What neither of them did however, was account for how this new ideology, this new respectability and the characterisation of theatre as a moral and educative force was also fast becoming an institution of enormous force and power. To conceive of the actor as a passive subject in these processes, as Davis and Baker did to some extent, was to obliterate

¹¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 58.

¹¹¹ Diderot. *op. cit.* Archer. *op. cit.*

their complicity in shifting the ideological basis of their profession from representation, mimicry, entertainment and even catharsis, to one of being, instructional, educational, therapeutic and transformational. Furthermore this view obscured the emerging symbiotic relationship between modern states who increasingly sought to institutionalise this new ideological representation which came to assist in the construction of what was regarded as legitimate culture, and the complicity of artists willing to sanction and promote such a pursuit.

The next chapter reveals how one can discern this symbiotic relationship and the new ideological representation of the actor in the all the attempts to construct legitimate culture in Australia in the post second world war era. The decision to focus on post WWII Australia (specifically 1954 to 1967), as the site to examine the material and ideological consequences of the institutionalisation of contemporary actor methodologies is two fold. First, because the site provides a unique landscape in which to observe the impact the introduction of these methodologies had upon the acting profession and the contribution they made to the construction of what constitutes legitimate theatre and performing arts culture today. Second, because it represents the birth, growth and development of Australia's government subsidised performing arts. The era of post war reconstruction in Australia was a fascinating period, which from 1954, saw an astonishing concentration of national and state arts institutions spring up in little over a decade. These included the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust in 1954, the National Opera and Australian Ballet in the late 1950s, the National Institute of Dramatic Art in 1959, the state theatre companies throughout the sixties and early seventies and the first Federal Arts Council in 1967. It was also a period in which the responsibility for the creation of these institutions lay in the hands of a powerful few. It was through the construction of these institutions that one can chart the rather elegant entry of the methodologies into Australia and the rapid proliferation of the ideologies which they contained. Furthermore, it was a site that was, for the most part, regarded as unproblematic by (working) practitioners, academics and governments, and was (and is) characterised as a kind of golden age of the arts in which dissent, criticism and historical investigation are largely absent or obscured.

¹¹² Baker. *op. cit.* p. 55.

Chapter 2

Post War Reconstruction – Making Culture

The relationships and interdependence between contemporary training for the arts, modern arts education and Government subsidised performing arts in Australia after the Second World War, have a complex and possibly unique history amongst industrialised nations. Whilst Australia's cultural history of government subsidy had clear parallels with that of post WWII Britain, Europe and the United States, in that it too received, "substantial concerted and direct government expenditure to benefit the arts and culture"¹, it was distinct because of the pristine territory in which it occurred. Unlike other industrial nations, Australia had no existing government institutions relating to the performing arts prior to the 1950s². The theatre environment was made up instead, of a mixture of commercial theatre managements, international touring companies and small pro/am 'little' theatre groups. Without opera houses, national theatres, concert halls and assorted monuments for the performing arts, Australia provided a unique landscape. Here one could chart the complex and sophisticated machinations involved in the construction of a model of government subsidised culture in which notions of training and therapeutic educative practices were embedded.

The next two chapters focus on the period of post war reconstruction leading up to the establishment of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (AETT) in 1954, the first organisation to receive significant government subsidy for the performing arts. Selecting the AETT as the site in which to focus analysis does not negate the significance of other cultural organisations of this period. These included; the Australian Broadcasting Commission (1932), the Arts Council of Australia (1943), Australian UNESCO (1946), Actors' Equity (1939), the National Opera Company, the Australian Drama Company (from 1956) the National Institute of Dramatic Art (1959) and the commercial theatre management J.

¹ Milton C. Cummings and Richard S. Katz. 'Government and the Arts: An Overview' in Milton C. Cummings and Richard S. Katz (Editors) *The Patron State: The Government and the Arts in Europe North America and Japan*. Oxford University Press. 1993. p. xiv.

² While certain government organisations supporting the arts did exist such as, The Commonwealth Literary Fund (1908), the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board (1912) and the Australian Broadcasting

C. Williamson Ltd. However, the AETT was an organisation of such ubiquity and a site of such influence that almost all these other organisations not only interacted and intersected within its sphere, but also were inevitably informed and defined by it.

Chapter two examines why the significance of the relationship between the first national drama school and the AETT has been overlooked. Part one of this chapter questions the relatively elementary manner in which the developing performing arts industry of the 1940s and 50s in Australia has been rendered historically. This rendering propagated specific myths current in much contemporary cultural discourse and obscured the variety and fluidity of cultural practice and ideologies of the period. Part two presents an examination of the prototype of an educative/training model of subsidised culture, introduced as an adjunct to the ‘notorious’ visit to Australia by English theatre director Tyrone Guthrie in 1949.

Chapter Three looks at Australia’s extremely early participation in the United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) after WWII and the importance and centrality of the organisation’s Drama in General Education Working Party in introducing national policies to merge drama in education and educational drama into a unified concept. The aims of the Australian UNESCO Committees were completely distinct to the original aims of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. The AETT initially sought to stimulate employment and participation in the existent theatre environment and not (as was the case of the Committees) to educate the public or practitioners. Nor was it the aim of the AETT to seek or provide Government subsidy.

Part 1. A National Training School For Acting – ‘Upon This Foundation The Theatre Can Be Built’

The first government funded facility for actor training in Australia, The National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA), was established in 1959 with Robert Quentin, a member of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust Executive, as its founding director. A triumvirate of organisations - the NSW University of Technology, the Australian Broadcasting Commission and the AETT, managed the Institute. However, the national drama school

owed its conception, philosophy and structure most to the AETT, having originated directly because of the organisation's initiatives, specifically those of its first Executive Officer, Hugh Hunt. The training provided by the Institute was explicitly based on Stanislavski's methodologies³. Hunt believed these methodologies were not only "essential to the making of theatre" but, the institutionalisation of them was a critical factor in the creation of Australian theatre. Hunt stated in his memoirs, "if, in my endeavour to make Australian theatre, I have succeeded in no more than helping to bring this school of Acting into being, then this alone will be worth while, for upon this foundation the theatre can be built"⁴.

The existence of this government-funded school for actors was unprecedented and many contemporary commentators characterised it as unique in the world. It represented the culmination of an extraordinary set of complex manoeuvres within the tertiary sector in order to have its unorthodox and unacademic methodologies legitimised⁵. More than simply a school for aspiring Thespians, it symbolised a massive shift in ideology amongst the public, practitioners and the Government, regarding the function of the 'legitimate' performing arts and was specifically tied to the future of arts subsidy. It also marked a crisis.

The national drama school was launched in the fifth year of the Trust's operations and the positive fanfare surrounding this event, the organisation was beset by difficulties. The funds representing the base of its capital had fallen dangerously by 20% - a result of a series of AETT production losses in opera, musical theatre (notably *Lola Montez*)⁶ and drama.

The Trust Board of Directors blamed "competition of television"⁷, a more than usually experimental repertoire and some slackness in general

subsidising the performing arts.

³ "The acting talent of the students would be further developed with particular use of Stanislavsky's method and with reference to contemporary dramatic material". *Plans For A Theatre School: National Institute of Dramatic Art. Sydney 1959*. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 21. p. 1.

⁴ Hugh Hunt. *The Making of Australian Theatre*. F. W. Cheshire. Melbourne. 1960. p. 31.

⁵ Chapter 5 charts the relationships between the development of the National Institute of Dramatic Art, the AETT and the universities.

⁶ Richard Waterhouse. 'Lola Montez and High Culture: The Elizabethan Theatre Trust in Post-War Australia'. *Journal of Australian Studies*. No. 52. 1997. pp. 148-158.

⁷ The first Australian television broadcast was in 1956.

economic conditions affecting the entertainment business generally”⁸. Box-office receipts ranged from disappointing to poor. As an emergency measure, the AETT Board decided to abandon its 1959 opera season and postpone the resumption of opera activities for fifteen months in an attempt to stabilise the Trust’s diminishing resources⁹.

The future prospects of the AETT’s national drama plans were scarcely better that year. The ambitious Flagship Company, the Australian Drama Company (whose 1956 inaugural season included the first national production of *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*) wound up. Despite its spectacular early success with the Australian - authored ‘Doll’, the Company had great difficulty developing any kind of consistent box-office for its subsequent productions. Repeat seasons of Ray Lawler’s successful play were insufficient to cover losses incurred by other locally authored productions such as *Ned Kelly*. Hopes that the play *The Shifting Heart* would be another classic (or at least a box office hit) did not transpire. The Company was to be replaced with the substantially more modest enterprise of the Trust Players, a permanent company of only eight actors, similar in structure to those in the English repertory system, with five plays (two Australian) proposed for the following year. The intention behind the AETT’s downsizing was the hope that the stock system of players would begin to encourage the hitherto capricious Australian drama audiences into a steadier pattern of attendance.

This was hardly an auspicious employment environment in which to launch a facility to train students as future actors for the legitimate theatre and leads one to posit certain questions. Why, for example, was the institute launched at this point when the provision of employment for experienced professional performers, whose numbers far outweighed job opportunities, was proving extremely difficult for the AETT? Furthermore, Hunt’s description of the Institute, unattached to any production company or specific theatrical enterprise, as the *foundation* of Australian theatre, was in fact the same function the now somewhat beleaguered Trust was supposed to have fulfilled five years earlier. Was it simply that the school for actors was the fulfilment of another of the AETT’s initial aims - akin to

⁸ *Report of the Directors to the Members at the Ordinary General Meeting to be held in Melbourne 12th October, 1959.* AETT Archives, MS 5908, Box 48, p. 1.

the establishment of a national opera and national drama company? Was it like those, an enterprise perceived as an ongoing commitment, to be pursued regardless of practical difficulties?

This was not the case. The establishment of a national drama school was not part of the original AETT charter five years earlier. The creation of a training facility for actors was part of a major transformation of its basic principles. This transformation owed its impetus to a conception of culture and Australian cultural product in which the notion of training and education had become intrinsic. This particular conception of culture and the means to construct it had been consolidating since the Second World War and it held within it the justification of why certain of the performing arts should be subsidised by government funds. The utility of this model eventually propelled the Trust to undergo a major realignment in its structure and become the model for most of the larger cultural organisations in Australia today. This was far more complex an endeavour than simply inculcating into the population beliefs that high culture was good for one and thus must be preserved.

This quite radical transformation in the Trust's original aims and thus the early trajectory of arts subsidy has been rarely accounted for, by historians and cultural commentators. This is in part because all detailed references to the original method of operations of the Trust exist only in haphazardly catalogued AETT archives. However, it was also due to the manner in which the aims and machinations of cultural organisations in the 1950s have been characterised¹⁰. Images of the AETT as paternalistic and top heavy with a conservative cultural management, (it would be described in 1966 as 'Disastrous, unfair, high-handed and resented'¹¹) were generated in the early to mid 1960s by the organisation's most vehement critics. While many of the attacks were well substantiated, these simplistic, pejorative sketches tended to mask what was in fact a highly complex and powerful generator of national cultural product and cultural

⁹ *ibid.* p. 3. The consequences of this crisis and the tensions between the Executive Director Hugh Hunt and the Chairman of the AETT, H. C. Coombs, are detailed in Chapter 6.

¹⁰ Nicholas Brown encountered the same tendency amongst Australian historians in his analysis of the 1950s. He observed a trend, " which relegated a decade of complexity, frustration and transition to the more manageable categories of inertia, complacency and irrelevance" . Nicholas Brown. 'Introduction'. *Governing Prosperity: Social Change and Social Analysis in Australia in the 1950s*. Cambridge University Press. 1995. p. 1.

¹¹ 'Verdict on the Trust'. *The Australian*. 11th June. 1966. pp. 6-7.

institutions¹². These sketches of the organisation also diminished the vital role it had in the construction of legitimate subsidised culture in Australia and led to the inappropriate characterisation of the AETT as a static edifice that could be altered and eventually replaced by a new (better and different) set of cultural organisations. This concealed the fact that all the changes to official cultural agencies in the 1950s and 60s were part of a developing and pervasive new notion of official culture - a paradigm in which, not only the Trust, but its critics and the new cultural edifices were contained. As a result, the transformation of one model of culture to another in post war Australia has been obscured.

1954 is often identified by Australian theatre historians and commentators, as the symbolic birth-date of contemporary arts culture in the country and the corresponding, “remarkable flowering of creative achievement among Australian artists”¹³. The date marked the year in which the non-government Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust Fund was launched by a group of businessmen as a memorial to Queen Elizabeth II visit to Australia in 1954. The intention of the fund was to raise and distribute money to arts organisations with the aim of establishing Australian drama, opera and ballet. However, it was a ‘birth’, along with its childhood in the ensuing decade, early adolescence and puberty crisis at 13 - when the Federal Government established the Australian Council For The Arts (ACFTA) in 1967 - which remained relatively unexamined and undiscussed in recent discourse regarding Australian culture. Documentary histories of Australian theatre like, *Entertaining Australia*, *The Australian Stage: a documentary history*, *The Australian Theatre*, *The State of Play*, *The Revolution in Australian Theatre since the 1960s*, and *A History of Australian Drama: Volume I* and the AETT entry in *Companion to Theatre in Australia*¹⁴, perhaps understandably, just lay out a series of chronological

¹² Sol Encel presented a cogent argument regarding the extraordinary concentration of power in the 1950s. He stated that the “the big industrial corporation has become entrenched as the dominant institution of our society, setting the tone not only of the economic system but of society in general”. Sol Encel. *Is there an Australian Power Elite?* Chifley Memorial Lecture 1961. National Press Pty. Ltd. Melbourne. 1961. p. 3.

¹³ H. C. Coombs. *Trial Balance*. Macmillan. Melbourne. 1981. p. 217.

¹⁴ Katharine Brisbane (Editor) *Entertaining Australia: The Performing Arts as Cultural History*. Currency Press. Sydney. 1991. Harold Love (Editor) *The Australian Stage: A Documentary History*, New South Wales University Press. 1984. Paul McGuire. *The Australian Theatre*. Oxford University Press. London. 1948. Leonard Radic. *The State of Play; The Revolution in Australian Theatre since the 1960s*. Penguin Books. 1991. Leslie Rees. *A History of Australian Drama: Volume I, The Making of*. Angus and Robertson Publishers. 1978. Helen Musa.

snapshots. The focus in these books is upon things such as descriptions of the Royal tour, the subsequent AETT Fund launch and providing a summary of the organisations' achievements¹⁵. It is less explicable why texts specifically devoted to analysis of Australian culture and the performing arts industry – its policy, history, funding – deployed a similar uncritical gaze at this period.

Rendering the past

Three highly influential texts relating to the history of contemporary performing arts culture in Australia have appeared in the last few decades; Tim Rowse's *Arguing the Arts* in 1985¹⁶, *Shooting the Pianist*, edited by Philip Parsons in 1987¹⁷ and *Arts Minister?* by Justin Macdonnell in 1992¹⁸. While each of the texts shared a specific focus upon the role of the government in the arts, they did so by establishing what appeared to be quite distinct approaches to the subject. Rowse stated in his preface that his book attempted "a critical, historical analysis of the rhetoric and practice of Commonwealth cultural policy" and that it did not "try to portray any of the arts themselves. There are no works of art and no artworkers in this book"¹⁹. Parson's introduction, conversely, made it clear that he believed such analysis failed "to understand what art is all about"²⁰. He argued that the removal of the artist from inquiries into government arts policy was predicated on a false understanding of the arts, "which are shaped finally not by precise, repeatable calculation but by the imponderables of human relationship, perception, interpretation, talent"²¹. Macdonnell's analysis conflated the seemingly contradictory aims of the two earlier texts, combining both the personal and the political as sources for examination. Unlike Parsons however, the significance

'Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust' entry in Philip Parsons (General Editor). *Companion to Theatre in Australia*. Currency Press. Sydney. 1995. p. 73.

¹⁵ For example, the mounting first National Opera season in 1956 or the spectacular early success of the Australian play, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, by Ray Lawler.

¹⁶ Tim Rowse. *Arguing the Arts: The Funding of the Arts in Australia*. Penguin Books. Australia. 1985.

¹⁷ Philip Parsons (Editor) *Shooting the Pianist: The Role of Government in the Arts*. Currency Press. Sydney. 1987.

¹⁸ Justin Macdonnell. *Arts Minister: Government Policy and the Arts*. Currency Press. Sydney. 1992.

¹⁹ Rowse. 'Preface'. *op. cit.* p. i.

²⁰ Parsons. 'The Background'. *op. cit.* p. 10.

²¹ *ibid.* p. 9.

Macdonnell attributed to human agency in influencing the development and history of arts culture and policy in Australia lay not in the actions of the artist but in those of Arts Ministers. Macdonnell justified his decision to explore, “the subject largely through the actions and views of these ministers” over a period from 1967 to 1987, because, “the arts in Australia have been influenced by personal patronage and bias in government as elsewhere. Those factors long preceded policy-making and even in the few cases where policy and patronage concurred... personal preference modified policy in crucial ways”²².

Despite the quite distinct and possibly antithetical arguments developed in these texts, a number of elements were importantly uniform in each. Each concurred that they were limiting their analysis to the period covering official government subsidy from 1967 on. They also agreed that the current state (at the time of writing) of arts culture was extremely poor and, in principle, their respective examinations would help provide useful reforms. And finally, while the reforms offered in each text differed widely, they seemed to be in agreement that a detailed examination of the period preceding the establishment of ACFTA in 1967 would not provide insights into the state of current Australian performing arts culture.

Each of these texts devoted little more than a few paragraphs to a discussion of the history of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, which dominated the national performing arts landscape for over a decade, before the setting up of the ACFTA. However, they did briefly acknowledge that 1954 to 1967 was a period in which the AETT presided over the creation of almost all current major government subsidised organisations and institutions such as the Australian Ballet, the Australian Opera, the National Institute for Dramatic Art and the respective state theatre companies.

Parsons argued that both the AETT and the “pioneers of arts funding such as H. C. Coombs”²³ either had complicity in, or were stymied by,

²² Macdonnell. *op. cit.* p. 4.

²³ H. C. ‘Nugget’ Coombs was arguably the most influential figure in the development of the subsidised arts in Australia. As Head of the Commonwealth Bank in Post WWII Australia he bore many similarities to the economist and arts advocate Keynes whom he greatly admired. Coombs, sat on many Post War Reconstruction committees and was an original founding member of the AETT. He would later head Australia’s first Arts Council (ACFTA) in 1967 and then briefly the Australia Council in 1973.

“Australia’s traditional philistinism” in the 1950s and early 1960s, which excluded the artist as an influence in policy. He did accept nevertheless, that they fostered an environment in which eventually, “thanks very largely to the support rallied by Dr Coombs, the arts were on a much firmer professional footing and clamouring to direct their own destinies”²⁴.

Macdonnell also favourably evaluated the legacy of the Trust.

To commemorate {the first Royal Visit in 1954} a combination of Federal subsidy, public subscription and grants-in-aid from State governments and councils of the capital cities was gathered to create the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (AETT). For the next fifteen years this private organisation, with its unique reference in the Income Tax Assessment Act... dominated the performing arts in Australia... Little of significance in the not-for-profit sector occurred without its intervention, participation or blessing... it must be said too, that for all the organisations’ failings, the (willy nilly) funding formula created by the Trust had, still has, much to recommend it.²⁵

Parson and Macdonnell regarded the AETT’s role in this period as basically pioneering attempts that had a major influence in creating the original environment that engendered government subsidy in 1967, but a fairly minimal legacy in the present model of contemporary policy. Rowse took a very different position. He argued that arts organisations in the 1950s established and constructed a rhetoric and ideology pertaining to the arts (and by extension created a definition of what constituted legitimate culture) which enjoyed a continuity to the present day. Rowse regarded individuals such as Coombs as the original architects of current systems of Commonwealth and State arts patronage. Unlike Macdonnell and Parsons, he argued that the ideologies and practices that permeated the nature of government funding were historically constituted and maintained by a governing elite.

For many years, those upper-middle-class people with a sense of their cultural responsibility to the rest of society have been able to engage the ear of the government... The movement for a National Theatre may have died with the spirit of post-war

²⁴ Parsons. *op. cit.* p. 12.

²⁵ Macdonnell. *op. cit.* p. 8.

reconstruction, but it left a cadre of voluntary entrepreneurs with a confident rhetoric. In the 1950s and 1960s they created or took over responsibility for activities, which actively defined culture for Australia and so erected a concrete test of government fidelity to civilisation. Could the Government commit itself to systematically subsidise individual artists and performing arts companies?

In showing that it could and would, the Commonwealth also supported a tendency towards duality in Australia's twentieth century culture {commercial entertainment and subsidised quality}. It not only preserved the Arts from their economic decline; it preserved the traditions of distribution and the social identities of their audiences.²⁶

While Rowse identified a significant benefaction from the early era of the AETT in contributing to the inequitable patterns of distribution in contemporary subsidised arts culture, he also regarded it as an outmoded influence that could and should be removed. For him the substantial government funds directed to high culture companies such as the Australian Opera should and could be devolved to smaller community groups whose audiences, he believed, were more representative. In this, Rowse shared with Parsons and Macdonnell a discursive framework in which the analysis of the way things were in the contemporary arts was followed by an articulation of solutions for the future. While Rowse admitted his solutions were compromise formulas – “the worst thing is that we can't start from scratch”²⁷, he still firmly asserted, as did Parsons and Macdonnell, that his suggestions for reform would, if implemented, transform Australian arts culture into the way it should be²⁸.

In each of these texts, the cultural politics of the 1950s and early 1960s in Australia are rendered as both simplistic and unproblematic – the 1940s are virtually absent. Parson characterised the cultural environment as “philistinism” and Macdonnell described it as it being made up of “willy nilly formulas”²⁹. Rowse too evoked a similarly uncomplicated image of the past characterising it as being simply fixed in the social (and possibly conspiratorial) yoke of the ruling classes whose understanding of culture

²⁶ Rowse. *op. cit.* pp. 116-117.

²⁷ *ibid.* p. 119.

²⁸ Nicholas Brown noted in his social history of 1950s in Australia, the habit of commentators from the 1980s on, to explicitly portray “the institutional and political patterns set in the 1950s as mistakes from which Australians must recover”. Brown. *op. cit.* p. 3.

²⁹ Parsons. *op. cit.* p. 12. Macdonnell. *op. cit.* p. 8.

was, if well meaning, hopelessly misguided and discriminatory³⁰. Each of these writers reinforced the perception that in Australia, real cultural history began when subsidy of the arts was institutionalised nationally by the government in 1967. Cultural organisations prior to this were represented as naive, ad hoc and ineffective attempts at cultural construction by amateurs, governed by out dated cultural ideologies that were either swept aside at the advent of institutionalised government subsidy or left as vestiges which could be easily prised from contemporary structures.

The relatively limited range of debate regarding the history of post war arts subsidy in Australia very much echoes that being conducted in the international arena. Like those found in Rowse, Parson and MacDonnell, the arguments circulated around whom should receive subsidy, who should distribute it and how this should be done. These texts frequently characterised what they regarded was wrong with current policy practice – “when the government is the overwhelming dominant patron, there may be no other place to go. Often, a government’s refusal to subsidize a project is the equivalent to preventing its realization.... {does this} amount to censorship³¹”? Texts discussing post WWII government arts subsidy often accepted its existence as self evident, regarding it as a proper continuation of the role of the private patron commissioning works of art (like the Medicis and their frescos or the Hapsburgs and their opera houses)³². This persistent fallacy failed to note that the continuum of the private patron was the private patron. The Gettys and the Rothschilds purchase of art, like their predecessors, was with the intention of acquiring aesthetic objects, displaying wealth and extending power. The few texts that acknowledge that a subsidized arts industry was an imaginary construct reliant upon a stream of qualitative decisions (opera should receive

³⁰ Tom O’ Reagan characterised Rowse’s argument as sharing a preoccupation he had identified in Cultural Studies literature from the 1980s on. He described this as eschewing focus on policy program and “engagement with the development of the state from the point of view of the disadvantaged recipients or those who are excluded from such policies altogether, and ...sought to defend or restore community”. ‘(Mis) taking Policy: Notes on the Cultural Policy Debate’, in John Frow and Meaghan Morris (Editors) *Australian Cultural Studies: A Reader*. Allen and Unwin. Sydney Australia. 1993. p. 194.

³¹ Milton C. Cummings and Richard S. Katz. ‘Government and the Arts: An Overview’. *op. cit.* p. 14.

³² Andrew Sinclair. *The Need to Give: The Patrons and the Arts*. Sinclair-Stevenson. London, England. 1990.

funding, rock music should not) often veer, like the Australian examples, swiftly into the realm of the ideological expose³³.

These characterisations of arts subsidy like those in much contemporary Australian cultural history, maintained three powerful myths about the development of cultural ideologies and practice in the period covering post WWII to 1967.

Three Powerful Myths

The first myth was that problems pertaining to current cultural policies all occurred after the setting up of the first official government funding body in 1967 and that by applying certain solutions to these problems one could finally get it right. This failed to identify that the strategies deployed during the earlier post-war period forged a complex, powerful and importantly successful (in the sense that it could maintain and reproduce itself) model for contemporary arts culture that absorbed and deflected criticism and was able to adapt and transform itself in perpetuity³⁴.

³³ “Our arts policies are often at best political constructs, thinly disguised control systems which rely on the persuasive redefinition of many arts terms to make them seem both benign and credible”. John Pick. *The Arts in a State: A Study of Government Arts Policies from Ancient Greece to the Present*. Bristol Classical Press. Bristol. 1988. p. 6.

³⁴ For example, Rowse’s book was perceived as an indication that the “established dictum that flagship national opera and performing arts companies and symphony orchestras were qualitatively superior forms of expression that would have a leavening effect, improving the taste and the aspirations of the popular classes, who may not even participate directly in the consumption of such forms... {as} the basis for their intrinsically worthy claims for public subsidy... {had} exhausted itself. Both the concept itself, as well as ways of justifying cultural subsidy in general, have undergone major rethinking, transforming government’s interaction with the arts”. Stuart Cunningham *Framing Culture; Criticism and Policy in Australia*. Allen & Unwin. Sydney. 1992. p. 40. However, within 10 years Rowse’s book was out of print and Australian Opera was celebrating its 40th anniversary, with a confidence that was best reflected in *The Sydney Morning Herald’s Good Weekend* magazine tribute on July 13th 1996, entitled “A Chorus of Approval”. It opened with the statement, “Its beginnings were humble, but for 40 years the Australian Opera has set a standard of excellence that is acclaimed worldwide”. 1985 was not a transformative point at which elite culture exhausted itself but rather, in the Australian Opera’s terms, a ‘crisis’ which proved to be the “decisive turning point {which} required governments to decide if the continuation of the opera in this country was important. Both the NSW and Federal Governments, the latter through the Australia Council decided it was... and a national opera company was deemed worth saving”. And indeed they did, with both governments coming to its aid in 1986 and filling its ‘financial hole’. The Australian Opera, like a number of other arts organisations criticised in the mid eighties, was granted triennial funding direct from the Major Organisations Fund (MOF) administered by the Australia Council, having a board (MOB) separate from that of the Performing Arts Board (PAB). As a result, the opera has managed (as the other organisations have) to characterise itself as an ‘elite flagship company of national significance’ thus effectively placed itself in an orbit impervious to the sort of criticism levelled at it a decade earlier.

The second myth was that government subsidy for the performing arts was somehow a natural consequence of an evolving society. This obscured the fact that, inculcating society with the belief that certain arts and forms of arts training were essential for a society and thus needed government funding, was the result of a slow, complex, difficult and artificial process.

The third myth was that there was a complete lack of contemporary resistance, commentary and criticism to, and of, this evolving model. This criticism and these attacks in fact contributed to the development of the model, specifically in regards to the relationship it would come to have with training and therapeutic educative practices, helping it to adapt and survive.

Life before the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust.

One of the most enduring notions regarding the formation of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust was that it was originally constructed explicitly to emulate high culture institutions like those operating in Europe and England. However neither the initial aims articulated by those involved with the AETT, nor the rather original and complex political, social and economic strategies involved in the early development of this organisation, support such a notion. The first charter of the AETT owed much of its ingenuity to the rapidly changing social environment from which it emerged and the diversity of cultural attitudes throughout the decade that preceded it.

Australia, like many other countries³⁵, was determined to emerge from the Second World War with an optimistic vision for its future and a broader sense of obligation to its citizens. This was evidenced by the fact that Australia was one of the earliest participants in the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). The Commonwealth embraced the credo of an “urgent necessity to inculcate in the minds of men, women and children the value of peace and

³⁵ Even conservative politicians such as Harold Macmillan in the UK were attempting to rectify some of the inefficiencies of capitalism as seen in his book. *The Middle Way*. London. 1938.

international understanding”³⁶ and passed an act approving the constitution of the organisation allowing Australia to be formally admitted to membership in June 1946. The Council of Adult Education (CAE) was established the same year with the recognition that economic growth was increasing the income and leisure time available to the majority. What was seen as being required, “was access and inducements to appropriate forms of recreation, to... encourage ‘self-training’ for the duties of citizenship”³⁷. The Department of Post War Reconstruction (DPWR), responsible for overseeing and coordinating Australian UNESCO activities, became swiftly involved in seeking means to provide its population, making the transition to civilian life, with appropriate avenues in which to occupy such leisure time.

H. C. Coombs (head of the DPWR) noted that as early as 1944, “representations had been made to the Commonwealth from a wide range of theatrical groups for financial aid and also for the establishment of a National Theatre”³⁸. These groups included the diverse range of ‘little’ theatre organisations, such as the Independent, the Minerva, the Union Repertory, and the ‘New’ Theatre in Sydney and Melbourne and the Australian opera movements and ‘National’ opera companies also in Sydney and Melbourne. These were examples of the dozens of pro-am groups operating in the 1940s with varying degrees of success. In 1945, the American-based conductor, Eugene Ormandy, was asked by the acting Prime Minister, Frank Forde, to prepare a report on Australia’s post-war cultural requirements - the findings of which stated the need for state orchestras and a national theatre but led to no immediate action³⁹. In 1948 the question of a National Theatre was referred to an Inter-Departmental Committee of which H. C. Coombs was also a member. This Committee was not responsible specifically for questions regarding the development of national culture, but one investigating the post-war role of the government in education. None of these overtures or investigations proved conclusive. As Coombs noted,

³⁶ *Summary of Recommendations by the Conference of Art Specialists of the State Education Departments convened by the Commonwealth Office of Education in Sydney. From 13th to 15th September 1948.* Australian Archives. Series A1838. Item 863/6/7.

³⁷ C. R Badger. *Adult Education in Post War Australia.* (ACER) Pamphlet. Melbourne, 1944.

³⁸ Coombs. *op. cit.* p. 218.

³⁹ Katherine Brisbane (Editor). *Entertaining Australia; The Performing Arts as Cultural History.* *op. cit.* pp. 256-7.

It was far from clear precisely what form of a National Theatre was being advocated. Some envisaged it simply as a building, some as a national touring company or companies providing more consistently the service previously rendered by visiting companies from Britain, others as a channel through which government aid would flow, and perhaps through which training and other services would be provided for smaller state and regional groups.⁴⁰

Furthermore, it was clear that many current assumptions regarding what constituted legitimate culture were far less fixed in this period. Beliefs that high culture product and excellence in the arts required subsidy and should not be bound by commercial concerns, or that elite European cultural models were what Australian theatrical communities aspired to, or indeed, that cultural development reflected a civilised society, were not particularly well inculcated into the Australian post-war psyche.

The spectacularly successful tours of the Old Vic Drama Company, the Ballet Rambert and Williamson's Grand Italian Opera in 1948 had shown that a high culture (albeit imported) product could be sustained by box office alone. Commercial entrepreneurs could use such examples to mount spirited and substantiated defences against attacks that their organisations were profit obsessed and thereby producing second-rate cultural material. In early 1949, Elsie Beyer, the business manager of the Old Vic tour, launched a broadside at Australian theatre owners and producers. She accused them of "bleeding the theatre" and stated that "it is time the Dominion theatre managers realise that as directors of an art they are under an obligation to foster its growth - not view it solely as a profit making venture"⁴¹. J. N. Tait, governing director for J. C. Williamson Ltd responded vigorously to her criticisms listing the number of high culture endeavours and artists the commercial company had brought to, or supported, in Australia - from Anna Pavlova and the Russian Ballet to Melba and the Borovansky Ballet. He added that 97% of box office receipts went into paying salaries and costs of these ventures. Tait ended with the rejoinder,

⁴⁰ Coombs. *op. cit.* p. 218.

⁴¹ 'Producers "Bleed" Theatre; Elsie Beyer on Profits'. *Sun Herald*. 30th January. 1949. p. 7.

Australian entrepreneurs, without aid from Governments, arts councils or guarantors, have willingly undertaken great financial obligations to make these ventures possible... Our organisation has not neglected the artistic side of the theatre. An instance is the current Italian Grand Opera season, guaranteed by J. C. Williamson Theatre Limited, which placed all its great resources and theatres at the disposal of the newly formed Education in Music and Dramatic Arts Society.⁴²

From Beyer's point of view it was clear, what Australia needed and what had been proved by the success of the tour of her company (that made over a £40,000 profit) was that "Australian audiences... wanted the best that was to offer in the theatre"⁴³.

Not all foreign visitors shared Beyer's view that Europe and/or England were necessarily equipped to lead Australia into a theatrical renaissance by bringing them the "best that was to offer in the theatre". Visiting English playwright Geoffrey Thomas took the view that "the finest drama is achieved only when the playwright takes his script under his arm and marches boldly into the theatre to take command"⁴⁴. Thomas believed the paucity of local content on Australia's stages to be a result of awe in which Australians held foreign productions (classic and contemporary), the autocracy of the theatre producers and directors and the lack of support for Australian playwrights. Rather than look to cultural practices in Europe or England to emulate, as Beyer had suggested, or encouraging artists to go there to gain experience, Thomas suggested that,

Indeed, it may well be the very factors of isolation and inexperience, which are so often put forward as insurmountable obstacles, may in the end prove to be the ladder on which the Australian drama will surmount the fixed traditions of the older school... Let the Australian actor and playwright take heart. Even if you are still convinced that the only road to glory lies via Shaftsbury Avenue or Broadway, I would suggest that in these days of speed and disappearing frontiers, a little bold propaganda and vigorous liaison might suggest that the experimental theatres of

⁴² J. N. Tait. Letter to the Editor. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 5th February. 1949. p. 2.

⁴³ 'Producers "Bleed" Theatre'. *op. cit.* p. 7.

⁴⁴ Geoffrey Thomas 'Take Heart, You Playwrights'. Music and Drama Feature, *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 22nd January. 1949. p. 7.

Sydney are as good a training ground as those of Kensington or Dallas.⁴⁵

There was very little evidence amongst Australian artists of this period that they were particularly interested in emulating their European ‘betters’ and indeed these foreign artists presence on Australian stages was increasingly resented. Actors’ Equity had consolidated and strengthened its position throughout the 1940s with an increasingly militant stance against imported talent, poor working conditions and low wages, culminating in a successful and widespread strike in 1944. While the strike was specifically mobilised around a J. C. Williamson show using non-equity members, the outcome resulted in the Minister for Labor, E. J. Holloway, supporting Equity’s advocacy of a closed shop of total membership. This allowed the actors’ union to push further for the establishment of Australian content and labour quotas⁴⁶.

In a similar action, the Musicians’ Union announced in 1949 that it was to ban all foreigners from future membership and only admit British people from overseas after ten years’ residence in Australia. In an editorial, *The Sydney Morning Herald* described this action as a “cultural tragedy” and “a juvenile cultural sin”⁴⁷. This was not because of the unjust implications it had for local immigrant musicians (the stemming of whose ‘flood’ the editorial deemed as acceptable) but because “these closed-shop tactics, were so utterly alien to the practice of the arts”⁴⁸.

There was also cynicism about what a ‘National’ theatre would achieve. It was felt by some that there was a more urgent concern about improving working conditions for performers. Two letters to *The Sydney Morning Herald*, reacting to a proposal to erect a national theatre building on an existing bowling green site near St Mary’s Cathedral in Sydney, questioned the utility of such an edifice. Instead they urged that if there

⁴⁵ *ibid.* p. 7.

⁴⁶ The strike was started by actor Gladys Moncrieff and some of the dancers over disputes involving the non membership of cast members, in the J. C. Williamson production of *Katinka*. The strike ran for three weeks and was supported by other sympathetic unions and student groups. Action during the strike included walkouts by casts in other Williamson shows, disruptions in others (students exploding stink bombs in theatres, waterside workers interjecting during a play’s run) and the mounting of a play *Stars and Strikes* by the Equity strikers in Melbourne. ‘Actor’s Equity of Australia 50 Years of Defending Australia’s Performing Artists’ *Equity*. November 1989. pp. 17-19.

⁴⁷ Editorial. ‘Another Blow to our Cultural Progress’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 18th January 1949. p. 2.

was to be money spent, it should be directed to supporting local artists and, in particular, the 'little theatres' that existed around the country at the time.⁴⁹

Adding to the multiplicity and disparity of opinions regarding what constituted the best future for Australian performing arts in the post-war period, was one pointed article by a *Herald* correspondent, Neville Cardus. The article challenged assumptions that a more cultured and educated society was a more humane and civilised one, reminding readers that, "education does not necessarily deepen sensitiveness or subtilise the art of living. It is in fact possible for a nation to achieve culture and miss civilisation altogether, Germany of our time, for example"⁵⁰. Cardus went on to assert that the national obsession with culture had less to do with humanising the masses than with governments, "inspired not by precedent and principle, but by fear of the growing and mainly selfishly acquisitive masses"⁵¹.

Cardus argued that the acquisition of culture was no more than a symbolic indicator of wealth and status, "if it is proof of culture to play the piano and buy the latest book from Sartre, then Bellevue Hill is as Athens under Alexander and Vienna under Mahler... A Steinway in the room is an assurance not only of wealth (and God save Mammon) but of taste". Culture could both mask inequity (Cardus cited examples of the poor working conditions of the artists providing such product) and become detached from political and social issues. He noted bitterly that Furtwängler, Gieseking and the Berlin Philharmonic's 1949 tour to London had received "vast, tumultuous, generous, admiring, applause" in a city "where German bombs had not long ago killed and destroyed". He finished with the observation that, "in America, these great artists are not honoured; fixed ideas, a priori logic, plus atavistic instincts, confuse the issue. A clear case of 'culture' not yet civilised"⁵².

⁴⁸ *ibid.* p. 2.

⁴⁹ John Barnard, Ex Old Vic. Letter to the Editor. 'Little Theatres; Subsidy urged for Development', *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 19th February. 1949. p. 2. Jean Garling. Letter to the Editor. 'Subsidised Theatre'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 17th February. 1949. p. 2

⁵⁰ Neville Cardus. 'Culture Is More Than Books And A Piano'. Music and the Theatre. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 13th March. 1949. p. 12

⁵¹ *ibid.* p. 12. J.M Keynes had similar fears in the United Kingdom, see 'Concepts of Self and Society'. Brown. *op. cit.* p. 172.

⁵² Cardus. *op. cit.* p. 12.

Tyrone Guthrie

Into this complex and variegated cultural environment entered eminent English director, Tyrone Guthrie⁵³ on a national seven week tour of Australia's theatrical landscape.

As part of Guthrie's visit to Australia, he prepared a report on the viability of an Australian National Theatre for the Chifley Federal Labor government. The commissioning and consequences of this report have been identified as the false start to the beginning of subsidised and legitimate theatre in Australia. It has also been characterised as highly controversial, polarising and of questionable or negligible consequence to the development of Australian theatre. This was owing primarily to the fact that the Government which commissioned the report was voted out of office before the report's recommendations could be acted on and because the incoming Menzies regime had no wish to support it. Consequently, the significance of the visit and the report tends to be overlooked or regarded as a 'notorious' aside in Australia's cultural history. The absence of detailed analysis has led to an over acceptance by some Australian historians of depictions of the 'tour' written by key players (such as Guthrie and Coombs in their respective autobiographies) a long time after the event⁵⁴. As a result, the prevailing concepts of culture in the late 1940s and of what a national theatre might mean to artists, or how the first official formulations of subsidy were received by practitioners and the public and why the Menzies government ultimately rejected the report, remain unaccounted for. As will be demonstrated below however, the Guthrie tour and the report were critical in framing certain cultural

⁵³ Tyrone Guthrie did fit the stereotype of the cultured English gentleman. An Oxford graduate he worked at The Old Vic theatre and Sadlers Wells theatre between 1933 and 1945. He then freelanced as a very successful director of theatre and opera classics. At the time of his trip to Australia he was the director of the Shakespeare Repertory Company.

⁵⁴ Discussions of the Guthrie report in contemporary Australian theatre analysis are peppered with historical inaccuracies. For example; Virginia Kirby-Smith's 1969 Ph.D dates Guthrie's tour as 1950 and stated that his subsequent report on the National Theatre was rejected outright (which it was not) by the Chifley Government due to the hostility it provoked on reception. *The Development of Australian Theatre and Drama: 1788-1964*. Department of English. Duke University. 1969. p. 106. Guthrie himself dates his tour in his memoirs as being in 1947 and describes the rejection of his report as a result of anti-colonial sentiment (see below). Tyrone Guthrie. *A Life in the Theatre*. Columbus Books. London. 1960. p. 247. The 'Guthrie Report' entry by John Andrews and Katherine Brisbane in *Companion to the Theatre in Australia*. *op. cit.* pp. 255-256, states that Guthrie was in Australia for only 2 weeks, rather than just over seven, perpetuating the notion that Guthrie's report was insufficiently researched.

ideologies and introduced on an official level, an educative model of theatre practice.

Guthrie's visit to Australia was not, as sometimes presented, only the result of a request from the Chifley government to the British Council to "send someone to take a look at the Australian theatrical scene {and consider} the possibility of an Australian national theatre"⁵⁵. Guthrie had already intended to travel to Australia to explore the potential of an Old Vic theatre tour of Shakespearean plays. As an adjunct to this, as suggested by the British Council, he was asked to prepare a report for "Mr Chifley, who was considering the possibility of an Australian national theatre"⁵⁶.

Guthrie's visit, even before he had left England, was transformed into epic and momentous proportions. *The Sydney Morning Herald* anticipated his arrival with blazing confidence - "Theatre Expert Will Help Us" read the headline. The editorial gushed that, "Guthrie, perhaps the most eminent producer in Britain to-day, with 25 years of brilliant achievement behind him, looks forward to his Australian trip with all the keenness of a schoolboy football captain at the beginning of a new season"⁵⁷.

The enthusiasm was not to last. Within six weeks Guthrie had issued his report containing the apparently bald conclusion that Australia was simply "not ready"⁵⁸ for a national theatre and that an elaborate two phase export/import plan must be enacted to make it so. The breadth of the reaction was enormous. The report was characterised at the time as being everything from patronising and arrogant, to an intelligent and generous assessment of the state of Australian arts culture. And while the report did ignite contrasting opinions from those involved in the cultural debate at the time, what they were 'polarised' about was far more complex than simply a divide between those who rejected or accepted his advice. More pertinent was how and why Guthrie reached the conclusions he did and what the consequences of those conclusions were. These require a more detailed examination of Guthrie's tour.

⁵⁵ Guthrie. *op. cit.* p. 247.

⁵⁶ *ibid.* p. 247.

⁵⁷ 'Theatre Expert will Help Us'. Editorial. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 6th February. 1949. p. 6.

⁵⁸ "'Not Ready" for a National Theatre'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 23rd April. 1949. p. 6.

Guthrie's Tour

Rather than seeking to create controversy, Guthrie appeared to be a man pathologically careful about how his trip to Australia was reported. The staff correspondent in London related that, "Tyrone Guthrie will not fly to Australia with any ready made recipe for a national theatre... he is taking care to put all preconceived notions about Australia and its theatre into the back of his mind". The journalist added cheerfully, "he is certain to be tremendously popular in Australia, as he is here"⁵⁹. In his autobiography, (published 11 years after the visit and possibly tempered with hindsight), Guthrie remembered being acutely aware of his precarious position - "here, the smiling strangers would feel, is one more bloody Pommy, one more sneering, sophisticated, colonial-minded bloody bastard"⁶⁰. Indeed, immediately after the presentation of his report, Guthrie was described in not dissimilar terms (but without insults about his origins) in a *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial. This was markedly different to the one that had welcomed him so splendidly six weeks earlier; now he was described as "rather patronising and disparaging"⁶¹.

The vehemence with which Guthrie's report was received was owing possibly to a combination of Guthrie's own confusion about his brief, his own perceptions of what a national theatre should be and a breakdown in the communication routes between himself, the British Council and the Chifley government. To begin with, it was obvious that Guthrie, for all his protestations, did have clear ideas regarding an Australian national theatre before he arrived and they were enormously informed, as will be shown in the next chapter, by his involvement with UNESCO's International Theatre Institute. He was *quoted prior to departure* stating that he believed Australian actors should be sponsored to go to England to gain experience, that money should not be put into "bricks and mortar", that Australian companies should tour internationally and that "the Australian national theatre must establish an Australian tradition"⁶². These four directives would appear relatively intact (and represent the substance of his recommendations) in his report *after* his investigation.

⁵⁹ 'Theatre Expert will Help Us'. *op. cit.* p. 6

⁶⁰ Guthrie. *op. cit.* p. 248.

⁶¹ 'Are We Ready for a National Theatre?' Editorial. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 8th May, 1949. p. 2.

Moreover, it was more than possible that Guthrie initially assumed that the national theatre he was asked to advise on was of the bricks and mortar kind, given that the theatre he was working in at that time, the Old Vic, was envisioning exactly that kind of future itself⁶³. It was not until Guthrie was actually well into his visit that he was referred to the inter-departmental Committee findings (that Coombs helped write) on a national theatre proposal⁶⁴. This report had advised that the national theatre should be an “institution supported by the Commonwealth Government which would sponsor a national professional drama company to tour Australian cities and towns, and also to stimulate and support regional theatre groups”⁶⁵. Given that Guthrie read this report, he would also have been aware that the modest request for £13 000 to carry out this tour was rejected in the 1948 budget. Whether this influenced his findings cannot be ascertained, given his lack of public comment about it. Certainly when he announced his conclusions on the question of Australia’s national theatre five weeks later, at a British Drama League luncheon, the inter-departmental Committee’s modest suggestions did not figure in his report.

Guthrie’s Import/Export Plan

Guthrie’s recommendations on how to create an Australian national theatre were divided into two parts - ‘import’ and ‘export’. The ‘first phase import plan’ involved bringing internationally respected theatre companies to Australia for a period of five years. This process aimed to improve Australian standards of both taste and talent. The ‘second phase export plan’ (to operate concurrently) involved forming a subsidised Australian theatre company and sending it to Britain for five years to train it in English classics. In conjunction to this, Guthrie recommended the establishment of a scholarship scheme for promising directors, designers and actors, so they too could be sent away to gain experience.

How did Guthrie reach these conclusions? First, the British Council who sponsored Guthrie’s trip could hardly be imagined to be unhappy with a

⁶² ‘Theatre Expert will Help Us’, *op. cit.* p. 6.

⁶³ The Old Vic theatre was in the decades long process of becoming the National Theatre of England. There was enormous turmoil involved in the company taking on this role but also in the search/construction of a proper building. H. Williams. *Old Vic Saga*. Winchester Publications Ltd, London. 1949.

⁶⁴ ‘Theatre Scheme Discussed’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 17th March. 1949. p. 11.

proposal for Australian government subsidy further supporting its already successful exploitation of the antipodean theatre circuit. Nor, for that matter, would Guthrie himself, who was part of a company that had already had such success here. This is not to ascribe to Guthrie less than honourable motives, but rather to stress that he was a creature of his own cultural context. Guthrie made two things explicitly clear in his memoirs (and to a lesser extent in his report). One was that he simply accepted that government subsidy for elite cultural product was essential. For Guthrie this was self evident, requiring little or no justification. He believed that such subsidy should be provided for quality national product and for quality importations. Guthrie also believed that such importation could be achieved without excessive cost. The 'import' plan was not for "private enterprise". The cost of bringing world class companies to Australia over the five year period was to be supported by "either State or Government funds" which, organised efficiently, "would not lose money"⁶⁶.

Secondly, Guthrie was also promoting ideas for national and international theatrical development that echoed the beliefs of the other members of UNESCO's International Theatre Institute. The purpose of the Institute was "to promote international exchange of knowledge and practice in theatre arts"⁶⁷. Guthrie's export/import plan to some extent simply reflected the "two pillars of all ITI activities" - theatre information and theatre tours. This kind of 'show and tell', of the productions of a more 'cultured' nation to a less 'cultured' one, was genuinely felt by all the membership to be the most efficient way to stimulate taste and interest.

Thirdly, Guthrie believed that the market for such high culture products was intimately related to class structure and the acquisition of taste. Guthrie asserted in his memoirs that he believed the theatre's duty to be neither educative (in a conventional sense) nor morally uplifting. He disagreed with arguments (such as that contained in the charter of the Old Vic), that theatre's purpose was to enlighten the mass, "something we must take, like pills, because it is good for us". His experience at the Old Vic clearly indicated to him that the 20th century was bringing to the legitimate theatre a fairly distinct group of "intelligent and earnest patrons,

⁶⁵ Coombs. *op. cit.* p. 220.

⁶⁶ "'Not Ready' for a National Theatre'. *op. cit.* p. 6.

intensely aware of its responsibility as an audience” and who provided the basis for the company’s support⁶⁸. While Guthrie did believe in the fundamental superiority of such a high (and skilfully wrought) culture over the popular, he also believed it was attended willingly by an audience distinguished not exclusively by its class but by its intellect. He furthermore believed that, “Australian society is no more classless than any other” and that these hierarchies had more to do with taste and selection than with relative income.

His observations about Australia at this time were fascinating and revealing.

My dominant impression on this trip was not of Australia at all, but of home, provoked by impressions of a supposedly classless Australia. I do not mean to imply that British class-consciousness is a good thing or bad. It is both. But not till you get away do you realise how dominant it is....

In {Australian} small towns as well as the large, the doctors and dentists and their wives dine with one another, not with the truck-drivers and their wives, for the excellent reason that, by dint of common interests and roughly similar income, the evening is apt to be easier and pleasanter... In Australia in 1947 {sic} domestic labour was still regarded as a degrading occupation, although manual labour - by dint of the powerful trades unions - seemed to be rewarded, in proportion to intellectual labour, more highly than I have ever known... paradoxically, this made for more, not less, class distinction. Where nearly all the homes are run without domestic help, and on a similar scale of expenditure, the cultural standard can almost always and immediately be assessed; and this, rather than wealth, becomes the distinguishing factor.⁶⁹

Guthrie saw a great variety of performances in six cities while he prepared his report which, in his words, were not “particularly exciting” and importantly not particularly well attended. While Australia in the late 1940s had “an extraordinary mine of talent”, and there did exist a class of patrons interested in serious high culture, it was also one of low economic status. This meant that, “at that time {Australian theatre} had no satisfactory organisation for its expression, no considerable public

⁶⁷ *Annual Report of the Secretary-General on the Activities of the International Theatre Institute July 1948-June 1949*. Australian Archives. Series A 1838/1. Item 862/18/2 Pt. 2. p. 2.

⁶⁸ Guthrie. *op. cit.* pp. 127-131.

⁶⁹ *ibid.* pp. 249-250.

appreciation to develop it, and little enlightened criticism to lead the public”⁷⁰. In addition, Guthrie’s awareness of the hesitation of the government he was asked to advise, to subsidise existing cultural organisations and his involvement with ITI, made it completely understandable he reached the conclusions he did⁷¹. If the government wanted a company similar to the Old Vic (but recognisably Australian⁷²), established in an environment of tenuous interest, then it would be necessary to train the taste of the local audiences, increase their numbers and model the artists in the mode of those international companies. This latter process was far simpler to do in England.

Response from the Arts Industry

The reaction to the report was immediate, vocal, particular and disparate. Guthrie was incorrect however, that the “tremendous head of steam” aroused was simply a kneejerk xenophobic reaction.

Persons who would not otherwise have given a snap of their fingers to support a national theatre felt a passionate eagerness to possess such an institution, and a passionate rage against the sneering bloody Pommy who dared to suggest that the time was not yet right.⁷³

In fact, most of the responses, in the press at least, came from practitioners previously involved in the national theatre debate. In addition, they were not mouthing anti-colonial sentiments. There is not a single criticism in *The Sydney Morning Herald* or *Sun Herald* letters, opinions or articles, for the following eight months critical of Guthrie’s expertise or his nationality. Nor are all the responses dismissive of Guthrie’s conclusions. From over thirty published opinions (in the form of letters, features, articles, reportage) between April 23rd 1949 and November 19th 1949, six individuals initially completely supported his suggested

⁷⁰ *ibid.* p. 252.

⁷¹ This is supported by the speed in which Guthrie, utilising the same ‘plans’, (given adequate commitment and the existence of extensive public interest) established the Shakespeare Theatre Company in Stratford Ontario in the 1950s. See Chapter 4.

⁷² “The actors {of an exported National Theatre} should not waste their time learning to speak with an English accent. One of their functions should be to set a standard of Australian speech... I believe a theatrical company speaking well, but in a recognisably and consistent Australian lingo, could succeed in England; and that this success of dialect would be an important element in the resolution of a complex that is seriously detrimental to Australian national self-confidence”. Tyrone Guthrie. ‘Guthrie Report’. Andrews. *op. cit.* p. 256.

⁷³ *ibid.* p. 252.

initiatives. An example of this was the letter stating, “without the guidance, instruction and inspiration of a man of the stature and experience of, say, Tyrone Guthrie, any attempt to start a National Theatre in Australia is doomed to failure”⁷⁴. Others supported Guthrie’s proposals in part⁷⁵. Ross Buchanan regarded the report as “the most confounding and disappointing statement yet issued on this vital subject” (primarily because he thought the national theatre movement must have a building in each city) but he did agree on the need to import culture to set standards⁷⁶. Even an indignant newspaper editorial conceded that Australia’s “present day theatre standards are below those of Europe”, before adding that such a state existed, “because an import-and-export system {as Guthrie suggested, had already} gone on for a couple of generations, {and} not been effective”⁷⁷.

What was most significant was that the reactions did not polarise into pro - Guthrie and anti - Guthrie camps. The majority simply disagreed with him (rejecting both export and import plans) and argued that Australia was more than ready for a national theatre. Where the reactions differed was about where this national theatre should emerge from and where the resources for its creation should go. The reactions divided loosely into camps in which one was either pro or anti the existent ‘little’ theatres, a subject Guthrie did not discuss. *The Sydney Morning Herald* editorial argued that Guthrie’s “contention that we are unfitted at present to make a start {on a National Theatre} ignored the capabilities of {those} little theatres”⁷⁸. Even within these camps there was a range of debate. There were disagreements about whether buildings were needed or if writers were more important than actors to the national theatre movement. Nonetheless, what did appear to distinguish them as two groups was the different attitudes to the kind of training (preparation and development) they felt was required by practitioners to prepare for a national theatre.

⁷⁴ May Hollinworth, Beatrice Tildesley, R Windeyer, A McLelland, O D Bisset - Joint letter to the Editor. ‘National Theatre: Parochial Attitude Fatal’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 26th August. 1949. p. 2.

⁷⁵ Leslie Rees, for example, accepted the validity of ‘importation’ for raising standards, but rejected the ‘exportation’ of a National Company. Leslie Rees ‘Develop the National Theatre on Home Ground’. *Australian Quarterly*. Sydney. June. 1949. p. 15.

⁷⁶ Ross Buchanan. Letter to the Editor. ‘Australian Theatre: What is Needed’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 29th April. 1949. p. 2.

⁷⁷ ‘Are We Ready for a National Theatre?’ *op. cit.* p. 6.

⁷⁸ *ibid.* p. 6.

This was a significant development, as prior to Guthrie's visit the notion of systemised theatre training (either of an artist or an audience) was largely absent from discussions regarding a national theatre. Whilst Guthrie asserted he did not believe theatre should set out to educate the audience and he disliked the notion of institutionalised (methodologically based) actor training⁷⁹, his report advocated an educative theatre model. The 'export' phase was intended to train the artist (albeit by experience), and the 'import' phase to educate and train the tastes of Australian audiences⁸⁰. While many practitioners appeared to reject Guthrie's plan, they began to accept the frame of his argument that the legitimate theatre was an activity that one must be trained for. At this point, the majority of Australian practitioners agreed with Guthrie that training for the artist should come through occupational experience - "the only way to learn to tie knots is to get a piece of string in your hands and tie it into knots"⁸¹ - and not through institutionalised systems. Where Australian practitioners differed was where such experience should come from.

The polarity in the pro and anti 'little theatre' camps reflected a philosophic division. On the one side were those who argued that the small pro-am companies had the capability (given the resources) to train, produce and reach 'world' standards. Advocate Bryson Taylor stated, "all professional actors were amateurs once, and they will all tell you that the only way to learn to act - is to act... the art of the actor is such is that he must have an audience to gauge their response and reaction to his work"⁸². Antithetical to this view were those arguing that the 'little theatres' were simply "perpetuating a low standard {because} a play which owes its success merely because the players have a lot of friends who buy tickets {was} merely delaying a national theatre as it should

⁷⁹ Peter Hall described how Guthrie "conspired to effect the closing of the Old Vic School... I suspect he thought it was too arty". The School run by Michel Saint-Denis, George Devine and Glen Byam Shaw was teaching the methodology of Stanislavski. Peter Hall. 'Foreword'. Guthrie. *op. cit.* p. i. Michel St Denis. *Theatre, The Rediscovery of Style*. Heinemann. London. 1960.

⁸⁰ There is a certain irony in this given that Guthrie stated in his memoirs that he dreaded the word 'educational' when it was applied to theatre. He also discussed the dangers to theatrical autonomy if funding was predicated on an educational platform (which came to characterise much of theatre subsidy in both Australia and Britain). He did, however, unequivocally believe that the theatre was educative in the sense that it "widens the imaginative horizon by presenting ideas in the most memorable way". Guthrie. *op. cit.* p. 129.

⁸¹ *ibid.* p. 141.

⁸² Bryson Taylor. Letter to the Editor. 'Little Theatre Training'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 4th May. 1949. p. .2.

be”⁸³. This latter minority view (held by those more likely to support Guthrie’s proposals) believed that standards could only come, and should only be sought, from expert help, (the imported director, the exported company) and that a national company must be constructed and trained from the top down.

This vigorous debate amongst practitioners and the press had little effect on the official reception to, and ultimate acceptance of, Guthrie’s recommendations. While the Inter-Departmental Committee advising the Chifley government was aware of the debate, Coombs argued that,

It was reluctant to oppose the Report in any essential component, feeling that Guthrie’s authority was needed to push the government into action, and confident that, once under way, a National Theatre organisation would develop its own priorities. Accordingly, the Committee recommended that the Government decide that a National Theatre organisation would be established in three years and should set up a touring company, which would use existing theatre buildings. Pending this action it proposed that the Government should set up a guarantee fund of £30 000 to support the visiting companies contemplated for the Import Phase; establish a scholarship fund of £10 000 to support trainee actors, designers, technicians to be chosen for study in England; and appoint a Board of Trustees and a business manager.

In October 1949 {already having gained State co-operation in principle at the Premiers conference in August} Cabinet endorsed the proposals in principle.⁸⁴

Despite Coomb’s assertion that the Inter-Departmental Committee “shared some of the doubts” articulated by practitioners, the reality was that the Committee’s ‘scepticism’⁸⁵ regarding the plan, had little to do with practitioner concerns regarding employment, training, access and control. This was made explicitly clear in the public reaction to the announcement of the Federal Government’s Plan for a national theatre in August 1949.

⁸³ (Mrs) A H Dougan Gen. Sec. The Australian Arts Movement. Letter to the Editor. ‘National Theatre’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 2nd May. 1949. p. 2.

⁸⁴ Coombs. *op. cit.* p. 222.

⁸⁵ The Interdepartmental Committee was quite dubious about the utility of the ‘export’ phase and imagined that a London based Australian Company would lose its members to English companies or “strengthen the ‘colonial’ dependence of Australian Theatre”. *ibid.* p. 222.

It became immediately clear that there was even less support for the Government's proposal than there had been for Guthrie's controversial plans. Particularly unpopular was the lack of any employment opportunities for local performers (a local company would not be started for three years) something that had existed, in a limited extent, in Guthrie's plan for creating and 'exporting' an Australian company. Nor were practitioners pleased that the first Commonwealth subsidy of the performing arts was to be used to "meet any losses in bringing productions here", despite the incentive that this would produce a reserve fund on which the National Theatre Company "could rely" three years hence⁸⁶. In the same article, Hal Alexander, the secretary of Equity stated the union was "very dissatisfied" with the plan and that it was considering taking action. John Tait, from the commercial theatre sector representing Williamson Ltd, was also dubious about the benefits, arguing, "if the Government contemplated cultural theatrical productions such as Greek tragedies or Wagnerian operas there would be little scope for local actors in the cast"⁸⁷. Even ardent supporters of Guthrie's initial plans took exception to those proposed by the Chifley Government. Given the basic similarities of the proposals, such opposition appeared quite perplexing. May Hollinworth, producer of the Metropolitan Theatre in Sydney, criticised the Federal Government proposal on the grounds that, "bringing whole casts to Australia could be the means of swamping local talent". She suggested instead, that "the government should subsidise small theatres in capital cities {allowing} local talent broader scope for development"⁸⁸. Two days later, in an apparent volte-face, Hollinworth, in a joint letter to the paper, was energetically defending Guthrie's original plan to export artists overseas and the importance of imported companies to "set standards" for both actors and audiences. She ended with the warning that "any parochial or parish-pump attitude toward this National Theatre problem will be utterly fatal"⁸⁹. In an even more extreme change of attitude, A. H. Dougan, the general secretary of The Australian Arts Movement disputed in early May that the 'little' theatres had "kept alive Australian theatre" and he regarded "Mr Tyrone Guthrie's analysis of Australian theatre as very much to the point. We have no world standards

⁸⁶ 'Theatre Plan; Views Vary'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24th August, 1949, p. 4.

⁸⁷ *ibid.* p. 4.

⁸⁸ *ibid.* p. 4.

and until we look to these world standards Australia will not be ready for a National Theatre”⁹⁰. By August of the same year, Dougan completely altered her position and argued that it was “apparent that Mr Chifley thinks that the standard here is very low and apparently we must have overseas productions for at least three years... Is local talent then to be suppressed as not worthy?”⁹¹.

Not all rejected the Government’s proposals. Indeed some who had been most vocal in their rejection of Guthrie’s plans, suddenly warmly supported the government’s proposals. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, which had published the extremely critical editorials (quoted above) in reaction to Guthrie’s import/export plan⁹², totally shifted its editorial position after the Commonwealth announcement in November. The paper now stated that imported companies had in fact instituted a, “lively reawakening of public interest in the drama {and} set standards which are inspirational and technically invaluable”⁹³. While this editorial (printed on the eve of the Federal election) still argued that there was a “crying need for a ‘National Theatre”, as there had been in May, it now accepted that a version of Guthrie’s plan should be implemented. The editorial stated that, “to its credit, the Federal Government has taken a big step in the right direction”⁹⁴.

These extreme changes in attitude toward two barely distinguishable proposals in less than a space of a year, revealed examples of the emergence of a conception of theatre and by extension culture in Australia that had not as yet existed in any entrenched way. Two separate sets of issues, ostensibly at odds with one another, appeared increasingly to be held simultaneously without a sense of conscious contradiction. These issues related, on the one hand, to the economic and practical realities of producing theatre and on the other to the symbolic weight that could be

⁸⁹ May Hollinworth, Beatrice Tildesley, R Windeyer, A McLelland, O D Bisset. ‘National Theatre: Parochial Attitude Fatal’. *op. cit.* p. 2.

⁹⁰ (Mrs) A. H. Dougan. ‘National Theatre’. *op. cit.* p. 2.

⁹¹ A. H. Dougan. Letter to the Editor. ‘National Theatre’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 22nd August. 1949. p. 2.

⁹² ‘Are We Ready for a National Theatre?’ *op. cit.* p. 6.

⁹³ ‘Too Much Neglect of Our Cultural Progress’. Editorial. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 19th November. 1949. p. 2.

⁹⁴ *ibid.* p. 2.

attached to a cultural object: a phenomenon the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu referred to as 'cultural capital'.⁹⁵

May Hollinworth and her colleagues for example, recognised the cultural capital in supporting Guthrie's original proposal (as had H. C. Coombs), because he was an eminent foreign producer of legitimate cultural product. This was an association which increased the symbolic capital in their own ventures. However when these proposals were about to be implemented in reality by the Federal Government, Hollinworth and her colleagues could just as enthusiastically argue that they were unacceptable because they provided no practical assistance whatsoever to the small companies of which they were all members. Similarly, the *Herald's* rejection of Guthrie's import/export plan was by means of invoking an ideological rather than practical argument, "Australia is more than ready {for a national theatre} in the sense that the cultural need for the mass of the people to have more regular experience of the drama is pressing"⁹⁶. The paper's apparent about face in then supporting the Federal Government's plan (which was in most respects what Guthrie proposed) was more complicated. It appeared that while the paper had rejected Guthrie's plans on practical grounds it was prepared to accept the Federal Government's proposal because of its symbolic value. The Editorial applauded the Commonwealth's recognition that "civilisation does not thrive on bread alone"⁹⁷ and that it had recognised the need to separate cultural product from economic associations - "actors and companies of world celebrity have been imported for the commercial theatre. But there has been no way of fitting such visits into a planned program of cultural development"⁹⁸.

Evidence that these were examples of an emerging illogical (but symbolically coherent) cultural system, were also to be found in the lack of logic behind the Federal Government's acceptance of Guthrie's national theatre recommendations. Prime Minister Chifley had been quoted as

⁹⁵ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Field of Cultural Production*. Polity Press and Blackwell Publishing. Cambridge, Oxford. 1993. A useful examination of Bourdieu's notion of Cultural Capital is contained in John Guillory's same titled text. *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*. The University of Chicago Press. Chicago. London. 1993. pp. vi-xiv.

⁹⁶ 'Are We Ready for a National Theatre?' *op. cit.* p. 6.

⁹⁷ 'Too Much Neglect of Our Cultural Progress'. *op. cit.* p. 2.

⁹⁸ 'Are We Ready for a National Theatre?' *op. cit.* p. 6

regarding theatrical enterprises as “sinks for public money”⁹⁹, an attitude which had led him to reject the rather modest £13 000 National theatre proposal formulated by the Inter-Departmental Committee for inclusion in the 1948 budget¹⁰⁰. A year later, the same government accepted a plan that cost almost £60 000 (a more than 400% increase). This new more expensive plan provided no local employment for artists. It also provided subsidy for foreign companies already making healthy profits in Australia and interfered with Australian commercial theatre endeavours. What the new plan did have going for it however, as acknowledged by Coombs, was it carried with it Guthrie’s ‘authority’ and it was this factor and the cultural capital it carried with it that made it viable.

In initiating these costly and cost-ineffective plans, the Chifley government was starting to enact some of the symbolic aims of Post War Reconstruction, which included, according to H. C. Coombs, “a recognition from the outset that the economic system could... only satisfy part of human need. The government’s commitment to a better world after the war that had started out in the early 1940s merely as statements to strengthen national resolve for the involvement in international conflict, now became a feature of official propaganda”¹⁰¹. Alongside promises of security, full employment and the narrowing of “the gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’”¹⁰² offered to post war inhabitants, was the promise of a new polymorphous model of culture. As defined by organisations such as the Arts Council of Australia (established in 1943), this model’s newness lay not in its individual components which were familiar (for example ‘music soothes the savage breast’), but rather in the new combinations of apparently contradictory notions of culture. Culture was now characterised as being simultaneously physical and spiritual, both want and need, both material necessity and escape from the material, an appreciation of that which was excellent - the art and the artist - but also an expression of all individuals, both elite and accessible¹⁰³. It was an essential and not a luxury, a necessity like food or housing but also a

⁹⁹ Coombs. *op. cit.* p. 235.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.* pp. 218-220.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.* p. 220.

¹⁰² *ibid.* p. 220.

¹⁰³ All these apparently contradictory concepts of ‘culture’ appeared in an undated memo regarding the ‘Function and Policy’ of ‘*The Arts Council of Australia*’. AET Archives. MS 5908. Box 25. pp. 1-6.

necessity that required cultivating in the individual and implanting in a young mind. It was immortal but must be fostered or it would die. It was equal to, but separate from, “the fundamental economic freedoms” but in itself was to act as a civilising constraint on “abundant leisure”¹⁰⁴, a freedom one had to be trained in, a pursuit that was intangible, invaluable, non-material and required financial support.

By agreeing to act upon Guthrie’s expensive plan for a national theatre (yet rejecting the far less inexpensive one from the interdepartmental committee) the Chifley government was investing in a model richer in cultural capital and one that denied the need for it to be economically rational. As Bourdieu observed,

The art business, a trade in things that have no price, belongs to the class of practices in which the logic of pre-capitalist economy lives on... These practices, functioning as practical negations, can only work by pretending not to be doing what they are doing. Defying ordinary logic, they lend themselves to two equally opposed readings, both equally false, which each undo their essential duality and duplicity by reducing them either to the disavowal or to what is disavowed - to disinterestedness or self interest. The challenge which economies based on disavowal of the ‘economic’ present to all forms of economism lies precisely in the fact that they function, and can function, in practice and not merely in the agents’ representations - only by virtue of a constant, collective repression of narrowly ‘economic’ interest and of the real nature of the practices revealed by ‘economic’ analysis.¹⁰⁵

It was concerning this emerging “duplicitous” relationship between the arts and economics that the consequences of the Guthrie and Chifley government proposals should be viewed. This was despite the fact that both proposals were rejected by the Menzies led Liberal Party which defeated the Labor party in the December Federal Election of 1949. While Coombs and Guthrie characterised this rejection as simply an example of Menzies’ “philistine” tendencies, there was in fact a legacy of the proposals that they did not perceive. Guthrie’s version of events was that, “the Menzies government took a traditionally conservative view of Art, and the report

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.* p. 3.

¹⁰⁵ Bourdieu. ‘The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods’. *The Field of Cultural Production. op. cit.* p. 74.

fell upon stony ground”¹⁰⁶. For Coombs, (who described Menzies as having “little interest in the Arts”) the rejection of the proposal emerged from the new Prime Minister’s conviction that “Commonwealth support for the Arts... {was} part of the galloping socialist planning of the Chifley regime, to be nobbled before punters became too interested. Financial restraint, a narrow conception of Federalism and a scepticism about Australian cultural potential combined to ensure that support for the Arts disappeared from the Cabinet agenda papers”¹⁰⁷.

However, the idea that certain forms of cultural product had to be protected from the sphere of economic realities were not self evident facts (as they appeared to be to Coombs and Guthrie) to Menzies, nor to the public who voted his government into power. Coombs’s and Guthrie’s explanations of ‘conservative philistinism’ failed to account for why the right wing Menzies and the left wing Actors Equity both concurred over the rejection of the Chifley Government proposal¹⁰⁸. Menzies was very clear that he regarded government involvement in the arts as something that could institute nepotism and stymie productivity (two accusations aimed at the subsidised AETT in the 1960s). However, Menzies also believed, as did Equity, to some extent, that the arts could and should remain connected to the market. Art would remain relevant in a society as long as artists saw themselves this way - “The artist, if he is to live, must have a buyer, the writer an audience”. If that market failed to support the best, preferring the talentless and the fashionable, the “comedian or beautiful half-wit on the screen”, it was the result of “a world which need{ed} to have its sense of values set right” by independence and education¹⁰⁹. This was an endeavour – setting things “right” through education, as will be shown in the next chapter, fully supported by the Liberal party and it was

¹⁰⁶ Guthrie. *op. cit.* p. 252.

¹⁰⁷ Coombs. *op. cit.* pp. 218-220.

¹⁰⁸It was possible of course, that Menzies’ rejection of Guthrie’s report was quite particular. The middle class whom Menzies championed as the “forgotten people”, idealised as the “heart” of the nation and who gave him such success at the polls were described in unflattering terms a few months earlier by Guthrie in a BBC Broadcast, on his return to England. He described them as living in environments of “unrelieved, stereotyped department store mediocrity”. ‘Theatrical Producer Sums Us Up, Australia Vulgar But Vital’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 4th July, 1949. p. 2.

¹⁰⁹Robert Menzies. “The Forgotten People”. Pamphlet published by Robertson & Mullens. 1942, in Judith Brett’s, *Robert Menzies’s Forgotten People*. Pan Macmillan. Australia 1992. p. 10. Brett’s chapter ‘The Words of Mr Menzies’ pp. 1-4, provides a useful survey of the kinds of historical images of Menzies that emerged from both the Left and Right sides of politics. She also provides an interesting discussion on the effects that these ‘frozen representations’ have had upon cultural and political analysis in the last fifty years.

into this domain that the vocabulary Guthrie had established, regarding an educative and uneconomic theatre model, entered and began to frame subsequent cultural debate.

Chapter 3.

The Legacy of Tyrone Guthrie and the Launch of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust

The kind of legitimate performing arts endorsed by Tyrone Guthrie did not disappear from Australia with the rejection of his report but was actively supported and developed by various Government organisations. Guthrie's influence endured through the role Australian UNESCO would play in facilitating the introduction of the therapeutic function of drama into both the education system and theatre practice. The activities of UNESCO in the late 1940s and early 1950s counter impressions that the scuttling of both the report and the Chifley Government proposals for a national theatre, signalled a period of cultural stasis until the launch of the AETT in 1954.

Part one of the chapter looks at the results of Australian UNESCO's national survey into drama in general education. This survey provided a vital glimpse of the population's attitudes to drama and theatre in the post war era. The conclusions drawn from the survey revealed the frequency with which pseudo-scientific arguments were invoked to deal with paradoxical data and how closely related this was to the vocabularies that emanated from the 'closed' systems of actor methodologies. The results also provided a clear set of challenges to those in the national theatre movement eager to establish the kind of cultural institutions advocated by international UNESCO, ITI and the particular modernist function of the arts espoused by the director general, Julian Huxley.

Part two focuses upon the development and launch of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (AETT) and reveals how distinct its original aims for providing support for theatre were, from those of the Australian UNESCO Committees for drama and education. For the AETT founders, the urgent primary goals for fostering theatrical enterprise were resources and employment, rather than those of education and enlightenment. However, within a year, the original charter of the AETT underwent a number of radical alterations. The changes in the charter indicated that the founders of the AETT ceased to believe that the legitimate performing arts could be self-supporting and instead began to accept they were a set of activities that would require constant subsidy. After this point, the

organisation began pursuing the far less tangible goals of training both future artist and audience. This concept would help facilitate and justify arguments for subsidy and define the function of legitimate drama and by association, the AETT itself.

Part 1. Guthrie's Legacy

In 1949, the year the Menzies Liberal Government rejected the Guthrie Report and, according to H. C. Coombs, "banished support for the Arts from Cabinet agenda papers"¹, Australia's UNESCO Committees for Education and Drama established a working party, "for the purpose of considering the present position in regard to Drama in General Education in Australia"². To carry out this objective the working party agreed in its first few sessions that they would conduct a national survey of drama in education and educational drama activities conducted outside government institutions. This national survey would,

- (a) be limited to purely educational fields,
- (b) extend to all levels of formal education, including teacher training, and
- (c) include both "drama" as such, and "dramatic method" as a teaching technique.³

This cooperative venture was a very early initiative in the operations of Australian UNESCO activities. The advisory committees had only been established two years earlier in 1947. The Drama and Education Committees represented two of the eleven National Co-operating Bodies (Education, National Sciences, Social Sciences, Drama, Theatre and Literature⁴, Music, Visual Arts, Museums, Press, Radio, Film and Libraries) whose respective chairs made up the National Co-ordinating Committee. Each Committee provided the Federal Government with specialist advice on all aspects of the UNESCO program.

¹ H. C. Coombs. *Trial Balance*. Macmillan. 1981. pp. 222-223.

² 'Introduction'. *A Survey of Drama in General Education*. Draft Two. Sydney. September 1956. AETT Archives MS 5908. Box 26. p. 1.

³ *ibid.* p. 1.

⁴ The distinction made between 'theatre' and 'drama' is discussed below.

The speed with which the joint Drama/Education working committee was established mirrored exactly the imperatives of its parent organisation⁵. In May 1948, International UNESCO gathered a committee of experts to report on the function of the arts in general education. Their findings, sent to all member nations were that, the “establishment of machinery to develop and enrich the role of the arts in general education... in view of continued tension and unsettlement in the world... were extremely urgent”⁶. This urgency revealed itself in the Australian joint committee’s immediate decision to gather information on a national scale. It also revealed the importance Australian UNESCO placed on the educative value of drama and the role it would play in post WWII culture. Like International UNESCO, the concern in Australia in the late 1940s and early 50s, regarding the arts in education, did not include “the training of professional artists”⁷. The focus, similar to that of the Arts Council of Australia at this stage, was upon, a) all individuals (most of whom would not be professional artists) participating in “studies and activities leading to a fuller appreciation and understanding of the arts and b) the development of opportunities for creative achievement through the arts for all individuals, beginning with the lowest grades of schools”⁸.

The Joint Working Committee’s Survey of Drama in General Education

The Working Committee’s national survey of drama in general education examined the role of drama in education from pre-school through to tertiary levels and appeared in several versions. There was the 1952 Report on Theatre for Youth and the 1953 report by E.M Tildesley, the director of the British Drama League in Australia⁹. Both reports contained data collected from the questionnaire sent out to State Correspondents in 1950. This questionnaire underwent revision by the Joint Committee who sent it out again in 1954. This rather mammoth and lengthy national

⁵ Walter H.C. Laves, Charles A. Thomson. *UNESCO: Purpose, Progress, Prospects*. Indiana University Press. Bloomington. 1957. p. xix.

⁶ *Report of the Rapporteur. Committee of Experts. 11 to 15 May 1948. The Arts in General Education*. Paris. AL/Conf. 1/4. UNESCO. Australian Archives. Series A1838. 863/6/7. pp. 1–2.

⁷ *ibid.* p. 1.

⁸ *ibid.* p. 2.

⁹The first was a special International Theatre Institute survey subsequently incorporated in the “Theatre for Youth International Report on Activities for and by children in 27 countries’ prepared by

undertaking eventually took seven years to complete and contained the data of all the earlier versions.

The 1954 questionnaire had four sections: Theatre with Children under eleven; Theatre with Young People (11 to 18); Theatre for Children of all Ages and Drama in Adult Education. A sample of the questions asked, - "Is drama taught in your school as a specialist subject? Or are dramatic exercises based on mime and improvisation used as part of the accepted educational technique?", "Do young people ever present plays at school? When and under what conditions are they usually given? Do they come out of classroom work?"¹⁰. These questions made it clear 'drama' in education, at all levels, was regarded as *performance*, and not *text*, orientated. The play was not regarded as an object for academic study but rather as a basis for expressing and exploring performance skills (particularly mime and improvisation). Concern expressed regarding the lack of suitable (text based) material available for young people was in the context of it limiting opportunities for performance and "expression". The questionnaire also revealed a preoccupation with the qualifications and training opportunities available, asking frequently, "Are the actors trained? Are the producers trained?"¹¹.

The exhaustive final draft of the national survey contained an overview of the social, cultural, geographic and economic factors affecting theatre in post war Australia, as well as State Education reports and school and teachers' college curricula. The survey also presented detailed descriptions of existing general drama activities and the attitudes of theatre organisations, parents, the press and the public. The impressive collection of data from such a broad spectrum of participants made the document an accurate gauge of drama involvement in Australia of the early 1950s.

In the section entitled *Conditions in Australia*, the final report found that drama was in fact a minority activity. The report stated that drama was principally supported by amateur organisations, whose membership was predominantly female and the "the average Australian male {was} still not

the British Centre of the International Theatre Institute. The second report on Drama in Education in Australia was compiled for the American Educational Theatre Association.

¹⁰A *Survey of Drama in General Education*. *op. cit.* p. 90.

¹¹ *ibid.* p. 21.

greatly interested in theatre”¹². The report cited isolation and the expense of theatrical production as factors negatively affecting the expansion of drama activities and thus retarding the Australian national theatre movement. These factors were “automatically” stunting the development of drama in education. While there had been some growth in this area, the two decades of slight expansion of drama in general education in the 1930s and 1940s were inversely proportionate to the enormous decline in general theatre attendance¹³. More optimistically, but with very little empirical data to support it, the report asserted that the small but “enthusiastic” audience for live theatre (swamped by the “vast cinema going public”) was growing. It was hoped that the entry of European migrants (who were assumed to be more ‘cultured’) into the Australian population would act as an incentive in developing an appreciation of theatre in the general population¹⁴.

Despite the breadth and duration of the inquiry, the explanations given for the paucity of Australian interest in theatre and drama were for the most part unsubstantiated. The report’s authors viewed as self-evident that the theatre was “an educational and cultural force of the first magnitude” and that this should lead naturally to “the incorporation of drama as an integral part of the school curriculum”¹⁵. This was in spite of evidence collected to the contrary. In the survey there had been ample evidence that, “the dramatic method of teaching, the playway method of teaching and learning, the utilisation of the ‘by-products’ of drama and of drama as an art in education, [were] not universally accepted”¹⁶. The conclusion drawn from such data was not, however, that some teachers or practitioners had a valid basis for disagreeing with such methods, but simply that these methods *should* be accepted and went about explaining how this was to be achieved.

¹² *ibid.* p. 3.

¹³ W. Milgate, professor of English Literature at Sydney University in 1960, characterised this period as the “days of difficulty and depression that befell serious theatre in Australia {in which} the drama was kept alive by a small band of people whose faith, energy and resources were used without stint”. ‘Introduction’ *The Making of Australian Theatre*. Hugh Hunt. F. W. Cheshire. Melbourne. 1960. p. i.

¹⁴ *A Survey of Drama in General Education. op. cit.* p. 12.

¹⁵ *ibid.* p. 28.

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 28.

The survey made it clear that the joint Education/Drama committee accepted as unproblematic the assertion that, “drama as an artistic, educational and recreational exercise {was} a necessity in {Australia’s} national life”. While this was a conviction held by the Arts Council of Australia and drama enthusiasts, it was the first time such a statement had been ratified by a committee of theatre and education experts¹⁷ who would be reporting to the Commonwealth Government¹⁸. Rather than basing their findings on objective empirical analysis, the conclusions appeared to be indicative of a closed system of belief more than anything else. Certainly, the drama committee made up as it was of members from a mixture of professional theatre and literary organisations, the ABC, and Actors’ Equity¹⁹ had enormous self-interest in promoting the idea of a government assisted proliferation of drama activities. It was these representatives from the drama sector who took up the task of providing the expert analysis and not those from the education committee with less knowledge of (and less self-interest in) drama and drama training²⁰. This tyranny of ‘expertise’ occurred across all the UNESCO Co-operating boards, which increasingly excluded interested but were regarded as unqualified commentators. Members of the Teachers Federation were denied (despite repeated protestations) membership in the Radio, Press, Films, Libraries and Social Science UNESCO Committees because, the “Federation cannot be

¹⁷ International and Australian UNESCO, while focussed on upon improving the hearts and minds of ‘all men’ rarely had any lay people on their committees. It was an organisation that heavily favoured gatherings of experts with which to formulate policy.

¹⁸ The Government was not obligated to act upon their recommendations. “While we appreciate that the views of the National Co-operating bodies will of course be fully considered in the formulation of Australian Policy, we feel that it should be understood that those bodies themselves are not finally responsible for Australia’s attitude on the various matters raised by the Secretariat for comment and their views therefore cannot be taken as committing the Government in any direction”. J Burton Secretary. Department of External Affairs . Canberra. Letter to The Director, Commonwealth Office of Education. Sydney. 3rd September. Australian Archives. Series. A1361. Item. 16/20/1 Pt. 2.

¹⁹ The National Co-ordinating Co-operating body for Drama, Theatre and Literature from which the Drama Committee was drawn, had a representative of each of the following organisations – The British Drama League, the Fellowship of Australian Writers, The Australian Broadcasting Commission, Commercial Theatre Interests and the Actors’ and Announcers’ Equity Association of Australia. *Australian National Co-operating Bodies for UNESCO*. Annexure A. Australian Archives. Series A463/17. Item. 1956/1547. p. 3.

²⁰ The National Co operating body for Education had a representative of each of the following – The Directors of State Education Departments, the Australian Vice Chancellors Committee, the Headmasters’ Conference (non State schools), the Australian Teachers Federation, the Commonwealth Department of Health, the Australian Council for Educational Research, the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the New Education Fellowship, the Workers Educational Association, the National Union of Australian University Students and the Australian Council of School Organisations. *ibid.* p. 3.

regarded as an organisation specialising in the field”²¹. Federal policy and the UNESCO constitution stated that members had to be “active” in the field and any variations to this would mean, “the specialised and technical character of the individual national co-operating bodies would be seriously impaired”²².

The qualitative nature of the findings was evident in the definition given to the term drama in the survey findings. The authors assumed that the reader would understand and accept that the term indicated the legitimate drama made up of old and new, most likely non-commercial classics. The term did not include vaudeville, purely commercial theatre or indeed any kind of non-western theatre. When the Survey cited that the dance-drama activities of Aboriginal children in the 21 Aboriginal schools in NSW were increasing, it referred to colonial activities performed in English. For example, the presentation of the song *Wandering the King’s Highways* by the (Aboriginal) Wallaga Lake School Choir in the Choral and Verse Speaking Festival in Bega in 1954²³.

Starting with the unsubstantiated a priori belief - theatre was a cultural necessity - the committee, when faced with evidence that theatre was in fact an extreme minority activity, *could not* reach the conclusion that live theatre was simply regarded as irrelevant to the bulk of the population. Instead, the committee developed an argument that successfully explained not only the status quo but could also justify future investment. The report did this by evoking the notion of training (or lack thereof) to explicate both past, present and future conditions of drama in Australia. Comments regarding the lack of training of students, teachers and professional performers saturated the conclusion of the Survey:

The future development of drama in the primary and secondary school depends largely upon the training offered at Teacher’s Training Colleges and post teacher training. Not a great deal of time is allotted to this training at present... As drama in general education has expanded in the last two decades the acute shortage of qualified instructors, producers and leaders have become apparent... The standard of future work will

²¹ J. J. Dedman. Ministerial Office. Letter to H. S. Norrington, General Secretary. NSW. Teachers Federation. 14th July 1948. . Australian Archives. Series. A1361. Item. 16/20/1 Pt. 2. p. 1.

²² *ibid.* p. 1.

²³ This was perhaps not surprising given the policies of assimilation actively pursued at the State and Federal level in the 1950s. *A Survey of Drama in General Education. op. cit.* p. 19

depend on the standard of training offered, particularly for producers, and on the determination of a small band of enthusiasts and the reaction of the general public.²⁴

Such was utility and fluidity of the notion of training that it served as a justification for the future support of both theatre and of drama. The utility of the term also meant that the survey's conclusion glossed over certain practical implications. Questions regarding how students would be evaluated, according to what criteria, in reference to what body of work and by whom, remained (surprisingly in an survey about education) absent. At this point in the debate, particularly amongst the like minded, the simple invocation of the idea of training as resolving past and future deficiencies, were sufficient arguments in themselves. In time, these questions would become increasingly important.

The survey also contained a further number of unsubstantiated arguments that echoed many of the pseudo-scientific assertions found in contemporary actor methodologies. These assertions revealed the extent to which those involved in drama education in Australia were versed in, at least, the fundamental principles of such approaches to theatre. References regarding the efficacy of the "dramatic method" and its acceptance as a valid teaching procedure in America revealed at least a working knowledge of the American based Method approach to drama teaching. These were derivations of Stanislavski's System of actor training advocated by such New York based drama organisations as the Group Theatre Studio (1936), the Actor's Studio (1947) and the Theatre Workshop (1952)²⁵. It was likely however, that the "dramatic methods of teaching" cited in the Report had enormous variation and erratic dissemination amongst Australian drama educators at this time. While some teachers would have been familiar with some of Stanislavski's writing, the manner in which many of the ideas were spread was more likely to be via workshops, classes or by anecdote. The acceptance of the basic precepts of such methodologies was clearest in the repeated references throughout

²⁴'Conclusion'. *A Survey of Drama in General Education. op. cit.* p. 34

²⁵ For an overview of the factionalism about which of these groups represented the 'purest' form of Stanislavski's teachings see chapter 1 and 5. In Australia the American actor Hayes Gordon (who had been a member of the Actor's Studio) began teaching the Method in Sydney through the Ensemble Studios which he founded in 1954. Maria Kreisler. 'Russian Influences'. *Companion to Theatre in Australia. op. cit.* pp. 514-55. Kreisler also notes the influence of Stanislavski's methodology from the 1930s on, upon the Australian directors Doris Fitton, Colin and Gwenneth Ballantyne, Keith George and upon the Union Theatre Repertory Company founded in Melbourne in 1953.

the survey regarding the therapeutic and transformative aspects of drama in education. For example;

Drama in the schools is used in many different forms, but principally as a classroom method in the presentation of literature, as a means of developing personality and improving speech, as an end in itself, for purposes of recreation, and as a phase in the growth of a cultured community.²⁶

There were frequent claims in the various State reports as to the ability of drama education to improve “personality”, “social poise”, “self-confidence” and “grace” in the student. The report promoted the idea of the young child as the natural actor – “throughout the world children welcome drama in education”²⁷. In the section on General Education, drama and the ‘dramatic method’ were said to have helped re-educate delinquent girls as “good citizens” at the Parramatta Girl’s Training School. These methods enabled Aboriginal students to “express” themselves and helped bring out the “timid child” at St Michael’s School for Children in Need of Special Care²⁸. The section on Experimental Drama in the report that focussed on the benefits of psycho-drama and socio-drama noted that, “careful experiments have also been made to ascertain the value of socio-drama to help adolescent pupils to overcome their many social and emotional problems”²⁹.

In addition to the numerous philosophical echoes between the survey and contemporary actor methodologies the Working Party’s vision for educational theatre in post War Australia was informed by ideologies inherited from its parent organisation International UNESCO.

The function of theatre in UNESCO’s postwar vision

UNESCO was established in 1945 with the assumption that the resources of education, science and culture would provide the means not only for post war reconstruction but also “contribute to peace and security and foster

²⁶ ‘Report of the Minister for Education. W. A 1954’. *A Survey of Drama in General Education*. *op. cit.* p. 23.

²⁷ *ibid.* p. 17.

²⁸ *ibid.* p. 18.

²⁹ *ibid.* p. 25.

the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind”³⁰. The organisation’s faith in its ability to construct from these resources the “defences of peace in the minds of men ... since wars begin in the minds of men”³¹, revealed the extent to which Education underpinned, dominated and defined the Cultural and the Scientific. The dominance of Education was also because the original impetus for UNESCO came out of conferences of allied Ministers of Education held during the War³². This strengthened the organisation’s conviction, in the first decade at least, that one could simply *teach* people to be better - more civilised, more humane, and more tolerant, by introducing them to the great achievements and diversities of humankind³³. As the UNESCO Preparatory Commission declaimed, “we are convinced that society can eventually be transformed by education”³⁴.

Within the context of introducing and exposing post-war populations to “great” ideas - UNESCO viewed theatre and drama as the most “pertinent”, “affecting” and “educative” of all the creative arts³⁵. This representation of theatre as the quintessence of “living art” owed much to the ideas of International UNESCO’s inaugural director general, Julian Huxley.

Julian Huxley.

Huxley, who held the top post at UNESCO from 1946 to 1948, was responsible for the consolidation of many of the organisation’s early ideological assertions. He claimed that UNESCO was the first international agency charged with concern for the arts. While earlier organisations had existed

³⁰ Walter H. C. Laves, Charles A. Thomson. *.op. cit.* p. xix.

³¹ *ibid.* p. xix.

³² S. Nihal Singh. ‘A Beacon’. *The Rise and Fall of UNESCO*. The Riverdale Company, Inc., Publishers. Maryland, U.S.A. 1988. pp. 15-31.

³³ Richard Hoggart in his history of UNESCO has described such “extraordinary assertions as redolent of their time”. He argued that a shattered Europe, suffering from the after effects of fascism and propaganda, found such assertions with their “passionate emphasis on truth, justice and the importance of the individual” highly compelling. Richard Hoggart. *An Idea and its Servants - UNESCO From Within*. Chatto & Windus. London 1978. p. 27.

³⁴ UNESCO Preparatory Commission. *Report on the Program of the Organisation UNESCO/C/2* p. 40, in Philip Warner Jones ‘The Evolution of Guiding Principles’ *Literacy Education for National Development in the Program of UNESCO 1946-74*. Ph.D Department of Education. Sydney University. 1978. p. 60.

³⁵ *UNESCO and the Theatre*. UNESCO/C.L.21/1947. Paris, May 8th. 1947. Australian Archives. Series. A1838/1. Item. 862/18/2 Pt 1. p. 1.

with similar aims³⁶, UNESCO was the first inter-governmental organisation of its size and influence to deal with the arts as a totality and inculcate them in a systemised way on a global scale. It was also the first organisation to widely promote and implement the idea that the creative arts, which it regarded as “an important group of human activities”³⁷, could be utilised by a nation as a mass ideological force for good or, lacking the correct management, for bad.

Huxley’s manifesto, *UNESCO: Its Purpose and Its Philosophy* contained the most complete definition of how this dichotomy of good art/bad art functioned within the context of UNESCO’s international agenda. While, Huxley’s treatise did not reflect the ‘official’ agenda of UNESCO³⁸ it was still a useful guide to the, “western, liberal, democratic ethic concerning human welfare”³⁹ that dominated UNESCO in its early years. It was also useful in pinpointing the role envisaged for the theatre in the post war era. Huxley’s manifesto was also important because it echoed many opinions held by modernist theorists about the function the arts would play after WWII. Huxley’s manifesto also had a significant personal influence upon the way UNESCO’s vision for the arts affected Australia⁴⁰.

Good Art / Bad Art

Huxley asserted that the arts differed from the sciences in one fundamental respect. While science required quantitative amounts of discoveries and achievements to contribute to a single indivisible body of knowledge, art would never succeed based on this principle; “here we are in the realm of values. The individual work of art is pre-eminent, and no amount of quantity can offset low quality... what UNESCO must... aim at is

³⁶ The French based International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation had preceded UNESCO. Hoggart. *op. cit.* p. 25.

³⁷ Julian Huxley. *UNESCO: Its Purpose and Its Philosophy*. Public Affairs Press. American Council on Public Affairs. Washington. 1947. p. 48.

³⁸ Sponsorship of the book by UNESCO was withheld by the Preparatory Committee. Nor did Huxley’s book impress all of his colleagues. It was accused of being “a kind of philosophical Esperanto” by the Yugoslav member Vladislav Ribnikar. Laves *op. cit.* p. 49.

³⁹ Hoggart. *op. cit.* p. 9.

⁴⁰ It was Huxley who authored much of the early UNESCO correspondence to the Australia UNESCO committees specifically to do with the arts, arts education and International Theatre Institute. There were numerous suggestions, directives, ideas and offers of participation to the various local committees. *Department of Foreign Affairs Correspondence*. Australian Archives. Series A1838/1 Canberra. 862/18/2 Pt 1.

not the promotion of a single unit but the orchestration of diversity”⁴¹. This “realm of values” however did not condemn art to an insoluble state of relativism, but demonstrated the very set of criteria (unquantifiable values) by which to judge an art object. In order to distinguish between art as a “living” and creative aesthetic form, rather than a “dead” object of study’ (such as a museum piece) the “value” of the art was now measured by the intangible, the transcendent and the sensations experienced. Huxley stated - “the successful work of art always produces an emotional impact; further this impact has something almost physiological about it, certainly something irrational and intuitive in its nature”⁴². This “impact”, which created a relationship between art object and art subject (the subject could be either artist or audience) determined to some extent the value of the art. The more powerful the union between the two (which Huxley described as one of pure emotion) the more likely the longevity and the ‘goodness’ of the art. Thus in UNESCO’s vision, as articulated by Huxley, a ‘good’ art object’s value was both widely recognisable and unchanging, highly individualistic and diverse and must be measured in non-materialistic terms.

Within this definition, the social function of art was of enormous importance.

[Art] can serve to express, as no other medium can do, the spirit of a society, its ideas and purposes, its traditions and its hopes. It can serve as the focus for national pride, and so provide a justifiable and beneficent outlet for nationalism, in place of the usual glorification of size or wealth of political or military power; in a friendly rivalry in the things of the spirit, instead of in hostile competition for material aggrandisement. It can bring enjoyment and fulfilment to a people, in ways of which no other activity is capable... And its practice can liberate and develop the personality, whether the growing personality of a child, or the incomplete personality of an adult, and help heal many of the distortions of neurosis.⁴³

Huxley argued, that the task of UNESCO was to ensure that this therapeutic ‘good’ art was to accessible to all, especially those in danger of being corrupted and damaged by ‘bad’ art. Some ‘bad’ art was difficult to

⁴¹ Huxley. *UNESCO: Its Purpose and Its Philosophy. op. cit.* p. 48.

⁴² *ibid.* p. 49.

⁴³ *ibid.* pp. 49-50.

distinguish from the 'good'. A minor form of 'bad' art was, "incomprehensible except to the self chosen clique, devoted to the sterile pursuit of art for art's sake instead of for life's sake and so rootless that it ceased to have any social function worth mentioning"⁴⁴. Most 'bad' art however, was recognisable by its quantity (it was often mass produced), its escapist qualities, its sole aim to entertain and not instruct, its association with the fiscal and, in Huxley's opinion, because it was "cheap, vulgar and inadequate"⁴⁵. 'Good' art demanded effort, "to expect to be moved and enriched by *Hamlet*, or one of Beethoven's posthumous quartets... without some preparatory effort, is like expecting a man with flabby untrained muscles to enjoy and derive immediate benefit from a twenty-five mile walk in the mountains"⁴⁶. The task then was to ensure that 'good' art, which was produced by a minority who were particularly skilled or talented, was introduced to the mass of the population, "the working and middle classes", who lacked beauty in their urban environments.

Huxley and Modernism

Julian Huxley's attitudes regarding aspects of mass produced culture placed him clearly in sympathy with 20th century modernists such as Eliot, Ortega, Camus and those from the Frankfurt School - such as Adorno, Benjamin and Horkheimer. Like him, they regarded (to varying degrees), "the great mass of the people in modern industrial nations, middle and working classes alike, [as living] in surroundings deprived of any beauty and with no understanding of what the arts could do for their lives"⁴⁷. These were dire indications for the future of civilisation. The modernists, like Huxley, also tended to provide definitions of 'good' art, which stressed the objects uniqueness, originality and non-reproducibility. They also highlighted the transcendental aspects - the "aura" - of the authentic work of art and asserted that it was this, which was in most danger of being obliterated by the totalitarian blanket of reproducible 'bad' art such as cinema, radio and television. Where they differed with each other and with Huxley, was whether or not 'good' art could, and whether the means

⁴⁴ *ibid.* p. 54.

⁴⁵ *ibid.* p. 54.

⁴⁶ *ibid.* p. 54.

⁴⁷ *ibid.* p. 50.

existed to, bring enlightenment and salvation to the barbarism of the mass.

At one extreme were those theorists who denied the possibility, such as T. S. Eliot and Ortega. Both defended the sanctity of elite art, but believed that it was only accessible to the already cultured members of a society. Eliot believed any attempt to involve the mass in true culture would lead to the adulteration and degradation of that culture. Eliot asserted,

We know, that whether education can foster and improve culture or not, it can surely adulterate and degrade it. For there is not doubt that in our headlong rush to educate everybody, we are lowering our standards, and more and more abandoning the study of those subjects by which the essentials of our culture - of that part of it which is transmissible by education - are transmitted; destroying our ancient edifices to make ready the ground upon which the barbarian nomads of the future will encamp in their mechanised caravans⁴⁸.

The Frankfurt School was likewise cynical about the invocation of culture against mass civilisation,

The gesture of invocation itself, the exalting of culture at the expense of mass society, the devoted consumption of cultural values as a confirmation of one's elevated internal spiritual equipment, these are inseparable from the decadent character of the civilisation. The invocation of culture is powerless⁴⁹.

Conversely, Huxley and UNESCO (like Camus) adamantly believed that 'good' art could provide enlightenment for the mass. Patrick Brantlinger in his book *Bread and Circuses*, characterised this stance as belonging to a "cautious or disillusioned liberal" view of mass culture. This definition held that, "if a satisfactory culture for a democratic society has not yet developed, it may do so through education and through the creation of institutions that safeguard creative minorities against the tyranny of the majority"⁵⁰. Huxley argued that the interior life of 'mass man' could be developed and exercised (in the manner of the physical training analogy above) through education and exposure to 'good' art. In this context,

⁴⁸ T. S. Eliot. *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*. Harcourt Brace. New York. 1968. p. 185.

⁴⁹ The Frankfurt School. John Vietral (translator). *Aspects of Sociology*. Boston. Beacon. 1956. p. 94. Quoted in Patrick Brantlinger. *Bread & Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay*. Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London. 1983. p. 229.

⁵⁰ *ibid.* p. 185.

Huxley's definition of 'good' art was further refined. He rejected the act of simply providing "highbrow" or "self centred" enjoyment but advocated instead the creation of outlets for "powerful human impulses"⁵¹. What frustrated these impulses was an extensive range of modern urban mass culture and a physical environment devoid of beauty and art. Here the corrupted mass mind sank into bad taste revealed in the "mean", florid architecture {and} vulgar designs in furniture, wallpaper, crockery and textiles"⁵².

For Huxley, the remedy lay in the development of a new form of arts education.

Unesco intends to make a basic study of the role of art in general education, and of the methods involved. The scattered experiments that have been made in this field show that art in general education has two main functions. First, to give the developing human being not merely some understanding of art, but that real understanding which is at the same time love, and desire for further satisfaction through art. And secondly, to secure the development of a fuller and more solid personality in the child. The existence of this second function has been fully realised only in the last few decades. In the past, the intellectual, informational, and moral aspects of education have been allowed too exclusive a domination. It was not understood that the aesthetic creative urge is fundamental and needs to be satisfied if the personality is not to be incomplete or frustrated; expression through art can spell liberation, or resolution of conflict, or self-confidence in advancing into the strange unknown world that surrounds the child.⁵³

Huxley's vision of "a new world through education"⁵⁴ and his belief about the potent transformative capacity of art provided clues as to why he placed drama at the top of the hierarchy of UNESCO's post war cultural agenda. Theatre, particularly its non-reproducibility, perfectly fitted the modernist criteria for 'good' art. Drama was "transcendent", because it evoked a union between the object and subject, could be the "focus of national pride", was an outlet of powerful human impulses and assisted in

⁵¹ Huxley. *op. cit.* p. 56.

⁵² *ibid.* p. 56.

⁵³ *ibid.* p. 51.

⁵⁴ Warner, *op. cit.* p. 61.

the “liberation” of personality⁵⁵. While Huxley endorsed the Aristotelian notion of drama as a public cathartic ritual, he also recognised its unique properties in the mid-20th century. Paintings, literature and music were easily reproduced en masse through printing and recordings, whereas drama could be separated from the potentially corruptible mass medium of film⁵⁶, leaving one with the purer form of live dramatic performance. It was this latter activity, the ‘art’ of drama, which was so difficult (and expensive), to mass produce, that Huxley regarded as possibly, “the most essential in bringing life to the everyday issues of life... The drama has the capacity of giving immediacy and concreteness to human conflicts, whether of character or destiny or idea”⁵⁷.

This vision of theatre in post War reconstruction as “a powerful means to help fulfil the cultural and educational aspirations of large groups of people throughout the world”⁵⁸, was to be disseminated by the International Theatre Institute (ITI). The ITI (representing spoken drama, musical, ballet, dance and opera) was set up under the auspices of UNESCO and supported by the national committees of its member nations, such as Australia. It was via this route that the legacy of Guthrie returned to the country.

As noted in chapter two, Guthrie had been highly influential in the setting up of the International Theatre Institute and was one of the “distinguished” international theatre experts at the first ITI congress in Paris in 1947⁵⁹. The Australian Committees for Drama and Education joint decision to launch a national survey into drama in education, was both an endorsement of the ITI charter and an indication of what the focus would be for Australian UNESCO in the 1950s. The Australian committee reiterated, as had Guthrie in his export/import plan, ITI’s emphasis upon international cultural exchange, in particular the touring of “superior” play productions to “assist” culturally disadvantaged nations. They also placed enormous value upon the development of drama education. In this,

⁵⁵ Huxley. *op. cit.* p. 55.

⁵⁶ Huxley did accept the possibility of quality cinema. *ibid.* p. 51.

⁵⁷ *ibid.* p. 55.

⁵⁸ *UNESCO and the Theatre. UNESCO/ C.L.21/1947.* Paris, May 8th. 1947. *op. cit.* p.1.

⁵⁹ Other delegates included Jean-Louis Barrault, Pierre Renoir and Lillian Hellman. J.B. Priestly was the Chairman. Maurice Kurtz. Acting Secretariat International Theatre Institute. *International Theatre has found its Voice.* Australian Archives. Series. A1838/1. Item. 862/18/2 Pt 1.

they explicitly followed the agendas of the parent organisation, “making concrete recommendations regarding the relationship between theatre and education... and encouraging in every way possible the work of theatres when they function as laboratories of Dramatic Art”⁶⁰.

The Committees dealing with the theatre in Australia the early 1950s also had little choice but actively support the kinds of arts education reform advocated by International UNESCO. Australia’s status as ‘observer’ at the first ITI congress in 1948 was specifically because it had no national centre of theatre⁶¹. While, at that point there was still much optimism that the construction of such a centre was imminent and that that association with ITI would assist the “Australian non-commercial and Repertory sector”⁶², these hopes were obliterated in the 1949 election.

Those involved in the national theatre movement in the early 50s felt keenly their inability to enact ITI’s vision of a nation’s “dramatists and his actors {giving} a really intimate, truthful picture of their people.... {and making} a sound contribution to the new world civilisation... struggling into existence”⁶³. This was something that they felt could only be achieved, as indicated in the conclusion of their national survey, through the establishment of an organisation like the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust.

It was rather ironic that the creation of the AETT was originally quite different to what participants active in the Australian national theatre movement and Australian UNESCO anticipated. It was started without any support or subsidy from the government, was willing to support both commercial and non-commercial theatre and was completely focussed upon creating employment in the performing arts and not in furthering drama education. While the ideological concerns of the Australian UNESCO Advisory Committee on Drama and the practical concerns of the AETT

⁶⁰ *UNESCO and the Theatre*, UNESCO/ C.L.21/1947. Paris, May 8th. 1947. *op. cit.* p.1.

⁶¹ R. C. Mills Director, Dept. External Affairs. Canberra. Letter to The Secretary H. J. Goodes, Dept of Treasury. Invitation to Australia to be represented at the International Theatre Institute. Undated. Australian Archives. Series. A1838/1. Item. 862/18/2 Pt 1.

⁶² *ibid.* p. 1.

⁶³ *International Theatre has found its Voice*. *op. cit.* p.4

became progressively closer and finally indistinguishable by the end of the 1950s⁶⁴, at the outset the organisations had ostensibly different roles.

Part 2. The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust: Development & Launch.

The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust was an organisation created to establish “native drama, opera and ballet” and to act as an ongoing memorial to the 1954 Royal Tour to Australia. Set up as an incorporated company limited by guarantee, its function was to garner a fund of £100,000 by tax deductible public subscription, to become “single source of initiative and financial support” for the performing arts⁶⁵. The aim was to bring together the disparate existing groups committed to the creation of a national theatre and “support projects for the production of drama of cultural value and opera and ballet at really satisfactory standards”⁶⁶.

The principal initiators behind the scheme represented some of the most influential individuals in the Australian business and media industries. They included H. C. Coombs, the head of the Commonwealth Bank, Charles Moses, General Manager of the ABC and John Pringle, the Editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Each of these men utilised their positions to enhance the status of the organisation. These men ensured that the Prime Minister, the leader of the opposition and the Premiers of NSW, Victoria and Queensland all gave their support for the scheme before the AETT’s public launch. They also approached prominent businesses for financial support for the scheme and by the 2nd of April 1954 (which was the day the Queen was to depart) these companies had promised donations representing over a third of the total funds required⁶⁷.

The level of preparation and the acumen of the initiators were impressive. The original aims were not the result of poor planning by a group of

⁶⁴ The two organisations not only came to share the same goals but eventually the same head. Hugh Hunt, the first Executive Director of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust was appointed chairman of the UNESCO advisory Committee into Drama and Theatre in 1959. ‘Australian National Advisory Committee For UNESCO’ - *Report of the Meeting of the Australian UNESCO Committee for Drama and Theatre in the Conference Room of the Office of Education, Sydney, at 10.30 A.M on Wednesday, 15th April, 1959.* AETT Archives MS 5908. Box 26.

⁶⁵ H. C. Coombs. Letter to The Rt Hon Sir John Latham, 30th March. 1954. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 94. p. 1.

⁶⁶ *ibid.* p. 1.

businessmen who failed to comprehend the specific needs of arts organisations - an attack that would come in the 1960s. On the contrary, the collective experience of the initiators and the impressive spheres of influence they occupied meant that the AETT began life as an organisation with an original mission statement based on cogent and well-researched precedents and innovative notions of financial support and incentive for the arts.

Tax Deductible Donations to the AETT

The best example of the powerful spheres in which the Trust's initiators operated was the somewhat unorthodox manner in which they gained approval for tax deductions on both donations to and income from the Trust. A series of letters between the then federal treasurer Sir Arthur Fadden, the taxation commissioner P. S. McGovern and H. C. Coombs revealed the extent to which personal favour could enhance the flexibility of the law.

A month before the launch, Coombs wrote to McGovern informing him of discussions he had with the Treasurer and the Prime Minister about the AETT. Coombs' stated that "they have both expressed themselves as enthusiastic about the proposal and expressed the opinion that you would probably regard contributions to such a fund as being eligible as deductions under the income tax law"⁶⁸. McGovern in reply, made it clear that he regarded such contributions in no such way. He pointed out to Coombs that, "in the present terms of the law, gifts to such a trust fund as you describe would not be allowable deductions for income tax purposes". McGovern went on to argue that even if the AETT fund found sufficient favour with the Prime Minister and the Treasurer as to warrant such a concession, "it would have to be accomplished by an amendment to the law"⁶⁹. Coombs's response to this obstacle was to reiterate that he had already received "assurance" from the Prime Minister and "approval"

⁶⁷ *ibid.* p. 2.

⁶⁸ H. C. Coombs, Governor, Commonwealth Bank of Australia. Letter to P. S. McGovern, Commissioner of Taxation. 27th February. 1954. AETT Archives. MS 5908 Box. 383.

⁶⁹ P. S. McGovern, Commissioner of Taxation. Letter to H. C. Coombs, Governor, Commonwealth Bank of Australia 9th March. 1954. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 383.

from the Treasurer that the concession *would* be given⁷⁰. This response not only failed to address McGovern's legal concerns, but also appeared to contradict the chain of protocol indicated in Dr Coombs' first letter to the Federal Taxation office. The letter nonetheless appeared to have had the desired effect. McGovern's reply to Coombs made no more mention of the law and indicated that some private discussion had taken place between the Commissioner and the Treasurer the result of which was that donations to the AETT were deemed to be tax deductible after all⁷¹.

The original model of the AETT

Archival material, concerned with the AETT's development and launch, revealed how thorough the design and preparation for the organisation was. This material also exposed how distinct the original model was from what it became. These differences were discernible in the various drafts and the final version of the original aims, constitution, structure and method of operations of the AETT.

Firstly, the Trust did not originally intend to form or administrate its own theatre and opera companies, as it would do within its first year of operation. Instead, the AETT perceived its function as being to assist 'other' organisations capable of presenting ballet, drama and opera of "the highest artistic standards"⁷². This was concordant with its intention *not* "to build theatres or to give permanent subsidies"⁷³. Instead, the Trust founders saw themselves as entrepreneurs of serious cultural product generated by *outside* organisations and companies. The Trusts role was to "supplement", "support", "encourage" and "assist" the existence and/or establishment of such organisations capable of producing "theatrical enterprises of cultural value".

The general procedure would be for the organisers of theatrical enterprises to approach the Executive Committee of the Fund to ask for a guarantee. Such approaches might come occasionally from private

⁷⁰ H. C. Coombs, Governor, Commonwealth Bank of Australia. Letter to P. S. McGovern Commissioner of Taxation. 14th March. 1954. AETT Archives. MS 5908 Box. 383.

⁷¹ P. S. McGovern, Commissioner of Taxation. Letter to H. C. Coombs, Governor, Commonwealth Bank of Australia 19th March 1954. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 383.

⁷² H. C. Coombs. 'The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust'. *Meanjin*. Vol XIII No. 2. Winter 1954. p. 283.

⁷³ *ibid.* p. 283.

entrepreneurs but would usually come from National Theatre, Opera or Ballet Movements, the Arts Council or similar organisations. It is contemplated that the Executive Committee of the Fund could negotiate with such organisations to ensure the quality of the proposed productions and their management were of a sufficiently high standard to give a reasonable prospect of success both artistic and financial.⁷⁴

The AETT fund was intended to “supplement and not to replace the various State and national organisations for the development of the theatre”⁷⁵. It was “hoped that {the AETT} would be the means of strengthening such organisations and encouraging their establishment where they do not already exist”⁷⁶.

The AETT outlined how it would achieve these aims in the original constitution. The AETT membership (made up of sponsors and subscribers to the fund) would elect a Board of between 20 and 30 members, which would exercise the powers of the AETT between general meetings. The Board could appoint and delegate certain tasks to various committees. The Board would also be responsible for appointing an Executive Committee, selected for their knowledge of theatre and their administrative capabilities, and “delegate to it, authority to conduct negotiations and carry out administrative work on its behalf”⁷⁷. The Board would also be responsible for appointing an Executive Officer to head the committee, “with experience in the management of theatrical enterprises”. The skills required of the Executive Committee and Officer were primarily administrative and managerial, rather than creative. In the original AETT charter, the function of both was to liaise, negotiate, and manage the output generated by external artistic organisations. The Executive Officer therefore, was not an Artistic Director in the sense that the job did not entail the creation of artistic product. Indeed, the original aims were careful to stipulate that this should not be the case - stressing that no individual of the Trust should benefit financially from its operations. In

⁷⁴ *A Project for the Establishment of THE AUSTRALIAN ELIZABETHAN THEATRE GUARANTEE TRUST FUND*. 7th Jan 1954. AETT Archives. National Library. MS 5908. Box 94. p. 1.

⁷⁵ *Draft. The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust*. 24th March. 1954. AETT Archives MS 5908. Box 94. p. 3.

⁷⁶ *A Project for the Establishment of THE AUSTRALIAN ELIZABETHAN THEATRE GUARANTEE TRUST FUND*. *op. cit.* pp. 1-2.

⁷⁷ *Draft. The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust*. *op. cit.* p. 3.

less than 12 months time Hugh Hunt, the Trust's first Executive Director, would completely rewrite these directives.

At the time its conception, the AETT therefore was a rather benign and benevolent model of assistance. It was an organisation primarily administrative in function with the objective of stimulating the market. The AETT was to be widely accessible to those already working in the performing arts in a professional or amateur capacity. H. C. Coombs described the organisation as,

Working quietly as a source of financial support and contributing also some business and administrative experience, {making} easier the tasks of those enthusiasts who have worked so magnificently to bring drama, opera and ballet to the Australian people.⁷⁸

The AETT thus originally accepted the credibility of existent Australian performing arts organisations and recognised the presence of a skilled and experienced pool of performers. These organisations and performers would benefit from the increase in the number of ventures facilitated through the Trust's financial support. It also indicated that the most important objective at the time of the launch was to provide professional employment opportunities rather than institutional training for Australian performers.

The ultimate aim of the Trust must be to establish a native drama, opera and ballet which will give professional employment to Australian actors, singers and dancers, and furnish opportunities for those such as writers, composers and artists whose creative work is related to the theatre.⁷⁹

Employment versus Training

While there were discussions about the provision of institutional training for the performing arts at an early stage of the AETT's development⁸⁰, these proposals were dropped from the Trust's agenda and no further references were made in later drafts or in public statements. The original

⁷⁸ H. C. Coombs. 'The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust'. *Meanjin. op. cit.* p. 285.

⁷⁹ *ibid.* p. 283.

⁸⁰ In an early draft, one of the 'Aims of the Trust' was to "encourage the establishment of training schools where new talent can be developed". This was later omitted. *Draft. The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. op cit.* p. 1.

charter of the AETT stated that performance skills would be increased through experiences gained in professional employment and through observation of imported companies and individual performers of international rank - “especially those Australians who have succeeded abroad”⁸¹. Much of the initial enthusiasm for the AETT was because of its pro-active position that Australian performers were more than capable, given the opportunity, of immediately producing material of cultural value and high artistic merit. This was evident from the success of so many Australian performers overseas. What was seen to be vital about the original aims of the Trust, by organisations such as Actors’ Equity and the Independent Theatre in Sydney⁸², was that it was perceived as preventing the ‘talent drain’ out of Australia. The leader that appeared in *The Sydney Morning Herald* the day of the AETT launch echoed this sentiment.

It is high time that something like this was done. For too long Australian opera and drama have seemed to falter on the edge of achievement. For want of opportunity in their own country, young Australian actors, singers and designers of the highest talent have reluctantly gone abroad to find artistic opportunities and professional employment. Even now some of these could be won back if only Australian companies could be established on the right lines and with sufficient backing. It is the aim of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust to do this.⁸³

The ‘Self-Supporting’ Arts

Yet another distinct facet of the original model of the AETT was that it was *not*, as is often assumed by Australian cultural historians, intended to be an organisation that provided ongoing subsidy, in a contemporary sense, to arts organisations. A wide range of documents issued before, and at the time of the launch, stated explicitly that the AETT would seek to provide assistance “especially” to those organisations, “which give promise of

⁸¹ H. C. Coombs. ‘The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust’. *Meanjin. op. cit.* p. 283.

⁸² “A large percentage of the plays presented in this country are by non-professional theatres, from which much of the talent for the professional theatre is recruited. Many Australians from these groups have gone abroad, to seek more lucrative fields, and many of them have done well. Given the opportunities for training and experience that only the professional theatre can offer, this talent would be encouraged to remain here and might well serve in the development of a truly Australian Theatre Letter to the Editor. ‘Australian Theatre Trust’. Doris Fitton, Director, Independent Theatre. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 13th April. 1954. p. 2. “The abundance of talent in Australia is deserving of assistance”. Hal Lashwood, Federal President Actors’ Equity. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 14th April. 1954. p. 2.

⁸³ ‘The Theatre in Australia’ Editorial. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 2nd April. 1954. p. 2.

becoming self-supporting within a reasonable time”⁸⁴. There was an abundance of evidence that supported the fact that the organisation originally believed that serious/legitimate culture could be financially self-sustaining and even profitable.

The AETT accepted that some projects it supported would incur loss, however, these losses were to be offset by the imagined profits of others. The fund would operate according to the following economic principle.

The Fund would be used to guarantee theatrical enterprises of cultural value. Since it would be the aim to maintain the original fund intact, guarantees would generally be given *only to enterprises which had reasonable prospects of paying their way*, although occasional losses might be deliberately accepted. Terms of guarantees given should provide for the Fund participating in profits so that the Fund could be self-perpetuating.⁸⁵{*My emphasis*}

This principle was conveyed to all those approached for support during the developmental stage of the AETT, including the Treasurer and Prime Minister Robert Menzies, and it was likely that it was a factor in their encouragement for the organisation. When H. C. Coombs invited Sir John Latham to accept the position of President of the Trust, he stated that, “there seems good reason to believe that if such a fund existed... these things {projects of cultural value} would be possible on a self-supporting basis”⁸⁶.

The best of the good reasons to believe theatre companies provided with initial capital could be financial autonomous in time was the healthy box-office results of a number of imported theatrical ventures in Australia in the years immediately prior to the launch. The AETT’s proposal for assisting a National Opera Project was optimistic that, if some kind of agreement could be reached with the ABC regarding financial

⁸⁴ H. C. Coombs. ‘The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust’. *Meanjin*, *op. cit.* p. 283. Statements regarding the “self supporting” performing arts also appeared in the AETT *Draft*, *op. cit.* p. 3. In H. C. Coombs, Letter to The Rt Hon Sir John Latham. 30th March 1954. *op. cit.* and in ‘The Theatre in Australia’. Editorial’ *op. cit.* p. 2.

⁸⁵ ‘Method of Operation’. *A Project for the establishment of THE AUSTRALIAN ELIZABETHAN THEATRE GUARANTEE TRUST FUND*. *op. cit.* This document also stressed that the Executive Committee negotiating with such organisations would have to be satisfied that the management were of “sufficiently high standard to give a reasonable prospect of success both artistic and financial”. p. 4.

⁸⁶H. C. Coombs. Letter to The Rt Hon Sir John Latham. 30th March 1954. *op. cit.*

management of an opera orchestra (made up from the ABC orchestras), that the company might expect to operate at a profit.

In fact, in recent years private entrepreneurs have succeeded in making money with opera, for example J. C. Williamson's Italian Opera Company in 1950 which made a profit even though an orchestra of 40 musicians and two overseas conductors had to be engaged and transported from State to State.⁸⁷

Further evidence of a self-supporting venture was the 1953 Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Company Tour to Australia, which played in theatres that were "full to bursting"⁸⁸. This tour, whose company included a number of ex-patriate Australian actors, had a major effect in intensifying public debate regarding the national theatre movement, as did the provocative comments made the Company's co-director Anthony Quayle⁸⁹. Coombs himself was greatly influenced by Quayle's comments;

He urged the need for an agency, independent of Government, business and other sources of subvention and the theatrical enterprises themselves. He advanced a very persuasive argument for this view. 'Our Company', he said, 'is making tremendous profits: probably about 40 000 pounds. These profits will not help the Shakespeare Company, they will simply go back to the United Kingdom Treasury. Why isn't there an Australian organisation with which we could at least share them?'⁹⁰

Coombs was aware, as head of the Commonwealth Bank, of how wary Australian federal politicians were, from both the left and the right, regarding government subsidy for the arts. This meant that he not only had the economic expertise to justify that the AETT model for self-support, but the political sensitivity to realise it would probably gain bi-partisan support.

⁸⁷ *Proposed National Opera Project*. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 94. p. 3.

⁸⁸ 'How Far is Sydney from Stratford?' Editorial. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 9th May. 1953. p. 6.

⁸⁹ 'These Players are Bringing Shakespeare from Stratford'. Music & Theatre Feature. London Correspondent. *The Sunday Herald*. 25th January. 1953. p. 12. 'How Far is Sydney from Stratford'. *op. cit.* p. 6. Michael Langham. Letter to the Editor. 'Theatre in Australia: a New Approach Needed'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 9th May. 1953. p. 2. Max Afford. Letter to the Editor. 'The Theatre in Australia; Problems of Finding "New Approach"'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 12th May. 1953. p. 2.

⁹⁰ H. C. Coombs. *Trial Balance*. *op. cit.* p. 236.

The Economic Viability of the Performing Arts or Preventing 'Gallop Socialism'

That the AETT was originally intended to establish an economically self-supporting model for performing arts organisations and not one of subsidy, contributes enormously to solving one of the most perplexing political about faces in Australian cultural history.

Although H. C. Coombs stated differently in his memoirs, it was unlikely that Menzies, a vehement opponent of any form of government arts subsidy and the key figure in rejecting Guthrie's 1949 plan, should five years later⁹¹, suddenly give his political support to a scheme like the AETT if it advocated permanent Federal subvention. It seems untenable that simply linking the AETT with the Royal Tour was of sufficient import to completely reverse (as ardent a monarchist as he was) Menzies' position. All official correspondence from the AETT organisers to the Federal government and all public statements at the time of the launch reiterated that the fund would be self-supporting. The AETT stressed repeatedly that it would, "not make outright hand-outs to theatrical ventures, but would put up capital on a profit-sharing basis"⁹² and that it would not provide "permanent subsidies"⁹³. Thus at the time of the AETT launch, Menzies was endorsing a model of assistance that was in complete accord with his belief in a market-driven arts industry. Archival material indicated that Menzies approved and ratified (in the area of tax-deductability) the formation of the organisation as a memorial to Queen Elizabeth II, but offered no financial support whatsoever to the Fund. Coombs, in his memoirs, sought to contradict this.

Coombs stated in his autobiography *Trial Balance* that Menzies, when approached with the initial proposals for the Trust, agreed to four things, conditional on demonstration of substantial support for the scheme. One, he would give the scheme his blessing, Two, he would allow donations to be

⁹¹ Menzies' policy statement for the 1954 Federal election made no specific mention of the arts but stressed the need for minimising government expenditure in all areas. Menzies inferred that "an irresponsible burst of vastly increased expenditure which our distracted opponents will offer in exchange for votes is a reprehensible possibly even communist party inspired action". *The Sydney Morning Herald*. May 5th. 1954. pp. 4-5.

⁹² 'Big Trust is Formed'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 2nd April. 1954. p. 2.

⁹³ 'New Theatre Trust. £100,000 Appeal to be launched'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 2nd April. 1954. p. 6.

tax deductible. Three, he would approach the Queen to accept the AETT as a form of tribute and four, provide a grant sufficient to make up the total of the fund to a reasonable target should it not be achieved by public subscription⁹⁴. While there was considerable evidence in both public and archival material to provide evidence for the first three points of Menzies' support, there was none for the latter. There was not a single reference prior to, or at the time of the launch, which stated that the Federal Government had agreed to make up the shortfall. Indeed, it was clear the Trustees considered that they could raise the £100, 000 without difficulty through the public appeal⁹⁵.

The evidence in the archives indicated that the Federal government's action of making up the Trust's capital shortfall five months after the launch was unpremeditated. After the flush of the launch, it became rapidly clear that there was a very real danger of not reaching the target of £100, 000. This failure coincided with Menzies' approach to Queen Elizabeth II to ask for her acceptance and endorsement of the AETT 'tribute' Fund, which was now insufficient to carry out its aims. It was more than possible that the Federal government stepped in with the additional funds to complete the Trust Fund, for the principal reason of avoiding embarrassment. This failure to reach the target figure by public subscription was not, as Coombs described it, an "expected" occurrence, but the first sudden blow to the Trust's model of an economically viable performing arts industry. It signalled clearly that the AETT had to reconsider certain of the company's original aims if it was going to continue. This was a critical step and signalled the beginning of the construction of an 'uneconomic' but educative high culture replacement.

The Failure to Raise Funds by Public Subscription.

Despite the wide-spread media fanfare surrounding the launch of the AETT and the apparent delight with which the performing arts community received it, the appeal had difficulty in attracting significant financial support from the public. Three months into the appeal the public had

⁹⁴ H. C. Coombs. *Trial Balance. op. cit.* p. 238.

⁹⁵ It may have been possible that this was a private and undocumented agreement made between Coombs and Menzies prior to the launch, which, if widely known, would have been a disincentive to public donors. This however seems unlikely given that Menzies equated arts subsidy with "galloping

donated just £23, 000, a figure well under the £37, 000 privately secured from companies and eminent individuals (many personally known to the organisers) prior to the launch. The private and public donations at this stage, only made up a total of £63, 000 and was still a long way from the anticipated £100, 000⁹⁶. More significantly, donations from the public had slowed considerably, trickling in at approximately £400 a week at the end of the third month compared to the £3000 to £4000 a week in the first. The organisers recognised this flagging of public interest and launched a secondary public campaign, in the form of a nation-wide Elizabethan Theatre Week, at the beginning of the fourth month. As at the original launch, the ‘Theatre Week’ was organised to receive maximum coverage. The press, along with radio and film companies, agreed to co-operate in the interim campaign that included corporate dinners and public displays of the AETT plans.

The stated intention of the theatre week was to, “raise at least £40, 000 to complete “the Trust’s drive for £100, 000 working capital”⁹⁷. This statement further throws into doubt Coombs’ retrospective claim that Menzies had already agreed to make up the shortfall. It also proved to be overly optimistic, with the week raising only £11, 000 towards the goal. The weeks following this secondary stage of the appeal showed some increases in donations, but they began to slow again toward the end of the fourth month with the total still only three quarters of the way to the target. Conversely, the pressures to secure the initial capital and begin operations were mounting. Up to this point, there were few public comments, from the Trust organisers, as to how they were to enact their ambitious plans and who would benefit professionally from it. During the first four months of the appeal the papers carried innumerable letters from artists and organisations who began to speculate, question, advise and sometimes criticise the AETT. In this period, the organiser’s only public announcements were calls for further donations and there was a distinct sense of growing unease amongst performing arts groups. This was put most succinctly in a letter to the editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald* that stated, “unfortunately there is a feeling that the plan may be

socialism”. It also wouldn’t explain why private and confidential letters to someone like Sir John Latham who was to be president of the Board, contained no reference to it.

⁹⁶ All figures are from *The Sydney Morning Herald* tally of the appeal. 2nd April - £37 000, 7th May - £50 000, 7th June - £57 712, 12th June - £59 862, 19th June - £60 245. 28th June Elizabethan Theatre Week opens, 14th July - £70 414, 17th July - £72, 312, 27th July - £73 882.

somewhat nebulous and unwieldy and that the prospectus is not one on which a public company could raise very much capital”⁹⁸. Things were not improved by the fact that it was clear that the general public was unwilling or unable⁹⁹ to contribute a substantial part of the funds required to reach the target with the majority of the donations still coming from companies and businesses. Even the offer of membership with associated discounts only attracted, after 5 months, 477 members in NSW and 120 in Victoria¹⁰⁰. This was a poor omen given that it was the rank and file contributors who were considered the principal audience for the AETT’s anticipated ventures.

Adding to the pressure was the fact that the early Trust initiative to amalgamate the two existing ‘national’ pro/am opera companies - the National Opera of Australia in NSW and the National Theatre Movement of Victoria - was about to come to a head, after ongoing and fractious negotiations¹⁰¹. The primary incentive offered by the AETT (with Coombs as chief negotiator) was that if the two companies made this move (which was unpopular on both sides) the Trust would provide financial support for a 1955 season. Without its capital base of £100, 000 secured and with this looking increasingly unlikely in the short term, the Trust had little else to persuade the reluctant parties. Consequently, at the Trust’s first meeting on the amalgamation no decision was reached¹⁰².

Another pressure was the imminent appointment of the AETT’s first Executive Officer, which was originally to be finalised upon reaching the target figure. However with the position already advertised both in Australia and in England there was little choice but to proceed. Coombs had requested that the Australian High Commissioner in London, Sir Thomas

⁹⁷ ‘Elizabethan Theatre Week Opens’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 28th June. 1954. p. 3.

⁹⁸ O. D. Bisset. Letter to the Editor. ‘Theatre Movement’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 7th May. 1954. p. 2.

⁹⁹ This could have been a very clear indication of Guthrie’s belief that the audience for legitimate performing arts in Australia was generally economically worse off than those who were simply uninterested – See Chapter 2.

¹⁰⁰ Coombs was aware of this rather top-heavy pattern of contribution stating, “many have apparently hesitated to make smaller donations”. ‘Grant of £25 000 to Theatre Trust’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 8th August. 1954. p. 4.

¹⁰¹ The first meeting between the two companies was announced during the less than successful Elizabethan Theatre Week. ‘Meeting Planned on Fusion of Opera Groups’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 29th June. 1954. p. 2.

¹⁰² ‘Combining Opera Companies Will Take Time’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 27th July. 1954. p. 5.

White, act as the Trust representative in vetting candidates in the UK because it seemed unlikely they would, “find the right man here”¹⁰³. While it was clear that the AETT might lose suitable applicants if the position was not finalised, there was the added complication that these prospective candidates might not accept the position if the Capital promised to begin AETT operations was incomplete.

It was at this rather critical point that the Federal government stepped in with a £25,000 grant and an offer to contribute an extra £1 for every £3 the Public donated in the last three weeks in August 1954. Prime Minister Menzies made it explicitly clear that the contribution was to commemorate the Royal visit - “It is fitting that the memory of that great occasion be perpetuated by a fund for the encouragement throughout Australia of theatrical ventures of real cultural value”¹⁰⁴. There was no indication as to whether the grant came as a result of a Trust approach to the government or vice versa. What was very clear, however, was Menzies’ determination to avoid any inference that the grant was a form of arts subsidy, rather than a one off gesture of financial support, assisting in the completion of a tribute to Australia’s monarch.

Creating the Deserving Arts

The Trust downplayed the failure to reach the target through its appeal alone and began instead the first step in shifting the organisation’s advocacy for a self-supporting performing arts to arguing that certain forms of culture were ‘deserving’ and thus had to be protected from economic realities. This shift was apparent in the language the AETT began to use to describe itself. An editorial by John Pringle, one of the AETT founders, in *The Sydney Morning Herald* described the Federal government’s £25,000 grant, as a contribution “no more than is due. Almost every Western nation has long since recognised that the decline of private patronage in the arts must be met by some form of public support”¹⁰⁵. What Pringle meant was a form of Federal government support raised from public taxes and then administered by the Trust. This was radically different from the specific type of public support originally

¹⁰³ H. C. Coombs. Letter to The Hon. Sir T White, Australian High Commissioner - London. 15th June. 1954. AETT Archives MS 5908. Box 383.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Grant of £25 000 to Theatre Trust’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. *op. cit.* p. 4.

sought in the form of individual donations and membership fees. Only a month earlier Coombs had described the AETT as “similar in structure to industrial and commercial companies” and as a venture of “practical idealism”¹⁰⁶.

AETT Internal Memos also reflected this transformation in the organisation’s basic aims after receiving the Federal grant. There were no longer any references to self-supporting ventures, but rather detailed discussions regarding and justifying the principle of subsidy. There was also the introduction of the idea that ‘good’ art may never be profitable.

The provision of good theatre is universally recognised as a legitimate object of public expenditure. Such costly arts as grand opera, ballet and large scale dramatic performances have never completely paid their way in any country though the performance may have been well supported by the public. In the past, these arts have relied upon the patronage of royal courts or wealthy benefactors¹⁰⁷. That kind of patronage is now virtually extinct and this obligation of patronage has become the collective responsibility of tax-payers and rate-payers in much the same way as public libraries, art galleries, museums and parks.¹⁰⁸

This was first time subsidy was mentioned in relation to the method of operation of the AETT and the tone conveyed a certain loss of confidence compared to those written earlier in the belief that the entire £100, 000 capital required could be raised by public subscription.

The Trust now formulated a plan (quite at odds with its original aims) to seek a gross annual subsidy of £60, 000 from State governments and City Councils. The AETT considered this amount of subsidy as, “not an

¹⁰⁵ ‘Theatre Trust Gets a Lift’. Editorial. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 8th August. 1954. p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Elizabethan Theatre Week Opens’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. *op. cit.* p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ This was inaccurate concerning the company of Elizabethan actors that the AETT claimed as part of its inspiration. Elizabethan actors who formed stock companies, for the most part owned the theatres they performed in. The various patrons of Shakespeare’s company Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon, Lord Chamberlain and James I (when the company became the King’s Men) did not support the company financially. The Patron provided respectability, profile and protection from frequently hostile London alderman who viewed the theatre as potential sites of sedition, disease and riot. Most Elizabethan theatre companies were owner operated and relied on box-office solely for their continued existence. Gary Taylor. *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History From the Restoration to the Present*. Vintage. 1989. p. 202.

¹⁰⁸ The most obvious difference being that attendance at public libraries, art galleries, museums and parks were free. *Memorandum on the Australian Theatre Trust. September 1954*. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 48. p. 1.

unreasonable national target for the provision of Australian professional grand opera, drama and ballet companies”¹⁰⁹. The AETT formulated arguments further justifying this subsidy, stating that their enterprises would be good for all and thus should be supported by all - “these companies will enrich the life of the community and eventually earn credit overseas”¹¹⁰.

Despite the appearance in AETT discussions about the symbolic value rather than economic viability of anticipated theatrical ventures¹¹¹, the organisers were also conscious that such beliefs would not be accepted without argument and much ground work needed to be laid for them to gain currency. This was clearly part of what motivated the decision *not* to approach the Federal government at this time with the request for annual subsidy. As H. C. Coombs noted, “the Federal Government has already contributed substantially to the capital fund and any further approach to them should... be left until State and Municipal support is available”¹¹².

Appointment of the Executive Officer

Once the AETT appeal reached its target by means of the federal government grant, the organisation immediately set about finalising the appointment of the Executive Officer. It had received one hundred applications from both Australia and England and short-listed six men from each country. On the 26th of October, the appointment of the Englishman Hugh Hunt, who admitted he knew “little about Australia and probably less about the Australian theatre”, was announced publicly. Another pro-AETT editorial by Pringle in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, swiftly countered potential controversy about the selection of an Englishman over an Australian. Entitled *An Excellent Appointment* it stated,

There will, no doubt, be some to complain that the choice did not fall on an Australian. The plain truth is that there is no one in this country with half Mr Hunt’s experience. If there are Australians of equal talent - and

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.* p. 1.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 1.

¹¹¹ The memo also stressed the need to build “audience appreciation for first-class theatre” which countered earlier assertions that there already existed an audience for such enterprises. *ibid.* p. 3.

¹¹² *ibid.* p. 2.

there may be - it will be one of Mr Hunt's chief duties to find them and train them¹¹³.

It was duty that Hunt fully endorsed. Despite making the apparently requisite comment that he, "had no set ideas about building the Australian theatre"¹¹⁴ (Guthrie had said exactly the same thing five years earlier), he arrived with a fairly prescriptive and fixed conception of the future of the AETT. These conceptions helped set the organisation's agenda for the next five years and orientated the Trust further away from its original aims.

Training justifies Subsidy

Hugh Hunt's previous appointments had all been in State subsidised theatres such as the Abbey Theatre in Dublin and the Bristol and London Old Vic theatres. It was thus no real surprise that he viewed, as unproblematic and unexceptional, that a venture such as the AETT should simply expect financial support from the State and Federal Governments. More surprising was the immediate stress he placed upon creating training facilities for actors. Hunt discussed his plan for a theatre school in detail at his very first press conference¹¹⁵, a day after he had arrived in Australia. This would indicate that it emanated from a belief that actors required specialised training as a matter of course, rather than that Australian actors, whom he had yet to observe, were particularly lacking in skill. Such a belief was quite uncommon at the time, particularly amongst English producers and actors. Unlike their American counterparts, who had embraced and disseminated Stanislavski's acting methodology from the 1930s on, many (like Guthrie) remained highly sceptical about the utility of psychologically based actor training preferring to focus on the development of specific physical skills such as speech and movement and experience gained through employment¹¹⁶.

The question does remain as to why Hunt felt it was so important to initiate, immediately, this kind of training for actors in Australia. At the time, this

¹¹³ 'An Excellent Appointment'. Editorial. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 26th October. 1954. p. 2.

¹¹⁴ 'Hugh Hunt Will Seek Everest of Theatre'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 26th October. 1954. p. 2.

¹¹⁵ 'Theatre Trust Officer Wants Results'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 9th January. 1955. p. 7.

¹¹⁶ The theatre director Peter Hall referred to this as "English pragmatism {in which we used} dislike of theory as an excuse of avoiding craft". Peter Hall. 'Foreword'. Michel Saint Denis. *Training for the Theatre. Premises and Promises*. Theatre Arts Books. Heinemann. New York, London. 1982. p. 14.

kind of initiative lay outside the immediate concerns of the AETT and his role as Executive Officer. Furthermore, one may ask, why were actors specifically targeted and not opera singers, musicians or dancers? The answers lie predominantly in the function Hunt assigned to drama. Like, Julian Huxley, Tyrone Guthrie and the International Theatre Institute, Hunt believed that theatre had a much greater role to play in Australia's cultural future than opera and ballet. Hunt also recognised the enormous contributions notions of training and educative drama could make to the construction and justification of the permanent subsidy for the legitimate performing arts.

The next chapter demonstrates how these goals, making drama the 'voice' of a nation and inculcating acceptance for government subsidy amongst the general public and importantly politicians, came to dominate the agenda of the AETT. They were goals however, that were surprisingly difficult to implement. It be would Hunt's ambitious scheme for a national theatre school and the AETT's growing awareness of the utility of educative drama that provided the means with which to carry them out.

Chapter 4

The First Years of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust

Mr Hunt's experience in the post war theatrical world of England, with its typically Anglo-Saxon combination of art and commerce, of monopoly and individualism, will be ideally fitted to deal with the Australian situation.

Keith Macartney¹

The first two years of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust's active operations were extraordinarily ambitious. The organisation set aside its original aims of giving financial incentive and assistance to existing performing arts companies and set about creating its own. The first part of the chapter shows how these attempts to disseminate high cultural product on a national scale, were in part a consequence of having to produce conspicuous cultural achievements that justified the AETT's earlier receipt of (albeit minimal) government assistance. Despite some successes, this was a particular precarious endeavour and would lead to major financial difficulties within the first two years.

The series of ideological setbacks that the AETT encountered towards the end of its second season, in conjunction with its budgetary problems, led to a major crisis that threatened the organisation's survival. The second part of the chapter documents how this crisis revealed that much more sophisticated and subtle processes were required to convince politicians and the public that certain arts forms must be subsidised in perpetuity and that the AETT was the appropriate organisation to disseminate these funds. Those arts forms and agencies deemed to be legitimate would have to be shown to be serving a much broader function than simply preserving uneconomic cultural artefacts. As a result, the organisation began to re-configure itself in a manner closely allied to the ideologies promoted by the International and Australian UNESCO Theatre Committees. The AETT, as had the Drama and Education Joint Committee in its national drama survey report, began to embed notions of training into its manifesto, to justify its failings and future expenditure.

¹ Keith Macartney. 'The Elizabethan Theatre Trust'. *Meanjin*. March 1955. Vol XIII No. 7. pp 125-126.

Part 1. Making Culture

The AETT's self titled chronicle of its inaugural year as a theatre producer, *The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust: The First Year*, was a remarkably revealing document². The publication concisely conveyed the priorities, achievements, style and ideologies that were consolidating in the fledgling company and taking it further from its original aims. When the Year Book appeared, the Trust was about to launch its first opera season consisting of four Mozart operas. The Trust had already mounted two drama productions, *Medea* and *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, which were to be followed by *The Rivals* and *Twelfth Night*. They had also presented the musical *The Boyfriend* and a Marionette Theatre production of *The Tintookies* for children. This eclectic repertoire immediately revealed the function that each of these forms of performing arts had been assigned by the organisation.

The AETT opera productions in 1956 were allocated a budget more than 50% higher than that of drama (£16, 000 compared to £10, 000) but without the responsibility of having to present contemporary or locally authored material. The selection of four Mozart operas to be presented as part of Olympic Games Festival season in Melbourne revealed that the AETT had endowed its opera company with a completely traditional role of disseminating high culture. This made good economic sense at the time and was an acknowledgement of English opera's large, stable and very conservative audience base. Conversely, the musical was assigned a 'popular' function (good box office was celebrated in the year-book against poor reviews³) and was mounted in conjunction with a commercial management. Set against this, were the complex and diverse requirements assigned to the Australian Drama Company. The aim was to produce a mixture of classical and contemporary plays but with particular focus on the latter, for these would be the vehicles with which to give 'voice' to Australia's national psyche. It was this function that placed drama (as it had for Huxley and the ITI) at the top of a hierarchy of the performing arts and, in this position, the cultural value of drama productions was inverse to their economic value. The machinations of this first year were

² Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust . *The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. The First Year*. F. W. Cheshire. Melbourne. 1957.

³ *ibid.* p. 25.

far more complex than has often been assumed. These assumptions owe much to the frequent over-generalisations and simplifications assigned to this period, and much to the 'charismatic ideology'⁴ associated with the AETT national production of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* - the first 'subsidised' Australian authored play.

The First Year

The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust - The First Year contained messages from Prime Minister Robert Menzies and each of the State Premiers congratulating the AETT on its achievements in its first year and congratulating themselves on their financial contributions which enabled it to carry out these achievements. These messages echoed the confident sentiments contained in the endorsements from other significant Trust contributors from the business sector. General Motors declared in a full-page advertisement that - "In both Art and Industry Australia has good reason to proud of her achievements". The Electrical Appliance company Phillips also fashioned their advertisement around Australia's artistic future - "Today's Toddler... Tomorrow's Toscanini". Vatric Electrical Appliances Ltd went even further, actually associating its product within the theatre itself. "Another First is added to the Elizabethan Theatre's progressive policy, with the spraying of the theatre, prior to each performance with a Vatric time saving Spray Unit containing Q-Temist, the new protective Germicide Insecticide refreshingly perfumed with Eau de Cologne"⁵.

Placed amongst these endorsements were a variety of articles by long-term AETT supporters as well as Board and Executive members - 'The Theatre in Australia' by *The Sydney Morning Herald* editor, John Pringle, 'The Playwright in Australia' by Douglas Stewart and 'The Beginning' by Hugh Hunt. These three spheres - the political, the commercial and the cultural - were united in their mutual praise for the Trust's inaugural year of active operation.

⁴ This phrase, coined by Bourdieu, encapsulated the manner in which *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* often acted as the production that consecrated the entire history of the AETT's operations. Pierre Bourdieu. 'The Circle of Belief; The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods'. *The Field of Cultural Production*. 1993. Polity Press. pp. 77-78.

⁵ *The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust: The First Year. op. cit.* p. 12.

The confident tone of the document, depicting the future of the AETT as positive and unproblematic, in fact masked the extensive criticism that had been directed at the organisation in the first twelve months. The attacks centred specifically on the extreme changes in the organisation's policy and direction since Hugh Hunt's induction as the AETT's Executive Officer.

The AETT's new charter was summarised rather emphatically by Hunt in the Year Book.

It was decided that the best method of serving Australian Theatre would be in the first instance to concentrate on raising our standards to that of the finest overseas companies. To do this we realised that we must concentrate the best available talents into single units. Such policy presents inevitable difficulties in a Federal country with proud State traditions where vast distances make a single national theatre building impractical and touring exceedingly costly... The program we have laid out for the first phase of our work is as follows -

- An Australian Drama Company
- An Australian Opera Company
- Assistance to promising playwrights
- Training of Young artists.⁶

These policies represented a major departure from the AETT's widely disseminated original intentions. The criticism these policies evoked and importantly the counter strategies employed by the AETT to overcome public and professional opprobrium are detailed below under the headings; National Companies, Theatre Buildings and their Audience, and The Executive. These changes marked the first stage of development of the AETT into a model for contemporary government subsidised arts organisations.

National Companies

The AETT's decision not to facilitate and stimulate production from existing Australian companies and instead, to form its own was a highly contentious step. The principal motivation for constructing national companies would seem to be, in part, that they provided immediate, tangible results that justified the one off Federal grant and State annual subsidy of £60, 000 given at the end of the appeal and offered the potential

for attracting future Federal assistance. The strategies used by the AETT to vindicate and facilitate this major alteration in policy, which had the associated consequences of providing financial and career benefits for members of the Board and the Executive, were different for opera and drama.

The National Opera Company

The ongoing resistance to a merger between the Sydney and Melbourne based 'National' opera companies was far from being resolved by the time Hugh Hunt took up his appointment on January 8th 1955. Furthermore, it seemed that the stand-off between them would become even more entrenched with the arrival, five days after Hunt, of Warwick Braithwaite to take up his position as the Artistic Director of the (Sydney based) National Opera Company of Australia. Braithwaite had already been quite vocal regarding his opposition to the merger - "Mr Braithwaite said he did not think the Elizabethan Theatre Trust was the answer to the formation of an opera company within Australia... there is too great a distance between the two cities and too much rivalry"⁷. Braithwaite, formerly a resident conductor at Convent Garden, argued that the AETT was unrealistic in its original projection of the costs involved in mounting national opera productions. He believed that such a venture could only succeed (like Convent Garden) with substantial subsidy ("a fixed annual income from a benevolent government") far greater than anything the AETT had at the time. Their capital, he argued, would "be expended on one or more productions"⁸.

Hunt, now as official spokesperson for the AETT, made no public comment in regard to Braithwaite's opposition, nor about the conductor's (as it would transpire, prophetic) comments regarding opera subsidy. Nor was it necessary. In less than six weeks Braithwaite resigned in a wave of controversy, citing "mismanagement forcing artistic compromise" and antagonism between himself and the honorary managing director Mrs C.

⁶ *ibid.* p. 10.

⁷ 'Appointment of celebrated conductor - National Opera Company of Australia', *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 31st August. 1954. p. 5.

⁸ *ibid.* p. 5.

T. Lorenz as the reasons for his departure⁹. He was warmly supported by the company's producer Robin Lovejoy and by the principal singers, and it seemed likely that this would force the resignation of Lorenz. The Executive Board of the pro/am opera company however, appeared barely concerned. Coming out in support of Lorenz they characterised the issues in the dispute as, "relatively trivial and purely domestic"¹⁰. This mild response in the face of the disintegration of the company¹¹ became swiftly comprehensible. Within days, Hugh Hunt publicly announced a 'Nation-wide Opera Tour Under the Theatre Trust'¹² by a newly formed combined opera company (a partial merger of the Sydney and Melbourne companies) one of whose inaugural board members was Lorenz.

With Braithwaite gone (the first casualty of this new regime), the AETT swiftly countered attacks that it was 'taking over' the National Opera Company, by asserting instead that, "the Trust wanted to form an entirely new opera company"¹³. In less than a month, the AETT had dismantled the two companies and replaced them with the most formidable artistic company structure to be seen in Australia at the time. The formation of this combined company (functioning in association with ABC orchestras), now represented the only ongoing professional employment opportunity for opera workers and singers in Australia. Not surprisingly, the completion of the new company also coincided with a cessation of threats of resignation from the principal artists and the formerly outspoken company producer, Robin Lovejoy, was offered a position with the new national drama company. To head the new opera company Hugh Hunt appointed a former Old Vic colleague, Robert Quentin. And despite avowals of the independence of the new Opera Company Board¹⁴, its members included, along with Mrs Lorenz and Mrs Gertrude Johnson of the respective state companies, Charles Moses, head of the ABC (and on the

⁹ 'Braithwaite Makes "Save Opera" Plea'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 20th March. 1955. p. 2.

¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 2.

¹¹ "Letters demanding the resignation of the Executive of the National Opera Company of Australia were posted to the honorary managing director Mrs C. T. Lorenz... They threaten that unless Mrs Lorenz resign by next Wednesday, the nine artists will not be available for performances after their current contracts expire". 'Threat by Opera Principals'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 21st March. 1955. p. 7.

¹² 'Nation-wide Opera Tour Under Theatre Trust'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 26th March. 1955. p. 3.

¹³ 'Threat by Opera Principals'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. *op. cit.* p. 7.

¹⁴ 'Company Formed For Nation-Wide Opera Tour'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 14th April. 1955. p. 6.

AETT board) and Hugh Hunt himself. The new company under the aegis of the AETT also differed in one very important aspect to the National Opera Company of Australia. While the latter, now defunct, company had an employment policy of using 100% Australian Artists (a levy of 2/- was imposed on all Actors' Equity members and given to the company in support of this policy¹⁵) the AETT's Australian Opera Company did not.

For the Olympic Games Festival season in Melbourne ... the company will be honoured by Sena Jurinac and Sesto Bruscantini as guest artists. Jurinac, who has been singing at the Vienna State Opera House this season, is one of the most exquisite Mozart singers of her generation and the newly formed Australian Opera Company is extremely fortunate to have secured her services.¹⁶

The National Drama Company

The formation of the Australian Drama Company, was brought into being even more disingenuously and required major justification from the Executive to the performing arts community. Hugh Hunt announced in June 1955 that the AETT had formed its own drama company, which would include "one or two leading artists from overseas"¹⁷. This was less than eight months from when the organisation was praised for the arms length role it would have in supporting existing theatre companies. The Press had predicted great things from such an approach, "indeed, artistically the less control from above the better, and the Elizabethan Theatre Trust will not try and direct, though it will have to approve, the policies of the companies it assists"¹⁸.

Unlike the early AETT public intention to amalgamate the two State opera companies, the question of a national drama company was side-stepped by Hunt on his arrival in Australia. He stated that, "he would spend the next six months visiting the 'little' theatres in all States in order to assess the local talent available and would then furnish a report to the Trust"¹⁹. This "report", which would never materialise, was presumably for the purpose

¹⁵ *Equity - 50th Anniversary Edition*. November 1989. p. 38.

¹⁶ *The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust: The First Year*. *op. cit.* p. 33.

¹⁷ 'Drama Company Formed by the Elizabethan Theatre Trust'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 23rd June. 1955. p. 4.

¹⁸ 'Theatre Gets A Lift'. Editorial. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 10th August. 1954. p. 2.

of deciding which of the existing 'little' pro/am theatre companies would be selected as suitable for financial support. This was clearly anticipated by those involved in the companies themselves, as indicated in their letters of support at the time of the AETT launch. It was, however, not to be. On April 29th, three months after his arrival (and three months into his 'six-month visit') Hunt announced the intention of the AETT to create its own full time drama company²⁰. Hunt's declaration that this company would be an "Australian Old Vic"²¹ was backed up by his decision to appoint Elsie Beyer, another former Old Vic colleague from Britain, as General Manager. Beyer was, at the time of her appointment and had been since 1954, also a member of the AETT Board.

The decision to form a single national drama company proved unpopular amongst much of the theatrical community. As Hunt expressed it, "considerable sacrifice by individual organisations was inevitable and some disappointment had to be felt that no individual group had been selected as a national company"²². Hunt attempted to diffuse discontent by stressing that the Australian Drama Company was unique in providing some actors with full-time employment, which was "something which has been denied up to now... they {have had} to work as bootmakers or postmen in their spare time, or emigrate as so many have"²³. Hunt ignored the extraordinary achievements of Actors' Equity a year earlier, in establishing local employment quotas in commercial productions and enormously improving conditions and earnings for Australian actors²⁴. He also argued that the national drama company would have a cultural trickle down effect, "State professional repertory companies would be

¹⁹ 'Theatre Trust Officer Wants Results'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 9th January. 1955. p. 7.

²⁰ 'Theatre Trust Hopes to have a Full Time Company'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 29th April 1955. p. 6.

²¹ 'Elizabethan Trust's First Show by Oct'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 17th May. 1955. p. 4.

²² *The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust: The First Year*. *op. cit.* p. 10.

²³ 'Theatre Trust Hopes to have a Full Time Company'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. *op. cit.* p. 6.

²⁴ The most substantial improvements to actor employment in Australia came about through union action by Actors' Equity rather than through initiatives of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. For example, in 1954 an agreement was reached with J. C. Williamson's commercial management over imported theatre artist quotas: 100% Australian b & c, Nudes and Showgirls; 75% Artists. *Equity - 50th Anniversary Edition*. November 1989. p. 38. In 1955 Equity established further quotas, "Variety; 50 per cent local artists with a complete ban on importation of ballet and chorus. Musical comedy: maximum of 25 per cent imported with a ban on importation of chorus. Legitimate theatre: Maximum of 25 per cent imported". 'Union Concern at "Flood" of U.S. Artists'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 27th January. 1955. p. 4.

stimulated and an attempt made to induce amateur societies to combine to form a professional repertory company”²⁵.

Ironically, these small theatre companies which had represented the backbone and continuum (as identified in the Australian UNESCO drama survey) of the national theatre movement in Australia were held to be accountable by many for failing to receive support from the AETT once it was operational. A *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial hailed their efforts, “to keep the flame of drama alight”, but also warned that the AETT must ensure that it would, “stand above the petty disputes and jealousies, which have too often hampered achievement in the Australian theatre”²⁶. This advice was reiterated in an analysis written by Keith Macartney after the launch of the Trust in the second half of 1954 but not published in *Meanjin* until March 1955. The article was interesting because it was written by an actor and producer from one of the ‘little’ theatres’ (Macartney co-founded the Tin Alley Players²⁷) themselves. He was one of the few to come out strongly in support of the formation of the AETT national companies and to favour training of actors and producers as a more vital imperative than the provision of employment opportunities²⁸. Macartney detailed his own concern about the AETT’s original aims,

Mr Hunt’s job in Australia will not primarily be that of a producer. Dr Coombs has said that the Elizabethan Theatre Trust will ‘usually proceed by offering financial support by guarantee or by direct financial participation on a profit sharing basis to existing organisations or companies’... Presumably, then, Mr Hunt and his advisers will have to spend a good deal of time in deciding between the claims for assistance of a number of local enterprises. This of course is an unenviable task and one which must be faced, but it is not an easy one... there is the danger that the encouragement of a number of local enterprises will lead to a frittering away of the Trust’s funds with no very marked achievement as a result.²⁹

²⁵ ‘Elizabethan Trust’s First Show By Oct’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. *op. cit.* p. 4.

²⁶ ‘The Theatre in Australia’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 2nd April. 1954. p. 2.

²⁷ David Bradley. ‘Keith Macartney’. Philip Parsons (General Editor). *Companion to the Theatre in Australia*. Currency Press. 1995. p. 334.

²⁸ This may also be to do with the fact that Macartney was also an associate professor of Drama and English at Melbourne University which was the first educational facility Hunt would approach to establish a drama training facility. See Chapter 5.

²⁹ Macartney. ‘The Elizabethan Theatre Trust’. *Meanjin*. *op. cit.* pp. 125-126.

Macartney's solution to this predicament facing the Trust highlighted the pressure the AETT came under the moment it received the Federal grant completing the appeal and the State and local Government annual subsidy. It had to produce results. Investing in smaller multiple ventures providing seed money and financial stimulus to a diverse range of existing companies may have made sounder business sense in the long term, but the approach simply didn't have the cultural capital inherent in cultural monuments such as a national company. In time, cutting off the grass-roots movement of the 'little' theatres that would have been a key to stimulating audience growth would prove an extremely costly mistake.

Hunt appeared to be aware that there were serious concerns about the AETT's increasing dominance and tendency to shift policies without consultation with the arts community. He went to some length in the 1956 *Year Book* to emphasise that these concerns would be assuaged by "future policy".

The next phase of our policy will, we hope, allay fears of over-centralisation. In this, we will concentrate on promoting the development of efficient little theatre organisations in each state in order to assist them to reach fully professional status. A start has already been made in this direction by the provision of a guarantee against loss for an experimental six-month period to the Independent Theatre in Sydney. This long-established amateur theatre with a line of tradition of plays and players behind it will now endeavour to run as a professional theatre.³⁰

This small contribution to the Independent of £100 in fact led swiftly to acrimony, when the AETT removed its contribution after the allotted six-month "experimental" period. Melbourne drama critic H. A. Standish blamed the Independent itself, particularly the poor quality of its productions - "its best friends have been among those who have been most disappointed by some of its work"³¹. However, it was very clear that this 'little' theatre was not afforded (and certainly no others were afforded) the 'acceptable failure rate' provided, as will be detailed below, to the AETT's own companies.

³⁰ *The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust: The First Year. op. cit.* p. 11.

³¹ H. A. Standish. 'Amateurs and all That'. *ibid.* p. 30.

In addition to breaking commitments upon which public and private monies had been raised³², the AETT's new plans had the effect of eliminating women from creative positions in the Australian national theatre movement. The 'professionalisation' of the movement subsequent to the launch of the AETT along with the formation of national companies, meant that women, identified in the UNESCO national drama survey as the primary supporters of Australian theatre, were marginalised. Local female directors, like Doris Fitton of the Independent and May Hollinworth, were passed off as amateurs or small players in comparison to the real players, the professionals - such as Hunt, Quentin and Sumner, men imported from the British theatre³³. Women were relegated to non-creative administrative roles such as (the admittedly imported) Elsie Beyer, or to Board positions, such as the stalwarts of the national opera theatre movement - C. T. Lorenz and Gertrude Johnson. This male dominated creative superstructure remained unchecked for decades. At the time, many of these women moved further into theatre in education, although this subsequently underwent a process of professionalisation in the late 1950s and resulted in senior positions going to men, as women failed ground entry tests on the basis of lacking practical theatre experience³⁴.

Theatre Buildings and their Audience

Early in 1955, the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust was ready to start active operations and though the actual ownership of theatre buildings was not its purpose it was realised that a theatre of its own would be invaluable³⁵

Also creating controversy, was the AETT's decision to acquire its own theatre space. Despite dozens of assertions to the contrary, the organisation changed its original policy of not investing money into theatres. Hugh Hunt, in another of his first day policy declarations, stated that, "one of the first jobs will be to find theatrical buildings... I am not in favour of a small intimate theatre, the National Theatre movement has got

³² "Any company which aims at the highest standard and gives promise of achieving it will have the right to ask the trust for help to make it self-supporting". 'The Theatre in Australia'. *The Sydney Morning Herald. op. cit. p. 2.*

³³ There was one exception when May Hollinworth was asked to direct the AETT production of *The Shifting Heart* in 1957. Lynne Murphy. 'May Hollinworth'. Philip Parsons (General Editor) *Companion to Theatre in Australia*. Currency Press. Sydney. 1995. p. 281.

³⁴ This is detailed at the end of Chapter 5.

to appeal to a large number of people and opera requires a large auditorium”³⁶. Prior to his arrival, the AETT Board had attempted to secure the lease of the Palladium Theatre in Sydney but under much criticism regarding the rental and questions about suitability, called off the deal³⁷. The second site selected, ‘The Majestic’ in Newtown, was no less problematic. Complaints were made about the size and the location - it was argued that the AETT by basing itself in Sydney was failing to fulfil its national charter. Complaints were also made about the expense and the fact that the lease and renovation costs necessitated further subsidy from the NSW State Government and the Sydney City Council. Hunt refused to engage in the criticism announcing, “I am aware that there are many people who are critical of the Majestic Theatre... We had an unenviable choice - that or nothing... We don’t regard The Majestic as the future National Theatre of N.S.W. We are building up for the future”³⁸.

Within weeks of leasing the theatre (renamed the Elizabethan), problems between the style of the theatre and the envisioned audience base began to emerge. To be expected, given Hunt’s and the AETT Board members’ backgrounds, the style mimicked the high culture ‘drawing room’ theatre of the British and was reflected in the nature of the renovations. “The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust gets a Chandelier and a Grand Piano for its Theatre at Newtown”, gushed one headline³⁹. The style was cemented by the inauguration of the theatre by a visiting English company, presenting two Terence Rattigan ‘drawing room’ plays, with the titled actor Sir Ralph Richardson in the lead. It was also reinforced by a series of highly publicised fashionable upper-class opening nights which were in part a consequence of having to provide sponsors and importantly politicians with events in which they could be seen (and publicised) as being part of, and thus contributing to the construction of elite culture.

³⁵ *The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust: The First Year. op. cit.* p. 14.

³⁶ Theatre Trust Officer Wants Results’. *The Sydney Morning Herald. op. cit.* p. 7.

³⁷ ‘Rental paid by Elizabethan Theatre Trust for the Palladium Theatre questioned by Alderman J. S. Cockle at Sydney City Council meeting: Payment of £3,600 a year for three years to subsidise rental’. *The Sydney Morning Herald.* 16th November. 1954. p. 3. ‘Elizabethan Theatre Trust’s lease of the Palladium Theatre in doubt: Cost of remodelling the stage might necessitate the deal being called off’. *The Sydney Morning Herald.* 15th December. 1954. p. 5.

³⁸ ‘Theatre Trust Hopes To Have a Full Time Company’. *The Sydney Morning Herald. op. cit.* p. 6.

³⁹ ‘Gift of a Chandelier, Piano for Elizabethan Trust’s Newtown Theatre’. *The Sydney Morning Herald* 1st July. 1955. p. 7.

In spite of the above, this style was in fact reported in the Press in an extraordinarily self-conscious manner and was regarded, within a few years, as a highly inappropriate characterisation of the national theatre organisation. The clearest example of this self-consciousness was evident in the reporting of the AETT's first opening night at the Elizabethan Theatre. While it was hailed as a 'Great Occasion at Newtown' with the fashion, glamour and social status of the audience being celebrated, the focus of the Press was to offset these images against that of the inhabitants of working class Newtown, who lined the streets to watch.

A crowd of two thousand Newtown residents jammed the streets around the theatre. Girls in jeans, workmen in overalls, women in aprons with babies on their hips and hoards of excited and barefooted children cheered and clapped the first nighters as they arrived in resplendent evening dress, "Look out mum you'll do your petticoat" one burly wharfie called to a lady who missed her step as she alighted from a car.⁴⁰

These images of class difference witnessed at the opening of Australia's first national theatre were treated with both humour and concern. Some journalists rendered the event as some bizarre anthropological meeting between 'natives' and plumed 'exotics'. This was highlighted in the feature 'THE OWNER joined a QUEUE'⁴¹. The article explained how the "hard working kindly folk of Newtown" played games pretending which of the expensive cars parked by Elizabethan Theatre patrons they would like to own and further how the 'homespun' theatre lessor had to take second place to the 'smart set' when obtaining theatre tickets. Such articles sought to emphasise the absurdity of the scene and convey the sense that this was not what Australian theatre and by association Australian society was really all about. It also caused offence. One Newtown resident's reaction to the article above (which featured as the *Sun Herald's* 'Letter of the Week'), started with the sarcastic,

Come orf it mate! Do you think that the only opportunity we slum dwellers have of seeing expensive cars is an occasion of a gala night at the Elizabethan... Why we even go to the Elizabethan, not for the purpose of being seen and getting our pictures in the social papers, but to

⁴⁰ *The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust: The First Year. op. cit.* p. 17.

⁴¹ 'The Owner Joined the Queue'. Music & Theatre. *Sun Herald*. 7th August. 1955. p. 60.

enjoy the show... See you at "The Medea" - front row of the dress circle not "The Gods!"⁴²

While Tyrone Guthrie may have been correct that Australian society was no more classless than Britain - it certainly did not wish to promote that image of itself. This was stressed in 'serious' editorials,

Though {the theatre at Newtown} is not in a fashionable area, that is not wholly a disadvantage. In the long run the drama is doomed if it is not a popular art and the Elizabethan Theatre in Sydney, like the Old Vic in London, can be proud to begin among the people.⁴³

The AETT too, swiftly sensed the need to move downmarket and promote itself as an egalitarian and classless enterprise and the organisation's publicity machine set about diffusing depictions of it as an elitist venture⁴⁴. The organisation compared itself with the community orientated Abbey Theatre in Ireland and their productions at the Elizabethan akin to those of the popular 1930s entertainers, 'Stiffy and Mo'⁴⁵.

The Executive

The AETT's shift from the role of facilitator to producer meant that the organisation became one of the biggest performing arts employers in Australia in the 1950s and one of the few providers of permanent employment⁴⁶. The change also meant that the Executive Staff and some Board members benefited directly from AETT activities, either financially or with regards to career opportunities. Within the first eighteen months, Hugh Hunt, the Executive (and now Artistic) Director of the AETT, directed *Medea*, the first production of the Australian Drama Company as well as *Twelfth Night*. John Sumner, the General Manager of the Elizabethan

⁴² 'Letter of the Week; To the Editor'. *Sun Herald*. 14th August. 1955. p. 58.

⁴³ 'A Great Occasion at Newtown'. Editorial. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 28th July. 1955. p. 2.

⁴⁴ It was possible that the 'Letter of the Week' quoted above was in fact a product of this publicity machine and/or written by an AETT supporter.

⁴⁵ This mixing of high and lowbrow to make the Trust appear non elitist was best represented by the "Prologue; For the Opening of the Elizabethan Theatre 27th July, 1955". Spoken By Dame Sibyl Thorndike and presented in rhyme, it tried to create a continuum of 'melodrama', 'Shakespeare', 'motion-picture shows', 'crooners', 'cops', 'cowboys', and 'Our Royal Patron'. *The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust: The First Year. op. cit.* p. 16.

⁴⁶ The Commercial managements, such J.C. Williamson's, offered a much greater quantity of job opportunities on an engagement to engagement basis.

Theatre (who later headed the Melbourne Theatre Company) directed the Trust's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* (as he had for Melbourne Union Theatre). Elsie Beyer (as noted above) moved from being an AETT Board member to General Manager of the Drama Company. Robert Quentin, the General Manager of the Opera Company (who became the first Director of NIDA) directed the Trust's first musical, *The Boyfriend*. Only the Administrative Officer John Stephens, was not employed in both an executive and creative capacity by the AETT, out of the five members of the Executive Staff. This meant in effect that the Executive, whose role it was to select which artists (including directors) were employed in the national companies, was providing jobs to its own staff.

The Executive, referred to in the press as Mr Hunt's "cabinet", represented a very small concentration of individuals who wielded great power within cultural spheres. Despite the fact that this shift in policy was the one that made the AETT most vulnerable to criticism, the arts community and public were for the most part silent (or went unreported) regarding these 'appointments'. This was perhaps owing to practitioner fears (given the ubiquity of the organisation) about whether such criticism would affect their ability to secure employment. One exception to this, were the public attacks regarding the nationality of the staff - "The Trust has been mainly criticised because there are no Australians among its top executives". In defence, Hunt stated in an interview,

As an Englishman, I have no reason to feel that we are here to do anything else other than help Australia... English people are here to try and repay a debt - to try and give Australia a theatre that we robbed from them. If there are more Australians prepared to come back from overseas to help lay a solid foundation and build up their theatre - they are more than welcome to do so. But how many are prepared to do this? So many of them find excuses for staying overseas. We are not here to take jobs from Australians - we are here to give jobs. I am not here to prevent an Australian from being executive director of the trust. I intend to hand over my job to the right Australian when he comes along and I shall be happy and proud to do so.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ In fact, when that time came in 1959, Hunt recommended a list of six names, none of whom were Australian, his particular choice being Robert Quentin - the Englishman. 'Two Reply to Theatre Trust attack'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 4th November. 1955. p. 4.

What was most interesting about this interview done in late 1955 was that he had begun referring to the Australian theatre as an object of the future, for which present interim activities and decisions however unpalatable were justified. Elsie Beyer had been the first to introduce this new useful image into descriptions of the Trust's endeavours that year.

Establishing a national theatre in Australia, Miss Beyer explained, lighting her umpteenth cigarette, was like planting a tree - "the fruits of which will be picked by others... She added I don't think we will pick those fruits. I think there is a great future for the Australian Theatre but I warn you it's a long-term job."⁴⁸

Such descriptions also helped the Executive Staff explain why the AETT national companies were in increasingly serious financial trouble

Box Office, *The Doll* and the long term job

The success of the AETT production of Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* was unparalleled in the history of Australian-authored drama. The immediate and unanimous critical praise, the sell-out national tours, the Olivier-backed London production and the Hollywood film were all components of the legend associated with the watershed production of Australia's "most famous" play⁴⁹. This legend served and was actively used to prop up the chronic financial and artistic difficulties that the AETT consistently encountered from the mid 1950s on. The Executive Director's report of July 1956 showed that *The Doll's* popularity at the box office had failed to ameliorate the losses encountered in the other drama and opera productions. For the opera, Hunt stated, "the production costs have, as reported to you by Mr Quentin at the last meeting, been in many cases higher than we anticipated"⁵⁰. For drama, the problems were the lack of audiences,

The trading results of the current season in Melbourne have been disappointing. Both TWELFTH NIGHT and THE RIVALS have had a weak box office response. The Secretary has reported on the financial situation to date,

⁴⁸ 'Theatre here is a Long Term Job'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 28th July. 1955. p. 2.

⁴⁹ John McCallum. 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll'. *Companion to Theatre in Australia*. *op. cit.* pp. 564-565.

⁵⁰ *Executive Director's Progress Report*. July 26th 1956. AETT Archives MS 5908. Box 48. p. 2.

but it is unlikely that *THE DOLL*, which opened strongly on July 21st and will run for 4 1/2 weeks, will be able to reduce the net loss shown.⁵¹

The following year's productions also yielded poor results. A 1957 Executive Director's Progress Report stated lamely, "business to date has been somewhat disappointing"⁵².

The lack of support for *Twelfth Night* and *The Rivals* reflected a pattern of reception for almost all of the AETT Australian Drama Company productions in the first few years. Myra Roper, the Principal of Melbourne's University College and AETT Board member, provided a summary of the difficulties the Trust encountered. The Australian play *Ned Kelly* had failed to attract an audience owing to problems of theatrical style and content⁵³. Similarly, *The Rainmaker* - that had "enchanted large audiences in U.S.A. and in England... failed to do so in Australia", *Hamlet* - had "a slowish start" and *The Relapse* - produced little interest because, "Restoration Comedy is an acquired taste... being indigestible fare for many"⁵⁴.

By late 1957, the AETT, having delivered only its second season, was facing serious budgetary problems. It seemed that it had greatly underestimated (as Braithwaite anticipated) the costs of mounting opera productions and failed on a consistent basis to provide the kind of dramatic fare that audiences were willing to attend. The great competitor and "enemy"⁵⁵ to the performing arts, television had begun the year before amidst enormous public fascination, whereas the AETT's earnest efforts were struggling to make an impression in the general population. The AETT Board had made it clear to the Executive that requisitioning further funds from the Federal or State Governments or City Councils was at this point untenable⁵⁶. Furthermore, while the success of *The Doll* had proved that

⁵¹ *ibid.* p. 2.

⁵² *Executive Director's Progress Report. May 22nd 1957.* AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 48. p. 2.

⁵³ The circumstances and consequences of the play's failure are detailed in Part 2 of this Chapter.

⁵⁴ Myra Roper. 'An Idea is a Fact'. Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (Editors). *Australian Theatre Year Book. 1957.* F. W. Cheshire. Melbourne. 1958. pp. 11-16.

⁵⁵ *Executive Director's Progress Report. May 22nd 1957. op. cit.* p. 2.

⁵⁶ "One of the attractions I had held out to State and City Governments was the protection the Trust would offer them against demands for additional funds after Budget decisions had been made, enabling them to refer such demands to the Trust itself. To lend extra authority to this promise, I undertook that the Trust would live within its resources as determined in the annual Budget ... It was easier to

particular drama productions could be self-supporting, it was not sufficient to offset the losses incurred by the dozen subsequent AETT productions that were not. The criticism directed at the organisation became more pointed.

A spokesman from J. C. Williamson Theatres Ltd made clear the level of achievement (both artistic and financial) expected of the AETT and the potential hostility that would be evoked if it failed.

Now that the public has subscribed and the Government added its subsidy to a new organisation formed to bring cultural efforts to Australia it will be interesting for the commercial firms to sit back and see how much greater the efforts will be when the sordid thought of money does not enter into the calculations of entrepreneurs... It is apparent that any new group... with a nice fat subsidy... with objects and aims of presenting Australia with something better than Australians have witnessed in the past, has its problems ahead.⁵⁷

The AETT Executive and Board expounded multiple justifications for the difficulties they were encountering⁵⁸ and attempted multiple strategies (such as attempts to sell AETT productions internationally⁵⁹) for financial recovery. It was quickly recognised that the most successful and useful of these was the promotion of the AETT as the incubator for theatre of the future.

The 1957 *Australian Elizabethan Theatre Year Book* was saturated with this new image of the AETT. Unlike the assured prose of its predecessor, this document was both cautious and sober. It contained no advertising or endorsements from sponsors nor any affirmations from politicians, but instead presented a series of analytical review articles from AETT executives, theatre critics and commercial theatre executives. It opened with a preface from H. C. Coombs, which set the tone for this dense and lengthy review. Coombs' voice was absent in the first Trust Year Book, indicative of the benign position he had taken up until now in the AETT

give this assurance than live up to it, even though the Trust got off to a flying start". Coombs. *Trial Balance*. *op. cit.* pp. 238-9.

⁵⁷ 'Elizabethan Theatre Trust'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 3rd July, 1956. p. 2.

⁵⁸ One was the "general recession in theatrical business". *Executive Director's Progress Report*. May 22nd 1957. *op. cit.* p. 3.

⁵⁹ *ibid.* p. 3. Richard Waterhouse. 'Lola Montez and High Culture: The Elizabethan Theatre Trust in post-war Australia'. *Journal of Australian Studies*. No. 52. 1997. pp. 148-58.

subsequent to Hunt's appointment. This time Coombs took on the very visible mantle of leadership. Coombs presented a kind of mission statement for the organisation that argued that certain of the performing arts would require a form of consistent government subsidy to survive. He stated that there was "no such thing as universal entertainment". The costs associated with grand opera, ballet and Shakespearean performance were such (and much greater than light comedy) that in order to provide a diverse and "fully mature Australian theatre... we must find additional financial support for our theatre"⁶⁰. Coombs made public the argument (referred to in Chapter Three) that had circulated privately in AETT memos for almost 18 months. This argument was not that such productions could never make money but that they should be protected from that imperative. "These forms of theatre... require some experience and familiarity to enjoy fully {and} for which a wide audience can be built only slowly"⁶¹. A secondary process had to occur if the kind of legitimate theatre produced by the AETT was going to be successful in attracting both audiences and government subsidy. That process was training.

It was only the Australian Drama Company that was having such difficulty attracting adequate audience figures on a consistent basis. The Australian Opera Company, conversely, was boasting of a 90% attendance average for its performances⁶². Yet it was in drama (despite the lower expenditure involved) that the AETT had placed the tasks, and the public expectations, of reflecting Australia's national consciousness. AETT supporters had always represented the *theatre*, as something distinct from *drama*. J. J. Wilson explained that,

Drama can present or create significant images of a national spirit... because its audiences are vitally involved in its forms and its discoveries... The *Theatre* can clearly reflect the taste and opinion of a nation but it is the native *Drama*, which presents the character of a nation itself.⁶³

Keith Macartney concurred,

⁶⁰ *Australian Theatre Year Book 1957. op. cit. p. 7.*

⁶¹ *ibid. p. 7.*

⁶² *Executive Director's Progress Report. May 22nd 1957. op. cit. p. 3.*

Drama is surely the basis of all the arts of entertainment, including ballet and opera. It reflects much more closely the life of the people, and a community without a living drama is to some extent a community without a voice.⁶⁴

It was because of these definitions that the success of AETT drama ventures carried far greater 'ideological' weight than its other activities and carried far greater responsibility in the justifications for Government subsidy. Thus, the early success of *The Doll* completely overshadowed the box office achievements of the first opera season. Conversely, the subsequent and ongoing lack of public interest in AETT drama productions in the years that followed began to threaten to undermine the existence of the organisation itself.

Part 2. Ensuring Survival

The financial crisis of late 1957 was compounded by a series of confronting setbacks the AETT encountered in the subsequent twelve months. These setbacks - the controversy surrounding the production of Douglas Stewart's *Ned Kelly*, the success of Canada's National Theatre and the failure of *The Doll* on Broadway, seriously affected the AETT's representation of itself as the proper organisation to be producing government assisted legitimate arts culture.

The AETT would not recover in its present form from the impact of these setbacks. Collectively they presented the AETT with a series of challenges that subsidised dominant culture would have to meet and the form it would have to adopt, in order for its principles to be achieved. To justify future financial contributions from Federal and State governments and ensure public support, subsidised arts agencies had to now transcend the perception of themselves as simply producers of worthy cultural product to become instead the cultural educators of future artists and audiences alike.

⁶³ J. L. J. Wilson. *Australian Drama and Theatre*. Current Affairs Bulletin; Dept of Tutorial Classes in the University of Sydney. University of Sydney. 1958. p. 2.

⁶⁴ Macartney. *Meanjin*. *op. cit.* p. 126.

The Controversy of *Ned Kelly*

One of the ironies about the spectacular achievements of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* was that they were of little comfort to AETT's Executive Officer. Hugh Hunt's equivocation toward the play was owing to his dislike of "the slice of life" school to which he felt the play belonged⁶⁵. Hunt's interest lay instead in creating a "native" Australian dramatic tradition that was based in "heightened" language, like the Irish theatre, and myth as in ancient Greek theatre. These plays he hoped would be presented alongside international classics because, "a theatre that relies entirely upon a diet of home made plays will burn itself out"⁶⁶. Together, they would provide the community with "a living drama". Hunt felt that examples of this Australian "poetic drama" were encapsulated in the work of the playwright Douglas Stewart, such as his radio play *Fire on the Snow* and the AETT 1957 production of *Ned Kelly*. Stewart described this form of drama, in the first AETT Year Book, as contributing to the "creation of the nation"⁶⁷.

The first major setback encountered by the AETT in 1957 emerged out of the controversy (that would haunt the organisation for the next eight years) surrounding the closure of this production. The reception of the play, relatively tepid reviews⁶⁸ and poor box office - were similar enough to other AETT failures to indicate that the usual arguments deployed, such as the high risks involved in presenting an Australian work should have been sufficient justification for the closure. Myra Roper had explained the mixed reception to the show, as owing to "the Trust's regular supporters mostly educated and culture conscious, {being} antipathetic to the whole

⁶⁵ He argued, "now, whilst the realistic play with its accurate observation of character, language and atmosphere has its rightful place in literature, it has obvious limitations and the limitations of backyard realism are considerable". Hugh Hunt. *The Making of Australian Theatre*. F. W. Cheshire. Melbourne. 1960. p. 17.

⁶⁶ *ibid.* p. 16.

⁶⁷ Like the International Theatre Institute's vision for the social and nationalistic function of drama in the post war period, Stewart and Hunt asserted that Australian plays "must somehow form the minds and shape the lives of the audience that see them and create "the myths by which people live"". Douglas Stewart. 'The playwright in Australia'. *The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust: The First Year. op. cit.* p. 9.

⁶⁸ The most influential review, which appeared in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, stated that while the direction of John Sumner, the settings by Desmonde Dowling and some of the actors displayed "special qualities", it also criticised the "play's looseness of structure, its occasional wordiness {and} its lack of some integrating moral argument". The critic admired the free verse of the text but felt that in performance it was "clumsy in its transitions from the matter-of-fact to the high poetic mood". 'Ned Kelly Play at Newtown'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 4th October. 1956. p. 4.

Kelly legend and reluctant to have him raised to hero status.

{Alternatively}, the galleryites and youngsters... were at first bewildered and then irritated by long philosophic discussions and, of course, its verse form was not their meat"⁶⁹. The controversy arose instead from hints in the Press that the closure of the play revealed fissures between the AETT Executive and the Board because of undue influence exerted by the latter.

Six months before the play's closure, AETT president Sir John Latham had expressed his dislike of the play's content, in a letter to Chairman H. C. Coombs. Latham stated he was,

Not willing - as a private citizen or in any other capacity - to give any support or countenance to the persistent attempt to represent Ned Kelly, thief, robber, and murderer, as a misunderstood, thoughtful, and really kind man, worthy of respect and sympathy, and fitted to be regarded as a national hero.⁷⁰

Latham had not made public his distaste about the play's subject matter and indeed did not overtly interfere with the mounting of the production. This was, in part, because the AETT had recognised the absolute necessity to present a united public front and a perfect congruity between Board and Executive (the Press would mention nothing of the fissure between Coombs and Hunt over the cancellation of the 1959 national opera season). However, with the production of *Ned Kelly* Hunt had taken it upon himself, possibly contrary to the wishes of the Board, to mount a very spirited and public defence of the play. While it was unclear as to what exactly occurred between Hunt and the Board (Stewart himself was unsure eight years on⁷¹) it was clear that Hunt's actions revealed to the public for the first time that the AETT was possibly not the benign organisation it purported to be.

On the 10th of October, seven days after *Ned Kelly* opened, Hugh Hunt had a long letter published in the *Herald*, vigorously defending the merit of the play and justifying its selection for presentation in the Olympic Festival in

⁶⁹Roper. *Australian Theatre Year Book*. 1957. *op. cit.* p. 15.

⁷⁰J. Latham. Letter to H. C. Coombs. 6th March, 1956. Latham papers 1009/72/83. Australian National Library.

⁷¹Douglas Stewart. *On Being a Verse Playwright*. Theatre & Drama Issue. *Meanjin*. No. 98. Vol. XXIII. Number 3. University of Melbourne. 1964. This volume coincided with the AETT's 10th anniversary. In his article, Stewart makes abundantly clear his many reservations about the machinations of power within the Trust.

Melbourne later that year. He outlined the auspicious lineage of the work since it had been written in 1942 and the number of successful productions it had enjoyed. Hunt then reprimanded “those people {who had} criticised the play on the grounds that a story of lawless bushrangers is bad propaganda for visitors from overseas”, arguing that no self-respecting British company would rule out producing *Richard III* or *Macbeth* on the basis that the principal characters “were thugs”⁷². Hunt went on to state that by presenting *Ned Kelly* at the Olympic Festival, “the Trust will ensure that an Australian dramatic contribution is made to the festival”. Personally he felt it was a “moving” and “exciting” play, one that stood amongst the best of contemporary drama and would give international audiences an impression of Australian “virility”. Hunt ended by stating that he felt sure “that the majority of the public in Sydney {would} judge the play on its merits as entertainment and not by standards of propaganda”.

It would not have been immediately obvious to the public as to whom this sturdy defence was directed. Hunt’s letter was not a reply to anything that had appeared in *The Sydney Morning Herald* or had otherwise been publicly stated, nor did any of the other papers carry the kind of overt criticism regarding the selection of the play that Hunt appeared to be responding to. Indeed, subsequently there were a number of published letters from the public in complete support of Hunt’s stance⁷³. A. R. Allen wrote that, “too many people are inclined to suffer from an inferiority complex about many things of Australian origin... Because the play depicts a sordid episode in Australian history it does not alter the fact that it is dramatic and artistic entertainment worthy of any country in any age”. Mrs L. J. Dunn offered similar support,

Sir, - May I say a few words in defence of Ned Kelly?
Like perhaps, a lot of other people, I had no desire to see or hear any more of our overrated bushranger, but I happened to take my children along to see it... Not only did they leave with a great desire to go again, but I was thrilled with the whole thing⁷⁴.

⁷² Hugh Hunt. ‘Selection of Ned Kelly’. Letters to the Editor. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 10th Oct 1956. p. 2.

⁷³ A. R. Allen. ‘Ned Kelly’. Letters to the Editor. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 17th October. 1956. p. 2.

⁷⁴ Mrs L. J. Dunn. Letters to the Editor. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 20th October. 1956. p. 2

It seemed more than likely that the defence of the play was a not so subtle broadside at the AETT Board and Latham. According to Stewart, the “unofficial story” was that the play, “was taken off because certain members of the Trust thought that Ned Kelly wasn’t a respectable citizen”⁷⁵. However, with the exception of Latham’s letter, there was no specific evidence that a significant number of the thirty-strong Board pushed to have the play removed from the festival program, although the events that transpired appeared to confirm Stewart’s speculations. More importantly, this was the impression taken at the time and in the ensuing years by sections of the public, practitioners and cultural commentators.

Within seven days of the publication of his first letter, Hugh Hunt in a startling capitulation announced to the Press that because of poor attendance, *Ned Kelly* at the Elizabethan Theatre in Sydney would probably close early. It was further reported that the “Trust may not be able to afford to produce the play in Melbourne in December... Mr Hunt said he would meet with the Olympic Festival Sub-Committee... and suggest that Ray Lawler’s *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* should take the place of *Ned Kelly* in Melbourne during the Games if Sydney box office returns did not improve”⁷⁶. Despite this assertion, this did not transpire. After the announcement of the play’s early closure, box office improved to such an extent that the concluding two weeks were almost the best to date, yet the AETT went ahead and closed the production anyway. *The Doll* took *Ned Kelly*’s position in the Olympic Festival and the intended three-month tour of capital cities was cancelled⁷⁷.

A key factor in raising public speculation about the possibility of covert censorship from the AETT Board was that the announcement to remove *Ned Kelly* from the festival program coincided with an act of overt theatrical censorship carried out by the Federal Government. In the article reporting the replacement of the play it was also announced that the Menzies Government had decided to postpone the Chinese Classical Theatre Company season (due to open in Melbourne during the Olympics). The official reasons given, were that stage appearances by this company during the international sporting event, “could lead to incidents, because

⁷⁵ Stewart. *On Being a Verse Playwright. op. cit.* p. 276.

⁷⁶ ‘Games Opera & Play now in Doubt’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 18th October. 1956. p. 1.

⁷⁷ Stewart. *On Being a Verse Playwright. op. cit.* p. 278.

of the presence in the city of so many nationalities with conflicting political outlooks”⁷⁸. Menzies, who regarded Chinese communism “as an arrow aimed at the heart of Australia”, was less delicate in justifying his actions, stating he had foreseen controversy because many visitors to Melbourne, “would have strong views on some of the problems associated with these people”⁷⁹. Despite the outrage expressed by the Opposition, Press and Public, the musical *Kismet* replaced the Chinese Opera season.

The congruity between Menzies’ actions and the AETT’s helped to increase suspicions, as Kevon Kemp put it, that “the claim that members of the board {did} in fact hold their influence rigidly to questions of finance and high policy” were not true. Kemp pointed out that there was, “a great deal of personal contact among the Trust’s executives and directors {and it was thus} reasonable to assume that many pressures {were} made of the non-financial type”⁸⁰. This fissure in public confidence opened the AETT, by its own admission, to “a loud chorus of criticisms and demands” which although characterised vaguely by the organisation as “darkening counsel” and “clouding” the issues, were in fact specific and substantiated⁸¹.

Harold Bowden, the general manager of J.C. Williamson Theatres Ltd, was one such critic. He argued that the AETT was impeding the progress of culture in Australia. Rather than fulfil its original brief, the AETT was in fact operating inappropriately as a competitor to unsubsidised commercial organisations such as his own. He argued that,

{The Trust} was formed not as a producing unit, but to act in the same way as the British Council and subsidise reputable managements in an endeavour to bring to Australia plays that Australian theatregoers have a right to see, even if management’s consider them not commercial.

However the Elizabethan Theatre Trust changed its plans and became an opposition unit, its first effort to bring out a star and production Williamson’s had asked to be subsidised - Judith Anderson in “Medea”.

⁷⁸ ‘Games Opera & Play now in Doubt’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. *op. cit.* p. 1.

⁷⁹ ‘The Prime Minister changes the Itinerary’. Katharine Brisbane (Editor) *Entertaining Australia: The Performing Arts as Cultural History*. *op. cit.* pp. 284-85.

⁸⁰ Kevon Kemp. ‘The Australian Elizabethan Trust: Too many Amateurs’. *Theatre & Drama Issue. Meanjin Quarterly*. No, 98. Vol.XXIII. 1964. p. 288.

⁸¹ Roper. *Australian Theatre Year Book*. 1957. *op. cit.* p. 12.

I don't know what could possibly have influenced the trust to expend its cultural activity on a banal little musical titled "The Boyfriend".⁸²

Further complaints were made regarding the AETT's betrayal of the public in altering their original aims,

When the trust was formed and public subscription was asked for, the aims of the trust, in so far as negative aims are concerned, were stated as being that the trust would certainly not acquire theatre buildings and form theatrical companies; rather that it would interest itself in encouraging Theatre, as such in Australia. We found however that the very first things the Trust did when it got going were those very things it said it would not do.⁸³

The public criticism of the AETT continued throughout 1957 and ranged from reproaches over conservative opera repertoire⁸⁴ to continued disappointment in the quality of its drama productions. Amidst this litany of censure came a second major setback for the Trust.

Canada gets its National Theatre

When the Australian press announced that Canada had successfully opened its National Theatre in Stratford, Ontario, it did so in such a way as to cast the AETT in poor relief. Articles such as the one entitled *Stratford (Ontario) Sets us an Example*⁸⁵ made it extremely clear that the cultural achievements of the Canadians had far exceeded, under more difficult circumstances and in less time, anything that had as yet occurred in Australia. As summarised by the *Herald's* New York correspondent -

⁸² 'Culture Not Profitable Says Bowden'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 19th July. 1957. p. 7.

⁸³ Denis Logan. 'Theatre Aim's'. Letter to the Editor. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 14th December. 1957. p. 2. Logan went on to remark "One recalls the case of the competition for the memorial to the late King George V, when the winning design could not be proceeded with, as it was considered that the design did not meet the stated objects of the public subscription. It was said that an Act of Parliament would be necessary to validate the award". He was suggesting the same thing occur in regard to the AETT's changing their original charter.

⁸⁴ "The Elizabethan Theatre's choice of operas for the second season does not show the adventurous spirit of the proposed new Opera House, whose designer Mr Utzon, shortly arrives here... so many fresh works simply cry out for an introduction here". Bill English. 'Choice of Opera'. Letter to the Editor. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 23rd July. 1957. p. 2.

⁸⁵ Beverley Longworth Lee. 'Stratford (Ontario) Sets us an Example'. *Sun Herald*. 28th June. 1957. p. 16.

The whole festival and theatre project {was} developed in five years from an idea cherished by a dedicated group of amateurs in Stratford, without funds or experience, into an established international event. Ontario's Shakespeare Festival started in 1953 after a Stratford newspaperman's campaign that seemed to be a flop. Tom Patterson, working against all odds, talked England's Tyrone Guthrie into directing and Alec Guinness into starring {in the} first season.⁸⁶

The presence of Guthrie as the festival director and the raising of Canadian \$1,500,000, almost entirely by public subscription in less than twenty months, highlighted how comparatively less inspiring the AETT's overall achievements had been⁸⁷.

The strategies deployed by the organisers of the Stratford festival and the Canadian National Theatre which led to its extraordinary success, were quite distinct from those used by the AETT. Rather than burden itself with the task of forming and touring national companies, the Stratford organisers set about stimulating public interest by means of innovative and relevant approaches to cultural product and an acceptance of existing public taste. Unlike the AETT, the Stratford organisers had very few concerns⁸⁸, about presenting traditional forms of theatre alongside material emerging from popular or mass media. The 1957 season included a Shakespeare festival (featuring film star James Mason), a selection of contemporary plays, the first performance outside the UK of Benjamin Britten's *Turn of The Screw* (along with a season of the composer's work), a jazz festival (with Billy Holiday and Count Basie on the bill) and a film festival, "that {aimed} to rival the well established one in Venice"⁸⁹.

⁸⁶ 'Canada Gets Its National Theatre. By a Correspondent in New York'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 28th June. 1957. p. 2.

⁸⁷ This was very impressive given that the population of primarily blue-collar Stratford Ontario was only 19,000 in 1953 and, until the inception of the festival, mainly employed in the town's railway workshops.

⁸⁸ The AETT not only regarded television as the great enemy of the legitimate stage and thus culture but cinemas also. It made much of the fact that in a climate when theatres were being converted to cinemas, it had turned the tide by reconverting the Elizabethan (formerly the Majestic) from a cinema back into a theatre. 'Gift of a Chandelier, Piano for Elizabethan Trust's Newtown Theatre'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. *op. cit.* p. 7

⁸⁹ 'Canada Gets Its National Theatre. By a Correspondent in New York'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. *op. cit.* p. 2.

The Stratford festival's eclectic repertoire and accessible facilities (it was perhaps the first festival in the world to offer child care services⁹⁰) appealed to a broad cross section of the public as was evident in the astonishing box office returns and the large number of international visitors that flooded in. In contrast, the AETT struggled on with its haphazard producing agenda in an increasingly enervating climate. The organisation once again looked to its one unassailable example of success, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, that had assisted in many ways up to this point in vindicating the AETT's existence. If it had been able to 'discover' one Australian classic the AETT would be able to do so again.

The Broadway failure of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*

By the end of 1957 it seemed clear that strong commitment to the production of local material would be guaranteed to appeal to an increasingly hostile public⁹¹. This was stated unequivocally in the 1957 *Year Book*.

The most important pressure on the Australian theatre today is that of ordinary Australians who want to see themselves on the stage... What there is of the Australian theatre is the work of playwrights... When in a few centuries the history of the Australian theatre is written it will not need to begin much before the name of Lawler... There can be little doubt that the Trust is the factor of greatest single importance in Australia's theatre revival.⁹²

A pro-AETT editorial in *The Sydney Morning Herald* enthusiastically supported these aims.

In drama, the Elizabethan Theatre Trust, following the spectacular successes in "The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll" is on the watch for as many high-grade Australian plays as our much stimulated

⁹⁰ "Even a Baby Sitting Service is offered through the Accommodation Department". 'Stratford (Ontario) sets us an example'. *Sun Herald. op. cit.*

⁹¹ This hostility had been reported in the press as early as 1956. "Another aspect of the Trust's policy- an aspect which has provoked some criticism in the last year - is its Australian content. Some observers feel that the Trust was not placing sufficient emphasis on Australian artists and Australian works". This report also showed how critical the success of *The Doll* was to countering such assertions. "Much of this criticism was refuted, though by the selection and success of Ray Lawler's play *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*". 'Theatre Trust Reviews its Plans and Achievements'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 13th April. 1957. p. 2.

⁹² Bruce Grant. 'Where Now?' *Australian Theatre Year Book 1957. op. cit.* p. 40.

playwrights can supply. A “school” of Australian playwriting, comparable with the Irish school that grew up around Dublin’s Abbey Theatre is conceivably becoming a reality. A new all Australian musical show, determined to show that a big American reputation is not vital to a musical’s success, is scheduled for later in the year. Meanwhile the Elizabethan is restoring to its Sydney stage Australian Richard Benyon’s emotional study of Italian migrants “The Shifting Heart”.⁹³

These confident and optimistic predictions for creating world class contemporary Australian drama, based in part on the enthusiastic reception of *The Doll* in London, were somewhat ill timed. Not long after both were published, the enormously anticipated AETT Broadway production of the Lawler play opened to uniformly poor reviews. The jewel in the AETT’s crown was described by New York critics as “commonplace”, “lacking distinction” and as a “small and seamy segment of that virile and rapidly growing nation {introducing} some of the less articulate and intelligent people of that fascinating country”⁹⁴. These reviews ensured that the run was truncated and led to the play’s closure⁹⁵.

The effect on the reputation of the Trust was swift. *The Sydney Morning Herald* featured two editorials written by the AETT Board member Pringle in the space of three days. ‘The Winter Of The 17th Doll’ and “‘The Doll’ And Australia’ went to great lengths to dismiss the significance of the production’s failure in New York, “drama rarely travels well... Do the Londoners or New Yorkers or the Parisian’s worry? Of course not. Nor should we be concerned if a local success fails abroad”⁹⁶. Each editorial argued that international verdicts on the play were irrelevant and that the play’s unprecedented success in Australia, “not its reception abroad, good or bad {is what made it} important, historically important” to Australians. Rather than dispelling disquiet these provoked accusations from the public and practitioners that such a defence smacked of ‘literary parochialism’ and misrepresentation. Doris Fitton, the director of the Independent Theatre in Sydney, took offence to the *Herald* endorsing the

⁹³ ‘Gains In Our Cultural Life’. Editorial. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 1st January. 1957. p. 2.

⁹⁴ Reviews appeared in the *New York Times*, *Daily News*, *Daily Mirror* and the *New York Herald Tribune*. ‘Broadway Critics Cool to “Doll”’. Staff Correspondent and A.A.P. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 24th January. 1958. pp. 1 and 3.

⁹⁵ ‘Doll Likely To Have Short Run’. Staff Correspondent and A.A.P. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 25th January. 1958. p. 3.

AETT line that Australian drama was born with the advent of *The Doll*. Fitton pointed out that the Independent's 1949 (unsubsidised) production of *Rusty Bugles* by Sumner Locke-Elliott (who was at the time working successfully as a writer in New York) had toured nationally for over twelve months and sold over 120, 000 tickets⁹⁷. P. K. Elkin and R. G. Gerring of the School of Humanities at the NSW University of Technology attacked the editor's arguments as erroneous, citing the international enthusiasm for the drama of (amongst others) Aristophanes, Moliere, Chekhov, Ibsen and Strinberg, adding,

The fact is that any drama of more than superficial topical interest travels well and in all its important features, can be satisfactorily translated... If the "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll" is so limited in theme and reference that it appeals only to Australians and Englishmen specially interested in Australia then we should not value it very highly... any attempt to defend a play on the mistaken view that it deals with a specifically "Australian illusion"... can only do harm to the reputation of a fine play, and dis-service to the development of Australian drama generally.⁹⁸

Hugh Hunt's own explanation for the Broadway failure was astonishingly reactionary for an eminent contemporary theatre director and surprising, given he cared little for the play himself. It seemed more than anything, to be about defending the AETT's reputation. Hunt asserted that the American theatre (which in the last few years had produced Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and William's *A Streetcar Named Desire*) had,

Recently become sensationalised by playwright moralists whose characters are motivated by drugtaking, alcoholism, perversion, guilt complexes and other forms of moral derangement {and that} somehow or other, a straightforward portrayal of simple human beings {was} regarded as unfashionable.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ 'The Winter of the 17th Doll'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Editorial. 24th January. 1958. p. 2.
 "'The Doll' And Australia'. Editorial. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 28th January. 1958. p. 2.

⁹⁷ Doris Fitton. "'Rusty Bugles' And 'The Doll'". Letter to the Editor. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 30th January. 1958. p. 2.

⁹⁸ This lengthy published letter was regarded with such import, that it became the subject of the Herald's second editorial about *The Doll's* fate in New York. P. K. Elkin, R. G. Geering. 'US. Reception of "The Doll"'. Letter to the Editor. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 28th January. 1958. p. 2.

⁹⁹ Hugh Hunt. 'US Reaction To The Doll'- "Honesty, Integrity" Puzzled Critics'. Letter to the Editor. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 14th February. 1958. p. 2.

The failure of the Broadway production was a real blow to the AETT and seemed to signal that the early success of *Summer of Seventeenth Doll* was an isolated phenomenon. The incident did little to assist the AETT's ambitious plans for producing another Australian classic. This was evidenced by the fact that both the Trust's major 1957 Australian authored productions, the Musical *Lola Montez*¹⁰⁰ and the revival of *The Shifting Heart* had to be taken off early because each performed so poorly at the box office¹⁰¹.

In 1956 the AETT had unveiled a list of "Achievements and Plans"¹⁰² which vindicated its existence and future. By 1958 each of these, the national companies, the repertoire, the AETT's "extremely happy relations" with commercial organisations, producing local content, their involvement in the Olympic Festival, *The Doll* and finally its plans for an Australian School of Drama - had suffered major setbacks. Of these, only one, the rejection of Hugh Hunt's proposal for the theatre school by the Professorial Board at the University of Melbourne¹⁰³, had not been reported in the press and as of yet had encountered no censure whatsoever.

The launch of the national drama school remained a potentially popular and useful platform (and possibly its new jewel) from which the AETT attempted to restore its image and status. The organisation swiftly recognised the value of creating an institution that educated both the artist and the audience. Having encountered such difficulties in its attempts to receive untrammelled support from a broad cross section of the adult Australian population, the AETT by 1958 focused instead upon the unformed and uninformed - the young¹⁰⁴. Like Australian UNESCO's Joint

¹⁰⁰ The AETT went to extraordinary lengths to ensure the success of this musical, "A very large promotion campaign was embarked coinciding with the publication of the long playing record of the show, undertaken by EMI, but despite this campaign and favourable press results {it received fairly good reviews from three of the four daily newspapers} box-office receipts have been disappointing". *Executive Director's Progress Report*. 20th November. 1958. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 48. p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Waterhouse. *op. cit.* p. 52.

¹⁰² 'Theatre Trust Reviews its Plans and Achievements'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. *op. cit.* p. 2.

¹⁰³ The rejection of the theatre school plan by the University of Melbourne is detailed in Chapter 5.

¹⁰⁴ The AETT had already begun to establish a number of schemes for "developing young audiences". In mid 1957 they set up an Associate Membership for those under 25, accompanied by a recruitment drive. This scheme also reflected AETT attitudes to the appropriate place of young people within the organisation. Associate membership entitled one to price-reductions and priority booking but it did

Committee for Drama and Education before it, the AETT found great utility in the notion of training in justifying the past, present and future, and it was on this basis that, within a year, the two organisations became aligned.

The AETT's explanations for, and solutions to, lack of public interest in their drama productions, were identical to those made in the Australian UNESCO joint committee report. The problem lay in the lack of training and the remedy in its provision. For the AETT this meant two things. The first was, training the performer - "the need for a theatre school is paramount; good training must lay the firm foundations on which experience can erect the lasting structure of achievement"¹⁰⁵, and the second was educating the audience - "an assured audience needs to be trained"¹⁰⁶.

The AETT intended that the training of the audience and the actor would be a dual operation. As nurturer of the national voice, the AETT needed to provide the pedagogical environment, not only for those who were to articulate it - the actor/playwright - but also teaching potential audiences how to hear and interpret this voice. In brief, the AETT's new role was to train Australians in the creation and reception of a particular form of culture, a form which the public did not recognise spontaneously or naturally. That the argument lacked logic in view of the success of *The Doll*¹⁰⁷ was irrelevant in comparison to the value it had as the essential legitimating principle of all AETT activities for the next decade. The arrival of television in Australia gave credibility and exigency to the AETT's role in preserving the stage from "the final death blow" and the nation from a flood of "base" entertainment¹⁰⁸. It was a fertile environment for the AETT to promote its new pedagogical goals as having

not bestow voting rights. *Memorandum on Associate Membership for Young People*. 21st May 1957. Hugh Hunt, Executive Director. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 86. p. 1.

¹⁰⁵ Roper. *op. cit.* p. 13.

¹⁰⁶ Macartney. *op. cit.* p. 127.

¹⁰⁷ For example the apparent spontaneous mastery of speaking and hearing the national voice in the first production of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. This was written by an untrained author, performed by untrained actors in the essentially pro/am company, the Melbourne Union Repertory Theatre Company. Another example that contradicted the AETT's pedagogical goals was the success of untrained Australian actors abroad - such as Leo McKern and Peter Finch.

¹⁰⁸ Hal Lashwood. 'Television and Australia'. *Meanjin*. Summer 1954. No. 59. Vol XIII, No. 4. p. 565. Interestingly Lashwood (president of Actors' Equity and member of the UNESCO Committee for Drama, Theatre and Literature) did not believe that the theatre could survive on appeals from enthusiasts who believed "it is good for the public", but rather if it offered something different, as a form of entertainment, from cinema and television.

an urgent moral imperative. The creation of an enlightened audience, civilised by means of exposure to the 'good' art of the legitimate theatre, would be essential in preserving society from the potentially degrading mass of material beamed into the homes of the public. This legitimising principle also gave the AETT a set of critical tools with which to attract continued government subsidy - thus securing its future for the time being. It also provided explanations for the inability of AETT companies to be self supporting, for poor audience response, for nepotistic employment practices, the favouring of future directed goals such as 'training' over the provision of employment for artists, the conservatism of repertoire and the 'infantilisation'¹⁰⁹ of the artist. However, it would not be able to inculcate this legitimising principle of 'training the artist and audiences of the future' into the population on its own. To implement its ambitious pedagogical aims, the first part of which was to set up the first national theatre school, the AETT required the assistance and sanctification of other powerful institutions - Australian UNESCO and the universities.

¹⁰⁹Les Murray explains the notion of the 'infantilising the artist' in 'The Noblesse Trap: the Ills and Possibilities of Arts Patronage' in *Double Take: Six Incorrect Essays*. (Editor) Peter Coleman. Mandarin - Reed Books. Victoria. 1996. pp. 63-100.

Chapter 5.

AETT - the Educator

The AETT's attempts to establish the first national acting institution in Australia was a complex and initially difficult endeavour. Hugh Hunt, the principal force behind the school, had his proposal rejected by a prestigious university, rewritten by an Academic Committee, endorsed by Australian UNESCO and Soviet Russia and its legitimacy questioned by the Attorney General before it opened four years after the idea was first mooted. The success of this endeavour was critical in shifting public perception of the AETT as a domineering arts entrepreneur to that of benevolent arts educator. This shift enabled the organisation to justify 'difficulties' such as lack of audience support and to construct arguments for continued and increased arts subsidy.

Training the actor

When Hugh Hunt announced the AETT's intention to establish a national acting school within the tertiary education system in Australia, Allan Ashbolt, the music and drama editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, immediately responded with the article *Should Drama be Taught in the University?*¹. Ashbolt outlined what he believed were areas of potential contention between the requirements of academia and those of a theatre school. He argued that the teaching of drama, with the exception of the study of "great plays", was regarded by many as "outside proper academic functions". Ashbolt questioned Hunt's desire that a "critical appreciation of theatre" be taught in universities to "budding actors, producers and playwrights as well as to ordinary students". For him, this raised the "old question" of whether the university should remain "a place for free inquiry and intellectual experiment {with} its purpose less to train people for a vocation than to make people think"². Ashbolt pointed out,

¹ Allan Ashbolt. 'Should Drama Be Taught in the University?' *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 8th January, 1955. p. 10. Ashbolt learned of Hunt's intentions to establish an Australian Theatre School from a missive Hunt had written in the letters-to-the-editor column of the English *Sunday Times*, prior to Hunt's taking up his appointment as the AETT Executive Officer in Australia. Hunt was replying to the newspaper critic Harold Hobson who had dismissed the idea of "such {drama} teaching" as being inappropriate in a tertiary institution.

On the one hand... we usually find pedagogues and professors regarding the theatre as a somewhat erratic expression of man's more frivolous traits. A childish game of make-believe, a delightful pretence, a needful entertainment of course; but certainly not a subject worthy of serious speculation.

On the other hand, theatrical practitioners tend to hold to the view that nothing worthwhile about the theatre can be learned in the abstract and that any knowledge must result from "personal experience". Exactly what this phrase means is rather doubtful, for it seems capable of either infinite extension or infinite contraction.

There is, too, a genuine fear that an alive art like the theatre, an art that relies so much on the manipulation of formal materials, cannot be inspected, analysed and discussed as though it were a literary corpse.³

The article reflected an extraordinary presentiment of the difficulties and tensions that were to be encountered by Hugh Hunt and the AETT in trying to locate a university which would accommodate their plans for a national drama school.

Stanislavski comes to Australia

Hunt's own experiences with specialised theatre schools for actors had come most recently whilst he was Artistic Director at the London Old Vic between 1950 to 1953. During that period, he witnessed the controversial work and eventual closure of the Experimental Theatre Centre made up of the Old Vic Theatre School and the Young Vic players. This quite radical enterprise had been established by Michel Saint-Denis, Glen Byam Shaw and George Devine in 1947 and was designed to complement the work of the Old Vic Company. The centre however, was always regarded with some suspicion, "there was distrust in some quarters of the intuitive and analytical emphasis of the School's teaching, rather than on the rigorous technical exercises that would prepare the students to play as cast"⁴. While, Hugh Hunt and some of the members of the theatre company supported the centre, the closure came about through a combination of internal politics, financial problems and lack of support from the Governors of the Old Vic and the uneasy alliance dissolved. An attempt by

² *ibid.* p. 10.

³ *ibid.* p. 10.

⁴ George Rowell. *The Old Vic Theatre: A History*. Cambridge University Press. 1993.
Peter Roberts. *The Old Vic Story: A Nation's Theatre 1818-1976*. W. H. Allen. London. 1976.

the founders to regain the confidence of the Board failed when they submitted their resignations in protest, only to have them accepted without comment⁵.

Saint-Denis, the founder of the Old Vic School, had worked as an actor, administrator and stage manager in the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier, founded and run by his Uncle Jacques Copeau. During this time, Saint-Denis met Stanislavski, when the Moscow Art Theatre toured Paris in 1922. After these experiences, Saint-Denis developed a blueprint for actor training in which the teaching methodology was a combination of the prescriptions of both Copeau and Stanislavski. Saint-Denis regarded their individual approaches to actor training as superficially antithetical. Copeau based the key to an actor's verisimilitude in the authenticity and inventiveness of the actor's (not necessarily naturalistic) theatrical physical expression. Alternatively, Stanislavski believed that "reality" lay in the authenticity of the actor's subjective and introspective discoveries that were to be conveyed in absolute naturalistic detail. However, underlying each was the essential belief that the actor's function in the theatre was to convey this "perfect authenticity" and reject theatrical artifice, a function that could emerge only from the authenticity of the actor's own adherence to "truth" and was "rooted in the very depth of self"⁶. They also shared the conviction that the actor's art must be developed and perfected in the School/Laboratory set apart from the day to day pressures of the working theatre and that the goal of the trained actor was to present theatre that was uplifting and educative. It was because of such unities Saint-Denis felt that Stanislavski's "achievement confirmed and complemented Copeau's work" and believed that Stanislavski's system, "applied selectively, with discrimination {could be} the grammar of all styles that it aspires to be"⁷. With these unities in mind, Saint-Denis constructed his model for a theatre school that was eventually implemented across three continents. Saint-Denis also believed in the moral imperative associated with such instruction. He explained that his own "obsession" with training actors was, "based on a desire to restore to the theatre its vocation of being not only a place of entertainment, but

⁵ Rowell. *op. cit.* p. 141.

⁶ Michel Saint Denis. *Training for the Theatre: Premises and Promises*. Edited by Suria Saint-Denis. Theatre Arts Books. New York. 1982. p. 32.

⁷ *ibid.* p. 38.

also a place where there is a communion with the play: communion between man and man”⁸.

Saint-Denis implemented his model for actor training (with variations) in the setting up of The London Theatre School (1935-39), The Old Vic Theatre School (1947-1952), L’Ecole Supérieure d’Art Dramatique (1952-57) amongst others⁹. His influence upon Hugh Hunt’s own ideas regarding actor training was profound and it was his theatre school model that Hunt sought to establish in Australia.

The National Drama School and the University of Melbourne.

It was always Hunt’s intention to establish the school of acting at the University of Melbourne. This was in part to deflect criticism about the AETT’s operations unfairly favouring Sydney. Early in 1955 he began corresponding with the Vice Chancellor, G. W. Paton, and submitted a proposal for a Diploma of Dramatic Art to the Professorial Board for review. Concurrent with this, Hunt also began to seek funds to provide capital for the venture. The School of Acting, while endorsed by the AETT Board, remained, at this stage, outside the charter and was not to be funded out of AETT capital¹⁰.

In 1956 Hunt submitted a memorandum to the Rockefeller Foundation in New York asking, “if they would be prepared to provide a grant of (US) \$6000 a year for five years, or alternatively a capital sum of (US) \$11,000 for equipment for the provision of visiting lecturers”¹¹. The foundation replied that they were prepared to consider a more formal request for assistance but could “make no prediction with the decision, which would be taken by our trustees”. It also made clear that the endorsement of the acting school by the University was critical. The Rockefeller Foundation stated that a formal application must come from the University of Melbourne and not the AETT and they would only negotiate with a

⁸ *ibid.* p. 56.

⁹ Saint Denis also established, The National Theatre School of Canada (1960), The Stratford Studio of The Royal Shakespeare Company (1962) and The Julliard School Drama Division New York (1968).

¹⁰ *Executive Director’s Progress Report. July 26th 1956.* AETT Archives MS 5908. Box 48. p. 2. This situation gradually altered over the next five years and by 1960 the National Institute of Dramatic Art received substantial funding from the AETT.

¹¹ *Executive Director’s Progress Report. July 26th. 1956.* AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 48. p. 4.

recognised educational institution. The Foundation ended their letter with the proviso that “further correspondence and any specific request should... come from Vice-Chancellor Paton”¹².

The Professorial Board at the University of Melbourne was in receipt of Hunt’s proposal for six months by the time the Rockefeller Foundation replied. Vice Chancellor Paton decided to wait for the outcome of the review before approaching the Foundation with a formal request for funding. This did not transpire. Five months later, after “protracted negotiations” and “long discussion... the ultimate result was that the Board turned down the proposal for a diploma”¹³. The Professorial Board’s rejection was based on four specific points that “weighed” against the proposal. One, the Board did not like diplomas and was in the process of abolishing existing ones. Two, the Ormond Chair was vacant “and... no such proposal affecting the Conservatorium should be decided until after the professor was appointed”. Three, there was not adequate accommodation available for the course and Four, the Board foresaw financial difficulties in running such a course and in obtaining adequately trained staff. The Board went on to make two concrete suggestions. First, that the diploma might be acceptable if an outside body conferred it, with the University providing such teaching as was practicable. The Board acknowledged that this would lack the “prestige” of a University Diploma and mean Commonwealth Scholarships would be unavailable to students. Second, that the Board might consider the possibility of a course of degree standard for students of dramatic art but this would require a quite different proposal than the one submitted.

Paton foresaw that neither suggestion would fulfil Hunt’s intention of a university-approved vocational acting course and outlined the general obstacles that the two Professorial Board suggestions would encounter,

It would require a major operation to get the practical side of the course into an Arts curriculum, and such a degree course would tend, for your purposes, to be overweighted on the academic side. Moreover, if it is impossible to start slowly with a diploma and gradually build up the course, I imagine it would take years to persuade the Arts faculty on a degree course...

¹² *ibid.* p. 5.

¹³ G.W.Paton (Vice Chancellor). Letter, Vice Chancellor’s Office to Hugh Hunt. 22nd May. 1957. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 48. p. 1.

I am very sorry that this is the result... I presume that this means that it is impossible for me to make any approaches to Rockefeller with any degree of sincerity at all.¹⁴

Hunt was undeterred by the protracted and disappointing outcome and immediately began approaching alternative institutions with the proposal. His course of action was “to pursue endeavours to establish a School of Acting situated in Sydney, where overtures have been made by the Technical College and the University of Technology”¹⁵. This indicated he was aware that he should perhaps avoid the obstacles presented by prestige universities and pursue more vocationally orientated institutions. Hunt also sought to reassure the Executive and the Board that, despite the set back, he continued to accept that providing “financial guarantees { for the School} was clearly something outside our charter {and} that {he would} endeavour to interest the Rockefeller foundation in this latter proposal”¹⁶.

Plans For A Theatre School

An examination of the original proposal for the school of acting makes it clear why the course had difficulty being accepted by a university Professorial Board. Firstly, the proposal had an extraordinarily broad brief, the general intention of the school being to make education in theatre readily available to widely differing categories of students. The school intended to not only train actors but also to offer part time courses for interested amateurs and professionals, to “extend their knowledge and appreciation of theatre”, and make certain courses available to student teachers who might later teach theatre or produce plays in schools. The school would also make a selection of courses available to university students, co-operate with the Conservatorium of Music on a joint curriculum for opera students and “encourage and promote activities of all kinds associated with education in and through the theatre, here and in other states”¹⁷. Each of these ventures, it was stated,

¹⁴ *ibid.* p. 1.

¹⁵ *Executive Director's Progress Report, July 26th 1956. op. cit. p. 2.*

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 2.

¹⁷ *Plans For A Theatre School 1957. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 21. p. 1*

Must be governed by one consideration - that at a time when great numbers of semi-educated people are being exposed to a flood of entertainment calculated to appeal to their baser instincts and deliberately aimed at the lowest common denominator of human intelligence, education of the taste of future audiences and practitioners in the field of entertainment is of prime importance.¹⁸

While these sentiments reflected fears surrounding the introduction of television in Australia¹⁹ and were relatively common among certain of the intelligentsia, it was unlikely that they would assuage academic concerns about the innumerable incoherencies and unsubstantiated arguments set out in the proposal.

Many of the courses proposed in the theatre school plan had already been offered (without prerequisites) by existing organisations such as the British Drama League²⁰ and the Arts Council as part of adult education schemes or by private individuals. This threw into question the academic rigour of similar courses offered by the School of Drama. Exacerbating this, was the indication that the school would waive the entry requirement of holding the Leaving Certificate for some students auditioning for the two-year Diploma of Acting. "Candidates of marked talent who do not satisfy {this} requirement, might be admitted to the course, providing that their general intelligence would allow them to assimilate instruction"²¹. Also problematic was the nature and breakdown of the courses offered within the Diploma of Acting. Despite a commitment to establish a Board of Studies, the plan contained no information on how its non-text courses were to be examined or upon what criteria or existent body of knowledge they would be assessed. Eleven of the twenty-three weekly class hours for

¹⁸ *ibid.* p. 2.

¹⁹ The first television broadcast in Australia was on September 16, 1956, by TCN 9. It was followed swiftly by the launch of the Australian Broadcasting Commission - ABN-2 - on November 5, ATN-7, December 2, and GTV-9 January 18, 1957. While it is true that many of the stations, including the ABC, introduced a flood of cheaply acquired overseas (mainly US) programs, it also provided local coverage of sporting events and news and current affairs. Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka. *The Screening of Australia. Anatomy of a Film Industry. Volume 1*. Sylvia Lawson. (General Editor). Australian Screen Studies. Currency Press. Sydney. 1987. pp. 49-51. The principal concern of practitioners at the time was that local program quotas be maintained as shown in the proposed Equity Strike of mid 1957 (below), not that the medium of television itself was base.

²⁰ At the time Hunt was sending his proposal out to various institutions, the British Drama League was organising, in conjunction with Sydney University's Music Department and the Workers Educational Series, an Adult Education Summer School to include "extending the knowledge and appreciation of drama". 'University School opens on Monday'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 9th January. 1958. p. 7.

first year acting students were devoted to purely vocational subjects of speech, speech for the stage, physical training, fencing, mime and dancing, rudimentary stage mechanics, singing and production. A further eight hours focused on the theory and the practice of acting – “the psychological approach to dramatic art”²². It was within this teaching block that – “the acting talent of students would be further developed with particular use of Stanislavsky’s method and with reference to contemporary dramatic material”²³. The remaining four class hours, while text based, also raised questions regarding assessment and feasibility. The two hours a week devoted to dramatic literature were to be “treated chronologically” not as a history subject but so that “the dramatic literature of the past and the social and theatrical conditions in which it was first presented could be introduced with reference to contemporary productions”. Such works were to be studied, not for the sake of textual analysis but rather to “develop the student’s appreciation and understanding of plays of all eras”²⁴. Only the eleventh course was a conventional tertiary course and required the first year acting students to attend the first year English University course for two hours a week. Even this presented some problems for it failed to explain how those acting students who lacked the Leaving Certificate would be admitted into the University’s English course.

Hunt was now under some pressure to overcome the obstacles presented by the tertiary sector and get the school approved. Only three months before the rejection of the proposal by the Professorial Board, he had announced in the April 1956 review, that the AETT’s plans for the school of drama were ‘well advanced’ and “would soon be established at one of Australia’s major universities”²⁵. In following year, a number of critical factors enabled these plans to come fruition and were the result of two trips abroad Hunt made in 1957. The first was as the Australian UNESCO Committee for Drama, Theatre and Literature’s delegate to the International Theatre Institute’s July 1957 world congress in Athens and

²¹ *Plans For A Theatre School 1957. op. cit. p. 2*

²² *ibid. p. 7.*

²³ *ibid. p. 1.*

²⁴ *ibid. p. 8.*

²⁵ ‘Theatre Trust Reviews its Plans and Achievements’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 13th April. 1957. p. 2.

the second to Russia in October as the official guest of the Soviet Government.

Australian UNESCO and the AETT Unite

Hunt's first trip abroad marked the first official step of what would become a vitally important and productive union between Australian UNESCO and the AETT. It was a relationship that only a year earlier seemed unlikely to develop. The Theatre, Drama and Literature Committee had approached the AETT Board in 1956 about appointing a delegate for the first world ITI congress to be held in Bombay. Board member R. J. F. Boyer replied that while they were,

Anxious to co-operate in a matter of this kind, we feel that since it is *not in the direct interests of our organisation to do so*, we should approach you to ascertain whether you consider the presence of an Australian delegate to be of sufficient importance to warrant providing funds to cover air transport.²⁶ {*My emphasis*}

In other words, we'll send someone if you pay. No funds were available from the Committee and thus an AETT representative did not go.

Hugh Hunt, unlike the Board of Directors, felt that it was absolutely within the interests of the Trust to become explicitly involved with the activities and interests of Australian UNESCO. Hunt's commitment to the creation of a national drama school and his comprehension (as a product of British subsidised arts culture) of the necessity of a sturdy educative element within AETT activities to justify government funding, were completely compatible with the concerns and aims of both International and Australian UNESCO. His desire for an alliance between the two was evidenced by the fact that Hunt (despite the difficulties of the AETT at the time) nominated himself as the 1957 delegate to the second world ITI congress in Athens. Hunt became a member of the Committee and within eighteen months was appointed its Chair²⁷.

²⁶ R. J. F. Boyer. Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. Letter to Rt. Hon. R. G Casey, Dept of External Affairs. 25th September. 1956. Australian Archives. Series No. 862/18/2 Pt 3. p. 1.

Hunt's association with UNESCO proved to be enormously useful. This was not so much owing to his experiences at the Congress. He reported to the Committee on his return that, "the general feeling in theatrical circles had been that the International Theatre Institute was a rather ineffective body"²⁸. Instead, the Committee was critical in acting as a respectable, educative agency that could endorse the national theatre school proposal and help facilitate its entry into the university curriculum. When Hunt advised the Committee of the AETT's intention to set up a theatre school, the Committee responded enthusiastically, "in view of the obvious value the proposed School of Dramatic Art can have for dramatic activities... members agreed that Mr Hunt's proposal should be supported"²⁹. Hunt also proposed that the Committee might seek financial aid from the Director-General of International UNESCO to assist in the sponsoring of visiting lecturers to the school.

With great serendipity, Hunt had joined the Committee just as it began organising its most significant event to date - the 'Australian UNESCO Seminar on Drama in Education'. This Seminar was the culmination of the Committee's almost decade of work, begun in 1949 when it launched its national survey in this area. However, before this, Hunt went on his second trip abroad, this time to Soviet Russia. This trip was critical to the success of the national drama school and revealed how actor methodologies would function in Australia in relation to both subsidised legitimate drama and the acting profession itself.

Hugh Hunt Goes To Russia.

Hunt's trip to Moscow was the result of an invitation from VOKS, the Soviet Culture Department, for him to come and study their theatre. The visit revealed evidence of the disjuncture between the closed system and apolitical nature of Stanislavski's acting methodology, which was to form the basis of the national drama school, and the pressing industrial concerns of the Australian professional actor at the time. The first

²⁷ Australian National Advisory Committee for UNESCO. *Resolutions of The Australian UNESCO Seminar on Drama in Education - 16th- 22nd August, 1958*. AETT Archives MS 5908. UNESCO File. Box 105. p. 3.

²⁸ *Report of the Meeting of the Australian UNESCO Committee for Drama, Theatre and Literature. Commonwealth Office of Education. Monday 26th May, 1958*. AETT Archives MS 5908. Box 26. p. 5.

instance of this disjuncture was that Hunt could, in an era of such virulent anti-communist sentiment (promulgated with enormous potency by the Conservative Federal Government), visit a Soviet country and report back enthusiastically about their arts culture in the Australian Press, without receiving censure. How this occurred, less than a year after Menzies' involvement in postponing the Chinese Classical Opera until after the Melbourne Olympics, was clarified in Hunt's commentary of the visit.

'Actors, as Important as Sputniks'

Hunt authored three articles on Soviet culture immediately upon his return, *Soviet Actors "As Important" As Sputniks*³⁰, *Rigorous Training For Russian Actors*³¹ and *Ideology in the Soviet Theatre*³². In these, he took great care to separate those aspects of Soviet arts culture, he was clearly seeking to adopt or promote in Australia, from those aspects of it that were clearly anathema to the governing Australian political party and many members of the public. Hunt vigorously supported both Stanislavkian actor training and government subsidy of the performing arts, and vigorously rejected what he regarded as negative cultural aspects, "the Communist attitude", and "the doctrine of Socialist Realism", "patriotic fervour" and "Marxist-Leninist class hatred". Hunt artfully combined his "amazement" over the skills, status and substantial financial security of the Russian actor with his condemnation of the propaganda contained in the post revolution productions they appeared in. He nonetheless stressed to his reader, "however deplorable the actions of their Government and their political philosophy may appear to us, it would be idle to overlook the potency of the inspirational mixture supplied by society to the artist"³³. Hunt avoided the possibility that one was contingent upon the other, by characterising Stanislavski's methodology as universal, timeless and detachable from its political context which was temporal and corrupted. Hunt argued somewhat intriguingly that even Communist Russia recognised this fact, "Stanislavski's call for truth is still greater than

²⁹ *ibid.* p. 4.

³⁰ Hugh Hunt. 'Soviet Actors "As Important" As Sputniks'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 30th November. 1957. p. 2.

³¹ Hugh Hunt. 'Rigorous Training For Russian Actors'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 2nd December. 1957. p. 2.

³² Hugh Hunt. 'Ideology in the Soviet Theatre'. *Australian Theatre Year Book: 1957*. Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (Editors). F. W. Cheshire. Melbourne. 1957. pp. 44-46.

Lenin's call for class hatred and when it comes to interpretation of the beloved characters of the Russian classics, no party propaganda is permitted to mar the integrity of the characterisation. In the end the art of the theatre is greater than political theories, and Stanislavski has outlasted Stalin"³⁴.

Hunt's separation of the value inherent in an acting methodology from the environment that engendered it, stressed how abstract the AETT's plans were for constructing a "vital" and secure employment environment for the Australian actor. They reflected too how Hunt and the AETT were becoming increasingly out of touch with performers, quite specific and articulated needs. At the same time Hunt was praising the Soviet Government for providing its actors with free training, lifetime employment and state pensions, saying it made him "gulp... thinking of the haphazard and precarious life of our professional actors at home"³⁵, those same actors were involved in a bitter union struggle with the Federal Government who was labelling them as Communists.

'The Haphazard and Precarious life of our Professional Actors.'

The confrontation between the Federal Government and Actors' Equity began in early October 1957, just before Hunt's departure to Moscow. Hal Alexander, the general secretary of Equity, proposed a 24-hour stoppage by members working in Sydney's two commercial TV stations to protest against the Government's "easing of control over the import of film for TV"³⁶. The proposed stoppage was immediately endorsed by the Labor Council of NSW which began conferring with five other unions associated with Television - the Musicians Union, the Professional Radio Employees Institute, the Electrical Trade Unions, the Miscellaneous Workers Union and the Australian Journalists Association³⁷ - about support for the action. The outcome was that the latter four Unions decided to support members of Actors' Equity if they went ahead with the strike.

³³ *ibid.* p. 44.

³⁴ Hunt. 'Rigorous Training For Russian Actors'. *op. cit.* p. 2.

³⁵ Hunt. 'Soviet Actors "As Important" As Sputniks'. *op. cit.* p. 2.

³⁶ 'Support for Proposed TV Stoppage'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 11th October. 1957. p. 11.

³⁷ 'TV Talks Urged Instead of Halt'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 12th October. 1957. p. 7.

Despite widespread support for the proposed strike (which included the Federal Opposition) the Federal Arbitration Commissioner, J. R. Donavon, immediately intervened and recommended that the proposed stoppage be cancelled. Donavon, while not wanting “to get involved in the merits or otherwise of the Actors’ Equity demand for employment for more actors on television”, suggested instead that Equity confer directly with the management of TV stations, “on the subject of a quota of live artists for television programmes”³⁸. The industrial advocate of Actors’ Equity, W. A. Baker, said that the Union’s executive would consider Donavon’s recommendation.

The hiatus was extremely brief and the following week the issue escalated into a major confrontation at a special sitting on television in Parliament House, between the Federal Government and the Opposition. The Opposition seized upon Equity grievances and the failure to meet promised labour quotas³⁹ and launched an attack on the Conservatives who supported the TV networks. Each side utilised arguments that explicitly echoed the concerns of the Australian arts practitioner on the one hand and the AETT on the other.

The performers concerns were characterised in the speech made by the NSW Labor member L. C. Haylen who ‘raised for discussion’,

The urgent need of action being taken by the Government, the Broadcasting Control Board and all television licensees, to secure that Australian actors, artists, writers, and musicians should be guaranteed engagements and contracts on television performances, to ensure an Australian content, tone and atmosphere in this important medium of education, entertainment and broad Australian culture. Mr Haylen said that before television licences were issued, the Labor Party had maintained that an Australian quota of at least 55 per cent should be maintained in television programs. Assurances given by the Postmaster General that Australian talent would be used had not been met nor had the requirements of the Act passed by Parliament been met.⁴⁰

³⁸ *ibid.* p. 7.

³⁹ For the history of regulatory systems for Australian content on Commercial television see Stuart Cunningham’s. ‘Nations at the Crossroads’. *Framing Culture*. Allen & Unwin. 1992. Chapter 2. pp. 37-70.

⁴⁰ ‘Increasing Use of Aust. Talent On TV, Says Davidson’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 18th October. 1957. p. 4.

Conversely, the Federal Liberal member C. W. Davidson, in defence of the commercial stations, constructed an argument almost identical to those used by the AETT when accounting for their failures to deliver their original goals. There were three familiar components contained in Davidson's argument. First that the commercial stations had encountered unexpected and exorbitant costs (as the AETT had with the opera) and that "they were bearing these losses on behalf of the entire community"⁴¹. Davidson argued that the commercial stations would eventually succeed in meeting agreed quotas by presenting programs that "would build up" advertisers (as the AETT argued it would do with drama audiences). The second aspect of the argument was that commercial television stations suffered the "disadvantage" of having no established film organisations in Australia (as the AETT had argued about the performing arts after the launch) on which they could draw upon; thus they *had* to rely on imported films⁴². The third part of Davidson's justification for the failure to meet quotas and the Federal Party's failure to enforce them was that, "there were no *trained* directors, script writers or other specialised staff {and that} the television stations had to pioneer whole new fields" (my emphasis)⁴³. Davidson added that the commercial stations had achieved a "creditable performance {which, while not} entirely satisfactory, was credible in the industry's first year"⁴⁴.

The Labor Party argued that this line of defence was quite spurious and that in fact, only one commercial station at the time, ATN, was making any real attempt to provide Australian content in its programming. While it was correct that the initial investment of these organisations was considerable, so were the inevitable profits. Nor was the imposition of Australian content and artist quotas unusual or, "the most absolute form of censorship", as characterised by the Minister for Trade, J. McEwen. Haylen argued that in Britain, television stations were required to use 80% of

⁴¹ *ibid.* p. 4.

⁴² There were of course Australian filmmakers such as Cecil Holmes, Lee Robinson and Charles Chauvel struggling to make films in the 1950s, "but the obstacles to financing and distribution were almost insurmountable". The Commercial stations were not interested in becoming involved in this high risk, high investment area of production. Foreign product could be purchased at a fraction of the cost and this was the reason that the Commercial stations chose not to involve themselves. Dermody and Jacka. Chapter 2. 'Industry Revival'. *op. cit.* pp. 48-71.

⁴³ 'Increasing Use of Aust. Talent On TV, Says Davidson'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. *op. cit.* p. 4.

British programs and in the United States, the quota was 100% of programs be American. Furthermore, the Federal Government failed to account for how, if there was such a dearth of trained personnel, the ABC had managed to produce 26 live to air plays, and 147 live children's programs employing 820 actors overall and provided a further 883 engagements in the field of 'light' entertainment⁴⁵.

Without data to show exactly how the TV stations were fulfilling the obligations of their Licences, the Federal Government moved into attack. The Government refused to engage in the Opposition's specific questions (Dr Evatt, the Labor Party leader, accused Davidson of fabricating Australian content percentages in a Liberal Party report) and instead set about denigrating the group that had set the debate in motion. It stated that the Opposition "had been led by the nose" by Equity. They characterised the Union as having,

Not co-operated reasonably with the commercial stations to take advantage of the new medium {and} that they would not succeed in achieving their aims if they used threats of direct action that would do more harm than good. If there was friendly co-operation Actors' Equity could improve its position considerably... Let Actors' Equity get down to conferring with the other elements in this industry and take advantage of the opportunities that are there for them"⁴⁶.

The attack swiftly became personal and derogatory as it focussed in upon Hal Alexander, the General Secretary, and Hal Lashwood, the President. H. G Pearce, a Liberal Party member from Queensland, attempted to vilify Alexander (and by association the Union) by labelling him as an active Communist. Although Pearce was rapidly informed that he had confused the Equity member with the Communist candidate for Grandler who shared the same name and apologised, he added "he had since ascertained {from information gathered from the 1950 Royal Commission} that Mr Hal Alexander's real name was Williams. This man had been associated with

⁴⁴ *ibid.* p. 4.

⁴⁵ *ibid.* p. 4. Furthermore, given that the, albeit intermittent, foreign films shot on location in Australia during the 1950s - *The Overlanders*, *The Shiralee*, *On the Beach*, *Kangaroo* – were made with predominantly Australian crews, this statement lacks veracity. Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*. Oxford University Press and The Australian Film Institute. 1981.

⁴⁶ 'Increasing Use of Aust. Talent On TV, Says Davidson'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. *op. cit.* p. 4.

several Communist-front organisations”⁴⁷. Lashwood was similarly imputed for having taken part in Communist front and peace activities. Despite Opposition attempts to counter accuse the Federal Party of indulging in slanderous gutter tactics, it was an extremely effective strategy on the Liberal Party’s part. Such was the potency of ‘red’ accusations at this time that any form of defence was also subject to suspicion. The NSW Liberal member W. C. Wentworth made this very clear in his parliamentary speech,

Mr Haylen was covering up for Communists when he tried to protect Mr Hal Alexander. It was clear that Mr. Pearce had confused the two Hal Alexanders, But it is also true, and Mr. Hal Alexander knows it... that he has been associated with the Communists for a long time. He was declared a Communist after an examination of the evidence of Mr Justice Lowe. So here is a man who has been openly associated with Communists saying it is a lie and a slander if he is called a Communist. Mr Haylen gets up and endorses this view. Mr Haylen is deliberately covering up for Communists. This means that the Opposition is acting as an agent for the Communist Party.

Mr Haylen exhibited “phoney indignation” when he defended Mr. Hal Alexander.

This is typical Communist tactics whenever an exposure of Communists is made... Surely if the Opposition is sincere in believing Communism is a subversive conspiracy, then it will help in creating and developing the machinery for the exposure of Communists.⁴⁸

This argument proved very effective in invalidating Equity’s claims and the debate in parliament was “agreed” to be closed by 52 votes to 34, in favour of the Conservative Party. Actors’ Equity did not proceed with its strike and entered (relatively unsatisfactory) negotiations with a few of the commercial stations⁴⁹. Hunt’s first article paying homage to Soviet culture was published a fortnight later.

⁴⁷ ‘Apology for Calling Man a Communist’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 18th October. 1957. p. 4.

⁴⁸ *ibid.* p. 4.

⁴⁹ The Union was offered a poisoned chalice by ATN channel 7 a fortnight later. ATN made a promise to screen a half hour musical or dramatic program supplied by Equity (which protested that it was not a ‘producing’ Union) with the stipulation that the program, after one month, secure 50% of the total television audience (a feat achieved only by 6 programs in the whole of Australia at the time). ‘Offer To Actors’ Equity by ATN’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 7th November. 1957. p. 9.

The Establishment of the National Institute of Dramatic Art

Hunt's two trips abroad in 1957 and his involvement with Australian UNESCO, had provided him with sufficient information and institutional sanctions to construct a proposal for the national drama school acceptable to an Australian University. The document that was sent out to the NSW University of Technology in early 1958 was very different to the one sent to the Melbourne University two years earlier. While it was much briefer than the *Plans For A Theatre School* this version, entitled *The Australian Theatre Institute*, was more focussed and contained little of the contentious material in the original. In addition, the entire approach to administration and the governing principles of the proposed school had altered. Rather than attempt to persuade the University to absorb the acting school into its conventional curricula, this proposal put forward a plan for creating an autonomous company to run the school. This company, to be jointly established by the NSW University of Technology and the AETT, would be limited by guarantee and incorporated under the Companies Act. The company structure would, "closely follow the pattern of the Memorandum and Articles of the Elizabethan Theatre Company"⁵⁰, with three material alterations.

These three alterations related to the 'Objects' of the Company, the Board and the creation of a Board of Studies. The first alteration was designed to provide the University of Technology with assurances of the legitimacy and educational validity of the new company aims and was expressed in very different language to that of its first incarnation. The proposal stated,

The Objects for which the Company is established are:-
 a) To promote and encourage the knowledge, appreciation understanding and enjoyment of music, drama, opera, ballet and any art of the theatre in all their expressions, forms and media, and in anyway whatsoever either directly or indirectly and for those purposes but without limiting the generality of the foregoing -
 (i) to teach, train and instruct persons and promote education and research;
 (ii) to establish and conduct schools, lectures, courses, seminars and other forms of education.
 (iii) to confer diplomas, certificates and other awards;
 (iv) to award scholarships, bursaries and other financial assistance, and

⁵⁰ *The Australian Theatre Institute*. 1958. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 100. p. 1.

(v) to present plays, opera, ballet and any other forms of theatre art.⁵¹

The second and third alterations were provided as assurances to the University of Technology about the degree of influence and input the AETT would have in the acting school. It was suggested that the Board of the school (to consist of no less than five and no more than nine members) was to have at least two members from the University of Technology and two from the AETT. In addition, the company was to have a Board of Studies appointed annually under the auspices and advice of the Academic Committee at the NSW University of Technology campus to whom the new plan for the theatre school had been submitted.

The Recommendations of the NSW University of Technology Academic Committee

The revised proposal, while containing much more precise aims, was relatively general about the specific components of the courses and exactly how they would function. This gave the new plan the advantage of allowing the NSW University of Technology's Academic Committee the opportunity to provide its own recommendations on the establishment of the school. Indeed, it was their suggestion to found, not one, but two new drama training schemes which provided a solution to the academic obstacles Hunt had encountered previously.

The Academic Committee drew up plans for the two schemes, which were eventually submitted to the Department of Education for approval. The first training scheme was to be made up of two new academic subjects in drama - "literature of the drama" and "the historical and comparative study of the theatre" - within the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. The Academic Committee asserted that amongst the "good" reasons advanced for starting these two new courses, was that,

They would encourage the growth of a cultivated taste for the theatre among science and technology students and thus accelerate the developments in this direction

⁵¹ *ibid.* p. 1.

that have occurred in this country since the foundation of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust⁵².

These rather abstract justifications for the new courses were backed up by the concrete suggestions that they “would be in line with the academic courses in the appreciation of fine arts, music and architecture that have in recent years been founded in the Universities of Sydney and Melbourne”⁵³. The Committee also stressed that the ‘primary function’ of these subjects was non-vocational and academic.

The second scheme recommended by the Academic Committee was the school of professional acting. The justifications for this much more contentious proposal were put forward in enormous detail which acknowledged that such a vocationally orientated course was not wholly appropriate within the university environment. The Committee took great pains to suggest that many of these concerns would be assuaged if it was formed and administered under the aegis of an Institute to be jointly formed (as was suggested in the AETT proposal) and administered by the NSW University of Technology and the AETT. By accepting the view that “undergraduate Diplomas have no rightful place in the University”, the Committee was able put forward a persuasive argument for the construction of a more appropriate place for them, such as a collaborative venture like the Acting Institute.

The Academic Committee argued that the acting school would nonetheless be run on a highly professional and academic level. The presence of the school on campus would enhance existing courses, be beneficial to the national interest and reveal that the University of Technology was making an outstanding and important contribution to the life of the cultural community. The Committee finished with the assertion that these “advantages are so clear and considerable that a case could, it is believed, be easily made out for the direct establishment of an acting school under the exclusive aegis of the School of Humanities and Social Science”⁵⁴. This was not recommended however, “out of deference to the view that the University should not be solely responsible for a course of training that

⁵² Morven S. Brown. Professor of Sociology, and Head, School of Humanities and Social Sciences. *Recommendations Regarding Suggested New Courses in Drama. Academic Committee.* 8th May, 1958. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 100. NIDA File. p. 1.

⁵³ *ibid.* p. 1.

includes some elements such as mime and dancing, or practical stage work that does not seem to be of genuine academic character”⁵⁵. The Committee did not provide information on how these ‘non-genuine’ elements were to be assessed nor upon the qualifications required of teachers of non-academic subjects. The presumption by the academics was that experts from the AETT would supervise the vocational area of the acting school. The Committee finally defended the collaborative venture by citing the “pattern of Institutes organically associated with Universities”⁵⁶ already accepted in Britain such as the Institute of Archaeology at the University of London and the Nuffield Institute of Medical Research at Oxford University.

The advantage in allowing the NSW University of Technology Academic Committee to provide the final architecture for the new drama courses and the acting school was that they knew how to contend with the potential obstacles to tertiary acceptance. Unlike Hunt’s original *Plan for a Theatre School*, the new outline and curriculum for the two-year diploma in acting contained a much higher degree of text based assessment⁵⁷. Entry to the course also now required that students hold the Leaving Certificate in at least four subjects, including English. The enormous contributions made by the Academic Committee to improving the plan were evident when the Department of Education accepted both proposals without revision on the 15th of July 1958⁵⁸. The Department’s only concern in approving “the school of drama project” was that it sensed a “pressing need” for trained specialist teachers⁵⁹.

This jointly-administered school of drama in Sydney, now finally endorsed by the Department of Education, was one of the first of its kind. The Academic Committee had observed that there were no existing examples of

⁵⁴ *ibid.* p. 2.

⁵⁵ *ibid.* p. 2.

⁵⁶ *ibid.* p. 3.

⁵⁷ *A Proposed Outline and Curriculum for a Two Year Course Leading to a Diploma in Acting, to be Given by a University Institute of Dramatic Art.* AETT Archives. MS 5908. NIDA File. Box 100.

⁵⁸ D. J. Dempsey, Department of Education. Letter to Hugh Hunt, Director AETT. 15th July. 1958. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 100. NIDA File. p. 1.

⁵⁹ The Professorial Board at Melbourne University had also expressed this concern. G.W.Paton (Vice Chancellor) Vice Chancellor’s Office. Letter to Hugh Hunt. 22nd May. 1957. *op. cit.* p. 1.

a dramatic institute of this type associated with a British university⁶⁰. Moreover, the examples provided by the Committee, of the 'Institutes' in relationships with universities, had little in common with the structure of the joint venture between the NSW University of Technology and the AETT. Unlike the Nuffield Institute of Medical Research at Oxford University, the NSW University of Technology was collaborating with a private company limited by guarantee, the AETT, to create another private company (to run the acting school) also limited by guarantee. Furthermore, as distinct from British comparisons, the AETT Board and Executive, who were to be responsible for the vocational components of the course, did not necessarily hold qualifications or have experience in the areas that they were deemed to be exper' in. None of the Board of the AETT could be said have any real experience in the training of actors or an acquaintance with the "psychological approaches to the actor's art" that represented almost a quarter of the diploma's syllabus⁶¹. Likewise, the appointed Board of the National Institute of Dramatic art⁶² (NIDA) could make few claims of expertise in actor training, made up as it was of H. C. Coombs, a banker, Morwen Brown, a professor of sociology, Cecil Burns, an accountant and the directors, Hugh Hunt, Robert Quentin and Stephan Haag. While the latter three had ample experience in directing theatre (and Hunt, an acquaintance with acting methodologies) they had none in teaching actors. In the kind of precedents put forward, of the Nuffield and the Institute of Archaeology, the students were taught elements of their craft by practitioners who were either graduates of university courses or worked in the role they were training students for. This was not the case at NIDA because the teachers were neither graduates of tertiary courses in acting methodologies and nor were they professional actors.

This was no doubt part of the reason for the Education Department's concern about the lack of qualified teachers. Hunt quickly sought to allay this anxiety in his reply to the Department,

⁶⁰ Bristol University had established a Department of Drama wholly under its aegis. *Recommendations Regarding Suggested New Courses In Drama. Academic Committee. 8th May, 1958. op. cit. p. 2.*

⁶¹ *A Proposed Outline and Curriculum for a Two Year Course Leading to a Diploma in Acting, to be Given by a University Institute of Dramatic Art. op. cit. p. 2.*

⁶² The Under Secretary of Justice, Department of the Attorney General and of Justice. Letter to A. C. McPherson. Solicitor. *Application Under Section 34 of the Companies Act 1936. The National Institute of Dramatic Art. 12th September 1958. AETT Archives. MS5908. NIDA File. Box 100. p. 1.*

These {views} certainly coincide with my views on the project, I suggest that as soon as the School has been set up and the Director appointed, he should be instructed to give full consideration to these matters, and discuss them in detail with you.⁶³

Hunt reassured the Department that the courses were yet to be finalised by a Board of Studies and D. J. Dempsey, who had raised the question, was subsequently invited to be a member. The Department of Education was given further confidence in the veracity of the Institute's educational legitimacy by the AETT's substantial involvement in the UNESCO Drama in Education Conference that was to be held prior to first meeting of the acting school's Board of Studies.

The Australian UNESCO Conference on Drama in Education

The Conference, opened by H. C. Coombs, was the culmination of two-years planning by Australian UNESCO and was attended by over 250 people from Australia and New Zealand. The participants were all "gathered together to discuss activities and exchange ideas on the place of drama in education at all levels, from the primary school to the theatre going public"⁶⁴.

The introductory address to the delegates by Conference director, Professor Fred Alexander, made it clear that the concerns regarding the future of Australian drama held by the Australian UNESCO Committees for Drama and Education, and those held by the AETT, had become completely aligned. Alexander argued that for both organisations (like all the participants) the recognition of legitimate drama as a powerful educative force and the need to develop ways to disseminate this idea were critical to the future of theatre in the nation. With these aims Alexander hoped that the "week might in fact make history in Australia"⁶⁵.

Professor Alexander's speech touched upon the key tenets held by drama educators and practitioners represented at the Conference. These were the

⁶³ Hugh Hunt. Letter to D. J. Dempsey. Department of Education. 16th July, 1958. AETT Archives. MS 5908. NIDA File. Box 100.

⁶⁴ *Drama in Education*. UNESCO Information Circular. Vol. IX, No. 5. October. 1958. Series A1838/1. Item 862/12/15. Australian Archives. p. 1.

“recognition of the psychological importance of self-expression through drama” and the urgent introduction at all levels of the education system of educationally valid drama to counteract the increasingly detrimental exposure en masse to inferior material from mechanical media (Television and Cinema). These modernist principles were to be inculcated into society through the systematic training of future artists and audiences. These dual objectives were reflected in the titles of the seminar papers which included; *The Relationship Between Drama as an Educational Activity and Drama as an Art Form*, Hugh Hunt’s *The Place of the Drama Training School*⁶⁶, *Drama as an Educational Activity*⁶⁷ and two on *Educating the Audience*⁶⁸.

Of great benefit to the AETT was the substantial proportion of the Conference given over to finding solutions to, “the almost universal problem of the status of the drama in a university curriculum”⁶⁹ which Alexander characterised as a “touchy subject”. Although the Department of Education had already accepted the proposal for the Acting school, the Institute’s Board of Studies had yet to convene to examine the specific content or assessment of, and criteria for admission to, the courses. The presence of supportive overseas experts in tertiary drama at the Conference, Professor Horace Robinson, the Director of the University Theatre and Professor of Speech at the University of Oregon and John Allen, of the School of Broadcasting Department of the BBC, helped in legitimising the school’s vocational curriculum.

Almost all of the seminar papers delivered, as well as the final resolutions presented at the UNESCO Conference, came out strongly in favour of

⁶⁵ Professor Fred Alexander. University of Western Australia. Introductory Address of the Seminar. in *Drama in Education: UNESCO Report. Conference 16-22 August, 1958*. UNESCO Publications 1960. p. 8.

⁶⁶ Professor H. W. Robinson. *The Relationship Between Drama as an Educational Activity and Drama as an Art Form*. pp. 18-21, Hugh Hunt. *The Place of the Drama Training School*. pp. 29-55. *UNESCO Report. Conference 16-22 August, 1958*. *ibid*.

⁶⁷ Clive Samson, Supervisor, Speech Education Centre, Hobart, Tasmania. *Drama as an Educational Activity*. August 16th 1958. UNESCO File. Box 105. AETT Archives. MS 5908. p. 6.

⁶⁸ P. O’Loughlin. *Educating the Audience*. pp. 36-39. H. G. Kippax. *Educating the Audience*. pp. 40-44. *UNESCO Report. Conference 16-22 August, 1958*. *op. cit*.

⁶⁹ John Allen. *Springtime in Sydney*. UNESCO Information Circular. Vol. IX, No. 5. October, 1958. Australian Archives. Series A1838/1. Item 862/12/15. p. 2.

tertiary drama education⁷⁰. The consensus was that Australia should develop and support unique institutions like the AETT/NSW University of Technology joint venture, that combined elements present in existing British and American drama schools. However, despite praise for the first national school of drama as the “key stone” upon which “drama as an art form” and “drama as an educational activity”⁷¹ would be built, there was little discussion throughout the entire Conference on the specifics of what was to be taught. The papers delivered rarely discussed the function of drama or the methodologies of drama training in anything more than generalities. Hunt described drama as the “Mother of powerful children”⁷². Professor Robinson asserted that, “there is little doubt that the theatre in various forms occupies a significant position in modern society {and that} this ubiquity should suggest to any educator the value of theatre and drama as a teaching device - of theatre as a methodology”⁷³. Robinson, however, did not explain what this methodology involved or provide evidence to substantiate his claims and his statements took on a cultish tone.

Any educator knows that the main problems are motivation, attention, visualisation of material, retention, utilisation and integration. These qualities are inherent in the theatre as a result of the sociological development of the race. The theatre is by tradition elective and this is its greatest asset. The theatre is particularly useful in reaching youth in the formative years because it can readily implant subject matter as well as establish approved social patterns by analysis and example. It may be well employed as a remedial or corrective pattern for the maladjusted or as a source of inspiration and encouragement for the handicapped. While extolling the virtues of the theatre as a teaching device, I should also admit that it is an equally effective method of teaching evil, and implanting false standards. Here is another reason why education cannot disregard the theatre. Its negative values have a high potential and must be controlled and neutralised by a thoughtful and discriminating use of affirmative values.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Australian National Advisory Committee for UNESCO. *Resolutions of The Australian UNESCO Seminar on Drama in Education - 16th- 22nd August, 1958*. AETT Archives MS 5908. UNESCO File. Box 105. p. 1.

⁷¹ Professor Fred Alexander. University of Western Australia. Introductory Address of the Seminar. in *Drama in Education: UNESCO Report. Conference 16-22 August, 1958. op. cit.* p. 8.

⁷² Hunt. *The Place of the Drama Training School. op. cit.* p. 31.

⁷³ Robinson. *op. cit.* p. 18

⁷⁴ *ibid.* p. 18.

Robinson's lecture was an example of how obtuse and subjective much of the discourse was at the seminar and how widely open to interpretation. This was a tendency noted by the other international expert John Allen.

Allen observed that one of the most disconcerting aspects of the Conference was that the apparent consensus about drama methodologies amongst practitioners and educators was quickly shattered when they were practically applied.

Occasionally we would reach agreement over a formula, a pattern of words. A particularly plausible speaker would woo us into a sense of harmony with the urgency of his message, the conviction of his experience, or the persuasiveness of his logic. And then we would watch a demonstration of classroom work and it would become horribly clear that what some of us meant by 'free movement' was very different from the way in which others practiced it; that methods of producing the classroom play sounded satisfactory enough in one context but showed themselves to be techniques of a very different nature in practice.⁷⁵

Allen also observed the pervading tendency of ideas about drama education to be delivered within a closed discursive system that required belief and faith rather than arising out of empirical inquiry and thus open to speculation, criticism and debate. He remarked that as the

Seminar went into its fourth or fifth day {and} as the number of words that poured upon our ears... topped the million mark... one was possessed by the depressing thought that we hadn't come to listen but to bide our time to tell; that we had come with a point of view which we were going to defend against logic, persuasion and greater experience; that if others didn't share or understand this point of view, that was just too bad.⁷⁶

This insider's view of the conflicting, chaotic and pseudo scientific quagmire of ideas about drama education revealed a state of play clearly unknown to the NSW University of Technology's Academic Committee and the Department of Education. Both these educational agencies readily assumed that the type of vocational actor training to be taught at NIDA was based on a substantial, agreed upon, body of knowledge. It was these assumptions (which were contrary to debates going on in the

⁷⁵ Allen. *op. cit.* p. 3.

international arena) that led to departures of academic protocol on the part of the NIDA Board of Studies.

Disruption to Academic Protocol

When Hugh Hunt delivered his paper *The Place of the Drama Training School* at the UNESCO Conference, he announced “with some sense of pride” that the first national acting institute had been established in conjunction with the NSW University of Technology. Hunt asserted that the school’s relationship with the University would “give new dignity and status to the age old art of acting and inculcate a greater appreciation of theatre in men and women who are to take a leading place in an increasingly scientific and mechanical world”⁷⁷. He closed the paper saying he was unable to give precise details on the courses to be taught at the Institute because, he “must not anticipate the deliberations of the Board of Studies” which was yet to meet. When it did, the Board of Studies’ “task would be to examine these matters and to build a school of acting which {could} provide the roots of a healthy and vigorous theatre for Australia, and keep that theatre alive with fresh talent and inspiration”⁷⁸. However, these “deliberations” and “examinations” of NIDA’s course outlines and content did not take place before the opening of the school.

The NIDA Board of Studies had its first “informal” meeting on the 18th of September 1958, a month after the UNESCO Conference. At the meeting the newly appointed Board of Studies was informed by H. C. Coombs (who had invited each member onto the Board personally⁷⁹) that the matters of vital importance in the oncoming months were firstly, proceeding with the preparation of “a prospectus” and secondly, approving arrangements for holding auditions. Their final task was to decide on the qualifications required for students applying for admission⁸⁰. While the members of the Board of Studies, made up predominantly of academics and a single theatre

⁷⁶ *ibid.* p. 3.

⁷⁷ Hunt. *The Place of the Drama Training School. op. cit.* p. 29.

⁷⁸ *ibid.* p. 33.

⁷⁹ An example of these personal invitations was the letter H. C. Coombs sent, on behalf of the Directors of the Institute of Dramatic Art. H. C. Coombs. Letter to Dr L. J. Kramer, B.A., Ph.D. 11th September. 1958. AETT Archives. MS 5908. NIDA File. Box 100.

⁸⁰ This seemed to indicate that the AETT, despite the Academic Committee’s recommendations to the Education Department, were still willing to admit “exceptional” students who lacked the Leaving Certificate to the school.

practitioner (AETT employee Robin Lovejoy), were no more specifically experienced to judge the merits or not of particular acting methodologies, they were also not given the opportunity to do so. It was decided that the first “formal” meeting of the Board of Studies should be convened on the 13th of November, “in order to hear the Acting Director’s recommendations on students to be admitted into the course and to give some preliminary consideration to course curriculum”⁸¹. This intended meeting however, was cancelled. The reason given to the Board of Studies members from the Chair, Morwen Brown, was that unforeseen circumstances had delayed the appointment of AETT producer Robert Quentin to the post of Director of the school. Consequently, the Board of Studies’ first formal meeting was postponed until the 15th January 1959. By then, all the auditions for the school of acting had been completed, the first students selected for the inaugural year and the course plans, which Robert Quentin was to submit to them for their “approval”, already prepared. The school opened two weeks later.

The most plausible reason why NIDA’s appointed Board of Studies did not articulate more concern over its lack of involvement in reviewing the curriculum prior to the opening of the school, was again out of deference to imagined vocational ‘experts’. In mid 1958 the AETT made a request to UNESCO through the Australian Advisory Committee for the “provision of the services of an overseas lecturer” for the first six months of operation of the school of acting⁸². This appointment was clearly designed to assuage any continuing concerns with regard to the legitimacy of the curriculum and help ensure “the success of the first course” on which it was felt “many people’s judgements of the Institute would be based”. Ironically the Board of Studies appeared to be ‘wooded into a sense of harmony’, in a similar way to those at the UNESCO Conference, by the very man who had warned against the uncritical acceptance of the individual plausible expert, John Allen of the BBC. The AETT’s arguments regarding Allen’s suitability for the job focussed on his prestige as a public figure and did not appear to be conscious of his private concerns about the chaotic state of drama education. The AETT liked him because “he was seen as being very experienced in ‘educational drama’”, was an acceptable choice to

⁸¹Morven S. Brown. Letter to Hugh Hunt. 4th November. 1958. AETT Archives. MS 5908. NIDA File. Box 100.

⁸²*National Institute of Dramatic Art - Acting Director’s Report - 29th July, 1959.* AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 100. NIDA File. p. 4.

UNESCO (who paid for his term of employment) and “would have the warm support of the NSW Education Department”⁸³. Allen’s appointment was specifically to do with giving credibility to the school once it was operational. For all his experience he was not asked to help in the development of the curriculum, with his term of employment coinciding with the opening of the school.

The Board of Studies also simply deferred to what the AETT and Hunt presented as an irrefutable fact - that the Stanislavskian acting methodology which underpinned the principles of the acting school was a universally accepted and even ‘scientifically’ proven way to train actors and develop a nation’s drama. The closed nature of the discourse surrounding Stanislavski’s system, which encircled itself in a kind of mystical fog and excluded the uninitiated, was detailed in the first chapter. It was also the effect, described by Allen, which had occurred repeatedly at the UNESCO Drama and Education Conference. It appeared too, that this process of presumed consensus and expertise was ultimately the prevailing factor in the final acceptance of the Institute’s curriculum by the NSW University of Technology Academic Committee, the Department of Education and the Board of Studies. Hunt summed up the effort involved in this achievement noting, “it had taken two years to convince the “academic purists” that drama was a legitimate study”⁸⁴.

What was perhaps most peculiar in this acceptance was that it occurred in a pedagogical vacuum and was cut off from the international debates about actor training and specifically Stanislavskianism occurring at the time. None of the agencies that sanctioned the acting school questioned why in the UK there was such a “{sharp} definition between vocational schools of acting and the academic study of the theatre”⁸⁵. Nor did they question why many of the British vocational acting schools rejected ‘psychological’ approaches to acting and focussed purely on the practical and technical. Hunt’s model for the school was admittedly more influenced by Michel Saint-Denis and by American innovations in actor training (both heavily influenced by Stanislavski’s System) than the more ‘traditional’ schools of his own country and thus was possibly seen as innovative departure from

⁸³ *ibid.* p. 4.

⁸⁴ ‘Plans For Dramatic Art School’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 14th July, 1958. p. 3.

⁸⁵ Hunt. *The Place of the Drama Training School. op. cit.* p 31.

them. However, this did not explain why there was no acknowledgment by any of the academics that the same year the National Institute of Dramatic Art was established in Australia there was a furious (and public) debate going on in the US, about how contentious this System was⁸⁶.

AETT the Educator

The National Institute of Dramatic Art faced one more major hurdle before it opened and the overcoming of this obstacle underlined the extraordinary dominance the AETT had come to have over the realm of drama education as it had in the performing arts. It also demonstrated how central the role of the national drama school was to be in the AETT's promotion of its new function as the educator of future artists and audiences.

The events that surrounded the cancellation of the first formal Board of Studies meeting were far more serious than the AETT and Morwen Brown had indicated to the members⁸⁷. Such was the confidence of the AETT as the rightful architect and joint administrator of the first national drama school that it did not submit its application to register the school as a company with the Department of the Attorney General and Justice until the 12th of September 1958⁸⁸. This was only 5 weeks before the auditions began and indicated that the acceptance of the application was considered merely a formality. However, in reply to the application the Attorney General and Minister of Justice directed the applicant's attention to the fact that there *already* existed an organisation incorporated under the Companies Act which, was carrying out the "objects" which the National

⁸⁶ The introduction to Robert Lewis's book *Method or Madness?* published in 1958, described the "nonsense, the misconceptions, the amateur gibberish and myths that {have} sprung up and flourished around the theories of Stanislavski". The book specifically highlighted the complex and conflicting interpretations of Stanislavski's methodology (detailed in the first chapter) being disseminated in American theatre circles in the mid to late 1950s. The book was also very well known within professional drama circles in the US, yet when the Institute was established in Australia, the same year this debate was at its peak, no discussion about the matter arose in regards to the Acting School's curriculum. Robert Lewis. Frontispiece and Introduction. *Method or Madness?* Samuel French Inc. New York, Toronto, Hollywood. 1958. pp. xi - xii.

⁸⁷ The delay was described as "unexpected difficulties relating to the omission of the word "Limited" from the title of the Institute". Robert Quentin. *The National Institute of Dramatic Art - Progress Report. 1958.* AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 100. NIDA File. p. 4.

⁸⁸A. C. McPherson. Solicitor. Letter to the Under Secretary of Justice, Department of the Attorney General and of Justice from *Application Under Section 34 of the Companies Act 1936. The National Institute of Dramatic Art. 12th September 1958.* AETT Archives. MS 5908. NIDA File. Box 100. p. 1.

Institute was seeking to perform. The upshot being that this was prohibited in Section 34(1) of the Act. The Department went on to state that “the prohibition would, prima facie, appear to preclude Mr. Downing from recommending the issue of a license”⁸⁹.

The organisation cited as “carrying out the objects” of the proposed company was the British Drama League whose Memorandum of Association included the object to “maintain a training department in dramatic art, to organise drama schools, dramatic competitions, lectures, conferences and exhibitions of dramatic art”. The British Drama League had been running vocational drama summer schools at Sydney University for three years and had been involved since inception in the Australian National Theatre movement and the Australian UNESCO Theatre, Drama and Literature Committee. It was also importantly one of the long-term organisers behind the UNESCO national drama and education survey and the Drama and Education Conference, both of which played a critical role in legitimising drama as a subject within the education system. Furthermore, half the League’s thirty member Council were women and included the directors Doris Fitton and May Hollinworth and a number of female drama teachers. All these contributions were belittled by the AETT who in their reply to the Attorney General’s Department stated,

The League has not the skill, equipment, resources or even the intention of actively promoting education in the arts of the theatre so as to equip students to pursue the career of the theatre {and that} in reality it would be impossible to attempt to pursue the aims of the Institute within the framework of the League.⁹⁰

The Attorney General’s office had also questioned under what “powers” the various “promoters” of the Institute proposed to act, in making contributions to the Company, when it became incorporated. Macpherson, on behalf of the AETT and the NIDA Board (of which Hunt and Coombs were members), cited in reply general clauses from the Memorandum of Association of the AETT and the NSW University of Technology Act 1949 - 1958. While these did not specifically contain the intention to establish a

⁸⁹ S. M. Ramsay. Under Secretary of Justice. Department of the Attorney General and Justice. Letter to A. C. MacPherson. 6th November. 1958. AETT Archives. MS 5908. NIDA File. Box 100. p. 1.

⁹⁰ A. C. MacPherson. Letter to the Under Secretary of Justice. The Department of the Attorney General and Justice. 17th November. 1958. AETT Archives. MS 5908. NIDA File. Box 100. p. 1.

vocational school, they were broad enough to infer that such an endeavour was in keeping with the objects of the proposed company. Macpherson ended his letter stressing the urgency with which the matter had to be resolved, as auditions for the first year of the Institute (for which there were 150 applicants) were now already under way. He suggested that a private interview be granted, “at which one of the promoters might be present to give any further information desired”. This meeting was evidently a success (and echoed the ‘successful’ 1954 private meeting between Coombs and the Taxation Commissioner - outlined in chapter three) and the company was registered in January of 1959.

The newly opened National Institute of Dramatic Art became the centrepiece in the AETT’s shift from entrepreneur to educator in the late 1950s. This was a necessary response, as indicated in the last chapter, to combat some of the immense criticism its producing activities had been attracting. The existence of the acting school and its satellite activities were also critical to the new image of the AETT as it began a major campaign to secure government subsidy for the performing arts in perpetuity.

The next chapter will show that this campaign proved more complex than first anticipated and what little benefit the AETT’s educative platform had for professional practitioners. Within a few years, the Trust abandoned all attempts to create permanent drama companies (and thus permanent employment) and of its drama initiatives launched in the late 1950s only the National Institute of Dramatic Art remained. This became one of the critical elements in the bitter campaign to discredit and wrest power from the AETT spearheaded by the arts community in the 1960s.

Chapter 6

A New Decade and a New Ideology

The opening of the National Institute of Dramatic Art, in early 1959, marked a profound change in the underlying ideology of the AETT since its inception five years earlier. With the school as the cornerstone of a new therapeutic and morally uplifting ideology of theatre, in which the viewer and the viewed had to be trained, the organisation could now set about completing the shift in its function and image from entrepreneur to educator. This task had become more urgent through the second half of 1958, both to combat the growing critical attacks on the AETT and to orchestrate a massive increase in government subsidy needed to stabilise its highly precarious financial state. It had become clear that capricious Australian audiences, which appeared to only regularly attend those cultural activities which were the most expensive to mount yet carried the least cultural capital, could not be relied on to support, through box office alone, a regular flow of national cultural product. In order to maintain and preserve these products, government subsidy in perpetuity was required.

In order to combat criticism that such product catered to, and was attended only by a minority of the population, a new ideology had to be adopted that could explain how such product in fact benefited all. This ideology, found in the basic principles of the national drama school and specifically in the methodologies of Stanislavski, became the basis of the successful model that justified subsidy and came to govern what constituted legitimate culture in the future.

This chapter and the next two, chart the effect and impact of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust's educational policies upon Australian theatre activities and professional practice during the years 1959 to 1964. This period represented the second half of the Trust's ten-year regime to create, subsidise, administer, and control performing arts companies and initiatives on a national scale. It was also a period which saw the organisation increasingly exposed to intense public, practitioner and media scrutiny, leading up, as it did, to the tenth anniversary of its operations. The anniversary in 1964 would result in a major review by these interest groups of the Trust's achievements, policies and dominance

in the administration of government arts funds. The result of this review was overwhelmingly negative and the organisation's powerful position in the Australian performing arts scene would be severely truncated.

Despite the organisation's loss of centralised control by the late 60s, the Trust managed, during this period, to implement certain administrative practices and policies that had an overwhelming effect upon the future orientation of subsidised 'legitimate' dominant culture which would remain unchallenged to the present.

Chapter six focuses on the immediate fallout and tumultuous consequences caused by the shift in the AETT's role during late 1958 and 1959. The shift brought with it certain administrative practices and policies, privileged by the ideology orientating the national drama school. This ideology contributed significantly to the complete and necessary split between the function of arts administration, management and policy development from what was produced, and those responsible for creating this material. By the mid 1960s it was no longer possible to assess the cultural capital inherent in arts practice (whether it was a reflection of popular or high culture) simply according to an analysis of the content of a production. Instead, the cultural value of artistic product and indeed the arts practitioner was located in the agencies that facilitated the dissemination of that product or provided the employment or training of the practitioner. In effect, the product and practitioner were no longer the sole sites in which to calculate cultural value, rather it was in the processes and systems by which they were supported in which cultural meaning could be principally found.

The Performing Arts as Education

In addition to launching the drama school (NIDA) towards the end of 1958, the AETT also initiated two new drama ventures to be associated with the school and specifically orientated toward educating both audience and artist. These were the Young Elizabethan Players (YEP) and the Trust Players, (replacing the Australian Drama Company). Both companies were to be made up of small semi-permanent groups of actors and were inextricably linked to both NIDA and audience development. The Young Elizabethan Players' role was specifically educational, devised as it was in conjunction with the NSW Arts Council and supported by the Education

Department. Their brief was to present abridged versions of Shakespeare's plays to city and country school children. The five actors "with a basic stage wardrobe of jeans, white shirts and gym shoes", toured the country in a station wagon and caravan presenting, in the first year, *Henry V* and *Hamlet* - both plays set for the 1958 Leaving Certificate examinations¹. The Trust Player's scheme was based on the model of the Dublin Abbey theatre system and began with a small nucleus of six actors on six-month contracts. The company presented seasons of new productions (classic, contemporary and Australian plays) alternating with revivals of more successful productions, and had the long-term objective of building a stock repertoire.

Harry Kippax, the newly appointed theatre critic for *The Sydney Morning Herald*, detailed how these three initiatives interacted and the role they played in the future of Australian drama in a three part series entitled, *The Australian Theatre*,

The companies would recruit most of their actors on the "ladder" system, with actors beginning at the school of acting... and then graduating to the senior companies through country touring groups... The Abbey system has shown that {stock repertoire} can be a stabilising economic factor - a capital investment which can be exploited to return regular dividends. It can also be a powerful influence in establishing a tradition. The stock plays for instance would be studied at the acting school...

This scheme... has everything to recommend it.

- It will build a regular audience far more effectively than the present ad hoc policy at the Elizabethan...
- It will both train and encourage actors {and} in this respect {will} complement the {School of Drama which} promises indeed to be of central importance in the development of an Australian theatre.²

The selection of drama as the site to initiate elaborate and highly publicised reform reflected, once again, how much more critical it was to succeed in this area of the performing arts than in the consistently more popular Trust activities of opera and (imported) musical comedy. Again, drama, despite its relatively modest expenditure in comparison to opera,

¹ 'Shakespeare in Jeans, Shirts and Gym Shoes'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 2nd April. 1958. p. 10.

carried far greater ideological weight in modernist and contemporary nationalistic performing arts endeavours. This was evident during the urgent campaign, in late 1958, for increased government subsidy, when the AETT Board decided to ameliorate its extensive financial losses and cancel the 1959 opera season but proceed with its new educational drama reforms intact. The cancellation was not supported nor anticipated by the Executive and marked a significant swing in power toward the AETT Board.

The Campaign for Increased Government Subsidy

There was substantial evidence to suggest that the Trust Executive went to great lengths anticipating the 1958 Budget deficit and developed strategies to both protect the opera season and prepare the public and the Board for the inevitable financial loss.

Six months prior to the Board's cancellation of the opera season, Hugh Hunt was using prominent media outlets to both highlight the Trust's new drama activities and issue warnings that the present level of grants to the Trust were insufficient. In the second part of Kippax's major series, *A National Opera Company Will Not Pay For Itself*, Hunt was provided with a platform with which to make public his concerns;

Despite the generous contribution of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, which provides us with their matchless State orchestras, the opera season last year cost the Trust £30,000.

Our company played to an average capacity of 90 per cent and was visited by 159, 318 people. Incidentally, this percentage is higher than that of Great Britain or Italy.

Our losses were met from the funds which are made available to us from the Commonwealth, the State Government and city councils, but we cannot indefinitely risk the hazards of economic depressions, inclement weather, unexpected competition or a repertoire which for some reason or other takes longer to gain popular support.

Unless these risks can be shared, the Trust may have to discontinue the presentation of annual seasons of opera in capital cities.³

² Harry Kippax. 'Ambitious Plans for a Repertory Theatre for Sydney. Elizabethan Theatre Trust Leads a National Movement. Australian Theatre III'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 26th July. 1958. p. 2.

What Hunt hoped to achieve was to use this financial predicament to spearhead the campaign to appeal for further Government subsidy. Kippax assisted in this endeavour by adding that, in order for the AETT to move forward, and by extension the Australian performing arts, the Government must provide adequate subsidy.

Major problems have still to be overcome if we are to achieve an Australian theatre which is capable of expressing our national consciousness and by which we may be worthily judged in the culture of nations... we need more capital for the theatre.⁴

Hunt also ensured that these warnings were buoyed by extensive publicity about what he described, as the “reconsideration of the Trust’s function”, always stressing that the focus now was on training and education for artist and audience and that these endeavours would be achieved through the new AETT drama activities⁵.

In these articles, it was also stressed that this new form of educative, legitimate theatre was distinct and culturally superior to the commercial. Hunt explained that, “new blood {would} flow” from the National Institute of Dramatic Art, into the “body of raw material” that would make up a new innovative Australian theatre⁶. Part of this “body” would be groups such as the Trust Players whose company policy was,

As far as possible, different from the policy of the commercial theatre and little-theatre movement... we are aiming at something in which the players, producers and audiences will work together and gain experience from their teamwork... Many of our productions at the Elizabethan have been unsuccessful... because there is no ‘identity’ to our productions.⁷

³ Harry Kippax. ‘A National Opera Company will not Support Itself. The Australian Theatre II’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 25th July. 1958. p. 2.

⁴ *ibid.* p. 2.

⁵ ‘Plans for Dramatic Art School’. *Sun Herald*. 14th July. 1958. p. 58. ‘Dramatic School Approved’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 15th July. 1958. p. 10. Harry Kippax. ‘Elizabethan Theatre Trust Leads a National Movement. Australian Theatre I’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 24th July. 1958. p. 2. ‘Our Response to Theatre is Colossal’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 15th November. 1958. p. 10. ‘Permanent Group of Actors for Elizabethan Trust’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 28th November. 1958. p. 10.

⁶ ‘Our Response to Theatre is Colossal’. *op. cit.* p. 10.

In addition, Hunt emphasised that this form of legitimate theatre involved “creating a continuing body of Australian plays, players, producers - and audiences”, who must be protected from “the theatre’s great menace, television”⁸. The AETT blamed the introduction of television in Australia for being responsible for a 25% drop in theatre attendance. Television was characterised, as the ‘enemy’ that the AETT would have to fight in order to survive.

The effectiveness of these strategies on the Executive’s part was indicated by the fact that the hitherto endemic attacks on the AETT ceased. For the first time since the launch of the organisation five years earlier, the AETT appeared to have secured widespread and popular support for their new direction, amongst both the public and arts practitioners. Furthermore, the campaign had already received some measure of success. Hunt and Board Chairman, Coombs, had begun negotiations with Prime Minister Menzies’, to secure a promise of an additional £50,000 per annum to assist with the opera deficit. They were confident that the State Governments would match this figure.

The Cancellation of the 1959 Australian Opera Season.

It was clear from Hunt’s and executive staff’s activities in the last six months of 1958, that they did not anticipate the AETT Board’s decision to cancel the 1959 opera season. While the organisation was still in a highly precarious financial state by the end of 1958, this was not the sole factor that motivated the decision. The Board used the crisis to realign its relationship to, and assert its dominance over, the AETT Executive.

Hugh Hunt made his final ‘Executive Director’s Progress Report’ for 1958 on the 20th of November and nine days later left Australia for his annual trip abroad, which combined work and his Christmas break in England⁹. In the report, Hunt acknowledged that, “it would appear that the overall

⁷ ‘Permanent Group of Actors for Elizabethan Trust’. *The Sydney Morning Herald. op. cit.* p. 8.

⁸ ‘Our Response to Theatre is Colossal’. *The Sydney Morning Herald. op. cit.* p. 10.

⁹ Hugh Hunt would use these trips, most often to the UK or USA, to carry out a variety of Trust business endeavours. These included theatre engagements for Trust productions overseas, the purchase of the rights to foreign material and securing engagements of international artists or expatriate Australian performers.

loss on the opera this year will be greater than anticipated”¹⁰. However, Hunt clearly did not feel that this loss was completely unexpected or unacceptable and proceeded with discussions regarding the proposed repertoire for the Capital Cities Opera Tour scheduled for the following year. Hunt then issued a report on the opera company’s financial situation and the proposed repertoire to the AETT Board on the 24th of November.

Immediately following Hunt’s departure from Australia, H. C. Coombs announced that there were to be new weekly meetings between himself and the Trust’s Executive staff. At these meetings, “various activities of the Trust”, would be discussed and reports of the proceedings then circulated to AETT Board representatives in each state¹¹. These meetings were instituted immediately, with the first held on December the 4th. This was followed by a meeting on the 12th and then one on the 19th and it was at this meeting, held on the eve of the Christmas break, that the Board announced its decision to cancel the opera season.

Hugh Hunt’s vehement reaction upon being issued this information, whilst still abroad, revealed how unprecedented the actions of the Board were, and how (in his view) they represented an extreme disregard for his position as Executive Director of the Trust. Hunt complained, in an urgent letter from England, that he was both “gravely concerned” and considered himself “personally compromised”. He pointed out that the Board had twice been given the opportunity to determine whether or not to continue the Opera Company through 1959 and on both occasions had firmly decided in favour of doing so, despite the inevitable financial loss¹². Hunt stated that,

At the first meeting, held early in the 1958 season, a forecast of the financial loss of the season was made and this forecast did not differ substantially from the statement of actual loss incurred as known at the conclusion of the season. At the last meeting of the Board held in Melbourne in November, it will be recalled that, on the motion of Sir Robert Knox, the Secretary and I withdrew from the meeting in order that the members might discuss the overall financial position

¹⁰ Hugh Hunt. *Executive Director's Progress Report. 20th November 1958*. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 48. p. 1.

¹¹ Elsie Beyer. *Acting Executive Director's Report. 19th January 1959*. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 48. p. 1.

¹² Hugh Hunt. Letter to AETT Chairman H. C. Coombs. Brooks Cottage, Brockenhurst, England, 5th January 1959. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 48. p. 1.

of the Trust in relation to Opera in the absence of the Officers. I must here state that I am bound to take a very serious view of this procedure in the light of the subsequent proposal to abandon the Opera little more than three weeks after my departure. On rejoining the meeting at the conclusion of this discussion, I was given a categorical assurance that the Board wished the 1959 season to proceed.¹³

What appeared to make Hunt most anxious, were two things. First, that he had made personal assurances, subsequent to the outcome of the meeting above, to the opera's General Manager, Stephan Haag, the director John Sumner, the Musical Director Karl Rankl, and a number of artists, that they would be employed for a substantial period during the opera season. Second was Hunt's sense that he was being set-up as a scapegoat to absorb the blame for the Trust's precarious financial position and for other areas of AETT mismanagement.

There appeared to be at least partial justification for Hunt's concerns. Not only was he not informed about the introduction of the weekly meetings between the Executive Staff and the Chairman, Hunt knew from 'private discussions' with the Chairman prior to his departure that a strategy had been jointly devised that would cover the anticipated budget shortfall. Hunt reminded Coombs that he had agreed to "proceed with our commitment to present the season in 1959 independently of the appeal we proposed to make to the Commonwealth Government, in the faith that assistance would ultimately be forthcoming"¹⁴. What further concerned him was that not only had Coombs and the Board gone back on their word without informing him, but that he had not been told of the December 19th decision until January 5th 1959. By that stage, the ABC had already been instructed that its orchestras would not be required for the 1959 season.

Despite these events, Hunt still believed he was in a position to dissuade the Board and that the decision was not final. In a letter sent to Coombs, on the 13th of January 1959, Hunt reiterated his "strong disagreement" with the cancellation and questioned the, "propriety of the proposal in view of the commitments that have been made"¹⁵. In addition, Hunt listed five points

¹³ *ibid.* p. 2.

¹⁴ *ibid.* p. 2.

¹⁵ Hugh Hunt. Letter to H.C. Coombs. Brooks Cottage, Brockenhurst, England, .13th January 1959. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 48. p. 1.

against the cancellation, which included that, the “Trust could be criticised on the size of its grants in relation to its services. Such criticism weakens the case for Government and Council’s voting grants to the Arts”¹⁶. Hunt ended his appeal with the rejoinder, “I urge the Board to uphold firmly its decisions to fulfil its commitments for the 1959 Season”¹⁷.

The inference contained in Hunt’s letters was that the Board had taken over his role of Executive Director of the AETT and that they had done this deliberately and without justification. Coombs, back in Australia, did little to reassure him. Instead, the Chairman instructed Elsie Beyer, the Acting Executive Director, to have copies made of Hunt’s letters and had these circulated to the Board during the first Executive staff meeting of 1959 held on the 19th of January¹⁸. Hunt’s objections were noted but made no impact and it was made clear that the decision to cancel had been final as of the 19th of December. At the same meeting, the Board was at pains to outline that it was prepared to question other areas of Executive responsibility. The Board stated that the running estimates for the Trust Players (which had been already been accepted) were too high and must be reduced¹⁹. Next, they rejected a request by the NSW Arts Council for a grant of £1000 to tour *The Barber of Seville* throughout New South Wales and Queensland country districts. The reason given was that the Board “expressed the opinion that it would not wish to enter into this commitment at the present time”²⁰.

Alternatively, the Board was in complete support of all the AETT activities that contained an explicit educational element. It endorsed the Executive’s decision to include the 1959 school text, *Julius Caesar*, in the Trust Players’ repertoire, and its intention to present *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, another set text in the 1959 high school curriculum, in a joint venture with John Alden and the Independent Theatre. The Board was similarly

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 1.

¹⁷ *ibid.* p. 2.

¹⁸ Elsie Beyer. *Acting Executive Director's Report. 19th January 1959. op. cit.* p. 1. Hunt’s position was further undermined at this meeting by the report that his attempts to secure overseas interest in the AETT production of *Lola Montez* had failed. Robert Fenn of M.C.A (England) Ltd had told Hunt that “he found the book very ordinary and the music uninspiring.”

¹⁹ *ibid.* p. 4.

supportive of the proposed tour by the Young Elizabeth Players which was to present four abridged Shakespeare plays to school students in Victoria and NSW later that year.

It seemed from the tone of this report that the Board wanted to display its approval for the educational drama reforms initiated by the Executive which were reorientating Trust activities in 1959. At the same time, the Board's actions inferred that in the area of general expenditure the Executive and specifically Hunt had been profligate and less than competent. The question was why would the Board of the AETT seek to isolate and censure the Executive Director of the organisation, who in late 1958 was characterised in the press as "the man who put the movement on its feet"²¹?

The answer lies in an examination of what the Board gained by taking the course of action it did. To begin with, the Board was formulating a potent argument, that those directly involved in creating art were incapable of responsibly managing the funds that made possible that pursuit. In short, that artistic vision was equated with a form of fiscal blindness. This argument was one that the AETT Board would use to great effect over the next five years and was intrinsic to the appeals for increased subsidy it would make to both the Federal and State Governments in 1959 and 1963. In addition, it was an argument that operated in tandem with the AETT educational reforms.

Second, the Board recognised, along with the Executive Staff of the Trust, the efficacy of publicising a warning that one of the Trust's national companies, and its most popular, may have to suspend its activities. However, it was clear that where they differed was that while Hunt's exhortations in mid 1958 were issued as a call for future action, the Board perceived the utility in going through with the suspension. This radical manoeuvre was shrewd because it proved to the State and Federal Governments that, unless further funds were forthcoming, the emerging Australian performing arts scene might cease altogether.

²⁰ *ibid.* p. 5.

²¹ 'Our Response to Theatre is Colossal'. *The Sydney Morning Herald. op. cit.* p. 10.

Thirdly, the Board anticipated that neither the Executive Staff (many of who were to be employed in key artistic positions in the opera season) nor Hunt would accept such action without major resistance. It was possible that the Board, having already experienced the detrimental effects of public censure during the first years of its active operations, sought to delay and avoid the negative consequences of a potentially damaging AETT internal split between itself and the Executive. It could not have been coincidental that the Board made its decision to cancel immediately after Hugh Hunt, Karl Rankl, and Stephan Haag, had all left for extended engagements overseas and that despite the plethora of written protestations from them, their collective absence helped to render these appeals ineffective.

Furthermore, Hunt had unwittingly placed himself in a position of vulnerability in relation to the Board. At the end of 1958, he reached the end of his contract with the AETT, and turned down an offer to renew his position for a further three years, opting instead for an extension of twelve months ending in January of 1960. Because of this, Hunt had arranged to take a far less active role in the Trust's activities in his final year. Despite being the principal author of the popular new AETT drama initiatives, he was to have no direct involvement in the running of these programs in 1959. With Robert Quentin as the newly appointed General Manager of NIDA and Robin Lovejoy as the Artistic Director of the Trust Players, Hunt had become the only member of the Executive who was expendable.

The Dominance of the AETT Board

The Board continued to consolidate its position of dominance over the Executive throughout 1959. The announcement to the press of the cancellation (referred to now as a "postponement") of the opera season was made in Hunt's absence and framed in a manner which raised questions about the efficacy of the Executive's management of AETT funds. The papers were informed by a 'Trust Official' that the Trust's resources had been "drained by losses on the three previous seasons... and that it was felt that in view of the drain... an annual opera season was not justified²².

²² 'Hitch for Opera'. *Sun Herald*. 25th January. 1959. p. 11.

The characterisation of the decision as a responsible (albeit emergency) economic measure helped to deflect any objections (similar to those raised by Hunt in his letters to the Board) regarding cultural loss. Also deflecting such criticism, was the popularly received announcement, a week later, of the inaugural season of The Trust Players, Sydney's first permanent theatre company, which was to include two Australian plays in its repertoire and whose eight actors and Artistic Director were all Australian²³.

While Hunt was unable to make public his opposition to the cancellation, without appearing to advocate a policy of uncontrolled and irresponsible spending, he did make one attempt to display his frustration whilst still in London. Hunt used the opportunity delivering the third Sir Thomas White lecture on Australian Arts at Australia House, to argue that, "the present Australian theatre would surely die unless further funds were provided by the Federal Government, industry and other sources"²⁴. Hunt stated that inadequate Government funds led to an "overcautious Public Service mentality {that} was undesirable in the arts". In the lecture, he also made an uncharacteristic attack on Australian audiences who he said, "had shown a strong preference for overseas productions and undervalued Australia's own professional efforts"²⁵.

Hunt's comments provoked an editorial in the *Herald*, which did much to explicate the motives behind the AETT Board's aggressive stance toward the Executive. For the first time in the Trust's history this prominent newspaper ceased to give its previously whole hearted support to the organisation. The editorial agreed that Hunt's criticisms regarding the paucity of Government funds for Australian Theatre had some basis and that there was a strong case for increased State patronage. But it also added that, "other difficult questions {remained} to be answered", one of which was whether the Australian Elizabethan Trust was the appropriate national organisation, "to whom patronage should be dispensed?"²⁶

²³ 'First Season of Trust Players to Open March 11'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 3rd February. 1959. p. 12.

²⁴ 'Opera House in Search of an Opera'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 13th February. 1959. p. 12.

²⁵ *ibid.* p. 12.

The editorial went on to speculate whether increased Government funding would be more appropriately dispensed by, “one principal instrument of patronage - a Ministry of Fine Arts, or a non-political Arts Council”²⁷, rather than by the AETT. The reason given was that the AETT’s use of such funds in the promotion of its own artistic activities could be seen to lead to unfair competition with private enterprise. The leader acknowledged that its mooted alternatives of a Council or Ministry were open to criticism and that, “the arts do not necessarily thrive under bureaucratic organisation, however enlightened and dispersed”. However, it also added that the present fragmentation of funding, in which the AETT played a significant role, was open to charges of waste and parochialism and could be termed “patronage without a policy”²⁸.

These were serious charges - nepotism, unfair competition, waste, parochialism and lack of policy - and represented the obstacles the AETT would have to overcome in its campaign for substantially increased government funds, yet they were not wholly unanticipated by the Trust’s Board. The Board’s new dominance over what had been hitherto the domain of the Executive staff, the Trust’s artistic activities, along with its displays of budgetary constraint and the continued promotion of those activities involving policies of educative reform, represented a new system of control and stability. The Trust could use this educative platform to counter, and distance itself from, the charges above.

Part of the re-configuration of the Trust’s direction entailed down-playing the function of the significant individual artistic reformer (as Hunt had been seen) in favour of highlighting the efficacy and significance of the system itself. The frequent and positive media coverage that continued to surround the new drama initiatives in 1959 focussed upon the continuity of structure, the innovative policies and linking mechanisms between these organisations rather than upon the personnel involved. The National Institute of Dramatic Art was lauded as “the only one of its kind in the world because it was linked both with a university and a practical theatre organisation (the Elizabethan Theatre Trust) and also with

²⁶ ‘The State and the Arts’. Editorial. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 16th February. 1959. p. 2.

²⁷ *ibid.* p. 2.

²⁸ *ibid.* p. 2.

broadcasting and television (the Australian Broadcasting Commission)”²⁹. Similarly, the company structure of The Trust Players was praised because of the stability and flexibility inherent in “a system which allow{ed} proven successes to stay in the repertoire allowing room for new, untried plays or experimental productions”³⁰. Robert Quentin and Robin Lovejoy, who headed the respective organisations, were represented as relatively benign figures whose roles were to facilitate rather than orientate the process. Lovejoy summed up this role when he stated that, he was part of a general movement that was responsible for providing “a set of conditions, which may provide the glasshouse in which the plant of Australian acting and production style will grow. We don’t know what the plant will be like. All we can do is create the right conditions for it”³¹. This focus upon systems and not individuals also accounted for why Hugh Hunt, who had been so prominent in the media as the dominating creative force within the AETT a year earlier, tended to be excluded from this coverage. Out of the six articles that appeared in *The Sydney Morning Herald* specifically charting the progress of the Trust Drama reforms between January and April 1959, Hugh Hunt was mentioned once and then only to report that he was to direct *Julius Caesar* for the Trust Players later that year³².

The Resignation of Hugh Hunt

The effectiveness of the marginalisation of the artistic figurehead was further evidenced in the reaction to the announcement of Hunt’s resignation from the AETT on April 6th, 1959. The resignation, announced by Coombs himself, was the first public statement involving Hunt since his return to Australia. The AETT Chairman said that Hunt’s “reasons were personal”³³, and that he would remain in his position until the end of the year. However, it seemed likely that the Board takeover of the Executive,

²⁹ ‘Undergrads in Greasepaint’. *Sun Herald*. 22nd February. 1959. p. 77.

³⁰ ‘Glasshouse for Actors in Warehouse’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 23rd February. 1959. p. 2.

³¹ *ibid.* p. 2.

³² ‘First Season of Trust Players to open March 11’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. *op. cit.* ‘First Institute in Dramatic Art’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 18th February. 1958. p. 7. ‘Undergrads in Greasepaint’. *op. cit.* ‘Glasshouse for Actors in Warehouse’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. *op. cit.* ‘Drama Institute opened at Uni. of N.S.W.’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 24th February. 1958. p. 4. ‘Rough House - at the Elizabethan’. *Sun Herald*. 6th March. 1959. p. 86.

³³ ‘Trust Director to Return to the U.K’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 7th April. 1958. p. 1. ‘Hugh Hunt Speaks On Resignation’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 18th April. 1958. p. 13.

earlier that year, was directly responsible for Hunt's decision to make the announcement at this point³⁴.

Hunt's resignation was an extremely beneficial outcome of the strategies deployed by the Board since the beginning of the year. It had removed the power from the role of the Executive, deflected potential resistance by the Executive Director and revealed that the Trust's artistic endeavours were able to function as autonomous self reproducing systems independent of figureheads and personalities. The Board was now able to implement the managerial reform essential in its quest for further Government subsidy.

The necessity of managerial reform within the AETT was recognised and approved of in a *Herald* editorial published immediately after Hunt's resignation. While the leader provided an obsequious nod to Hunt's regime, "thanks to him, none of his successors should ever again have pioneering work quite as hard and thankless"; it also stressed that it was time to review "the many different and sometimes conflicting tasks Mr Hunt has had to perform"³⁵. The solution it advocated, which reflected the desires of the Board, was to divide the position of Executive Director into two distinct roles.

Not one man, but two are needed to carry on Hunt's work. The first should be a business executive - a man with experience in theatre management, no doubt, ideally a young man with a new and fresh approach to the economic and in the broadest sense, the cultural problems of the Trust; but, whatever his other qualifications, first and foremost a businessman. The second should be an artist with long and wide overseas experience and with a bias towards the kind of pioneering experimentalism that will be needed for many years yet to find, let alone build, the type of theatre which can best serve Australia's needs.³⁶

³⁴ Interestingly none of the papers noted the redundancy of the act itself. Hunt had already publicly stated on November 15th the year before, that he would be leaving the Trust in 12 months time. It was possible that Hunt was seeking to make some kind of public display about his disappointment with the organisation. Lynne Murphy's entry on Hugh Hunt in, *The Companion To Theatre In Australia*, stated- "A recurrent charge of brushing aside semiprofessional and amateur organisations that had kept the theatre alive in the hard times led Hunt to resign in 1960". Not only is the date of Hunt's resignation incorrect, there is also no evidence to support this argument. Lynne Murphy 'Hugh Hunt', Phillip Parsons (General Editor) *The Companion To Theatre In Australia*. Currency Press. Sydney. Australia. 1995. pp. 289 - 290.

³⁵ 'The Future of Elizabethan Theatre Trust'. Editorial. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 23rd May. 1958. p. 2.

³⁶ *ibid.* p. 2.

This was not an outcome anticipated by Hunt and indeed appeared to be one he greatly feared. A series of increasingly anxious internal memos issued by Hunt to the Board outlined his concerns regarding the reformulation of the position of Executive Director. In the first, Hunt put forward the 'Proposals of Policy and Estimates for Trust Operations over a three year period commencing 1st July 1959', stating that,

It was not considered desirable to provide specific allotments for specific operations during the years 1960/61 and 1961/62, other than for fixed commitments... {because the} new Executive Director... must be given space to manoeuvre.³⁷

In this memo, Hunt went to great lengths to emphasise to the Board that continuing the new Trust initiatives was of paramount importance. While he conceded that an annual opera season was not financially feasible, he proposed that two main opera seasons could be presented over the following three years contingent on the "retention and employment of key singers and staff through the twelve month gap"³⁸. In the area of drama he argued, "it would be unwise to abandon the Trust Players after one season's trial". Instead, he suggested that the Union Repertory in Melbourne be given additional funding so the two companies became the basis of a dual repertory policy, a policy which he noted had been "accepted in the past by the Board as a desirable goal for our dramatic work".

What seemed to be the source of Hunt's consternation was his belief that, like the 1959 opera season, any of the new Trust activities could be cancelled without notice by the Board should they fail to yield financial results in the short term. He repeatedly stressed the importance of allowing these initiatives a period of leeway so they could come to fruition. In a second memo he outlined how the national drama school would "provide the roots of the theatre"³⁹ and the "habit of repertory" had to be

³⁷ *Proposals of Policy and Estimates for Trust Operations over a Three Year Period Commencing 1st July 1959*. Policy. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 48. July 1. 1959. p. 1.

³⁸ *ibid.* pp. 1-2.

³⁹ *National Institute of Dramatic Art. Executive Director's Report*. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 48. Undated. p. 3.

given time to be “adopted by the public”⁴⁰. Hunt also attempted to defend his arguments to the Board for continuity for the future, through reference to his past experiences,

The five years I have spent in Australia have covered the formative years of the Trust. They have been years of trial and error. Some of our work... proved immediately successful, such as “Summer of the Seventeenth Doll” and “The Shifting Heart”. Some... resulted in immediate failure; some will, like the Trust Players, The Union Theatre Repertory Company, and the Young Elizabethan Players, and the establishment of the National Institute of Dramatic Art yield their rewards in the future.⁴¹

Hunt continued this argument in his carefully constructed third memorandum regarding the appointment of the new Executive Director of the Trust. He began by criticising the Board’s decision to use advertisements in international publications as a method of attracting prospective applicants as it lowered “the Board’s prestige as an experienced employer”⁴². He added, that had this been the procedure at the inception of the Trust, he himself would not have applied for the post. He suggested instead that it would be more appropriate if the Board followed up the advertisement with personal invitations to a list of eminent candidates suggested by Hunt, one of whom was Tyrone Guthrie⁴³, but stated unequivocally that such a procedure was, in his opinion, premature.

As an alternative, Hunt proposed that the appointment should go to an individual who would ensure that the current “pattern of operation”, produced after a “period of experiment”, was carried through. Hunt

⁴⁰ ‘Trust Players, Country Tours and Y.E.P. Players’. *Proposals of Policy and Estimates for Trust Operations over a Three Year Period Commencing 1st July 1959*. *op. cit.* p. 3.

⁴¹ *National Institute of Dramatic Art. Executive Director’s Report*. *op. cit.* p. 4.

⁴² *Memorandum. Appointment of Executive Director of the Trust. 9th July, 1959*. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 48. p. 1.

⁴³ On Hugh Hunt’s short list of candidates were, Michael Benthall: Director of the Old Vic, London. Glen Byam Shaw: Director of the Old Vic, London and Director of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford Upon Avon, John Clements. Independent Theatrical Manager, George Devine: Director, of the Young Vic Company and Director at the Royal Court Theatre, Tyrone Guthrie, Director of the Old Vic, London, Founder of Festival Theatre, Stratford, Ontario and Ian Hunter, Director of the Edinburgh Festival and Manager with Harold Holt Ltd. *Memorandum. Appointment of Executive Director of The Trust*. *op. cit.* p. 3.

emphasised that this pattern, which had been “adopted by the Board”, was dependant,

Firstly upon the personality of our staff and artists - a knowledge of their abilities and faith in their development {and} secondly upon a knowledge of this country which by comparison with the U.K. and the U.S.A, is complex and decidedly different.⁴⁴

Underlying this argument was Hunt’s anxiety that the hostility the Board had recently displayed toward the AETT Executive would lead them to appoint an individual who would serve as the Board’s subordinate. Hunt believed this could threaten the autonomy of those involved with the Trust’s artistic endeavours. Hunt urged instead that the Board cease its combative stance, allow the organisation ‘time to consolidate’, and that the ‘inevitable tension’ which had accompanied the last five years be ‘relaxed’. He added that he felt it would be “undesirable to set up a fresh state of tension regarding our future relations and to raise new hopes and fears of a radical change of policy”⁴⁵.

To this end, Hunt gave his unequivocal recommendation to the Board that the new Executive Director of the Trust be Robert Quentin. This was a recommendation he believed would be recognised as sound by international professionals and one that had the support of the senior members of the Executive staff.

What was of most interest in these three memorandums was how much Hunt’s arguments for continuity of the then current AETT activities were predicated upon the Trust’s obligation to provide artists with permanent and stable employment. This was a relatively new attitude from Hunt and it was an issue that he appeared to have only taken up with extreme zeal after the fracas over the cancellation of the opera season. Hunt was to make it one of the essential tenets of the Kathleen Robinson Memorial lectures he was to give in October of 1959 (published as the book *The Making Of The Australian Theatre*). He would also present it as being inextricably linked to Stanislavski’s notions of theatre and training,

⁴⁴ *ibid.* p. 2.

⁴⁵ *ibid.* p. 2.

which represented the ideological basis of the Trust's educative drama reforms⁴⁶.

The provision of permanent employment to artists (particularly to actors) was not however, as would become clear in the next twelve months, a major concern of the AETT Board. It was also more than possible, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, that Hunt's advocacy of Stanislavski's System as the basis for reorientation of the Trust's new drama initiatives contributed to the dominance of management over artistic staff and to the loss of power and increasing expendability of artists.

While the Board did not respond directly to Hunt's final memoranda, it was clear from the Director's annual report given to the members of the Trust in October 1959 that their priorities differed substantially⁴⁷. The report revealed that the enormous losses incurred by the Trust in the previous financial year, £68,998 from the Opera (compared with £27,976 in 1957) and £31,581 from the musical *Lola Montez*, were the issues of utmost concern to the Directors. The report acknowledged that while occasional overspending was to be expected in theatre productions, but stressed that,

These set-backs emphasised to {the} directors the basic weakness of the Trust's financial resources in relation to its responsibilities {and that} it was apparent that for the Trust to be able to face the occasional difficulties which are normal theatre experience it needed both increased capital resources and a greater secure annual income.⁴⁸

The report then reiterated that this was the primary factor for deferring the 1959 opera season and focusing instead, on successfully launching the Trust's new educative drama initiatives. Because of these actions, successful representations had been made to the Commonwealth Government to secure an increase of its grant, of £50,000 per annum, with the proviso from the Prime Minister that each State would contribute an equivalent amount.

⁴⁶ The dysfunctional relationship between Stanislavski's ideology and industrial practice is examined in chapter 7.

⁴⁷ *Report of the Directors to the Members at the Ordinary General Meeting to be held in Melbourne 12th October, 1959*. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 48. p. 1.

⁴⁸ *ibid.* p. 1.

The Basis for Increased Subsidy

The success of the ‘representations’, made to the Prime Minister and the respective State Premiers, revealed how critical the Board’s aggressive tactics were in its quest to secure permanent subsidy for the Trust. The requests for increased funds dispatched to the State Premiers, carefully separated the past activities of the Trust, described as “the five year exploratory period of operation which it had contemplated at its inception”⁴⁹, from the function it would play in the future.

These letters, written by the Chairman, went on to cautiously construct an argument that explicated the necessity for ongoing subsidy and why the AETT was the “appropriate organisation through which governmental support of theatre {could} be effectively and economically channelled”⁵⁰. The letters began by stating that experience had shown that despite widespread appreciation of opera, classical drama and ballet, these forms of theatre “*could not be presented regularly on a profitable basis*” (my emphasis). Consequently, unless responsibility for these forms of theatre was accepted by the Trust, or some similar agency (though it was clear the AETT knew none existed) supported by public funds, quality performances would disappear. This threat of imminent national cultural loss was extremely potent, substantiated as it was by the actual loss of the National Opera Company that year. Furthermore, the letter argued, should insufficient subsidy lead to the demise of the Trust, this would result in the “rich vein of ability in the theatrical arts” amongst Australians, to which the Trust was dedicated to providing “stimulus, training and opportunity”, remaining “untapped” and “frustrated”.

This was an intelligent tactic on the Chairman’s part. He repeatedly characterised the AETT as the only existing organisation with the resources, experience and business acumen to appropriately channel public funds to the performing arts. This was stated alongside the equally emphatic position that “the Board of the Trust was unwilling to continue

⁴⁹ H. C. Coombs. Letter to The Hon. E. E. Reece, M.H.A. Premier of Tasmania. 6th November 1959. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box. 80. p. 1.

⁵⁰ *ibid.* p. 2.

entering into commitments unless it could be confident that it was in a position to cover them”⁵¹.

This ultimatum was tempered with assurances from the Board that, should funding be increased and secured for the next five years, the future of the Trust would be governed by careful financial planning and an increase in educational activities. These activities, which were to complement the “basic activity” of the Trust, sponsoring quality touring companies in opera and drama, were to include; country tours in association with adult education authorities and the

Production for schools by a special company of the classical plays being studied for examination purposes in the schools concerned...{and} the maintenance of an Institute of Dramatic Art in association with the University of New South Wales, which provided professional training at the highest level.⁵²

What was not included was an obligation on the Trust’s part to provide permanent employment or to maintain the system of repertory drama.

The requests to the State Governments for increased annual funding (collectively matching the Federal Grant in total) were successful and secured for five years at that level. While the funds fell slightly short of what the Board had anticipated as necessary for the Trust’s future operations⁵³, the security associated with the promise of ongoing subsidy provided the Trust with a reprieve. The increase in subsidy also carried with it an obligation on the Trust’s part to maintain the organisation’s new orientation and ideology, which ensured it remained the appropriate organisation to allocate government subsidy on a permanent basis. This ‘obligation’ had a major effect on future policies.

⁵¹ *ibid.* p. 2.

⁵² *ibid.* p. 3.

⁵³ The AETT Board believed that it needed “a capital fund of no less than £150, 000 and an annual assured income of an equal amount”. What it achieved was an increase in Government subsidy from £50, 000 to £110, 000 and managed, through the profits from the visit of the Bolshoi Ballet and the cancellation of the 1959 Opera season, to replenish its capital fund, which had fallen to £90, 000 at the beginning of 1959, to £130, 000 by the end of the year. *Report of the Directors to the Members at the Ordinary General Meeting to be held in Melbourne 12th October, 1959.* *op. cit.* p. 2.

The AETT had found that its original vision for the “self-supporting” arts became unfeasible when it had attempted, during Hugh Hunt’s regime, to construct a new form of legitimate performing arts in Australia. The AETT was now set on a path in which it had to prove and perpetuate the ideology that its own existence and by extension, quality, legitimate performing arts, were culturally imperative, therapeutic and educative, but *not* economically viable. This compelled the AETT to pursue goals that justified perpetual funding. This would prove a difficult, multifaceted and even contradictory task. The Trust had to promote activities and systems that were rich in cultural capital and educational value, were future orientated, and displayed the ability not only reproduce themselves but also increase their yields in this area. At the same time these ever-expanding cultural endeavours, which had to ‘prove’ that they must not be measured in a fiscal sense, were controlled and disciplined by the bodies responsible for disseminating funds, which were governed by principles of economic accountability.

The inevitable result was to develop a system whereby the areas of artistic production and those concerned with the management of funds were kept as distant as possible. The Board of the AETT had already perceived the utility of this separation in its successful quest for increased subsidy and it continued with process. This was evident in two significant appointments in the latter part of the year, that of Tom Brown to the staff of the national Opera and Neil Hutchison as the new Executive Director of the Trust.

Redefining the Role of The Executive

The first appointment involved the creation of a position for the Australian Theatrical Manager, Tom Brown, whose task was “to find ways to minimise the cost of opera seasons without sacrifice of imagination in production”⁵⁴. Brown’s role was explicitly managerial. He was to oversee areas of publicity, production budgets and was only to be involved in questions of artistic production, such as the selection of repertoire, as it pertained to expenditure. The decision to create the position, while clearly part of the AETT new policy regarding management, was also the result of experiences gathered by the Board Director, F. E. Lampe, who had

⁵⁴ *ibid.* p. 2.

“examined” the methods employed by Opera organisations in the U.S.A, the U.K and Europe.

The appointment of Neil Hutchison confirmed the Board’s decision to redefine the role of Executive Director. Hutchison had been director of drama and features at the Australian Broadcasting Commission for over a decade and thus had ample experience in areas of management and policy. He did not, however, have any experience in the professional performing arts. Hutchison’s only involvement in theatre, at the time of his appointment, was to have been a member of the Oxford University Drama Society in the 1930s⁵⁵.

Hutchison’s lack of hands on experience in live drama was, as far as the Board was concerned, a distinct advantage. The new Executive Director (unlike Hunt) was to have no specific artistic involvement in AETT-funded productions and his role was primarily the policy and management of Trust activities. Furthermore, the paucity of Hutchison’s knowledge regarding both the Australian and International theatre scenes separated him from obligations to the former AETT regime and ensured that he would have to rely heavily on the Board for advice and guidance. Also exacerbating Hutchinson’s reliance on the Board, was the fact that he was only given a twelve-month contract, as distinct from Hunt’s original three years. This provisional appointment demonstrated the Board’s ongoing desire to keep careful watch over the role and safeguard its dominance over this position.

Hutchinson’s allegiances became swiftly apparent. From early in his regime he fully endorsed the Board’s position of careful spending and channelled his energies into developing strategies to increase income and diminish expenditure. In addition, he shared the Board’s opinion that the AETT was not necessarily obligated to provide artists (particularly actors) with permanent and stable work environments, should the costs appear prohibitive. This appeared to be the principal motivation behind his decision, within eight months of his appointment, to begin dismantling the repertory system of drama in Australia. This decision was one of the

⁵⁵ ‘New Director of the Theatre Trust’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 13th December. 1959. p. 4.

least popular the Trust had ever made and became an important element in the campaign against the Trust in the early 60s.

What Hutchison did not change was the underlying ideology that now unpinned the model the AETT had adopted to justify perpetual government subsidy. The next chapter steps back from the minutiae of the Australian performing arts to examine in detail the historical lineage and industrial implications contained within this ideology and the potential consequences it had on contemporary legitimate culture.

Chapter 7

Hugh Hunt and the Ideology of Stanislavski's Methodology.

What were the industrial consequences of introducing the ideologies contained in Stanislavski's methodology into the Australian performing arts? In answer to this critical question, this chapter begins with a detailed discussion of Hugh Hunt's manifesto for the future of Australian Theatre, produced on the eve of his departure from Australia. Hunt's *Making of Australian Theatre*, appearing first as a series of lectures and later published, owed much to his interpretation of Stanislavski's beliefs about theatre. Hunt's vision (despite producing a spate of unfavourable reactions at the time) was extraordinarily accurate in its predictions of the current structure of legitimate performing arts culture with one important exception – the provision of stable and permanent employment opportunities for practitioners. In addition, the ideology and practices that the work advocated became the blueprint from which all subsidised drama companies and drama schools in Australia would be constructed.

This chapter also explores why this exception, of providing a secure employment environment, may have occurred while all the other aspects of Hunt's Stanislavskian vision for the Australian theatre were instituted. This section identifies areas of Stanislavski's methodologies, based as they were upon the principles of Taylorism, as ironically assisting in creating an industrial environment in which artists were expendable. Chapter eight examines the AETT's adoption of these principles and the consequences they had, specifically regarding the provision of training over employment opportunities, upon the performing arts industry from the 1960s on.

Part 1. The Making of Australian Theatre

When Hugh Hunt delivered the Kathleen Robinson lectures on drama at Sydney University in October 1959, he was aware that his recommendation to appoint Robert Quentin as his successor had not been supported by the

Board. Having become marginalised within the AETT, Hunt used this public platform to make a final attempt to articulate his vision for the future of Australian Theatre, based upon the “foundations” that he had helped lay over the previous five years. The three lectures were delivered in weekly intervals and were entitled respectively, *The Making of Theatre*, *Rogues and Vagabonds* and *The Lost Audience*.

The Making of Theatre

Hugh Hunt began his first lecture by noting the paucity of texts dealing with how theatre was made. He believed the reason for this was, because the “making of theatre” (which included drama, opera and musical comedy) was fundamentally “a matter” of the heart’ and thus a subject that was impossible to analyse. As a result, the most Hunt hoped to do in the lectures, was to remind the audience about certain facts regarding the requirements of theatre, the attitude that must be adopted toward it and its position in society. One of these facts was that the creation of theatre had to be oriented by the twin goals of, developing its artists and organisations and through the “making of the audience”¹. Hunt stressed that because the theatre was not, in his view - a hobby, a social activity, nor a form of occupational therapy - achieving these goals was both difficult and complex. The theatre, in addition to needing “solid roots”, required careful planning, good buildings, trained artists and administrators and producers with knowledge and experience. Creating and nurturing these elements was made more difficult in Australia because it was a country that had “lost” its audience for “indigenous” theatre². This loss meant that local theatre organisations had the arduous task of competing with imported productions from countries with long records of established work which were subsidised at a considerably higher rate than those in Australia.

Hunt went on to describe the unique qualities of theatre that made it superior to cinema and television. These included its function as the expression of

¹ Hugh Hunt. ‘The Making of Theatre’. *The Making of Australian Theatre*. F. W. Cheshire. Melbourne. 1960. p. 2.

civilisation and that it was an art form surrounded by an aura of “magic”³. Theatre, unlike the mechanical media, had to be “born of love” and seek to involve the spectator in a communal ritual shared with the artist. This transcendental aspect meant that “theatre-making {was} a vocation, and {could not} be made... if it {was} regarded solely as a business {or} its success {was} measured by box-office returns alone”⁴.

In order to engender such a theatre, Australian organisations, in addition to providing the conditions of development listed above, had to create institutions that would act as “focal points” of great art⁵. These institutions, (Hunt suggested there should be one in each State for drama⁶) were to be the national theatre companies of Australia, the “storehouses of the best” and the permanent homes for what Hunt loosely described as “classical” theatre. These companies would set the standards of performance for all drama activities in Australia.

The keys to the success of these future goals lay in increased government subsidy, the creation of new audiences among school children and the maintenance of the recently established permanent repertory companies in which actors and audience could benefit from the advantages of continuity of policy.

Hunt ended his first lecture with a warning about Australian playwrights predilection for “depressing backyard realism”⁷. This tendency, he felt, detracted from the potential greatness of Australian theatre which should make “full use of language”. He urged local playwrights to explore themes of

² *ibid.* p. 4.

³ *ibid.* p. 6.

⁴ *ibid.* p. 5.

⁵ *ibid.* pp. 11-13.

⁶ With the exception of Tasmania, Australia does indeed now have a subsidised Theatre Company in each State. The Sydney Theatre Company, the Melbourne Theatre Company, the State Theatre Company of South Australia, the Royal Queensland Theatre Company and the Black Swan Theatre Company in Western Australia. All present a repertoire very similar to the one Hunt advocated in his final lecture ‘The Lost Audience’.

⁷ This sentiment reiterated his dislike of the “backyard realism” of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* detailed in Chapter 4. Hunt. *op. cit.* p. 17.

greater depth and significance, to avoid naturalism in favour of ceremony and ritualistic settings and to comprehend that while conflict and emotions lay at the heart of all drama, “conflict {could} only be expressed by articulate people”.

Rogues and Vagabonds

Hunt’s second lecture was dominated by his description of the appropriate function of the contemporary actor. This portrait was exclusively derived from Hunt’s understanding of Stanislavski’s methodological prescriptions for the theatre. Hunt began by equating the traditional historical disregard for theatre performers with the limited number of options available to the Australian actor⁸. This was a form of ‘cultural cringe’ on the public’s part and Hunt stressed that the future of Australian theatre depended on an appreciation of local talent and creating a “continuity of employment” for them. Without this, Australia would not produce either “great” theatre or “great” actors.

Hunt went on to stress, however, that the best theatre was not made by stars or personalities, but was the result of a team effort and specifically the work of a visionary director. Hunt contrasted the “star personality”, a superficial or “false” actor - a performer, with the “real” actor - a player - who was disciplined in mind and body and a disciple of art. While the real actor required training and the opportunity of consistent practice, this latter requirement was contingent upon the right kind of employment. No work, in many instances, was better than bad work and the actor had to be willing to, “make the necessary sacrifice in their income to devote themselves wholeheartedly to their art”⁹. The actor, like the maker of theatre, had to be motivated by the love of theatre, not money, and had to allow his or her personality to be subsumed by a role and be dominated and obedient to the rigours demanded by the practices of legitimate theatre.

⁸ The title of the lecture immediately evoked the kind of preoccupation, present in Stanislavski’s methodology, to lift actors into a higher moral realm away from their former status as craftspeople. This was endorsed by Hunt as essential to the “making” of Australian Theatre.

⁹ ‘Rogues and Vagabonds’. Chapter 2. Hunt. *op. cit.* p. 28.

Hunt then reiterated the inherent paradox within contemporary actor methodologies. He emphasised the essential veracity of Stanislavski's prescriptions but warned (as did Stanislavski) those who sought absolute laws. While creative instinct could not be manufactured, if it did exist in the actor, it could (and must) be stimulated, channelled and developed. As Hunt put it, "instinctive imagination which appears to be the greatest single attribute of the actor is an unreliable and dangerous creative power, unless it is disciplined and developed by training and buttressed by the experience of using it"¹⁰. Even those actors, who had creative instinct and who adhered to the disciplines and training stipulated in Stanislavski's prescriptions, could still fail, not because of a deficiency in the teachings, but rather owing to the unreliability and dangerousness of this creative power.

Despite this paradox, Hunt nonetheless repeatedly stressed the importance of Stanislavski's teaching and noted its influence on, Brecht, the American Method school¹¹, on the teachers and actors, Copeau, Dullin, Jouvet, and Saint-Denis and in Australia on the principles of the National Institute of Dramatic Art. Hunt argued that the existence of such schools was essential since the demise of the apprenticeship system of 19th century stock companies. They were also particularly essential in Australia (and America), because they redressed the inherent deficiencies in the native accent, which were described by Hunt, as being responsible for inaudibility, slurred delivery and harshness and monotony of tone.

At the end of the lecture, Hunt discussed the role of the producer (director) in contemporary theatre. It was here that the child-like (infantile) status of the ideal actor, advocated by Stanislavski, was most apparent in Hunt's vision for the future of Australian drama. The director was critical to the creation of good theatre because, unlike the actor (and the writer), he or she was able to

¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 30.

¹¹ His citing of the work of the American Method made it likely that he was aware of the contention surrounding the various competing versions of Stanislavski's System in the U.S during the late 1950s. However, if he did know at the time, it was clear he never informed the National Institute of Dramatic Art's Board of Studies.

separate themselves from the process of creation. The director had to have a complete and greater comprehension of the skills of the actor and the writer, but did not have to possess these skills themselves. Nor did the director necessarily require training; rather they were guided by a vision, which was tempered by experience and knowledge. The director's role was to communicate this vision to the actor who was incapable of completely comprehending the impact of his or her own performance. The writer also lacked the necessary qualities of leadership to impart his or her own authorial intention to an audience and whose presence in a rehearsal was more likely to inhibit and frustrate the actor than stimulate them. As Hunt put it, the introduction of directors, as an integral component in 20th century theatre¹², brought with them a quality, "which actors and authors rarely possess. This quality (was) objectivity, so that he (was) able, in a very specialised way, to see the effect of the play upon the audience"¹³.

The Lost Audience

Hunt began his third lecture with a discussion on the "unity of taste" that must exist between actor and audience as a prerequisite to a successful theatre culture. The form this unity could take however, was historically variable because the, "taste of the largest audience in any given place and in any given time will depend upon the political and social circumstances and upon the type of theatre which it has been principally habituated"¹⁴. Despite this, Hunt argued that if a theatre organisation tried to simply give the public what it wanted, rather than what the organisation felt was good', the attempt would result in failure. The taste that should guide the type of theatre presented was the individual taste of the maker of theatre. The "instinctive" taste of the founder would initially be recognised by a minority of the public, but then grow at an incremental rate. In this way, one could "create" an audience for the type of theatre the individual founder believed in and not

¹² Prior to the 20th century theatre companies functioned for the most part without a director. Companies, ensembles, acting troupes and so on in both Eastern & Western cultures tended to be facilitated by actor managers (such as Irving}, writers (Euripedes, Aeschylus} actor/writers {Shakespeare, Moliere}, or collectives of actors like the Commedia dell' arte.

¹³ *ibid.* p. 33.

the other way around. Any alternative to this was simply the erroneous and superficial pursuit of the majority, tainted with a commercial agenda and stemmed from “a shop-keeping mentality”¹⁵.

Engendering an environment in which the tastes of these makers of theatre could be implemented was one of the keys, Hunt argued, to reclaiming Australia’s lost audience. Hunt repeated what had long been evident in AETT productions in the preceding five years, that the issue of the lost audience related only to drama and not opera, ballet or musical comedy, whose need for subsidy lay principally in the rising cost of production. Hunt’s explanation of this phenomenon was relatively sketchy. He argued that “serious” plays were not considered good entertainment by the middle aged audience representing the majority of theatre-goers. However, he did not explain why their taste for light entertainment (either comedy or melodrama) in drama made them amenable to attending the opera and the ballet, which he characterised as activities requiring “serious” appreciation. Nevertheless, Hunt believed that the future of Australian drama lay in the presentation of these serious plays (both contemporary and classical) and that the lost audience for these plays were the young, the “audience of tomorrow”¹⁶.

Hunt reiterated the assertion he had made in his first lecture, that the material for this serious drama of the future would not be found in realistic, provincial portrayals of Australian life, but in those that explored universal themes. An example of this latter approach was to be found in Douglas Stewart’s *Ned Kelly*, a production which Hunt described as “the greatest failure I should record against myself”. Here, Hunt allowed his bitterness toward the AETT Board to surface. He made veiled references to being “warned” against mounting the play and allowing himself, once the play was on, to be influenced by these opinions which led to the play’s early closure. Hunt went on to suggest that the reasons for the “sickness of drama” and for losing its audience, were largely due to the fact that, “the makers of theatre and in particularly of plays, have lost their faith in themselves and the

¹⁴ ‘The Lost Audience’. Chapter 3. Hunt. *op. cit.* p. 39.

¹⁵ *ibid.* p. 39.

theatre. {Instead they ask}, how cheaply can we put the play on? What safeguards can we adopt against failure? Is it likely to please our regular patrons?" These attitudes, Hunt felt, had contributed to, "a dangerously cautious attitude among the makers of {Australian} theatre"¹⁷.

For Hunt, the only solution lay in inculcating the young into the habit of theatre going through education. Hunt again stressed the importance of drama in education and the essential need for trained specialist teachers in this area. He also stressed the need for theatre organisations to devote a significant proportion of their activities to presenting either material from the syllabus and/or productions, which were specifically youth orientated¹⁸. In addition, he felt that the introduction of drama at a tertiary level at the NSW University of Technology should be an innovation that was continued at other institutions. This was of paramount importance because, "the university, more than any other institution outside the theatre itself, can contribute forcibly to the formation of high standards of taste in an art which can shape and send out to the world ideas and feelings on which our civilisation is based"¹⁹. It was this latter task, which Hunt described as the "burden of providing a comprehensive national service", that was also the function of subsidised theatre and it was a task that neither the commercial theatre nor radio, television or cinema could be expected or were able to supply.

Reactions

The reactions in the press to Hunt's lectures on the Australian theatre revealed firstly which issues were of most concern to the public and secondly how useful Hunt had become to the AETT Board, as the representative of its old regime and as a target to absorb criticism. Thirdly, they revealed the

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 40.

¹⁷ *ibid.* p. 48.

¹⁸ This is a major policy component of all contemporary State Theatre Companies and many Australian drama companies today and represents a substantial degree not only of their income but also an important justification for their appropriateness as recipients of government subsidy. All State companies have Educational Officers and often present plays from the secondary and tertiary syllabus as part of their repertoires. See Chapter 9 and Conclusion.

¹⁹ *ibid.* p. 50.

framework in which ongoing and future debate about subsidised legitimate culture would be contained.

The 'Depressing Similarity' of Australian Drama

Out of all Hunt's far ranging comments on the Australian theatre scene, it was his remarks regarding the "depressing similarity" of Australian dramatic literature that became the focus of discussion. This subject dominated the report of Hunt's first lecture²⁰ and prompted an editorial in *The Sydney Morning Herald* the following day²¹. The editorial was favourable, dubbing Hunt's remarks on this subject as, "refreshing criticism" and used them to segue into a critique of the form of rampant nationalism preoccupied with Australian idioms and idiosyncrasies. The editorial finished with the statement that this preoccupation was found in its purest form "amongst the uneducated" and questioned whether the search for national identity was a proper subject for drama at all.

In contrast, several letters to the editor made it clear that the public was less inclined to accept the notion that Australian playwrights were collectively in the grip of a nationalistic obsession with slum realism. They pointed out that the similarity between the material, cited by Hunt, was the responsibility of the theatre organisations producing this drama. D. Watts observed that playwrights were beholden to the whims of management and the material they would commission²². Ray Mathew similarly noted that the blame had to lie with organisations like the AETT whose "policies allow them to produce one kind of play (imitations of what look like the money-making qualities in "The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll")"²³. Louise Mackay, in a letter to the editor, supported these comments, pointing out that Hunt's criticism of theatrical management could only be regarded as self-criticism. Mackay

²⁰ 'Australian Drama as "Depressing in Similarity"'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 9th October. 1959. p. 6.

²¹ 'Realism on the Stage'. Editorial. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 10th October. 1959. p. 2.

²² D. Watt. 'Australian Plays'. Letter to the Editor. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 14th October. 1959. p. 2.

observed that when the AETT was formed, the hope of ‘thousands of Australians’ was that Australian plays that had not been produced, due to lack of funds, would finally be performed²⁴. Instead, she argued, only a tiny amount of local material had been professionally produced and furthermore those that were produced were written by an unrepresentative few. Mackay suggested the reason Oriel Gray’s *The Torrents*, a play that had come equal first with the *Doll* in the in 1955 Playwrights’ Advisory Board competition²⁵, had never been produced was due to “sex prejudice” rather than the merits of the play. Mackay then asked why, when “we are constantly reminded of our aboriginal question”, no play on the subject, such as George Landen Dann’s *The Fountains Beyond*, had ever been mounted²⁶.

‘The Benefit of Advice from Overseas Visitors’ - The Isolation of Hunt

Hunt’s lectures attracted far broader criticism when they were (as H. G. Kippax put it) “enterprisingly” published in book form, in early 1960, to coincide with his departure from Australia. Kippax, in his lengthy review of the book, felt that while Hunt had produced a stimulating argument regarding the Australian theatre, the most inevitable consequence of the publication was to invite a review, “of all the Trust has done, and has not done, since Mr Hunt came to Australia”²⁷. Kippax was disappointed that Hunt had reduced the Trust’s problems in its first five years, to being solely due to a lack of sufficient subsidy. Kippax felt that Hunt’s own interpretation of events had a tendency to be “unnecessarily defensive” and that the discussion of the

²³ Ray Mathew. ‘Australian Drama’. Letter to the Editor. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 19th October. 1959. p. 2.

²⁴ Louise Mackay. ‘Australian Plays we have yet to See’. Letter to the Editor. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 24th October. 1959. p. 2.

²⁵ Leslie Rees. ‘Playwriting Competitions’. Phillip Parsons (General Editor) *Companion to Theatre in Australia*. Currency Press. Sydney. 1995. pp. 457-458.

²⁶ Hunt replied to Mackay’s criticism in a letter published a few days latter. While he defended some of the AETT’s actions (such as the production of *The Shifting Heart*), he stated that Mackay was “quite right” in supposing Hunt was criticising himself in the lectures, “We have all made mistakes and indeed without mistakes there can be no theatre”. Hugh Hunt. ‘Australian Plays and the Trust’. Letter to the Editor. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 28th October. 1959. p. 2.

economics of a national theatre culture had been reduced to a “few generalities” in the margin. Kippax agreed that subsidy was probably insufficient at its present level. However he found Hunt’s arguments for constructing Australian theatre in the future by means of increased Government funding, the creation of training institutions for artists and the development of young audiences, to be “infuriatingly circular” and vague. Kippax also failed to see how any of these actions would facilitate an environment that would encourage a greater percentage of locally authored material. It was this material, including the plays of Lawler and not expensive productions, training institutions nor educational policies, that had “dynamited” the apathy of audience. Kippax’s conclusion was that Hunt’s ideas for a national theatre were comprehensively put, but misguided. The Trust had shown a tendency to “do too much with too little” and would probably continue in this manner even with increased subsidy. Kippax believed that the AETT, rather than concentrating on local product and artists, continued to promote a form of generic grand theatre that did not represent Australian theatre, which had to be based on “indigenous” drama.

Wal Cherry’s commentary on Hunt’s book in the (overtly nationalistic) journal *Overland* was even more critical, stating that it was largely irrelevant to Australia’s present cultural state and “essentially the work of a man looking backward rather than forward”²⁸. Cherry described the book, in his article, *Pitfalls of Grandeur*, as a “parting gift” from yet another departing “overseas visitor”, advising Australians on what should be done about “our theatre”. Cherry concurred with Kippax that Hunt’s schemes for the theatre of the future were overly grandiose and merely an emulation of old fashioned large scale English provincial theatre of the 1940s that had little to offer Australian audiences or audiences. Cherry was also critical of Hunt’s educational schemes. NIDA he felt, was an institution lacking in artistic policy (as were many of the Trust ventures) and that Hunt failed to reveal, “what is taught at NIDA and how many students are enrolled because they are good and how

²⁷ Harry Kippax. ‘New Books. The Making of Australian Theatre. by Hugh Hunt. Vast Problems of an Australian National Theatre’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 16th April. 1959. p. 13.

²⁸ Wal Cherry. ‘Pitfalls of Grandeur’. *Overland*. No. 17. April. 1960. p. 33.

many because they can afford it”²⁹. Moreover, Cherry asserted, given the Trust’s ‘patchy’ record, it was a ‘miracle’ it received as much money as it did. He felt that Hunt’s contempt for ‘little’ theatre and for contemporary material in favour of the ‘out of date edifice’ and grand classical repertoire revealed that the real ‘sickness’ in Australian theatre was over-capitalisation. Hunt’s demands for more money would simply lead to grander, more wasteful, and largely irrelevant forms of theatre, the ticket prices of which would escalate in proportion to the high production costs, making it a form of entertainment accessible only to the rich. Cherry proposed instead, a de-centralisation of funds and the investment into existing small autonomous theatrical ventures that favoured experimentation and had modest overheads³⁰.

Importantly, Cherry extended his criticism to include the present AETT regime. While Hunt’s isolation and departure from the Trust made him an excellent target for criticism (as may have been anticipated by the Board), Cherry was the first of an increasing number of commentators who would, over the next few years, begin to challenge the validity of the organisation itself. Cherry accurately predicted where the attacks on the Trust would be directed in the future when he stated in his conclusion,

The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust is not the national theatre of Australia nor is it the total of Australian Theatre. It is a facet of the development of the medium in this country. If the Trust is to lead that development somebody will have to think constructively about all those committees and those powers; the Trust’s top heavy administrative machinery; the internal politics and interstate jealousies; the snob value of the theatre; the attitude of newspapers and political parties and churches; the attempt of the Trust to increase prestige by centralising theatrical power; the preponderance of businessmen in the organisation and the lack of artists; the complete lack of youth; the assumption that the Australian theatre is a natural extension of the English {and} the employment conditions of artists.³¹

²⁹ *ibid.* p. 34.

³⁰ Cherry’s proposals for the devolution of subsidy bore many similarities to those articulated by Tim Rowse (amongst others) in the mid 1980s Tim Rowse, *Arguing the Arts; The Funding of the Arts in Australia*. Penguin Books. Australia. 1985.

³¹ Cherry, *op. cit.* p. 35.

What these reactions to Hunt's lectures also made clear was that the public, arts practitioners and the major political parties increasingly accepted as unequivocal and as self evident that government funds should be provided to support certain arts organisations and certain art forms on a permanent basis. In the future, discussion and contention would surround issues of *how* these funds should be allocated and disseminated, to whom and for what. Alternatively, questions of why a selection of cultural activities should be subsidised at all, or what effect this might have on the arts as an industry would remain, with the significant exception of when they were raised at the 1975 Industries Assistance Commission on Assistance to the Performing Arts, absent.

One of the consequences of this framed and exclusive debate was to obscure the critical relationship and causal links between the ideologies upon which the notion of subsidy was predicated and the kinds of structures, practices and systems selected by subsidised arts organisations to underpin and orientate their operations. This failure was in part to do with the manner in which ideologies, such as Stanislavskianism, were represented as universal and timeless and a tendency by cultural analysts to avoid situating them in the temporal and historical contexts from which they emerged. Such a tendency however, makes it impossible to locate explanations for the many dysfunctional elements in contemporary subsidised culture that nonetheless co-exist without apparent contradiction. For example, while all the major government educational facilities for actors in Australia adopt a policy of ensemble training over three years, none of the major subsidised State theatre Companies operate as ensembles and offer only casual contract employment on a play by play basis to professional actors. Most of those employed by these companies are graduates of the institutions above. One would presume that the training provided would better reflect the kinds of experiences they would encounter in professional practice such as constantly changing casts for each production instead as in the case of drama schools, working with the same twenty or so student actors year after year.

Yet, such divergent practices between government actor training facilities and subsidised State theatre companies were not random or inconsistent. Rather they were the logical consequence of the adoption and inculcation of a model of subsidised culture based, as it was, on notions of education and training which were specifically informed by the ideologies of Stanislavski's methodology. It was the principles upon which the actual training was based that provided the greatest influence to the changes of employment practice in the acting profession.

Part 2. The System

In the plethora of texts that discuss, interpret and analyse the methodologies of Stanislavski, there has been little consideration given to the kind of work practices or systems of management that underpinned his commentaries upon the actor's art. As detailed in Chapter One, the proliferating discourse surrounding the methodologies treated Stanislavski's notions on theatre as a sort of meta-text and focused upon the theoretical rather than industrial implications of this material.

Stanislavski's System has most often been described as the identification and codification of the "universal laws" of acting, "an activity and a practice... a working method for working actors... a system, because it is coherent, logical - systematic... a process"³². These universal laws related to the creation of organic links between the actor's own personality or subconscious and the character he or she was to play, through a process of conscious activity in the preparation and rehearsal of a role. This conscious activity had to be coherent and organised in order to create the conditions in which spontaneous, intuitive creation could occur. It was frequently stressed by commentators, as it was by Stanislavski himself, that the discovery of these laws and the processes by which they were to be implemented, were made through a combination of observation and experimentation. In this sense, the System was represented as the 'science' of acting based on immutable laws of nature, equivalent to the sciences of physics or chemistry. Geogi Rovstonogov, the

³² Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction - The System*. Methuen. London. 1982. p. xi.

Russian director stated, “Stanislavski did for the theatre what Pavlov did for physiology. Working in their different fields, the two men simultaneously discovered the laws of the psychological and physiological life of man. Those laws are eternal because they were not invented, but dictated by life”³³. Jean Benedetti, one of Stanislavski’s most influential interpreters and biographers in the West³⁴, likewise sought to stress the objective ‘scientific’ veracity of the System. Benedetti noted that the author had been given “scientific confirmation of what he had perceived instinctively” through the reading of Théodule Armaund Ribot’s *Les Maladies de la Mémoire* and *Les Maladies de la Volonté*³⁵, on the notion of affective memory³⁶.

Despite the tendency amongst commentators to provide secondary evidence to validate Stanislavski’s “laws of the creative process”³⁷ there was almost no discussion of the most significant contributing influence to the System’s basic

³³ Geogi Rovstonogov. ‘A Memorable Meeting’ in Konstantin Stanislavski. *Selected Works*. Compiled by Oksana Korneva. Raduga Publishers. Moscow. 1984. pp. 8-9.

³⁴ Benedetti has provided more source material from Stanislavski to Western readers than has been available to many of his native Russians, even today. One of Benedetti’s latest books contained letters from Stanislavski to Stalin that were omitted from the ‘official’ Russian version of his ‘Complete Works’. *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters*. Selected, Edited and Translated by Jean Benedetti. Methuen Drama. Great Britain. 1995. p. xv.

³⁵ Jean Benedetti. *Stanislavski*. Methuen Drama, London. 1988. pp. 171-175.

³⁶ Ribot’s theories on memory were also very similar to the ideas on memory promoted by Marcel Proust in his three volume work, *Remembrance of Things Past*. According to Ribot, the nervous system recorded and contained traces of all the previous experiences of an individual. While these memories were not always accessible, they could be triggered by an immediate sensory stimulus such as taste, touch or smell. This stimulus would call up and recreate the memory with the vividness in which it occurred in the past. This memory could then trigger a series of related memories of similar incidents and emotions. Stanislavski believed that an actor could, through careful preparation, utilise this process to graft the recall of a personal experience onto the part he or she was to play and thus give the character a dimension of truth in emotion and ‘make the part their own’. Interestingly, this area more than any of Stanislavski’s methodology has been rigorously disputed (see Chapter One). Theodore Komisarjevsky, a contemporary and colleague of Stanislavski, felt that the System was essentially a reflection of a rational middle-class outlook on life and argued that, “feelings experienced in the past and resuscitated by means of ordinary association {were} too weak to be really effectual on the stage... The emotional content of a stage action cannot be expressed, as Stanislavski thinks, by the substitution of the actors’ personal psychic experiences for those characters. Only penetration into the *artistic form* of the play and of the part can make an actor’s imagination work in the right direction and assist him in the embodiment of the play”. Theodore Komisarjevsky. *The Theatre: and a Changing Civilisation*. John Lane. The Bodley Head Limited. London. 1934. pp. 121-122.

³⁷ Constantin Stanislavski. *Building A Character*. Methuen. London. 1980. Ch XVI. p. 123.

principles, that of the works of Frederick Winslow Taylor. In all the works discussing Stanislavski's System, there was only one reference noting Stanislavski's obvious familiarity, as a Textile Factory owner, with Taylor's theories (often known as 'Taylorism') on the 'Philosophy of Human Labour' and 'Scientific Management'. This was despite the fact that Vsevolod Meyerhold, a student of Stanislavski's and original member of the Moscow Art Theatre, developed a system of actor training in the 1920s, called Biomechanics, which was specifically based on Taylor's principles and which Meyerhold himself referred to as "The Taylorization of the Theatre"³⁸. Furthermore, while this single reference, which appeared in Jean Benedetti's biography of the Russian Director³⁹, acknowledged Stanislavski's evident acquaintance with the theory (it was not referred to in any of the Russian's own texts) Benedetti limited its influence to supplying no more than an ordering principle. Benedetti argued that Taylor's notions of breaking down complex manufacturing processes into a sequence of simple actions on a production line, only provided Stanislavski with an example of how to break down a role into component parts, to be mastered separately and then assembled into an organic whole.

However, a comparison of the works of Taylor with the works of Stanislavski reveals a far greater influence of the former over the latter, than has hitherto been assumed. In addition, one can identify the astonishingly similar impact they have had on the respective industrial environments in which they were applied.

Taylorism and Stanislavskianism

Frederick Taylor's theories on shop management were widely known by engineers and manufacturers throughout America and Europe before they were published as 'The Principles of Scientific Management', in 1911. Taylor had developed his theories through his experiences working in the American

³⁸ Vsevolod Meyerhold. 'Biomechanics-Constructivism-Eccentricism-Cinefication'. 1921-1925. Part 5. *Meyerhold on Theatre*. Translated and Edited by Edward Braun. Eyre Methuen. London. 1969. pp. 183-206.

³⁹ Benedetti. *Stanislavski. op. cit.* p. 160.

textile industry, starting as an ordinary labourer, through to machinist, foreman and finally chief engineer. His theories, first presented at a Meeting of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers in 1903, were primarily the development of a new management technique consisting of two major elements/techniques. The first element was the discovery, by “experiment”, of finding out the best way of performing every operation and the proper time, every component unit of each operation, should take. The “performance” of an operation was determined by working out the best material, tool, machine, manipulation of tool or machine, and the best flow of work and sequence of unit operations for the job. The second element was creating a new division of labour between management and workers and assigning to management the responsibility for discovering the best ways of performing units of operations, and the further responsibility of planning operations. Management was also to make available at the proper time and place, and in the proper quantity, the materials, tools, instructions and other facilities required by the workers⁴⁰.

These widely publicised innovations generated a great deal of contention and dominated discussions of the 1910 Interstate Commerce Commission in Washington. Taylor’s ideas then became the subject of their own hearing, in which Taylor gave lengthy testimony, before the Special House Committee of Representatives to “Investigate the Taylor and Other Systems of Shop Management Under Authority of House Resolution 90” in 1912⁴¹.

It is likely that Stanislavski was already familiar with the principles of Taylorism at this stage. The highly symbiotic relationship between Stanislavski’s occupation as factory owner and as actor/director has often been overlooked, despite the fact that his first theatre company, ‘The Society of Art and Literature’ (1887-1898) was funded completely by the profits of his textile plant at Alekseiv. In addition, his role as a manufacturer, while not

⁴⁰ Harlow S. Person. ‘Forward’. Frederick Winslow Taylor. *Scientific Management*. Harper & Row. New York, London. 1947. pp. x-xi.

⁴¹ Taylor. ‘Taylor’s Testimony before the Special House Committee; A Reprint of the Public Document’. *Scientific Management. ibid.* pp. 5 - 287.

his primary passion, was one he took extremely seriously⁴². In 1898, when Stanislavski took over the family's textile firm, the largest in Moscow, consisting of a number of manufacturing factories, he immediately adopted a process of reform. This process consisted primarily of the importation of foreign technology and involved frequent trips abroad to examine the latest developments in textile machinery and in factory management⁴³. This process of innovation coincided with another of his great reformist endeavours, the setting up of the Moscow Art Theatre, in conjunction with Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, through which he would eventually develop his treatise on the laws of acting⁴⁴.

The influence of Taylorism over Stanislavski's notions of theatre was most obvious in the way the latter took the appellation 'the System', applied to Taylor's Theory of Shop Management, and utilised it as the moniker for his own theories on acting⁴⁵. Furthermore, applying theories of shop management to something like the acting industry actually expressed the kind of lateral thinking Taylor encouraged - "the fundamental principles of scientific management are applicable to all kinds of human activities, from

⁴² The closure of Stanislavski's first studio in 1905 (designed to develop his theories on acting with student actors) that he had funded with his own money had a lot to do with heavy losses experienced that year in his factories. *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters. op. cit.* p. 235.

⁴³ Benedetti. *Stanislavski. op. cit.* p. 46.

⁴⁴ It is often assumed that the plays of Chekhov and the System of Stanislavski were inextricably linked at the Moscow Art Theatre. In fact, all of Chekhov's plays were originally written and performed by the MAT Company who were trying to explore a non-melodramatic manner of performance rather than following a methodology. The MAT became famous through its productions of the plays of Chekhov, long before it was associated with the System. Rather ironically, Chekhov had numerous arguments with Stanislavski about his direction, which he did respect but found at times very heavy going. As to Stanislavski's acting, Chekhov thought he was relatively appalling in all his plays, "Of course you're right: Alekseiev {Stanislavski} shouldn't be playing Ivan. That's not his *métier*. When he directs then he's an artist but when he acts he's just a rich young merchant who wants to dabble in art". Chekhov to (his wife) Olga Knipper. October 4. 1899. Yalta. *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters. op. cit.* p. 57.

⁴⁵ Taylor himself was unhappy with the term when it was tied to his own name, "I have had a great deal to do with the development of the system of management which has come to be called by certain people the "Taylor System", but I am only one of the many men who have been instrumental in the development of this system" 'Taylor's Testimony Before the Special House Committee'. *Scientific Management. op. cit.* pp. 5-6.

our simplest individual acts to the work of our great corporations”⁴⁶. Stanislavski clearly agreed with this sentiment. In one of his earliest published explanations on why the subconscious was so dependant on the conscious, he stated, “it seems entirely normal to me ...{that} the use of steam, electricity, wind, water and other involuntary forces in nature is dependant on the intelligence of the engineer. {In the same way} our subconscious power cannot function without its own engineer - our conscious technique”⁴⁷.

An element of Taylor’s work that also appealed to Stanislavski, was that he had constantly stressed that he had developed his theories on the ‘laws’ of human labour through a protracted process of “non-academic” observation and experimentation in a industry he was member of and wished to reform ⁴⁸. Stanislavski similarly stressed that it was by means of careful observation that he had come to the discovery and codification of the laws of acting. References to this process of observation peppered his first published work *My Life in Art*⁴⁹. As was the case in Taylor’s treatise, this experiential working method played a critical role in the legitimisation of Stanislavski’s own theories. As Benedetti put it, “what we receive as the System originated as his attempt to analyse and monitor his own progress as an artist, working to achieve his ambitions and meet his own developing standard; it is a theory of his practice examined, tested and verified”⁵⁰.

⁴⁶ Frederick Winslow Taylor. *The Principles of Scientific Management*. Harper & Brothers. New York & London. 1915. p. 7.

⁴⁷ Constantin Stanislavski. *An Actor Prepares*. Methuen. London. 1936. p. 15.

⁴⁸ Taylor stressed the importance of this working method throughout his ‘Testimony to the Special House Committee’. *Scientific Management. op. cit.* p. 24 and pp. 51-55. It was one of the principal elements that he used to validate his work, “He was in temperament, training and experience, a doer... Furthermore, he did not believe that management could be learnt from reading or taught in the classroom; it had to be learnt in the doing... Each of his expositions was the result of a challenge of experience.” Harlow S. Person. ‘Forward’. *Scientific Management. op. cit.* pp. v - vi.

⁴⁹ Constantin Stanislavski. *My Life in Art*. Eyre Methuen. London. 1970. First published in America in 1936.

⁵⁰ Benedetti. *Stanislavski: An Introduction - The System. op. cit.* p. 1. Geogi Rovstonogov. echoed these sentiments “Stanislavski’s system was formed in battles, born in the heat of argument, and grew out of anguish. Each of its tenets was verified experimentally thousands of times. Pages of notes were mercilessly rejected. Adherents of the new method of work had to be won over one by one”. ‘A Memorable Meeting’ in Stanislavski. *Selected Works. op. cit.* p. 12.

Working Methods

The most significant element that unified Taylor's and Stanislavski's theories, was the rejection of traditional working methods, regarded as individualistic and ad hoc, in favour of the universal principles found in their respective Systems - "In the past the man has been first; in the future the system must be first"⁵¹. Many of Taylor's arguments for scientific management were based upon the rejection of the traditional "rule of thumb" methods amongst workmen which were "almost universal in all trades, and which our workman waste a large part of their effort"⁵². Likewise, Stanislavski underpinned many of *his* arguments for a new system of acting upon a rejection of the traditions inherent in "the many centuries existence of our art, {which were}... bigoted and seldom renovated"⁵³. These traditions, that Stanislavski referred pejoratively to as "craft", produced waste, cliches and were dominated by rule of thumb patterns and techniques which "crushed" art⁵⁴ in much the same way that Taylor believed outmoded work patterns crushed productivity. Importantly, Stanislavski echoed exactly Taylor's belief that these traditional practices were tied inextricably to the moral diminution of those responsible for producing the work - the actor or the worker. Taylor regarded traditional work practices as encouraging the "natural laziness of men", such as "systematic soldiering" (working at the rate of the slowest worker), an activity he described as the "greatest evil" and one he felt that had widespread negative effects on civilisation as a whole⁵⁵.

Stanislavski, who wrote almost as much on the ethics and morality of theatre as he did on the theory of acting, similarly argued that laziness, apathy, self-infatuation (and indeed "looseness, cards, wine, women and lucre") all existent in traditional approaches to theatre, had to be banished. Such a task was to be achieved through the disciplined adoption of "correct ethics or

⁵¹ Taylor. *The Principles of Scientific Management. op. cit.* p. 7.

⁵² *ibid.* p. 16.

⁵³ Stanislavski. 'On Various Trends in Theatrical Art'. Translated by Olga Shartze. Stanislavski. *Selected Works. op. cit.* p. 133.

⁵⁴ *ibid.* p. 134.

⁵⁵ Taylor. *The Principles of Scientific Management. op. cit.* p. 17.

moral principles {which} helped the actor to: 1. Protect his will and his talent from corruptive influences; 2. Maintain his will and his talent in a wholesome atmosphere”⁵⁶.

In his rejection of traditional theatre practices, Stanislavski utilised the three essential principles of Taylorism to orientate the basis of his own reformist dissertations. The first was the systemised breaking down of complex tasks into separate actions and units. The second was the new division of labour between management and workers and the third, the assignment of a new relationship between management and workers in the dissemination and teaching of the System.

As indicated by Benedetti, Stanislavski made extensive use of Taylor’s task system in constructing a vocabulary or grammar with which to order his theories of acting. In his acting System, the actor, was to break down the play into its constituent parts, the units and objectives, while keeping a coherent sense of the role, the “through line of action”, and the significance of the play as a whole, “the super objective”⁵⁷. This paralleled Taylor’s method of analysing a complete task by examining and setting down, “the detail of operations” or “units” into which any piece of work may be divided”⁵⁸. These “units” were not to be regarded by the worker as simple unrelated components derived from time and motion studies, but as elements to be united eventually into a ‘single standard implement. The worker was also to be guided by the “the accurate study of the motives which influence men” and the larger philosophical goals that underpinned the principles of Scientific Management⁵⁹. This was an important factor of Taylorism. The organic coherency of the principles of shop management was frequently stressed by Taylor and he rejected criticism that it was an overly rigid and mechanistic approach to labour. Such interpretations of Taylorism may explain why connections between his and Stanislavski’s Systems were

⁵⁶ ‘Notes On Actors Ethics and Discipline’. Translated by Olga Shartze. Stanislavski. *Selected Works*. *op. cit.* pp. 99-119.

⁵⁷ Benedetti. *Stanislavski: An Introduction - The System*. *op. cit.* p. 42.

⁵⁸ Taylor. ‘Shop Management’. *Scientific Management*. *op. cit.* p. 152.

⁵⁹ *ibid.* p. 154.

overlooked and in fact it was probably this organic approach that particularly appealed to the Russian. Taylor was adamant that his “principles” were not simply an efficiency system or just a list of results from time and motion studies. Nor was it just a new system for figuring costs, or a matter of “printing and ruling and unloading of a ton or two of blanks on a set of men and saying, “Here’s your system; go use it””⁶⁰. Instead, Taylorism was supposed to be an “organic” process that involved a “complete mental revolution” on the part of the “working man” engaged in any industry and radically altered their obligations toward the work, their co-workers and to their employers. It also required a corresponding “mental revolution” on the part of the management⁶¹. Without this, its originator argued, the Taylor System could not exist.

Essential to Taylor’s System of Scientific Management, was the division between the management and the worker and the assignment of new roles for each. This division was a critical factor in the reordering and disciplining of work place practices. The division was based on Taylor’s general principle that,

In almost all of the mechanical arts, the science which underlies each act of each workman is so great and amounts to so much, that the workman who is best suited to actually doing the work is incapable of fully understanding this science, without the guidance and help of those who are working with him or over him, either through lack of education or through insufficient mental capacity.⁶²

The worker was no longer required to have an overview of the task or to utilise autonomous judgement in the fulfilment of that task, both of which were now the responsibility of the management. While Taylor asserted that this practice was in “accordance to scientific laws” and would lead to a “more equal division of responsibility” between management and worker than had

⁶⁰Taylor. ‘Taylor’s Testimony Before the Special House Committee’. *Scientific Management. op. cit.* pp. 26-7.

⁶¹ *ibid.* p. 27.

⁶² Taylor. ‘The Fundamentals of Scientific Management’. *The Principles of Scientific Management. op. cit.* pp. 25-26.

existed in the “traditional” workplace⁶³, there was in fact very little evidence within the principles of his System to support this.

In Taylor’s System, the new roles management were to assume were, the duty of developing the “science” of labour, carrying out the preparatory organisation of each task, conducting studies, collecting data and taking a far greater share of the responsibility for results ⁶⁴. It was also their responsibility to guide, instruct and train the worker, who was no longer part of any decision making process. It was Taylor’s belief that this new relationship would minimise dictatorial management, tendencies of coercion or the overworking of employees. Taylor also argued it would eradicate the passing on of ‘bad’ work habits (such as “soldiering”, waste and incompetence) from one worker to another and see a cessation of the old management practice of success which relied on the “incentive” of the worker, which Taylor believed, was rarely attained. Instead, management’s role was to be paternalistic, observational and vigilant in relation to their employees.

Stanislavski’s System reflected a similar division of labour and a similar hierarchy of power between the director and actor as there was in Taylor’s system between management and worker. While he, like Taylor, stressed that the relationship was to be co-operative, it was in fact predicated upon the actor’s obedience and deference to the director.

The complexity and responsibility of the theatre business considerably enhances the disciplinary and ethical demands made upon everyone involved. They are so high, in fact, that sometimes they necessarily approach military discipline... {This} applies to the actor’s relations with the director and the other people in charge. Since one or several men have to manage hundreds of people... it is

⁶³ *ibid.* p. 26.

⁶⁴ “The managers assume new burdens, new duties, and responsibilities never dreamed of in the past. The managers assume, for instance the burden of gathering knowledge which in the past has been possessed by the workmen and then classifying, tabulating, and reducing this knowledge to rules, laws, and formulae which are immensely helpful to the workmen in doing their daily work”. *ibid.* p. 36.

imperative that each one of these people should recognise the authority... submit to it and support it.⁶⁵

Stanislavski also stressed the affinities between the theatre and any complex business organisation. He believed productivity and order could only be maintained if employees focused upon the requirements of their specific tasks and carried these out faithfully, under the guidance and precepts handed down by management. The actor's duty was to know his or her part, the instructions of the director and to be conscious of the work of the ensemble. The function of the director was to be responsible for the preparatory work needed to organise rehearsals, give the play its general direction, bring all the creative elements into harmony and maintain discipline⁶⁶. As in Taylor's System, management now assumed the 'responsibility of results'.

In addition, Stanislavski's System contained a fundamental division of authority between theatre administration (management) and that of artistic direction. This division was first established at the inception of the Moscow Art Theatre. The division involved the assignment of financial control, selection of repertoire and organisation of staff to management and complete responsibility for staging and casting of productions to the artistic director⁶⁷, with all employees (including actors) required to implicitly obey the discipline implemented by each. While in theory this division again was to reflect a separate but equal sharing of power, theatre management swiftly came to dominate the area of artistic direction, maintaining as it did, the right of veto over productions and artistic decisions that were perceived to be not economically viable⁶⁸.

In both Taylor's System and Stanislavski's System the new roles assigned to the worker and the actor demanded standardisation, uniformity, and the

⁶⁵ Stanislavski. 'On Professional Ethics and Discipline'. Translated by Olga Shartze. Stanislavski. *Selected Works. op. cit.* p. 117.

⁶⁶ *ibid.* p. 114.

⁶⁷ Benedetti. *Stanislavski. op. cit.* pp. 60-61.

⁶⁸ Benedetti noted that Stanislavski was often perceived by his colleagues at the MAT as "muddle-headed", and a dreamer when it came to matters of expenditure, a tendency which led to the frequent

abatement of individuality and choice. It is important to note that commentators and interpreters who support the Russian actor/director's acting methodologies, rigorously deny such inferences. David Magarshack asserted in his introduction to Stanislavski's *On the Art Of The Stage*, that the "chief error of Stanislavski's critics was to ascribe to him a rigidity of method he himself denounced" and stressed that these critics failed to detect the "fluid" and "organic" nature of his System⁶⁹. However, as noted above, this was identical to the assertions made by Taylor when he defended his own System against accusations of overt rigidity. In addition, commentaries such as Magarshack's failed to account for the inflexible and uniform rules of conduct that the actor was expected to obey (and which Stanislavski made clear were not negotiable), which were in turn critical to the manner in which Stanislavski's System was to function.

Stanislavski's precepts made it fundamentally clear that the actor was subordinate to the vision of the director. While the actor was responsible, to some extent, for the interpretation of his or her role this was not to be exacted through individual motives or desires but through obedience and submission to the greater requirements of theatre and of 'pure art'⁷⁰. Failure to do this, Stanislavski argued, would result in chaos. The individual personality traits, he warned, that the actor could be "tempted" by and should be "cleansed of", were listed in his essay on *Ethics or The Atmosphere for the Development of Talent*. This list (which was one of a series) was posted up at the Moscow Art Theatre as a code of conduct. The code listed as inappropriate behaviour, displays of ecstasy, shyness and perplexity, hero worship, the aping of talent, easy tiredness, theorising on inner depth and inspiration and flirting with concepts. It also included, concern with one's looks, a thirst for originality, despair, disillusionment, hurt, vanity, self glorification, infatuation with

rejection, by theatre management, of his artistic proposals for which he "could not offer any practical solutions as to how {these} plans might be implemented". *ibid.* pp. 226-227.

⁶⁹ David Magarshack. 'Introduction'. Stanislavsky: *The Art of the Stage*. Faber and Faber. London, Boston. 1967. p. 86.

⁷⁰ In much the same way Taylor had argued that the "old school" of management practice which rejected standardisation and believed the worker should be allowed to develop his individuality "by choosing the particular methods and implements which suit{ed} him best... {and that the worker}

popularity, moral self-indulgence, vulgar showiness, confusion and fright, taking to drink and “dreams of world fame or a fabulous success by means criminal for art”⁷¹.

These new kinds of disciplined, docile, anonymous and obedient workers/actors, required by the respective Systems, entailed new regimes of constant surveillance and constant training on the part of the management. Both these Systems were part of a much larger shift in industrial practice in the West that corresponded with the ‘birth’ of the modern institution (the factory, the hospital, the school, the asylum, the prison). Michel Foucault described this shift in his book *Discipline and Punish*, as the development of a “new political anatomy” that had begun in the 18th century.

The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A ‘political anatomy’, which was also a ‘mechanics of power’, was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile bodies’. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns into an ‘aptitude’, a ‘capacity’, which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and it turns it into a relation of strict subjection. If economic exploitation separates the force and the product of labour, let us say that disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination.⁷²

Both Taylorism and Stanislavskianism advocated new systems of discipline that exactly corresponded to the unequal power relations and intense

should be responsible for results” would always result in practices that were unproductive and unprofitable because of the inherent unreliability (natural “laziness”) of the worker.

⁷¹ Stanislavski. ‘Ethics or the Atmosphere for the Development of Talent’. Translated by Olga Shartze. Stanislavski. *Selected Works. op. cit.* p. 117.

⁷² Michel Foucault. ‘Discipline - Docile Bodies’. Chapter 1. Part Three. *Discipline and Punish; The Birth of The Prison*. Penguin Books. London. 1977. p. 138.

continuous surveillance that was part of, and integrated into, the pedagogical relationship between management and worker detailed by Foucault in his chapter 'The Means of Correct Training'⁷³. In addition, both carried within them powerful ideological arguments of grand social reform that codified and legitimised these practices.

Taylor believed, while denying that any single panacea existed for all the "troubles of all the working-people and employers", that the fundamentals of Scientific Management would lessen suffering, offer freedom from discord and dissension, and increase prosperity and happiness. Overall, 'Scientific Management' was to be a means of great social reform in the civilised world. Stanislavski too, developed and presented his theoretical reforms on acting as part of a much greater of quest to bring 'civilisation' and positive reform to society as a whole. In this vein, he stated that, "at long last people have begun to realise that with the decline of religion, art and the theatre must be elevated to a temple, since it is religion and pure art that cleanse the soul of mankind"⁷⁴. This larger beneficial agenda was the primary reason that the Moscow Art Theatre, where he developed his acting methodologies, was set up as a public company and not funded exclusively (unlike its precursor the Society of Art and Literature) from private sources. Stanislavski recognised (as the initiators of the AETT would fifty years later) that a company supported through a combination of government subsidy and selective deductible donations from business and prominent individuals would protect it from criticisms of being a pure "money-making" exercise. Such a funding source would also allow the company to be recognised as a philanthropic, educational undertaking. Stanislavski argued that,

The creation of a limited company, and what more a popular price theatre will endow me with the merit - that is what they'll call it - of being an educator, of serving an artistic and educational charity. I know the businessmen of Moscow. In the first instance, they won't go to the theatre *on principle* and in the second, *on pure principle*, they will

⁷³ *ibid.* pp. 170-194.

⁷⁴ Stanislavski. 'The Theatre is the Temple, the Actor is the Priest' from, 'Notes on Actor's Ethics and Discipline'. Translated by Olga Shartze. Stanislavski. *Selected Works. op. cit.* p. 101.

stump up a pile of money to support *something they have created*.⁷⁵

Despite these benevolent goals, each System, rendered the specificity of the individual worker and actor obsolete. Favouring anonymous functionality and the successful and productive completion of each assigned task or role, the worker and the actor within these regimes was unable to bring any unique characteristics, skills or experiences to bear upon or influence the machinations of the individual Systems in which they were now habituated. Stanislavski summed this up when he rejected the traditional 'star system' (which afforded the actor a structure in which he or she could theoretically increase their power if they could increase their fame) with the assertion that in his system, there were no small parts just small actors. This was tantamount to saying that a desire to move up in a company to bigger and better (and better paid) roles, was no longer acceptable. Nor were the workers/actors expected or allowed to share knowledge gained within each System amongst each other. Decisions, skills, training, instructions, processes, time management and conduct were to be imparted from above to below, in a precise linear movement, to ensure the uniform and orderly release of information and reinforce obedience. The utility of the worker and actor was to be measured by the degree to which they could simply fulfil the task according to the precepts endowed from management and the more they lacked preconceptions and/or assumptions regarding their function the better. Each System was also designed to ensure that the potential aberrations, dysfunction or lack of productivity of the individual worker or actor had minimal impact upon the overall functioning of work environment. Each task or role was designed to be separate from the next and thus the faulty element could be swiftly and effectively replaced without loss to the whole. The effect of these Systems upon traditional employment practices was profound. Corresponding as they did with the dismantling of both the traditional apprentice and guild systems of training and employment meant that the worker and the actor were completely dependant upon a system of employment of which one of the consequences was expendability.

⁷⁵ Constantin Stanislavski (Collected Works), Volume VII, pp. 123-4 in Jean Benedetti's *Stanislavski. op. cit.* p. 63.

One of the great ironies of Stanislavski's life-long quest to reform the acting profession was, that despite his extraordinary international influence upon the development of institutional training for actors, he failed to completely realise his reforms within the company he had co-founded⁷⁶ during his lifetime. Many of his methodologies were developed in the latter part of his life and 'tested' on small companies of student actors which were part of a series of studios attached to the major theatre activities of MAT and did not necessarily result in production. Those professional productions which Stanislavski used to 'prove' the efficacy of his System such as *Hamlet* and *A Month in the Country* were in fact mounted with casts who were not trained in the director's methodologies and who were often vehemently resistant to it and the final results were regarded as uneven⁷⁷. In addition, a large number of Stanislavski's colleagues, including his partners Nemirovich and Komisarjevsky, the writer Bulgakov, his former students Meyerhold and Vakhtangov, and many of the professional actors of MAT, regarded his 'laws' on acting with suspicion and/or disdain⁷⁸. Meyerhold believed that all of Stanislavski's 'laws' had come about because,

⁷⁶ The best account of the quite stunning levels of tension and discord between Stanislavski and his partner Nemirovich-Danchenko and other MAT members throughout the course of his life is in Benedetti's collection of MAT letters. *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters. op. cit.* These letters also reiterated how marginal he increasingly became in the day to day running of the company.

⁷⁷ Olga Knipper, the MAT actor and widow of Chekhov, who was in the MAT's first production of *The Seagull* was one of these. She struggled with, and ultimately rejected Stanislavski's methodologies, during the protracted and difficult rehearsal process of *A Month in The Country* which was to be said to be the first whose actors were rehearsed according to the principles of his System. While this production was a critical and financial success, *Hamlet*, which was developed in conjunction with Gordon Craig and also rehearsed according to the principles of the System, provoked a mixed reaction. Jean Benedetti. *Stanislavski. op. cit.* p. 180-189. Benedetti also stated that, "Few, including {Stanislavski's} own wife, were convinced that his new approach to acting had anything to offer them or that it was worth the risk of abandoning old and tried methods, which had made them stars". 'The Theatre and the System'. *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters. op. cit.* p. 264.

⁷⁸ This was despite occasional evidence to the contrary. For example, when Nemirovich-Danchenko suddenly declared that the System was to be the official working method of the MAT, it was simply a manoeuvre to buy time to defer a process he found torture. "I came here to spend some time alone, to find out if he {Stanislavski} has not dragged me along too and whether that is not the danger for the future. I have reason to be suspicious... The trouble is I can't leave him alone with the actors... I spent two days, Thursday and Friday on something that Stanislavski has no way of refusing – that we apply his system to everything that we work on (which is impossible)... Keep him in bounds in such a way so that he will not notice and rear up, arrange things so we can take what is useful in his theories.

The management {of the MAT} demanded a theoretical justification for its enterprises {and Stanislavski} had no alternative but to concoct his notorious *system* for a whole army of actors, psychologically ‘experiencing’ the parts of all those characters who do nothing but walk, eat, drink, make love and wear jackets.⁷⁹

The consequence of all these factors was that, during Stanislavski’s lifetime, the MAT never mounted a single mainstream production using actors who had been explicitly trained according to the principles of his System. In addition, when his System was adopted by the ‘official’ methodology for all training schools and theatre companies in Soviet Russia in the mid 1930s, it was done so in an environment of total subsidy⁸⁰. This made it difficult to detail, from the experiences of Eastern Bloc countries, the impact of the introduction of his System upon performing arts industries in the West. Unlike Soviet Russia, in Australia, the U.S.A and the U.K, Government drama schools became *fully* subsidised, but the legitimate theatre did not and would only ever receive partial subsidy. Legitimate theatre in this environment thus still had to function, to certain degree commercially, like the rest of the ‘non-legitimate’ performing arts⁸¹. Stanislavski had hoped that the dramatic school and the theatre he envisioned for the future would only ever exist in a symbiotic relationship. The drama school would be informed by developments on the professional stage and the student actor would be able to work progressively toward an environment of secure and permanent

Others will be persuaded by example. My intention is this, not to do it right away: Stanislavski will be obstructive all winter... Better to delay at first as to proceed calmly later”. This strategy almost immediately broke down when they returned to rehearsals. Nemirovich to his wife Ekaterina. August 7th. 1911. Chernigovski Monastery. *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters. op. cit.* pp. 294-5.

⁷⁹ Meyerhold. *Meyerhold on Theatre. op. cit.* p. 177

⁸⁰ “While we retain the image often of {the MAT as} a highly privileged, massively subsidized theatre it must be remembered that for the first twenty years of its life and for a short period under the New Economic Policy (1921){brought in by Lenin} the Art Theatre was a commercial undertaking which had, at least, to break even. It was only in the mid-thirties under Stalin’s patronage that it was promised unlimited resources”. Benedetti. *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters. op. cit.* p. xiv.

⁸¹ For example, the Sydney Theatre Company at present receives approximately only 11% of its annual budget from Government subsidy. The rest of the money is made up of a combination of box-office and sponsorship. The company frequently has to produce seasons that are highly commercial, which includes reproducing ‘hits’ from overseas, proven classics and/or material that interests its commercial sponsors. Sydney Theatre Company. Annual Report 2000.

employment within a company⁸². However, again, this was never achieved at the MAT prior to the total subsidy provided by Stalin in the mid 1930s. He also failed to perceive that the creation of this kind of symbiotic relationship (that represented his vision of a 'holy' non-commercial theatre) required a degree of total government subvention that carried with it influences that could be problematic. Like Miklós Haraszti's negative answer to his question "Is freedom really necessary for art to flourish?" in his book *The Velvet Prison: Artists Under State Socialism*⁸³, the period that ushered in the 'golden age' and mass proliferation of Stanislavski's System in Russia was also its most oppressive⁸⁴. Ironically, the vibrant multiple forms of theatre of which the MAT was one, and era theatrical experimentation that existed during Stanislavski's lifetime, were the result of adherence to certain traditional company structures and practices that were centuries old. These company structures were also explicitly integrated with the "traditional", "rule of thumb" and "star system" practices he sought to eradicate and were eventually replaced with the 'innovations' of his System.

The Australian theatre companies and institutions modelled on Stanislavski's System provided an environment in which to observe the impact of its introduction upon a developing theatre industry that would only ever receive partial subsidy. The inevitable consequence of expendability of the actor within this System noted above, would come to be fully evident in the employment practices of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (and ACFTA and the Australia Council that would replace it) from the 1960s on.

⁸² Stanislavski. *On The Art Of The Stage. op. cit.* p. 56.

⁸³ Miklos Haraszti. *The Velvet Prison: Artists Under State Socialism.* The Noonday Press. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux. New York. 1989. p. 6.

⁸⁴ The playwright Bulgakov regularly had his plays at the MAT banned during this period and Meyerhold would have his theatre closed down and be eventually executed in 1940, by this regime. 'Stalin'. *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters. op. cit.* pp. 331– 359 and *Meyerhold on Theatre. op. cit.* pp. 233-252.

Chapter 8

Dysfunction - Training versus Employment

The educative performing arts reforms carried out by the AETT in the early 1960s had little benefit for professional practitioners in Australia. Within a few years, the Trust abandoned all attempts to create permanent drama companies (and thus permanent employment) and of its drama initiatives launched in the late 1950s only the National Institute of Dramatic Art remained. This became one of the critical elements in the bitter campaign to discredit and wrest power from the AETT launched by the arts community in the 1960s. However, such was the success of the model of the therapeutic educative arts espoused in contemporary theatre methodology, in justifying government subsidy, it would survive unscathed by the AETT's loss of power and become the basis of the ideology governing both ACFTA in 1967 and the Australia Council in 1973.

The Framing of the Legitimate Culture Debate

By 1960, it appeared that two major principles, introduced by the AETT, had been widely accepted by Australian society. The first was, that certain art forms, 'legitimate' opera, drama and ballet, were an essential part of the representation of Australia as a 'civilised' and 'cultured' nation but were incapable of being self-supporting and thus required and deserved government subsidy on a permanent basis. The second principle was that legitimate drama activities in Australia, both theatre companies and/or productions, would be underpinned and sustained by national actor training institutions, like NIDA, whose curriculum and structure were based upon Stanislavski's System.

These principles were contained within a model of subsidised performing arts that had been gradually inculcated into Australian society during the 1940s and 50s. This model would require consolidation (particularly concerning its

demonstrable educative value) throughout the 1960s and early 1970s where it was rendered both unassailable and reproducible.

The chapter looks at the how fundamental this model was in justifying government subsidy. This was evident from the disastrous consequences when Hugh Hunt's successor as AETT Executive Director, Neil Hutchison, tried to set it aside and move the Trust away from its function of educator back to one of entrepreneur. This shift exposed the AETT to intense public, practitioner and media scrutiny and was directly linked to the extraordinary attacks upon the organisation that coincided with the tenth anniversary of its regime to create, subsidise, administer, and control the legitimate performing arts on a national scale.

At the same time and possibly obscured by these very public debates about the future of subsidy of the performing arts, was the growing and related fissure between the subsidised full-time training opportunities available to student actors and the lack of subsidised full-time employment for professional ones. The kind of 'Taylorism' effect on the labour market, detailed in the last chapter, which was the result of the adoption of this new ideology, became swiftly evident in the AETT schemes of the 1960s.

'Disappointment and Hope'

An article that appeared in *The Sun Herald* in February 1960 was entitled, *Here are contrasting out-looks on Australian theatre - disappointment and hope; 'I can't get a job'- says veteran; Novice looks to 'big chance'*¹. The title of the piece perfectly encapsulated the peculiar and dysfunctional relationship between actor training and employment becoming increasingly evident in Australia since the introduction of Stanislavski's 'System'. The article detailed the plight of the actor Ethel Gabriel, an original cast member of the AETT Australian production of *The Summer Of the Seventeenth Doll*. Gabriel was the only member of this cast who had appeared in the London

¹ 'Here are contrasting out-looks on Australian Theatre - Disappointment and Hope; 'I can't get a job'- says veteran; Novice looks to 'big chance''. *Sun Herald*. 7th February. 1960. p. 31.

and New York productions and the Hollywood film version of the play. Upon her return to Australia however, she had only managed to secure intermittent work and was unable to obtain even 'bit' parts on the stage, radio or television. As a result she was considering leaving for England in an attempt to obtain employment. For Gabriel, "this was a sign of the pitiful state of theatre in Australia today".

The contrast provided in the article detailed the fortunes of Briony Hodges who had won the "Summer of The Seventeenth Doll" scholarship to study acting at NIDA full time for two years, a scholarship that was provided by the AETT. This example of the paucity of regular work opportunities for an actor at the top of their profession in comparison to the permanent subsidised full time ensemble training offered to one entering it, signalled the beginning of a permanent dysfunctional, yet causal, relationship between training and erratic employment opportunities. This relationship would be consolidated via AETT executive policies over the next few years.

Training in Repertory Drama: Training in Drama Schools

In May 1960, a little over a year after the popularly received inception of the most prominent permanent professional actor ensemble in Australia, the Trust Players, Hugh Hunt's successor Neil Hutchison began questioning both its efficacy and validity. Hutchison noted, in the *Executive Director's Progress Report*, that the Trust Players had incurred a loss of £35,000 in 1959 and that, despite a relatively successful second season, it was anticipated they might face a similar or even more "formidable" loss at the end of 1960². The immediate solution he felt was to cancel a proposed tour to Brisbane and that there be recognition of the fact that, "for financial success the Trust Players must be normally speaking be led by one or two star names, either as players or producers"³.

² *Executive Director's Progress Report*. May 9th, 1960. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 48. pp. 1-3.

³ *ibid.* p. 1. This went against Hunt's anti 'star-system' assertions he made in 'Rogues and Vagabonds'. Chapter 2. *The Making of Australian Theatre*. F. W. Cheshire. Melbourne. 1960.

The AETT Executive's 'star name' solution to the Trust's Players financial predicament marked the first indication that the AETT was moving away from the educational platform developed in the late 1950s and returning to a more entrepreneurial position. It became swiftly clear that both the introduction of famous leads and the cancellation of the tour were only temporary stop gaps and a far more radical review of the Trust's entire drama policy was required. This return to a relatively commercial role would eventually lead to catastrophic results for the Trust.

The AETT Executive staff used a discussion about underwriting a joint season between the Melbourne Union Repertory Theatre Company (UTRC) and the Victorian Council of Adult Education, as an opportunity to implement this review at the end of 1960. It was stressed that the commitment to these two organisations was for one year only and that the Trust should now "take stock" and review the whole issue of repertory theatre⁴. In taking stock, the Executive Director questioned something which had, up until that point, been self evident amongst theatre practitioners - that the benefits of repertory theatre were the benefits of continuity of operation and employment. This time, however, Hutchinson asked,

What exactly do we mean by "benefits of continuity"?... benefits for whom? A team of actors? Short seasons of co-operative work are certainly useful, but repertory actors quickly become stale. They need the stimulus of different conditions, different surroundings, different colleagues and different directors.⁵

Hutchison was even more critical about the benefits of continuous employment offered in repertory, stating, "it would be wrong to let the tail wag the theatre dog. Benefits for whom? For the theatre audience? I have heard bitter complaints about the monotony of seeing the same performers too often"⁶.

⁴ *Executive Director's Progress Report*, November 14th, 1960. AETT Archives, MS 5908, Box 48, pp. 1-8.

⁵ *ibid.* p. 1.

⁶ *ibid.* p. 1.

In the same report, the Executive used this critique of repertory theatre to reject a proposal made by Wal Cherry's Theatre 60 group and 'a Mr Spivakosky'⁷. It was also used to justify changing the Trust Players from a permanent company to a seasonal one, in which the actors would be employed on a play by play, casual contract basis. While these actions were characterised as motivated by economic concerns and a desire to avoid "expensive obligations to provide theatrical continuity", they were clearly underpinned by new ideas on how actors should best function within AETT drama operations. The Executive Director argued that the "continuity" principle supported a plethora of negative theatrical practices, "the best actors become restless and stale when they work together for too long" and no one producer could keep them at the peak of achievement. Lacking flux, employee turnover and stimulus the entire system suffered and produced 'club' like companies in which "thinking inbreeds"⁸.

However, these attacks on repertory as a "negative" foundation for Trust drama initiatives had little empirical evidence to support them and it was difficult to ascertain upon what the AETT Executive staff based these claims. The reviews for the Trust Player's eight productions in 1959 and 1960 were, for the most part, very positive. The production of O'Neil's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, was described as,

The most deeply moving and most beautifully argued Australian production of a powerful prose drama within memory... {which} proved quite clinchingly that this Trust company under producer Robin Lovejoy is entitled to all

⁷ Spivakosky, a part owner of the premises in which the Village Cinema in Toorak was located, had made the suggestion to convert the cinema and the adjacent shops into a theatre to be leased to the Theatre 60 group with Wal Cherry as the director of productions. Spivakosky had offered to pay for the basic conversion (excluding fittings such as lighting and stage equipment) and to rent the premises at 10% of the gross, with a weekly guarantee of £100.00. Hutchinson's argument against this project was that despite the relative success of the Theatre 60 group in the area, it could not be proved that such a venture would be viable as an ongoing professional concern. Hutchinson's statement that at best it would only be a "creditably managed repertory-cum-Arts Theatre group in a upper class suburb", demonstrated that he did not accept that 'little' theatres that managed to survive through voluntary support could ever produce the kind of theatre that would receive wide spread popular support. Hutchison ignored the fact that the most successful Trust production, the *Doll*, had originally emerged from exactly this kind of environment. *ibid.* p. 4.

⁸ *ibid.* p. 7.

the gratitude and advocacy that Australian playgoers can give to it.⁹

Even the negative review of the 1960 production of *The Rape of the Belt*, by Ben Levy¹⁰ focussed upon the faults in the writing rather than the cast and despite this critical disapprobation it became a huge box office success¹¹. None of the reviews (nor indeed any article pertaining to the Trust's drama activities during this two year period) contained any reference, even at their most critical, to the inherent defects of repertory companies that were to the AETT Executive suddenly so obvious. It seemed that these views were primarily fuelled by the Trust's financial concerns over its drama ventures.

While it was clear that the Trust drama activities were losing money and were receiving uneven public support, it was not clear, even in the Executive's frequent analysis of the situation, why this was the case¹². While the critically acclaimed O'Neil play was poorly attended it first was thought that this was due to the "difficulty" of the content, but this was contradicted by the spectacular success, six months later, by a similarly 'difficult' play, T.S. Eliot's *Murder in The Cathedral*. Likewise two separate Bernard Shaw productions by the Trust Players, *Man and Superman*¹³ proved to be popular amongst audiences while *Candide* did not, despite the fact were both well reviewed. The UTRC production of *Moby Dick* succeeded in Melbourne and failed in

⁹ 'O Neil Drama at Elizabethan'. Review. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 4th June. 1959. p. 6. This was the 3rd Production by the Trust Players.

¹⁰ 'Greek Myth as Farce'. Review. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 8th February. 1960. p. 6. This was the 5th Production by the Trust Players.

¹¹ *Executive Director's Progress Report*. May 9th. 1960. *op. cit.* p. 1.

¹² In a discussion regarding the Trust Players' future plans the Executive Director laid out the chequered history of the company over the two and half years since its inception. Over the period, no play had made back its production costs and the overall losses amounted to £67, 614. It was not noted, however, that the Company had decreased its losses over the last eighteen months (from £35, 000 per annum to approximately £22, 000 per annum). Nor was a comparison made about the fact that the opera company while also incurring reduced losses, had similarly failed to return the costs of a single production. *ibid.* pp. 4-5

¹³ The review stated that this production, "in presentation and spirit... was one of the half dozen best Shaw productions ever staged here". 'Sparkling Show at Newtown'. Review. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. April 9th. 1959. p. 5.

Sydney¹⁴, while the moderately reviewed *Julius Caesar*¹⁵ and the badly reviewed *Rape of the Belt* both became box office hits. These inconsistent results were blamed on a plethora of reasons; the position of the theatres was wrong, rising and excessive productions costs, the growth of television and the consequent reluctance of the public to go out at night. Added to this were problems with the inflexibility of theatre schedules (which did not allow the Trust to extend and capitalise upon successful seasons) and questions regarding the choice of plays¹⁶. Importantly however, by 1961 it was the ideas regarding the negative effects of repertory and why it should be phased out that came to dominate all discussions of Trust drama policy.

The reports from the AETT Executive during the early 1960s made it clear that it was unwilling and unable to wait the years (as Hunt had argued) that the drama initiatives, launched in 1959, would take to come to fruition and this once popular notion was absent from all discussion. This eventually led to the Trust Players Company being disbanded early in 1962. These reports also made it clear that the ‘continuity principle’, deemed worthless for Trust drama activities, was regarded as fundamental to the future of the opera.

Why Opera is ‘Different’ to Drama.

Amongst the “broad principles” recommended by the 1962-3 opera sub-committee to be adopted as the basis for planning opera seasons from 1964 onwards, was that,

Seasons of opera should be presented every year to ensure;
regular and increasing audiences, maintenance and

¹⁴ Hutchinson’s explanation of this phenomenon was perplexing. He argued that the production should have been in a small theatre as it had in Melbourne because, “this type of play has an appeal limited to a section of the theatre going public whose interest is in virtuosity in production and performance”. This appeared to contradict his statements in support of the “glamour”, “pomp” and “spectacle” that made the commercial theatre so popular and thus something to be emulated by the Trust. *Executive Director’s Progress Report. May 9th. 1960. op. cit. p. 2.*

¹⁵ Most of the blame for the unevenness of the production, described as “big and inventive” but going “astray at times”, was focussed on the direction by Hugh Hunt. “Julius Caesar” At Elizabethan’. *Review. The Sydney Morning Herald. July 2nd. 1959. p. 4.*

¹⁶ *Executive Director’s Progress Report. November 14th. 1960. op. cit. pp. 4-5.*

improvement of standards and continuity of employment¹⁷.

In addition, earlier reports had made it clear that the maintenance of the opera's repertory structure was inviolate, despite misgivings about the essentially conservative repertoires demanded by opera audiences. With increasing frequency, the Trust began to abandon attempts to introduce even the most moderate innovations in the content of opera seasons. In June 1962 Hutchison noted that,

Once more, the opera season is proving that our opera audience is essentially conservative. "*Falstaff*" and "*Adriadne*", which are connoisseur's pieces, have been poorly attended... {and thus} in my view we should never, in future, put more than one new opera into the repertoire¹⁸.

In view of this, it was decided, in opposition to the artistic director Stefan Haag, that the plan to embark on a repertoire of twentieth century opera in 1963, should be deferred indefinitely.

This almost protective and certainly preservative attitude to opera arose out of a number of factors. Opera, unlike drama, did manage to maintain a consistent audience base if it adhered to a rigidly prescribed and conservative repertoire. It was also much more expensive than drama. As they had, in the 1950s, the Trust opera activities received a substantially larger section of the AETT annual budget (over a third in 1962) and almost twice that of drama¹⁹.

¹⁷ *Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. Proposed Opera Plans*. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 48. The document itself was undated although it makes reference to the Sub-Committee having met on August 14th, 1962 and January 23rd, 1963 and that the recommendations were for the following year.

¹⁸ 'Opera Future Policy'. *Executive Director's Progress Report. June 11th, 1962*. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 48. pp 5-6. This policy has been maintained by the Australian Opera until the present. While the opera does present more than one 'new' production each season, these are usually newly designed and directed productions of established classical repertoire. Alternatively 'new' operas such as *Mer de Glas* and *The Eighth Wonder* by contemporary Australian composers Richard Meale and Allan John, are recognised as being financial unviable and are produced, at the most, once every two years. In addition, they rarely, with the exception of *Voss*, receive more than a single production.

¹⁹ The Trust's 1962 budget totalled £144,000 with £51,000 allocated for opera and £30,500 for drama activities. 'Proposed 1962 Budget'. *Executive Director's Progress Report. September 11th, 1961. op. cit.* p. 8.

While drama carried the additional burden and 'risk' of presenting both original and contemporary material, the consequences of taking risks at the box office with opera could be financially catastrophic. Most significant, was the recognition and acceptance by the AETT of the traditional view amongst opera practitioners, that training should be garnered through one on one teaching, professional experience and/or progressive movement through the company ranks and not from institutional training, like that offered to actors at NIDA²⁰. Trust members had made a variety of proposals for establishing opera schools over the years, but all were eventually rejected. The initial proposal for the national drama school made to the University of Melbourne had included courses to be offered to aspiring opera singers²¹ and the 1963 sub-committee suggested that the Trust assist in establishment of opera schools in States where it was deemed necessary²². None of these proposals, however, came to fruition. This was probably because opera (like ballet) lacked the kind of theoretical challenge that contemporary actor methodologies had presented to 20th century theatre practice. It followed that opera was more able than drama to maintain traditional practices such as the apprenticeship system of training and the continuity of employment.

The growing discrepancy in Trust policy between the obligation to provide permanent employment for opera artists and not for actors, was justified by the argument that it, instead, offered actors full time training. The AETT Executive increasingly viewed institutional ensemble actor training as alleviating the Trust of the burden of providing permanent employment in drama.

A New Drama Policy

In the outline of the AETT's drama policy in June 1962, the Executive stated

²⁰ For example, most members of the Australian Opera Company are trained in this way and the company runs a 'Young Artist Scheme' within its own ranks. Likewise most members of the Australian Ballet are graduates of the Australian Ballet School, which is attached to the company.

²¹ *Plans for a Theatre School 1957*. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 21. pp. 1-2.

²² *Opera Sub-Committee Report January 23rd, 1963*. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 48.

that future drama activity must focus upon three areas. One, early training (NIDA), two, Repertory Companies and The Young Elizabethan Players (post-graduate training) and three, the touring of “prestige” drama²³. This final point reflected the Executive Director’s particular enthusiasm for a return to large-scale co-productions with commercial managements in what Hutchison called, “real theatres” – like the Princess or His Majesty’s, which contained “all the panoply of theatrical glamour”. In comparison, Hutchison felt that repertory and permanent ensembles were “a little parochial and parish-pump”²⁴.

These predilections provided the basis for the final reorientation of the Trust’s future drama policies that were finalised in September 1962²⁵. In these plans, the AETT Executive laid out the “full range of the Trust’s activities and aspirations” under four headings: One, the formation or importation of large-scale prestige companies of opera, ballet and drama for touring. Two, small scale theatrical undertakings, such as those activities at the UTRC, in which the Trust’s liability was limited and that could be mounted in conjunction with educational organisations such as the Victorian Council of Adult Education. Three, limited assistance in cash or kind to local enterprises such as the Independent Theatre or the Festival of Perth and four, co-operation with commercial managements on certain individual projects.

Hutchison acknowledged that the repertory companies he referred to in point two, in which actors were to gain “post-graduate training”, consisted at this point (the Trust Players had been abolished by then and the UTRC downsized dramatically) mainly of those ‘little’ (often amateur) theatres’. Most of these ‘little’ theatres still received minimal or no support from the AETT and it was clear in the September report that they were regarded as marginal to prestige theatre. It was stressed that the problem facing NIDA graduates was the paucity of opportunities available in “vitaly important prestige drama”

²³ ‘Trust Policy - Plans for 1962’. *Executive Director’s Progress Report, June 11th, 1962*. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 48. pp. 1-7.

²⁴ *ibid.* p. 3.

²⁵ ‘Trust Policy - Plans for 1962’. *Executive Director’s Progress Report, September 11th, 1961*. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 48. pp. 1-14.

produced in a commercial setting. While it was accepted that the repertory/‘little’ theatre companies were the site most graduates could get experience, they were warned that, “the infectious nature of bad habits in technique, and atmosphere of inbreeding and a growing staleness must always be carefully watched for”²⁶. It was difficult to ascertain how they envisioned ensemble repertory theatre, described as an “area of dramatic entertainment with... many limitations”, was to provide graduates with any useful preparation for contract engagements in the Trust’s “prestige” drama productions. Nor did these policies explain why the National Institute of Dramatic Art with its ensemble style training and repertory like structure was not similarly detrimental to the development of the actor. It was difficult to comprehend from the contradictions in the AETT’s new drama policies and how this incompatible triad of activities, NIDA, the ‘little theatres’ and prestige drama were to function in practice. What was clear was that the Executive no longer regarded the provision of career continuity for actors as the responsibility of the Trust. Hutchison acknowledged that new drama policies would probably result in most acting graduates having careers as itinerant employees, but justified this with the statement, “true, actors in Australia must be jacks of all trades. But is this such a bad thing?”²⁷

The Executive also used the provision of full-time actor training to relieve the Trust of other obligations that it had previously undertaken, relating to the development of Australian drama. The dismantling of the professional repertory system in favour of large scale prestige Australian and imported productions in 1961 had left the organisation without a vehicle that, not only provided full-time work to actors, but also one with which to produce new Australian works. It also now lacked a professional company that could offer experience to young producers and designers, as had been the case with Trust Players. These activities, that had been critical in maintaining the Trust’s popular support base, were relegated to the arena of development and training, and treated as adjunct activities at NIDA. These activities had also been essential for providing justification that the AETT should be the

²⁶ *ibid.* p. 3.

²⁷ *ibid.* p. 4.

principal recipient of government subsidy for the performing arts. Their collective absence in professional practice opened the AETT to extensive criticism.

Australian Plays

When the Trust detailed its policies for 1962, the Executive Director outlined the position new Australian works would occupy within this scheme,

My view is that both our dramatic resources are far too slender at this moment in history, both in ideas and writing talent, for us to expect Australian plays to take anything but a comparatively minor part in our total output... It seems agreed that no theatre can, at the moment, operate on a strict diet of Australian plays... To make the production of Australian works our prime end and thus make the production of other fine plays a secondary consideration would, in my opinion, be a mistake.²⁸

This statement was tempered by the assertion that this position did not “absolve” the AETT from the obligation of intensifying efforts to promote such activity, nor from attempting to increase Australian content in “all theatre operations in this country”²⁹. However, it was apparent that “future efforts” were to involve minimal administrative and financial outlays.

The complete responsibility for the development, promotion and production of new Australian works was to be undertaken by two connected schemes. First, there was to be a reading committee consisting of, amongst others, John Sumner, Alan Seymour, Neil Hutchison and Tom Brown, which would select favourable texts for development. Second, a ‘Playwrights Studio’ at NIDA would develop these texts by presenting “fragments” of them performed by student actors, which would then be subject to “practical testing”. Other than the Reading Committee and the Studio, the AETT provided no other formal methods of production development. There was the suggestion that perhaps

²⁸ ‘Trust Policy - Plans for 1962’. *Executive Director’s Progress Report. September 11th, 1961. op. cit.* pp. 4-5.

²⁹ *ibid.* p. 5.

“here, the competent amateur society {had} a part to play”. If one of the ‘little theatres’ somehow managed to produce (without subsidy) a success out of one of these new Australian works, the AETT was prepared to try the production out at the “Union rep and thence perhaps to full commercial production”³⁰. This relatively ad hoc system of development, not surprisingly, failed to result in a single new Australian play being fully produced by this Trust under this scheme for the next three years³¹. The exception to this case were the various productions of the plays of Patrick White including *The Ham Funeral* and the Trust’s 1964 production of *The Season at Sarsaparilla*. The Reading Committee³² and the Playwrights Studio, however, had little to do with the development of these plays³³, and their production owed more to the author being an internationally celebrated novelist, than to the processes implemented by the Trust for the development of new Australian plays³⁴.

NIDA was to additionally take responsibility for the development of “potential producers” and was to establish, in conjunction with the Trust, a selection Board to interview likely candidates. The two successful candidates were to be then “loaned out” to the truncated repertory schemes such as UTRC as well as the Trust Players, who at the time of this proposal were about to be disbanded. Despite stressing that these producers (unlike actors) “must learn by experience”, there was again no formal procedure provided for these

³⁰ *ibid.* p. 5.

³¹ Alan Seymour’s *One Day of the Year*, produced by the Trust in 1962, had at this point been already slated for production.

³² Hutchison hated *The Ham Funeral*. Upon reading the play he wrote a report that stated it was a “piece of work which fails to reconcile poetry with social realism. I think it would be very tedious in production. There is practically no character development and the dialogue is insufferably mannered. As for the abortion in the dustbin... Really, words fail me”. David Marr. *Patrick White – A Life*. Random House. Australia. 1991. p. 390.

³³ White did independently use the resources of NIDA to refine his plays. White had met the young director John Tasker after seeing his production of *Oedipus Rex* at the Cell Block Theatre in Sydney. Tasker then used his students at NIDA to present White with a stage reading of *The Ham Funeral* and after this White did further work on the play. *ibid.* p. 392.

³⁴ There is a useful analysis of White’s rise to prominence as a dramatist in Virginia Kirby-Smith’s thesis. *The Development of Australian Theatre and Drama :1788-1964*, which included a discussion of the controversy surrounding the initial rejection of *The Ham Funeral* by the Adelaide Festival’s

candidates to move up to prestige Trust productions. The shortfall of experienced producers in this area was to be assuaged through the employment of guest producers from overseas³⁵.

Finally, the Trust utilised the resources of NIDA to relieve it of the burden of repertory as well. The decision in late 1961 to disband the Trust Players was regarded with great hostility by the press and the public and the AETT Executive and Board recognised the need on the organisation part, to offset this loss and justify its actions. The Trust Players became characterised as an 'experiment' (rather than as it had been in its conception - a permanent professional company) which while artistically successful did not justify the seeking of additional government support for its continuation. AETT Chairman Coombs later dismissed the "widely criticised decision" to wind up the company as the unsubstantiated provocations of

Newspaper critics, who seemed to regard the need to honour commitments to the Government as a rather feeble excuse to cover what they saw as the malicious destruction of a successful venture.³⁶

With most of the drama budget relegated to large-scale production, the AETT needed to resolve its lack of repertory activities in a manner that involved minimal financial outlay. Consequently, it was decided that it would support the establishment of a small repertory arts theatre called the 'Old Tote', for a trial of twenty weeks to be run by NIDA. This commitment did not represent a weakening of AETT's move away from this form of theatre. In the discussion detailing the launch of the Old Tote, Hutchison reminded the Executive staff of the failures of a recent pro/am season by the Sydney Union Theatre, which it had given some support. This venture, with its "exorbitant" running costs that ended up being cut by 40%, showed, "clearly that repertory drama of a

Board of Directors on which many of the Trust Executive and Board, including Hutchison, sat. Department of English. Duke University. 1969. Chapter IV. pp 125-164.

³⁵ 'Trust Policy - Plans for 1962'. *Executive Director's Progress Report, September 11, 1961. op. cit.* p. 7.

³⁶ H. C. Coombs. *Trial Balance*. Macmillan. Melbourne. 1981. p. 240. Coombs appeared to have forgotten his successful appeal to Menzies in 1959 for an additional £50,000 to cover the shortfall created by opera losses. See Chapter 6.

continuing nature, in such a location, is not the answer to the problem so far as Sydney is concerned"³⁷. Alternatively, the appeal of establishing a small art theatre at NIDA was its cost effectiveness. The University was to pay for the conversion, lighting and cleaning costs of the space and the Institute was to be responsible for providing back stage and front of house personnel, and walk on parts from the student body, free of charge. Additionally, the University would provide the converted theatre rent-free. As a result of these measures the theatre had to only function at 45% capacity (less than 100 patrons a night) to run at a profit and thus the Trust's financial obligations were negligible³⁸.

The Trust and Commercial Management

Hutchinson's decision to favour large scale production over repertory theatre in the early 1960s, saw the organisation pursue two main areas of theatrical activity, prestige drama productions involving the Trust alone and co-productions (which included importations) with commercial managements. The solo Trust productions were underpinned by a commitment to produce 'serious' drama, such as *Saint Joan* and *A Man for all Seasons*, not unlike the educative plays that had been produced by the Trust Players, except now, the artists were employed on a play by play basis. Conversely, the Trust's co-productions with commercial managements such as J. C Williamson and Garnet Carroll, were moneymaking exercises, and marked a very clear return to engaging in entrepreneurial activities. This was something that had raised contention in the past and, while clearly sound on a purely financial basis, would raise even greater concern the second time around.

The Trust was evidently aware of the potential danger to its image as educator through these commercial collaborations. In the section dealing with 'Co-operation with Commercial Managements' outlined in the Trust's new policy plans for 1962, the Executive Director was extremely careful in detailing the justifications involved in supporting such activities to the AETT Board. In

³⁷ 'The Future of Drama in Sydney'. *Executive Director's Progress Report. March 23rd, 1962*. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 48. p. 5.

regard to the Garnet Carroll proposal that the Trust take a 25% share in an anticipated national production of *The Sound of Music*, Hutchison admitted that “it {was} not a work of great artistic merit”, but noted that it was one that would attract large audiences. He added that,

In a normal way, there would be little excuse for our participation in a venture of this sort, but we are here being given an opportunity to recoup some of the losses which we suffered in “The Most Happy Fella”. True, we could lose again, but the indications are all the other way, and I feel the directors may care to regard this proposal as a special case.³⁹

Despite the Executive’s attempts to assure the Board that the Trust’s association with a product of “dubious artistic merit” was to be an exception, it became clear that this pattern was to be repeated and the same justifications provided, with increasing frequency over the next few years. In addition, as A. L. McLeod observed in his analysis of Australian theatre in 1963, these associations with commercial theatre companies were “not wholly benign⁴⁰”. The self-interested nature of commercial management’s relationship with the Trust became apparent as early as 1961 in their involvement in the Garnet Carroll production of *Come Blow Your Horn*. Hutchison had noted again, that this play was, “not the sort of play the Trust would normally think of producing itself”, but explained that the AETT had found itself in a contractual situation with the commercial management with which it had little choice but to comply. The Trust had given up the Elizabethan Theatre and gone into a co-lease with Garnet Carroll on the Palace Theatre instead. Part of the agreement was that the AETT would use the theatre for a minimum of thirty weeks a year. However, after disbanding the Trust Players, the organisation had, by September of 1961, managed only to utilise the space for a period of fourteen weeks. The terms of the lease dictated that the AETT’s breach could result in them having to take over the entire responsibility for the theatre at great cost. With their anticipated

³⁸ *ibid.* p. 6.

³⁹ ‘Trust Policy - Plans for 1962’. *Executive Director’s Progress Report. September 11th, 1961. op. cit.* p. 9.

prestige solo productions still six months away, this left the AETT with nothing to fill the space and thus no way to recoup their investment. Carroll suggested instead that the Trust join him in presenting *Come Blow Your Horn* with a cast that included “leading figures in commercial television”. Carroll was quoted as “not minding if the Trust invested in this undertaking” but hinted that should the Trust decide *not* to, he may have to force the Trust to take over the empty and costly Palace theatre on its own⁴¹. As an added pressure, Garnet Carroll also inferred that unless the Trust invested in this commercial production, the singer June Bronhill who they had under contract to appear in *The Sound of Music*, would not be released for a number of imminent AETT national opera performances. Despite Hutchinson’s assertion that “we cannot make this a condition of our participation as Mr Carroll is clearly under the impression he is conferring a favour upon the Trust when he invites us to share with him in this attraction”, the Trust did comply. They invested, not only in *Come Blow Your Horn*, but also in the Garnet Carroll tour of *Lock Up Your Daughters* agreeing to a 50/50 split of costs and profits. This latter production, also not regarded “as an important work in any respect”, was justified by the Executive as allowing, “the Trust flag {to} be shown in South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania”⁴².

Showing the Trust Flag

Within eight months of the Trust’s 1962 policy launch, it became apparent that its two principal drama activities were developing an uneasy and highly problematic relationship. While almost all of the AETT’s collaborative commercial ventures had been extraordinarily successful⁴³ the two solo prestige drama productions mounted in the first half of 1962 had been, in the

⁴⁰ A. L McLeod. *Theatre. The Pattern of Australian Culture*. (Editor. A. L McLeod). Oxford University Press. Melbourne. 1963. pp. 313-412.

⁴¹ ‘Trust Policy - Plans for 1962’. *Executive Director’s Progress Report September 11th, 1961*. *op. cit.* p. 10-11.

⁴² *ibid.* p. 14.

⁴³ *The Sound of Music* was hugely successful. The Trust’s share of the profit was between £600 and £1000 per week. *Come Blow Your Horn* returned £600 a week and the Tour of the American Dance Company a collaborative venture between the Trust and Garnet Carroll yielded £5000 in profit to be divided on a 50/50 basis. *Executive Director’s Progress Report. March 23rd, 1962*. *op. cit.* p. 4.

words of the Executive Director, “bitter disappointments”. *Saint Joan* and *A Man for all Seasons* had received a high percentage of good reviews nationally⁴⁴, but failed to attract audiences. The scale of financial loss was so extreme that the Trust Executive felt that again, it must ‘take stock’ of its drama policy.

The failure of the Trust prestige drama productions represented a severe blow to the organisation. The Executive was forced to admit that the touring of high quality drama had proved to be more costly than had been anticipated. They also began to question whether ““prestige” drama presented in commercial theatres {was} not too expensive, to the extent of, being out of proportion to the audience it attracts”⁴⁵. At same time however, the Executive were not prepared to let the failure of these large scale drama enterprises force it into financing small scale repertory ventures. As the Executive Director put it, “one solution would be to lower our sights and to try to develop our drama effort at a low cost repertory level, and, abandoning altogether thoughts of touring, concentrate on the consolidation of small professional groups”⁴⁶. However, this solution was not recommended. In a review of the precarious status of AETT drama activities, the Executive again outlined to the AETT Board, their criticism of both repertory drama and the ‘little’ theatre movement. They noted that while they recommended limited support for these activities (principally a season at the Old Tote) they were unwilling to invest in such activities to the exclusion of the “possibility of large scale touring”. Hutchison reiterated the Executive’s position that the experience and ‘training’ offered to actors in these prestige productions on a casual basis far outweighed the benefits of permanent employment within small scale repertory theatre without actually explaining why one precluded the other. By sticking to this policy, yet with such reduced finances, the Trust decided it could only afford to mount one prestige national drama production the following year.

⁴⁴ The productions however did receive ‘severe criticism’ in “The Bulletin”, “The Nation” and from the television program “The Critics”. ‘Drama Policy - The Future’. *Executive Director’s Progress Report. June 11th, 1962. op. cit. p. 1.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.* p. 1.

⁴⁶ *ibid.* p. 1.

These decisions left the Trust in a highly uncertain position and extremely vulnerable to criticism. By the end of 1962, all the Trust high profile drama activities were exclusively those in collaboration with commercial managements. These productions would most probably have achieved success without Trust investment and the commercial companies probably able to secure investment from someone other than the Trust. Moreover, they were involved with productions of almost no apparent 'cultural capital' and the need to provide AETT subsidy to them seemed highly questionable in the eyes of many. Ironically these collaborations had significantly contributed to stabilising of the Trust's overall finances and enabled it, in part, to launch the Australian Ballet Company in 1963⁴⁷. Furthermore, it showed glimmers of the AETT's original 1954 model for the self-supporting arts in which the profits of successful productions were to sustain those which were not. However, evidence of how changed attitudes were to the performing arts and how successfully inculcated ideas about 'educative' 'uneconomic' 'legitimate' theatre were by the 1960s, was that these successful commercial associations now undermined the AETT's standing. Because of the overt pecuniary benefits of these collaborations, the Trust's representation of itself as the appropriate and legitimate body to receive and distribute government funds to support the performing arts was in serious trouble.

Again, drama, as it had been in the mid to late 1950s, was the activity around which most of the Trust's difficulties circulated and to some extent became the key area around which the organisation's overall success or failure seemed to rest. A Drama Sub Committee clarified this situation in a 1963 report to the Executive,

The presentation and assistance of drama by the Trust are important, not only because of its significance in its own

⁴⁷ "During the twelve month period under review, the Trust's financial position has shown a further improvement, capital funds having increased from £144,013 to £154,213. The surplus of £10,200 for the year was transferred to accumulated funds after providing reserves of £10,000 for the Australian Ballet Foundation and £10,000 towards production costs of the 1962 Opera Season". *Report of the Directors to the Members at the Ordinary General Meeting to be held in Sydney on 11th June 1962*. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 48. p. G2-1/1.

right, but because of the importance of drama as a foundation for the full development of the kindred arts of opera and ballet.⁴⁸

The Sub Committee challenged the position of the Executive on repertory, arguing it was of “major importance” in the dramatic activities of the Trust. They felt that while repertory should not oust the AETT’s other dramatic activities, it was within this area that the training and education of actors and audiences should occur. They also argued that that repertory was where the development and promotion of local and experimental works of drama and the presentation of educational programs occurred, elements that they considered critical to the ongoing function of the Trust. They recommended that the Trust approach the Federal Government later that year for a renewal of its funding upon this basis, because these were the areas upon which the Trust achievements would be weighed.

Despite these recommendations by the drama Sub Committee they were not the strategies adopted by the AETT. The request to the Federal Government for further funding was instead based upon two principal propositions. First, that as the State Governments were providing funds for theatrical activities within their own States, it would be “appropriate for the Commonwealth Government to accept a greater proportion of responsibility for the financing of Trust activities than it had previously been prepared to do”⁴⁹. Second, that it would be a “natural development” of the Trust’s existing activities to present annual rather than occasional opera seasons, to maintain the continuing existence of the recently launched national ballet company and to present *periodic* national seasons of classical and contemporary plays. These strategies certainly appealed to, and were endorsed by, the Federal government and they increased AETT funding levels to four times that of the previous five-year grant. They did not however receive support from the public, many practitioners or the press and it was from them that the Trust was increasingly unable to protect itself.

⁴⁸ Aubrey H. L. Gibson. Chairman Drama Sub-Committee. Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust: *Report of Drama Sub-Committee, 1962*. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 48. 2nd January. 1963. p. 1.

⁴⁹ H. C Coombs, Chairman AETT. Letter to Hon E.E. Reece. Premier of Tasmania. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 80. March 25th. 1963. p. 1.

Attacks on The Trust

The criticism directed at the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust in the mid to late 1960s, emerged out of the plethora of appraisals of the organisation's history and achievements that coincided with the Trust's tenth anniversary in 1964. These appraisals, which despite the appointment of Stefan Haag, the former director of the national opera company as the new Executive Director, were overwhelmingly negative. These attacks on the AETT appeared in the national press, in arts journals, in academic texts and on commercial television and came from a wide range of commentators that included cultural analysts, theatre critics, playwrights, theatre directors, actors and the public.

The criticism of the AETT's ten years of activity in the performing arts fell into four broad (and often overlapping) categories. The first was the Trust's status as a private company, whose Board was dominated and controlled by businessmen, and the second, the Trust's entrepreneurial and commercial activities. The third category of criticism was focussed on the Trust's failure to promote or assist local autonomous performing arts companies from the point of the organisation's inception. The fourth and final category involved the ubiquity and dominance of the Trust and its failure to provide either a stable employment environment to artists or industry infrastructure to allow artists and/or local companies to be able to operate with a degree of autonomy.

The Board

All the Trust's detractors were united in their criticism that the AETT had been conceived and administered by a group of eminent businessmen, "few members of which had any association with the performing arts"⁵⁰. These businessmen were seen to be drawn from the body of "interchangeable 'establishment' names which {appeared} on so many Australian cultural

⁵⁰ McLeod. *op. cit.* p. 335.

committees and boards”⁵¹. The accusations that AETT Board members lacked cultural expertise and had overt associations with the pecuniary, led to charges that it had an inappropriate obsession with “conspicuous culture” and a mindset that compared and fashioned Australian theatre culture with that of England⁵². The AETT Board was accused of having an unwieldy and top-heavy structure which (ironically like that of Executive’s summation of Repertory) was “in danger of becoming an exclusive club, an ‘in-group’, with all the static qualities and magnificent isolation customary to such private worlds”⁵³. More seriously, there were accusations of inappropriate Board member pressure regarding the selection of material and individuals supported by the Trust. There were also accusations that the organisation as a private company, although a recipient of public money, was answerable to no one. Colin Badger the director of the Victorian Council of Adult Education argued that the Trust’s structure was a purely private concern, whose members were able appoint themselves and yet “pretended” to be a public body. This he felt, “was the main reason why the Trust {had} been such a mischievous and disastrous body within the Australian artistic environment”⁵⁴.

Francis Evers, the theatre critic of *The Australian*, endorsed Badger’s characterisation of the Board, further charging that,

Those best placed to criticise the activities of this august body of businessmen, bankers, stockbrokers, broadcasting administrators and socialites are silent for the most part.

⁵¹ Kevon Kemp. ‘The Australian Elizabethan Trust: Too many Amateurs’. Theatre & Drama Issue. *Meanjin Quarterly*. No, 98. Vol.XXIII. 1964. p. 288. This criticism is still directed at the arts industry. A recent investigation by *The Sydney Morning Herald* found that a search of 32 arts boards showed they were “dominated by investment bankers, lawyers, and advertising and publicity figures, with practicing artists more in the back circle than the front stalls... This complex web {represents} the power base of the arts industry... {and is} formed by a smallish group of men and women. They are linked by friendships, shared boards, family relationships and political associations. This web forms the power base of the arts in Australia”. Valerie Lawson. ‘The Players behind the Players’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. March 14th. 2001.

⁵² Harry Kippax. Theatre Critic. ‘Discussion. Ten Years of the Trust’. *Quadrant*. 1964. p. 7.

⁵³ Kemp. *op. cit.* p. 288

⁵⁴ Colin Badger. ‘Verdict on the Trust’. *The Australian*. 11th June. 1966. p. 6.

Directly or indirectly, they are dependent on the trust for employment, subsidies or promises of the same.⁵⁵

Reid Douglas, a tutor in Adult Education Drama at the University of Sydney, pointed out that the Trust controlled “every key appointment and something in excess of 80 per cent of all professional employment in Australian non-commercial radio, drama, opera and ballet⁵⁶”. He supported Doris Fitton’s accusations of AETT monopolisation which had been “proved” when they had offered partial subsidy to the Independent Theatre in Sydney but only in exchange for complete control of that company’s activities⁵⁷.

Entrepreneurial & Commercial Activity

Explicitly connected to the criticism of the AETT Board’s lack of ‘answerability’, were questions raised about the inappropriateness of the Trust’s role as entrepreneur and its collaborations with commercial managements. Evers described the artistic merit of these ventures as “frankly minimal”, and reflected the now widespread belief that an organisation in receipt of government subsidies for the arts should only support productions that had overt “cultural value”. Questions were also raised, ten years after the fact, as to why the AETT had abandoned its original charter to “support recognised management in presenting theatre to the public of Australia”⁵⁸ and instead formed their own companies. The AETT’s (and specifically Hugh Hunt’s) argument that there had been no existing managements capable of the task of producing quality material was now regarded as untenable. Colin Badger put forward the examples of the Victorian National Theatre and the Borovansky Ballet Company as suitable organisations existing at the time who were, “pushed out {by the AETT}, their claims ignored and the whole effort

⁵⁵ Francis Evers. ‘Establish an Arts Council and Re-form the Trust’. ‘Verdict on the Trust’. *The Australian*. 11th June. 1966. p. 6.

⁵⁶ Reid Douglas, tutor in drama, Department of Adult Education, University of Sydney. Letter to the Editor. *The Australian*. 23rd June, 1966. p. 2.

⁵⁷ Doris Fitton, Director, Independent Theatre. ‘Is the AETT assisting Local Theatre to Grow?’ Letter to the Editor. *The Australian*. 17th June. 1966 p. 8.

⁵⁸ Harald Bowden, Executive Director of J. C Williamson Theatres. ‘Discussion. Ten Years of the Trust’. *op. cit.* p. 12.

they had put into the arts neglected and very largely wasted”⁵⁹. Conversely, the Trust’s subsequent activities were perceived to be without policy or direction and its association with “commercial productions which have no merit other than their ability to make money”, including those which (as “ascertained from the balance sheets⁶⁰) failed even to do that, as having “courted disaster”⁶¹.

The Trust’s Failure to Support Australian Arts

The consensus amongst the AETT’s critics was that its decade of theatrical activity had been largely inconsequential and that “its contribution to Australian theatre... overstated”⁶². The theatre critic Harry Kippax, a former supporter of the organisation, reflected on the eve of the tenth anniversary, that the Trust had failed to ‘build a theatre culture’. This could only have come about, Kippax stated, through the work of “particular theatres, particular groups, particular companies, working in particular towns”, rather than through the misguided creation of national companies⁶³. In a similar vein he believed that the Trust’s one great “triumph”, Ray Lawler’s *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, owed its success to the ‘particularity’ of its first production at the unsubsidised Melbourne Union Theatre before being picked up by the Trust. It was these ‘particular’ organisations, the ‘little’ theatres (such as the Independent), that the critics felt had been most betrayed by the AETT. A. L. McLeod asserted in 1963, that “the ‘little’ theatres {were} still bearing the burden of responsibility for producing a steady diet of serious drama” and yet still received little or no support from the AETT⁶⁴. Tom Brown, the new director of NIDA, was at pains to point out that the Old Tote Theatre Company suffered from the misconception that it was sponsored by the Trust, which it was not, and that in 1964 the Trust was not responsible

⁵⁹ Badger. ‘Verdict on the Trust’. *op. cit.* p. 6.

⁶⁰ Roger Covell, Theatre Critic. ‘Discussion. Ten Years Of The Trust’. *op. cit.* p. 13.

⁶¹ McLeod. *op. cit.* p. 336.

⁶² *ibid.* p. 345.

⁶³ Harry Kippax, Theatre Critic. ‘Discussion. Ten Years of the Trust’. *op. cit.* p. 8.

⁶⁴ McLeod. *op. cit.* p. 336.

for any permanent theatre company in Australia⁶⁵. Francis Evers took the criticism of the Trust in this area further and stated, “in any case most companies subsidised in part by the Trust existed before the Trust came into being and would have survived probably without its often only token assistance”⁶⁶.

The Lack of Infrastructure and Employment Opportunities

The collective perception that the Trust had failed to support independent Australian performing arts companies and correspondingly failed to support Australian artists reflected the widest gulf between the AETT and its critics in the mid 1960s. While the AETT attempted to defend its track record, citing frequently that it was lack of funds that made it unable to support smaller companies or offer more permanent employment opportunities, serious objections were being raised as to the general wastage and ‘unbusinesslike’ manner with which available funds were dispensed. Kevon Kemp argued that none of the several ‘leading industrialists and commercial magnates’ on the Trust’s distinguished board, “would for a moment consider running their enterprises in anyway remotely resembling the Trust’s operations”⁶⁷. Kemp noted that, rather than investing in revenue producing assets, such as constructing economical small-scale modern theatre venues, it had insisted on taking out expensive leases of unsuitable sites that it could not fill. This meant that each time the AETT presented a local or touring production in one of these “large and unwieldy premises”, a substantial amount of the AETT’s capital went to the owners of commercial theatre chains⁶⁸.

In a similar manner, the AETT’s assertions as to the economic unfeasibility of permanent drama companies were undermined. The actor Gordon Chater questioned why the Trust did not support activities such as a small scale

⁶⁵ Tom Brown. ‘Discussion. Ten Years of the Trust’. *op. cit.* p. 6.

⁶⁶ Francis Evers ‘Establish an Arts Council and Re-form the Trust’. ‘Verdict on the Trust’. *The Australian. op. cit.* p. 7.

⁶⁷ Kemp. *op. cit.* p. 291.

⁶⁸ Alexander Archdale. ‘There’s Hope for the Theatre’. *Meanjin Quarterly*. No. 99. Volume.xxiii, number 4. 1964. p. 313.

national tour of the inaugural Old Tote season - an unsubsidised season (which had offered semi-permanent employment to 12 actors in 1963) - that had proved to be both low cost and economically viable⁶⁹. He argued that the AETT's drama budget was wasted on touring large scale one off productions instead of gathering small groups of actors and providing them with a minimal "living wage" which would be a better (and more economical) investment and would provide "continuity of work". Another actor, Alistair Duncan, also commented in the discussion 'Ten Years of The Trust', that the main complaint amongst actors lay in the in the lack of continuity. He added that this was an essential element in a sound business practice - "if you are offering a service to the public you have to be able to guarantee its reliability and its continuance. You cannot afford to be erratic"⁷⁰.

It was clear that support for the permanent work opportunities for actors went beyond those involved in the acting profession itself. One of the 1964 issues of *Meanjin Quarterly* was completely devoted to the subject of Australian theatre and drama. In it, Alexander Archdale summarised the situation that, "while some talented actors can earn a living by radio and television, there are virtually no truly professional stage actors - for the simple reason that there is no professional live theatre in which they can regularly work"⁷¹. The editor of the issue, H. P. Heseltine, endorsed this view stating, "Theatrical performers cannot perform without some degree of financial security. Actors need steady employment". In his opinion, the AETT had failed to provide a solution to this very basic practical problem in Australian Theatre⁷².

The AETT's response to such criticism was to resort to one of its earlier arguments regarding repertory theatre. Stefan Haag reiterated Hutchinson's

⁶⁹ Gordon Chater. Actor. 'Discussion. Ten Years of the Trust'. *op. cit.* p. 14.

⁷⁰ *ibid.* p. 10.

⁷¹ Archdale. *op. cit.* p. 312.

⁷² H. P. Heseltine. 'Editorial: A Critical Time for Theatre and Drama'. *Meanjin Quarterly*. Theatre and Drama Issue. No. 98. Volume xxiii, number 3. 1964. p. 334. A. L. McLeod, also supported this view "It {can} not be claimed that the {AETT's} activities have either elevated public taste in the theatre or encouraged significant new developments... few actors, producers, writers or dancers have found permanent or challenging opportunities". McLeod. *op. cit.* p. 337.

claim that actors were able to gain casual work from a number of sources, such as radio and television, in a way that opera singers and ballet dancers could not. It followed then that the AETT did not have the same obligation to provide actors with permanent employment opportunities as it did for them. Alastair Duncan and Tom Brown replied that this defence was simply unrealistic. They explained that it was impossible for an actor, relying on casual radio or television employment, to take a role in either a production at the Old Tote or in one of the occasional Trust plays, as they “could not afford” to lose the part time work they already had⁷³. Haag countered this with yet another familiar Trust defence, arguing that continuity for actors was provided by the training systems in place at NIDA, an institution that was substantially funded by the Trust.

The evocation of training as a defence for lack of employment opportunities was the most successful defence the AETT used that year. This was despite the wry retort from playwright Douglas Stewart that this argument was given to him when he was attempting to have one of his works performed by the Trust in 1964 - “most certainly (a senior member of the trust said) but first they would have to train audiences, and critics... In the meantime we wait”⁷⁴.

Douglas’s quip was actually quite revealing. While he observed that this imperative to train practitioners and audiences of the future, before being able to move forward, had become a kind of ideological blanket statement that could justify any action, problem or delay in the present, he was an isolated example. Almost without exception, all the Trust’s critics, even the most vehement, completely accepted the ideology of a moral, therapeutic educative theatre that deserved to be subsidised. Their attacks on the AETT were aimed at when the organisation strayed from this ideology, as they did with their overtly pecuniary associations, such as having businessmen as Board members or collaborating with commercial organisations. No one was interested if *The Sound of Music* made phenomenal profits that offset some of the costs of the Australian Ballet. Producing this kind of material with a

⁷³ Stefan Haag, Alastair Duncan, Tom Brown. ‘Discussion. Ten Years of the Trust’. *op. cit.* p. 11.

commercial management was totally antithetical to everything that constituted legitimate theatre. This was because it was the uneconomic qualities of certain of the performing arts that made them suitable for Government subsidy. These uneconomic forms of legitimate theatre could educate the population and there was no greater indication of this than if the majority of people were unable to immediately 'appreciate' these forms. Everyone could 'appreciate' *The Sound of Music*, whereas one had to be trained to like serious drama. All the AETT detractors concurred with this belief. The concept of implementing reform to train the audience and creating multiple institutions to train artists was overwhelmingly accepted as essential. There was no sense that the greater public were simply uninterested in legitimate theatre. Nor was there any sense that the form of serious morally uplifting educative theatre the methodology influenced institutional training promoted might be turning the public away.

The critics of the AETT all revealed an absolute complicity in the ideologies that had been inculcated by that same organisation. What they didn't like was the way the Trust did things. They wanted a different agency (a publicly accountable one) to distribute subsidy and that for this subsidy to simply expand to support all forms of the legitimate performing arts. It would develop employment opportunities for 'legitimate' artists, would pay for 'legitimate' training and would do this in perpetuity. None of the critics of the AETT, even the most articulate, seemed to ever envision these imagined vast and ever expanding sums as having limit, or that being disassociated from the market place might disassociate theatre from the audience. Nor was it felt that the creation of alternative forms of government funding that may stimulate the performing arts to become self-supporting were acceptable. The expectation was that the support of the legitimate arts by State and Federal Governments should be viewed in the same way as Health Care or Schools. However, this kind of comparison was only coherent and justified if all the members of a population could be seen to benefit. Thus greater efforts to provide 'evidence' for this, despite the fact that the legitimate performing arts

⁷⁴ Douglas Stewart. 'On Being a Verse Playwright'. *Meanjin Quarterly*. Theatre and Drama Issue. No. 98. *op. cit.* p. 277

were attended by a tiny, unrepresentative minority, began to occur from this point.

In many ways, what transpired in reaction to the criticism of the AETT was what the detractors had hoped for, despite the fact that many of the changes implemented were relatively superficial.

The AETT's response

At the point at which the attacks on the trust reached their most vitriolic, the Federal government announced in June of 1966, plans to establish a Performing Arts Council to encourage the growth of theatre in Australia. While this was received with great favour amongst arts practitioners and commentators, they were equally adamant that the Trust should play no role in its formation. The editorial response to the announcement in *The Australian* made it clear that “any move to use the Elizabethan Theatre Trust as the council’s basis should be opposed”⁷⁵. Francis Ever, the newspaper’s theatre critic, described the organisation as ‘incompetent’ and believed that any individual associated with the Trust should *not* be allowed to sit on the anticipated Council’s committee. A few days later in an article entitled *Wanted... An Inquiry into Government Aid in the Arts in Australia*, Noel McLachlan reported that Raymond Westwall, a “distinguished” British actor and producer had,

Declared that he had no respect whatsoever for the functioning of the Trust after having been associated with it {and regarded} such criticism {that had been directed at it} as too serious - and too common - to ignore.⁷⁶

The AETT’s response to this onslaught of criticism was curiously benign. Stefan Haag, the new Executive Director, stood by the defence he had adopted during the critical attacks that coincided with the tenth anniversary. This was reflected in the title given to his speech in the episode of the Crawford

⁷⁵ ‘Piecemeal Patronage’. Editorial. *The Australian*. 11th June. 1966. p. 6.

⁷⁶ Noel McLachlan. ‘Wanted... An Inquiry into Government Aid to the Arts in Australia’. *The Australian*. 16th June. 1966. p. 8.

Productions' 1966 'Fighting Series' about the future of the AETT - *We Stand On Our Record...Who would Take Over Anyway?*⁷⁷ Haag seemed disengaged from the fracas surrounding the organisation and simply proceeded to reiterate the AETT's contribution to the development of "quality" performing arts in Australia.

The principal reason for the AETT's lack of engagement with the bitter criticism of 1966, was that the organisation was already (but unbeknown to the public) well advanced in its negotiations with the Government regarding the creation of a Council for the Performing Arts. It was also busy negotiating a new role for itself in the performing arts and what its specific relationship to the new Council would be. AETT Chairman, Coombs, had mooted the idea of an Arts Council early in the 1960s, initially as a possible solution for the growing criticism of the Trust's dominance⁷⁸ and by 1965 a draft of the proposed Council was in circulation amongst the AETT Executive⁷⁹. The Proposal, with a detailed outline of the new role for the Trust, was then submitted to the Liberal Party Prime Minister Harold Holt in late May 1966⁸⁰. When the Federal Government announced its 'Plans for an Arts Council' a few weeks later the immediate response, as indicated above, was that the AETT must take no part. Because the negotiations between the AETT and the Federal Government had been so muted, few knew that these 'Plans' had ironically been substantially authored by the AETT itself. By the time the announcement was made the Government had already accepted the bulk of the AETT recommendations for both the Council and for the AETT's role in relation to it. In a Confidential Memo issued to AETT Board members that same week, Coombs stated that "while no finality was reached on this matter, it was clear the Prime Minister was interested... and an early decision is anticipated⁸¹.

⁷⁷ Excerpts from the program were quoted in *The Australian* on June 11th 1966. p 7.

⁷⁸ H. C. Coombs. *Trial Balance. op. cit.* p. 241

⁷⁹ *A Council for the Performing Arts – Draft.* 13.12.65. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 76.

⁸⁰ *Memorandum for the Prime Minister. Organisation and Support for the Performing Arts.* AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 76.

⁸¹ H. C. Coombs. *Memorandum for Board Members. Report on Discussions with Prime Minister.* 20th June 1966. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 76. p. 3.

The AETT proposals for the Council and for its new role were relatively straightforward. The Council would be an autonomous agency that would make recommendations for the support of the performing arts and administer the funds provided by the Government. Unlike the AETT, the Council would be a non-producing, essentially, grant giving agency. These grants would be given to theatrical enterprises (such as the Opera Foundation or the Union Repertory Theatre) that could demonstrate a degree of autonomy. However, these companies would be administered, for the most part, by the AETT whose role would be to act as a servicing organisation and entrepreneur. The principal concession to criticism about the Trust's dominance came in Prime Minister Holt's announcement that, the "Council {would} distribute aid for the performing arts primarily, but not exclusively, through the Trust"⁸². In addition, when the Australian Council for the Arts was launched in 1967, the significant increase in government subsidy helped disperse criticism about the AETT's involvement, as did the establishment of the 'Special Projects Fund' the same year⁸³. This Fund provided small amounts of money to the plethora of tiny drama companies that clustered in the orbits of the emerging State Theatre Companies, which became the principal focus of subsidy. Some of its recipients were among the most vocal critics of the Trust, such as the members of the Old Tote, Doris Fitton of the Independent Theatre and Hayes Gordon of the Ensemble theatre⁸⁴.

⁸² *Statement by the Prime Minister, The Rt Hon. Harold Holt, C.H., M.P. in the House of Representatives 'Cultural Activities' 1st November 1967.* AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 76. p. 2.

⁸³ This fund was specifically set up to provide subsidy to small theatre groups whose focus was community or youth based, New Australian works or productions of "special interest". Dr Jean Battersby, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Council for the Arts. Letter to Stephen Hall, Secretary and Co-ordinator, Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. 24th December. 1968. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 76.

⁸⁴ Doris Fitton, Gordon Chater and Alan Archdale had all written letters to the Editor complaining about the AETT's involvement in the administration of the Fund. Letters to the Editor. *Sydney Morning Herald*. 27th -, 29th December 1968. Within six months both Gordon & Fitton received grants from the Special Projects Fund. The Old Tote (which Chater was associated and who had been a trenchant critic during the Trust's 10th anniversary) was granted \$2,500 for a tour to Tasmania of *Hamlet* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. The Independent had \$1500 set aside for a proposed production of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and \$374 granted for the transfer of a production *Eden House* by Hal Porter from Melbourne to Sydney. The Ensemble received \$1000 to provide Youth concessions to their productions. *Special Projects Fund Report*. Stephen Hall, Secretary and Co-ordinator, Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. 2nd July, 1969. AETT Archives. MS 5908. Box 76.

Continuity of operation during the setting up of ACTFA and the changes in the role of the AETT was provided by two elements. First, Coombs was made the Chair of the new Council thus ensuring that both the Council and the new styled AETT would develop without antagonism. Second, continuity was provided because all the companies and training schools that the Trust was instrumental in constructing and/or orientating through the 1950s and 1960s became the major recipients of subsidy from the Council. These included the Australian Ballet School, the Australian Ballet Foundation, the Opera Foundation, the National Institute of Dramatic Art, the Old Tote, the Union Theatre Repertory Company, The National Theatre in Perth, The South Australian Theatre Company and the Adelaide and Perth festivals. At no time during the well documented⁸⁵ five year life-span of Australian Council for the Arts, nor during the period when it metamorphosed into the Australia Council in 1973, did any these organisations alter their structures, or receive any challenge as to the expectation that they would receive subsidy in perpetuity. In addition, the peculiar dysfunctional relationship between the provision of full time subsidised training for actors and not full employment in the State Theatre Companies continued.

What had changed was a notable fall in the demonstrable educative value in these rapidly growing companies. Increased funding and the completion of ostensible 'quality' cultural sites such as the Sydney Opera House saw these institutions modelling themselves as prestige "cultural flagship" establishments⁸⁶. Correspondingly, it was the plethora of smaller companies that bore the burden of those activities with marked 'educational' element. Youth theatre (encouraging audiences of tomorrow) Community theatre and Experimental theatre - often became (while partially subsidised) increasingly marginalised. This led to a distinct division between them and the 'Prestige Companies' as a harsh but, to the Council, necessary (as Tim Rowse quoted a phrase popular in Britain at the time) process of weeding, "fewer but roses. "Excellence justified a concentration of funding, {and} the promotion of some

⁸⁵ Rowse, Macdonell and Parsons all began their detailed research in 1967. See Chapter 2.

projects as showcases of what a nation could aspire to in culture”⁸⁷. This was not to last.

In the next chapter, it becomes clear that it was the absence of an overt educative element in these prestige companies, which brought about the greatest challenge to the subsidised performing arts in Australia’s cultural history. This challenge would take the form of the Industries Assistance Commission Inquiry into Government Subsidy of the Arts and result in the final consolidation of a reproducible, educative model that came to legitimise all subsidised performing arts in Australia.

⁸⁶ Tim Rowse stated that this left companies such as the Independent in Sydney and Playbox in Melbourne to “go to the wall”. *Arguing the Arts*. Penguin Books. Australia. 1987. p. 31.

⁸⁷ An example of how powerful the AETT’s role was in determining which of the existing companies would become ‘flagships’ or not was contained in an attachment in the draft Memorandum outlining the proposal for ACFTA destined for the Prime Minister. The attachment lists the enterprises that should be affiliated with the AETT (& thus receive major subsidy). Under the heading C. Enterprises with which affiliation might be sought. The Independent Theatre was listed, but scribbled out by hand, with the note “Not included in copy to P Min” scrawled next to it. *Memorandum for The Prime Minister. op. cit.* Attachment 4

Chapter 9

The Therapeutic/Educative Model of the Contemporary Performing Arts

The very same people who strive to repress the clear relation between taste and education, between culture as the state of that which is cultivated and culture as the process of cultivating, will be amazed that anyone should expend so much effort in scientifically proving that self evident fact¹.

The most effective way to demonstrate the critical link between the 1975 Industries Assistance Commission Inquiry and the therapeutic/educative model that underpins the contemporary performing arts industry, is to begin by looking at a 'snapshot' of that industry in 1994, four decades after the launch of the AETT in 1954. The reason for looking at the industry at this precise point is that by the mid 1990s a process relating to how government agencies had come to represent the performing arts in various reports and surveys had been consolidated. The period affords a relatively unique concentration of material from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australia Council (amongst others) in which to specifically compare data collection and statistical analysis relating to the performing arts. The patterns that were established at this point occur repeatedly in publications and analyses throughout the rest of the 1990s and into this century. It will be demonstrated at the end of this chapter that later government reports relating to various aspects of the subsidised performing arts such as the 1999 'Nugent' report of the Inquiry into the Major Performing Arts, *Securing the Future*² and the 1999 Australia Council report *Selling the Performing Arts*³ contain all the problematic patterns of analysis that had become the norm in the government reports of the mid 1990s.

¹ Pierre Bourdieu. 'The Aristocracy of Culture'. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Routledge. London. 1986. p. 12.

² Helen Nugent, Michael Chaney, David Gonski, Catherine Walker. *Securing the Future. Final Report*. Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts. 1999.

³ Dale Osborne, Juliet Wheeler, David Elliott. *Selling the Performing Arts: Identifying and Expanding Audiences for Music, Dance and Theatre*. Australia Council. 1999.

The cultural landscape, at the time of the 40th anniversary of Government assistance, provided ample evidence that the therapeutic/educative model was continuing to orientate and sustain subsidised organisations, activities and institutions. The first part of the final chapter presents a portrait of an almost schizophrenic arts culture. On the one hand, the industry was declaring that it had grown to have enormous significance amongst the general population and that its history was one of triumphant success. On the other hand, these achievements were contradicted by evidence indicating a myriad of deep and dysfunctional elements, including falling audience figures and bleak employment prospects for practitioners. There was evidence too, that this paradoxical relationship between image and reality was somehow able to coexist. The model that underpinned the subsidised performing arts had, by this stage, been expertly and overwhelmingly inculcated into Australian society and the industry was able to absorb, disperse and obscure elements contrary to its ideology and to continue and proliferate intact. This was most evident in that art form most overwhelmingly influenced and reorientated by the model's ideology - the theatre and its actors.

The second part of the chapter returns to the mid 1970s (around the 20th anniversary mark) to look at the consequences of the Federal Industries Assistance Commission Inquiry into the performing arts and how they facilitated the survival and future of this model. This Inquiry, which questioned the justifications for Government assistance to the performing arts, was unprecedented in Australia's cultural history. While certain of its findings were ultimately dismissed, others were not and these helped to instigate the final consolidation of a reproducible, therapeutic/educative model that came to legitimise all subsidised performing arts in Australia. The popular misconception that the entire body of the Commission's work was summarily rejected when presented in 1977 has obscured those components of the Inquiry, specifically with regards to training and education, that were in fact accepted and implemented. An examination of the transcripts reveals how the testimony of those working in performing arts education was presented as evidence of the utility of the therapeutic/educative model, and how this came to be seen as vital for Australia's cultural future. This evidence,

from educationalists and practitioners, related to the therapeutic qualities associated with an individual's *active participation* in the performing arts and was explicitly derived from those assumptions and 'scientific' premises contained in Stanislavski's (and related) acting methodologies. The transcripts also reveal that the debates that flared up endemically about the purposes of arts subsidy - flagship/elite companies versus community/access orientated companies, concealed what it was, that distinguished the legitimate performing arts (which included both the elite and the accessible) from the illegitimate ones. Basically - one had a demonstrable therapeutic/educative uneconomic value and the other did not.

The final section looks at the legacy of the IAC's advocacy of the educative/therapeutic model in orientating the future development of the subsidised performing arts. It presents an analysis of how this model functions within the contemporary industry through an examination of three interrelated areas - employment, the complicity of performing arts practitioners, organisations and educators in sustaining the model in perpetuity and finally the manner in which this model masks cultural inequity.

Part 1. 'Schizophrenia' - Australian Performing Arts Culture in the 1990s

In 1992, almost forty years after the first government subsidy for the performing arts was distributed by the AETT, the results of these endeavours - 'legitimate' culture - were being hailed as robust and thriving and as having experienced a 'burst' of astonishing growth over the last two decades. A critical document published that year by the Australia Council, *Artburst!: The Summary*, claimed that,

In the last 20 years, Australian culture has been transformed by rising participation rates and a remarkable expansion of artistic diversity.

According to a major survey of our cultural habits by the Australian Bureau of Statistics:

At least one adult in three went to a dance, theatre or classical concert performance in 1990 - 91...

Current participation rates are way up on a 1975 survey of Australian entertainment habits - which suggested only 9% of people took in a theatre performance, non pop concert or opera.⁴

The same publication also claimed that, the “number of people employed in the arts industry {had} grown from less than 25, 000 in 1971 to more than 73,000 {in 1991}... - an average annual growth of 5.7% for the total workforce”⁵. These claims were widely reproduced, under various guises, in a diversity of other national publications including the Federal Labor Government’s 1994 cultural statement *Creative Nation*⁶, in Arts Training Australia’s national plan⁷ and in the introduction to the Federal Senate’s 1994 Arts Education Inquiry⁸.

Despite generating such a happy and productive image of the subsidised performing arts in the early 1990s, none of these statements, presented as facts, were strictly true. Instead, these assertions were examples of an erroneous and selective use of statistics and in the case of the participation rates, quite misleading.

The *Artburst!* summary by Gary Martin was based on much more detailed and slightly more sober publication, of the same title, by Hans Hoegh Guldberg and was also commissioned by the Australia Council⁹. If one examines the data contained in this latter publication and cross-checks it with data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) analysis of the 1991 Census and

⁴ Gary Martin. *Artburst! Growth in Arts and Supply over Two Decades. The Summary*. Australia Council for the Arts. 1992. p. 4.

⁵ *ibid.* pp. 4 and 6.

⁶ *Creative Nation; Commonwealth Cultural Policy*. Department of Communications and the Arts. October 1994. p. 1.

⁷ Arts Training Australia. *National Vocational Education and Training Plan for the Arts and Training Industry*. Arts Training Australia. March 1994. p. 10.

⁸ Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Recreation and the Arts. *Arts Education Inquiry*. Volume 1. Attachment B. November. 1994. p. 2.

⁹ Hans Hoegh Guldberg. Economic Strategies Pty. Ltd. *Artburst! Growth in Arts and Supply over Two Decades*. Australia Council for the Arts. 1992.

associated ABS national surveys, with reference to other independent empirical research, a very different picture emerges.

Participation Rates

Both *Artburst!* publications stated that, in 1991, one in three adults in Australia attended a performance of theatre, dance or classical music. The report did not distinguish whether these attendances were at commercial or subsidised performances, despite the rest of both documents being exclusively focussed on the achievements of government and Australia Council assisted organisations. The inference one got from reading them was that subsidised companies had achieved these results. Guldberg had elected to use the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 1991 survey of 32,000 households on *Attendance at Selected Cultural Venues*¹⁰ to ascertain participation rates. This survey did not provide separate attendance figures for subsidised and non-subsidised productions, unlike many other ABS publications regarding cultural activities and employment derived from the 1991 Census. Guldberg was also extremely selective about what he included in his report. He did not include the ABS household survey findings on the socio/economic backgrounds of participants, nor the reasons given for non-attendance. Instead, Guldberg used a “special computer analysis commissioned by the Australia Council”¹¹ to average out the percentages of attendance presented in the ABS household survey and it was based on this, that he stated that 34.8% of the population (or one in three) attended the performing arts in 1991. It was impossible to decipher how he reached this percentage, as the methodology was not included. It was also not a claim that the ABS had made, nor was it clear how one could derive the one in three calculation based on their findings. The ABS had cited percentages indicating that 11.2% of the population attended dance, 20.1% musical theatre, 17.8% ‘other’ theatre and 8.2% classical music. This at best, suggested that about 1 in 10 attended classical music or dance performances a year and about 1 in 5 Musical or ‘other’ theatre. Given the likelihood that a majority of the those

¹⁰ Ian Castles. Australian Statistician. *Attendance at Selected Cultural Venues, Australia, June 1991*. Australia Bureau of Statistics. Catalogue No. 4114.0. February 1992.

who attended a dance performance were often the same people attending the theatre (the ABS did not ask how many individuals attended multiple cultural events) it seems untenable to presume the total of all Australians attending would be much higher than 20%. Even this percentage was problematic. If one examines data from the 1991 census, in relation to far more detailed studies of audience profiles, one derives a very different result.

Despite warning about the problems of interpreting “unqualified survey results”, *Artburst!*, used these attendance figures and the Australia Council calculations as evidence that participation rates had risen from approximately 8.6% in 1975 to 34.8% in 1990-91¹². These figures obscured three things. First, the broad scope of the ABS survey pushed up the overall percentages and when compared to more accurate audience data they did not reflect (particularly in the case of subsidised productions) typical rates of participation. Second, *Artburst!* failed to include both the data from the ABS study that revealed that audiences on average were not representative of the general population and the reasons why most of the population did not attend. Third, it obscured the fact that the rise in participation rates during this sixteen-year period *occurred only in the commercial sector* and that rates for the subsidised sector actually fell.

Such omissions were more than an oversight. There was an obvious awareness by the Council at the time that almost all the major subsidised organisations were heavily dependent on subscribers¹³. These subscribers committed to

¹¹ Guldberg. *Artburst!* *op. cit.* p. 2.

¹² These figures were sourced in two different ways. The 8.6% was taken from an ABS *General Social Survey 1975*. Catalogue (4104.0) and the 34.5% figure was obtained from a combination of the ABS *Attendance at Selected Cultural Venues, Australia June 1991* (ABS Catalogue 4114.0) and “special computer analysis commissioned by the Australia Council”. Guldberg had also warned that comparisons between the 1975 data and the 1991 data were problematic because of the changes in the ABS collection of data that coincided with the setting up of the ABS National Culture/Leisure Statistics Unit in Adelaide in 1990. *ibid.* p. 2

¹³ The Australia Council’s Program Review Series presented triennial updates on each of the Performing Arts Boards. These reports always included the percentage of box office earnings made from subscriptions. The 1984 Theatre Board Review indicated that over the previous decade subscribers contributed to approximately 55 - 60% of the box office annually. ‘Income and Expenditure Summary: 18 Drama Companies’. Occasional Papers. *Theatre Board: Support for Professional Drama Companies*. Program Review Series. Australia Council for the Arts. 1982. p. 57.

attending between 6 to 10 performances a year at a single company and many individuals could subscribe to more than one, for example, both the Australian Opera and the Sydney Theatre Company. In contrast, the ABS household survey, by not distinguishing between subsidised and unsubsidised performances, included in its totals the large number of people that tended to go to a commercial 'hit' or imported 'blockbuster' once or twice a year. This pushed up the overall percentages, rather than reflecting the common patterns of highly regular attendance.

If one looks at ABS 1991 census data that did present separate statistics for attendance at commercial and subsidised performances and calculates individual's participation rate using profiles of an average audience in the early 1990s, one obtains different findings. In 1991 there were 2,100,000 attendances at the 13 major commercial musicals¹⁴, 1,013,000 at all other commercial theatre, dance, opera performances¹⁵ and 4,888,000 attendances at performing arts productions that were subsidised¹⁶. The total of all attendances was 8,101,000 in the year the ABS had calculated the adult population (people aged over 15) to be 13,596,000¹⁷.

The academic Maria Shevtsova conducted the most comprehensive performing arts audience profiles in the early 1990s. Her studies of audiences attending a number of different subsidised companies' productions¹⁸ were

¹⁴ Ian Castles. Australian Statistician. *Music and Performing Arts Australia 1991*. ABS. Catalogue. 4116.0. Australian Bureau of Statistics. 1992. p. 1.

¹⁵ Ian Castles. Australian Statistician. 'Number of Performances and Attendance by Type of Music and Performing Arts Organisation 1991', *Cultural Trends in Australia. No. 1, A Statistical Overview*. ABS Catalogue No. 4172.0. 1994. p. 25.

¹⁶ *ibid.* pp. 24-25.

¹⁷ Cultural Ministers Council. Statistical Advisory Group. *Australia's Culture No. 4. Employment*. Australian Cultural Development Office. The Department of Communications and the Arts. 1992. p. 5.

¹⁸ Shevtsova conducted exhaustive interviews with the audiences of four theatre companies, The Sydney Theatre Company, Belvoir St Theatre, The Melbourne Workers Theatre and the bilingual FILEF Theatre Group. All audience members were polled about their social composition – age, gender, education, occupational classification, ethnic group – as well as the frequency of attendance at drama and other legitimate performing arts activities. In asking the question about the frequency of attendance at the performing arts she did not distinguish between whether they were subsidised or commercial productions. Maria Shevtsova. *Is a Social Elite a Cultural Elite? Audiences for the STCs*

extremely detailed, with almost every member of the audience being asked their profession, their backgrounds, their frequency of attendance and their motives for attending. Her results indicated that in 1991, between 25% to 50% of audience members were subscribers¹⁹. Her research also showed that on average 20% attended (commercial and subsidised performances) between 1 and 3 times a year, over 50% of respondents between 4 to 10 times, 15% between 11 and 20 times, with 10% attending over 20 performances a year. Less than 1.5% of the respondents stated that they attended only once a year²⁰. If one factors in these percentages of repeat attendance in relation to the adult population, the percentages below appear²¹.

Table 1. Percentage of adult population attending commercial and subsidised performances – theatre, dance, classical music – based on average frequency of attendance.						
	% of Aud		Total no. Attendances		Average of frequency	Total
1.5%	0.015	x	8,101,000	÷	1	= 121,515
20%	0.2	x	8,101,000	÷	2	= 810,100
50%	0.5	x	8,101,000	÷	7	= 578,642
15%	0.15	x	8,101,000	÷	15	= 81,010
10%	0.1	x	8,101,000	÷	22	= 36,822
					TOTAL	1,628,089
100 ÷ 13,596,000 (1991 Australian adult pop) x 1,628,089 = % of population attending						11.8%

* Excluding attendances at 'pop/rock' music concerts and overseas performances by Australian based organisations.

Three Sisters, Conference Paper 2/7/91, Theatre Department, University of NSW. *Pilot Project: Theatre in Society*. French department. University of Sydney. 1991. *Audiences for the FILEF Group's L'Albero delle rose/ The Tree of Roses and Stories in Cantiere, Stories in Construction*. Australasian Drama Studies. No. 20, April 1992. pp. 93-118.

¹⁹ This was also the figure reflected in the Sydney Theatre Company's and State Theatre of South Australia's *Subscriber Profile*. 1992, and the Melbourne Theatre Company's *Attendance and Season 1992*.

²⁰ 'Frequency of Attendance at Performing Arts: All Respondents'. *Pilot Project: Theatre in Society*. *op. cit.* Table 14.

²¹ While these figures are not meant to be exact they are based on far more precise data than that presented in *Artburst!* and are a far more accurate picture of Australian attendance patterns.

Table 2. Percentage of adult population attending subsidised performances – theatre, dance, classical music – based on average frequency of attendance.						
	% of Aud		Total no. Attendances		Average of frequency	Total
1.5%	0.015	x	4,888,000	÷	1	= 73,320
20%	0.2	x	4,888,000	÷	2	= 488,800
50%	0.5	x	4,888,000	÷	7	= 349,142
15%	0.15	x	4,888,000	÷	15	= 48,880
10%	0.1	x	4,888,000	÷	22	= 22,218
					TOTAL	982,360
100 ÷ 13,596,000 (1991 Australian adult pop) x 982,360 = % of population attending						7.1%

Shevtsova's research indicated that approximately 11.9% (approximately 1 out every 8/9 adults) of the population was attending both subsidised and commercial performing arts in 1991. These were very different figures to the 34.8% or 1 in 3 claim made in *Artburst!* Furthermore, if one looks exclusively at the percentage of attendance at the subsidised performing arts – 7.1% – the figure rises to 1 out of every 14 adults. This percentage was lower by 1.5% from the 1975 estimate of 8.6%. While no empirical data existed for the frequency of performing arts attendance in 1975, the overall rise from 8.6% to 11.9% reflected an increased interest in the commercial performing arts (particularly musicals) and also seemed to indicate that the same individuals were attending more cultural events annually.

The principal reasons that these figures were very different are twofold. A profile of audiences at large commercial theatre productions (musicals and imported hits and so on) would give a much greater percentage of participation because of the high rate of one off audience goers that was unlike the patterns of regular attendance at legitimate subsidised productions. The other reason for the difference was the narrow demographic from which an average audience was drawn. Shevtsova's analysis had shown that an average Australian audience attending subsidised theatre was not representative of the general population. Over 60% had attended university with a further 16% completing their studies. Almost 60% worked as managers,

administrators or professionals compared to only 1% working as tradesmen or labourers²². By surveying 'households' rather than audiences, the ABS figures thus tended to present an *atypical* image of participation²³.

Nonetheless, the ABS household survey had found, like Shevtsova, that those who did attend (even the one off participants) were unrepresentative of the Australian population,

Those with Bachelor degrees or higher qualifications had the highest participation rates and those with a trade or no qualifications the lowest. The difference in participation rates for all these venues was high: about 30 percent between people with a bachelor degree of higher qualifications and those with trade qualifications at other theatre and musical theatre.²⁴

By not including this material in *Artburst!* and not including the ABS findings that a staggering majority (80%) of those who *did not* attend said "there was nothing preventing them from doing so"²⁵, the publication concealed the fact that if growth had occurred in the subsidised performing arts, it was benefiting the wealthy and well educated and that most Australians appeared to be simply uninterested in these forms of culture.

What was most perplexing about the inaccuracies, omissions and inflated figures presented in the opening chapter of Guldberg's *Artburst!* was that they were contradicted in the tables presented towards the end of his report²⁶. A

²² Shevtsova 'Social Composition of all Respondents by Age, Gender, Education and Occupation'. *Pilot Project: Theatre in Society. op. cit.* Table 1.

²³ Pierre Bourdieu found, in his study of cultural surveys, that, "within a spontaneous sample, the less a category is represented, the less its representatives are typical of the category as a whole". Bourdieu. *Distinction. op. cit.* p. 412.

²⁴ *Attendance at Selected Cultural Venues, Australia, June 1991*. Australia Bureau of Statistics. Catalogue No. 4114.0. *op. cit.* p. 8.

²⁵ *ibid.* p. 9.

²⁶ These tables were derived from figures supplied by the Australia Council and/or the subsidised companies themselves. The Drama/Dance company records of attendance were derived from two Australia Council publications. *Theatre 1* (1980) and *Theatre 2* (1987) and figures supplied by the Performing Arts Board in 1991. The figures for the Australian Opera came from *Australian Opera Annual Reports*, and those for the Australian Ballet from the *Australian Ballet Foundation Annual Reports*. Guldberg. *Artburst! op. cit.* pp. 69-75.

table, presenting the number of attendances and performances of performing arts companies subsidised by the Australia Council each year from 1974 to 1991, revealed clearly that the figures had dropped, despite increases in the population and relatively consistent subsidy²⁷. This fall was acknowledged in Guldberg's report - "Annual attendances, which... peaked at around 1984, have fallen to below levels of the 1970s"²⁸. Opera fared slightly better experiencing, "no movement in the average audience", with an annual growth of attendance of 0.0% in seventeen years²⁹. The explanation given for these patterns of decreasing or static attendance, was that they were the result of the "funding of increasingly diverse performing art forms". It was not clear to what this referred to, given that the attendance figures presented in *Artburst!* were for *all* subsidised performing arts companies. Those "forms" diverse enough to fall outside the umbrella of dance, drama, opera and classical music, represented a tiny percentage of all subsidised activities³⁰ and could hardly be described as competing for the same market.

Employment Rates

The figures for employment published in *Artburst!* were even more muddled than the participation rates and clarified they revealed a much darker picture. To start with, the report had stated that the number employed as "Artists and related workers" had risen from 25,000 in 1971 to 73,000 in 1991. However, keeping in mind that statistics prior to 1974 were unreliable³¹, an Australia Council 1982 report stated that (eleven years later)

²⁷ While Government assistance has never increased at the rate it did between 1969 and 1975 (apart from a slight increase around the Bicentenary in 1988 and a significant increase with the Labor Party's Creative Nation initiative in 1994) nor has it fallen below those 1975 levels. *Theatre Board Review. op. cit.* p. 22. Guldberg. 'Federal Funding for the Arts'. *Artburst! op. cit.* p. 81. *Australia Council. Annual Report and the Arts: Some Australian Data.* Australia Council for the Arts. Fourth Edition. 1991. pp. 14-16.

²⁸ 'Major Art Forms and Activities. Dance and Drama'. Guldberg. *Artburst! op. cit.* p. 69

²⁹ 'Major Art Forms and Activities. Opera and Ballet'. *ibid.* pp. 72-75.

³⁰ 'Grants List and Statistical Information, for the Year ending 30 June 1994'. *Australia Council Annual Report 1993 - 1994.* Australia Council for the Arts. pp. 77-111.

³¹ "Generally speaking, performing companies and groups are singularly lacking in research applications. If evidence given to the 1975 Industrial Affairs Commission {sic} Inquiry into the Performing Arts is any yardstick, few Australian performing companies and/or theatre administrations have commissioned or undertaken the most rudimentary audience survey activity, let alone empirical

there were still only 25,000 individuals practicing as artists³². Two other reports by the Australia Council published before and soon after *Arthurst!* estimated that the number of practicing artists to be 32, 000 in 1989 ³³ and 40, 000 in 1994³⁴. The massive difference between these and Guldberg's numbers reflected his inclusion of categories of employment (Journalists, Architects, Newspaper Photographers) that were excluded from the Australia Council's own definition of an artist (Writer, Craftsperson, Visual artist, Actor, Dancer/choreographer, Musician/Singer, Composer, Community Artist³⁵). Even this more modest rise in the number of artists in Australia obscured the negative pattern of growth in their earnings. The 1982 report stated that, out of its survey of 1000 artists, the average gross return from the actual practice of art was \$8000 per annum, with artists earning a further \$2000 in arts-related occupations such as teaching³⁶. The relationship between earnings from primary arts employment and related arts employment swung to \$10, 800 and \$4,700 in 1986-87³⁷ and swung back to \$5,000 and \$9,400 in 1992-93³⁸. These figures were not adjusted and if one included rises in the cost of living, earnings from primary arts activities dropped alarmingly in the decade. The high figures of the 1986-87 survey were also a little illusory, representing as they did the massive one off government grants in the year leading to Australia's Bicentenary in 1988. Out of all artists the worst affected were Actors and Dancers with incomes dropping by 44% between 1986-87 and 1992-93³⁹.

research". *Entertainment and Society in Australia. Section B. The Performing Arts*. International UNESCO Report. 1976. Australia Council for the Arts. p. 5.

³² 'Report of the Committee for the Individual Artists Inquiry' *The Artist in Australia Today*. Australia Council. 1982. p. ix.

³³ David Throsby and Devon Mills. *When Are You Going To Get A Real Job? An Economic Study of Australian Artists*. Australia Council. 1989. p. 5.

³⁴ David Throsby and Beverley Thompson. *But What Do You Do For A Living? A New Economic Study of Australian Artists*. Australia Council. 1994. p. 6.

³⁵ *ibid.* p. 8.

³⁶ *The Artist in Australia Today. op. cit.* p. ix.

³⁷ The same number of artists (approximately 1000) were interviewed for each of these surveys. 'Financial Circumstances'. *When Are You Going To Get A Real Job? op. cit.* p. 12.

³⁸ 'Financial Circumstances' *But What Do You Do For A Living? op. cit.* p. 27.

³⁹ 'Trends in Artists' Real incomes by Art Form, 1986-87 to 1992-93. *ibid.* p. 31.

In contrast, the number of trained artists and particularly the number of performing arts practitioners trained at government subsidised facilities had risen dramatically over the 20 years between 1971 to 1991. Unlike the figures for participation and employment, the figures for Tertiary Training in the Arts presented in *Artburst!* were an accurate gauge of the enormous growth in this area and were supported by independent figures presented by the ABS and Department of Employment, Education and Training⁴⁰. The number of tertiary enrolments in visual and performing arts courses in Australia rose from 2,945 in 1970 to 16,841 in 1991⁴¹ an almost 450% increase which was reflected in a 30% rise in household expenditure between 1984 and 1989 on cultural educational fees⁴². In theatre alone, the National Institute of Dramatic Art had been producing approximately 20 acting graduates a year from 1960 on⁴³, with the more recent vocational acting schools at the Victorian College of Arts and the Western Australia Academy of Performing Arts producing a similar number each year⁴⁴. The constant proliferation of trained artists entering the 'legitimate' market which had experienced negative or static growth over two decades, was clearly flooding it and contributing to the decline in artists' earnings. While some of these artists could obtain work in the non-subsidised performing arts even the growth in this sector (representing primarily the massive rise in 'pop' concerts of overseas artists and imported musicals) was unlikely to absorb the ever-increasing supply of graduates⁴⁵.

⁴⁰ Department of Employment, Education and Training from 1977. Australian Bureau of Statistics Year Book 1970 – 76 estimates. Guldberg. *Artburst. op. cit.* pp. 12-13.

⁴¹ 'Tertiary Training in the Arts'. *ibid.* p. 12.

⁴² *Cultural Trends in Australia. No. 1. A Statistical Overview.* ABS Catalogue No. 4172.0. *op. cit.* p. 18.

⁴³ 'National Institute of Dramatic Art'. *Artburst! op. cit.* pp. 76-77.

⁴⁴ These were only the most prominent of the Government actor training courses available. Others were offered at Charles Sturt University (2 courses), the University of Western Sydney, Nepean, Queensland University of Technology – Kelvin Grove, James Cook University of North Queensland, Flinders University Drama Centre, University of Adelaide, Victoria University of Technology – Flinders. University of Southern Queensland, Centre of Performing Arts – Adelaide College of TAFE and University of NSW – St George Campus. 'Lowdown's 1992/1993 Guide to National Tertiary Education in Performing Arts'. *Directions. 1992, Arts Training Australia.*

⁴⁵ There were 3,639,000 attendances at Popular Music performances in 1992. Table 1. Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Music and Performing Arts at Major Venues in Capital Cities.* ABS Catalogue No. 4171.0. 1992. p. 2. and 2,100,000 attendances at non-subsidised major musicals. Australian

In addition to the extreme decline in artist wages over the two decades, it was clear that more and more artists were working for nothing. This was evident in another ABS household survey of 30,000, 'Work in Selected Culture/Leisure Activities' conducted in 1993⁴⁶. This survey was completed partly in response to criticism from the Australia Council over the collection of data. The Council had complained that the 1991 Census had failed to account for the fact that many artists worked on a casual basis⁴⁷ and the question "What was your main occupation in the last two weeks?" excluded numerous artists such as actors who were frequently "between jobs"⁴⁸. The 1993 household survey changed its question from employment to that of 'involvement' in cultural activities and broadened its definition of "cultural activities" to include things such as fete organising, secondary school teachers teaching cultural activities and Furniture making⁴⁹. According to these criteria, the survey found that while an estimated 2, 614,400 individuals, "did culture-leisure tasks in the last 12 months" and 1,600,700 said they had a "work involvement" in culture- leisure tasks, of these, only 276,000 got paid for *all* their "tasks"⁵⁰. This represented approximately 2% of the adult population. In addition, a majority (approximately 150,000 close to 50%) of those paid for their cultural tasks were those *teaching* cultural activities, in comparison to only 20, 200 or 10%, who were paid as performers, representing less than 0.2% of adult

Bureau of Statistics. 1991. *Music and Performing Arts Australia*. ABS Catalogue. No. 4116.00. p. 2. If one adds other non-subsidised performing arts attendances of 1,013,000, this represents a total of 6,852,000 of non subsidised performing arts performances, 2 million more than that of the total attendances for the subsidised performing arts. However as stated above the non-subsidised sector often provided employment for many overseas artists. *Cultural Trends in Australia. No. 1 A Statistical Overview*. ABS Catalogue No. 4172.0. *op. cit.* p. 25.

⁴⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Work in Selected Culture/Leisure Activities, Australia, March 1993*. Catalogue No. 6281.0.

⁴⁷ 'Introduction'. *But What Do You Do For A Living?* *op. cit.* p. 3.

⁴⁸ I took issue with this thinking in Chapter 1 and gave the example of the number (1217) of professional actors estimated to be employed during the 1991 Census. While it was obvious that many more individual actors would be employed over the course of a year, there was nothing to indicate that for any 2 week period during that year, that a greater figure than 1200 would be employed.

⁴⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Work in Selected Culture/Leisure Activities, Australia, March 1993*. ABS Catalogue No. 6281.0. *op. cit.*

⁵⁰ 'Employment in Culture'. *Cultural Trends in Australia. No. 1 A Statistical Overview*. ABS Catalogue No. 4172.0. *op. cit.* p. 2.

population⁵¹. Those working as performers in the performing arts also had one of the largest percentages of individuals, over 85%, who received *no payment whatsoever for their tasks*. The nearest equivalent percentage of those receiving no payment was 93% for fete/festival organising, compared with 42.3% of non-payment for the teaching of cultural activities⁵². These figures challenged the claim made in *Artburst!*, that 5.7% of the adult population were employed as artists and related workers in 1991.

In contrast to the image of a rosy productive arts industry of the early 1990s, generated in the Australia Council's *Artburst!*, the genuine picture was rather bleak. It revealed a subsidised performing arts industry in which over the course of twenty years, attendance figures had declined. In short, there were fewer people attending subsidised performing art activities in 1991 than in there were 1971. Overall, artist's wages had dropped radically (in some cases over 40%⁵³ and unemployment figures for them were extraordinarily high, yet trained graduates from government subsidised facilities were entering the industry at an unprecedented rate each year. In fact, the only area of employment showing growth for this period was in the area of teaching cultural activities, which corresponded to the growth (8.1%⁵⁴) of tertiary arts training facilities and courses each year. To top it off, coinciding with these two decades of negative growth, were unprecedented levels of government subsidy which, while slightly declining in late 1980s, had jumped by 17% in 1971 and then by 100% in 1973 when the Whitlam Labor Government replaced ACFTA with the Australia Council⁵⁵.

"What was going wrong?" is not I believe, the pertinent question, but rather, "why would the Australia Council wish to massage and disseminate distorted statistics in order to present a vibrant picture of the performing arts industry

⁵¹ *ibid.* p. 3.

⁵² *ibid.* p. 3.

⁵³ Composer incomes had dropped by 12%, Visual Artists by 21% Actors and Dancers by 44% and Writers by 20%. Musicians interestingly experienced no fall in income but this could have been due to rise in employment opportunities in the commercial music sector. 'Trend in Artists' Real Incomes by Artform 1986-87 to 1992-93'. *But What Do You Do For A Living? op. cit.* p. 31.

⁵⁴ Guldberg. *Artburst! op. cit.* p. 12.

⁵⁵ *Theatre Board: Support For Professional Theatre Companies. op. cit.* p. 22.

in complete conflict with reality”? Certainly some artists at the time were patently aware, not only the decline in their income, but that the industry was in crisis. Babs Mcmillan, an actor and director stated,

The talk I hear in the industry isn't optimistic and it hasn't been for a long time. I think a lot of actors are feeling excluded and very disempowered by not being able to work. There's a lot of frustration and concern at the way the industry is changing so dramatically. Jobs are drying up; actors are feeling threatened and powerless.⁵⁶

Why, given this kind of comment, was the Federal government encouraging an increase in training opportunities and establishing national bodies such as Arts Training Australia when it was clear that the majority of existing graduates could not secure employment? This was also in spite of the fact that some of Council's own reports had advised against the expansion of training opportunities⁵⁷. Also perplexing were the national surveys about public attitudes to the arts commissioned by the Australia Council in the 1980s and 90s. These surveys, which contained highly problematic methodology, appeared to indicate that the majority of the population supported the present system of subsidising the performing arts. This was despite the fact that between 80% to 90% of Australians did not participate in any of these activities and appeared to express no real wish to do so⁵⁸.

These contradictory extremes of reality versus reportage permeated the entire performing arts industry and suggested that the total image was not one of crisis but of dysfunction. It reflected an endless series of institutions,

⁵⁶ Babs Mcmillan. 'A National Performance Conference: Reactivating Actors'. Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance. *Equity Section Yearbook*. December 1993. p. 23.

⁵⁷ The Australia Council commissioned survey and report on the economic status of Australian artists had found that while 39% of actors were dissatisfied with available training opportunities in Australia it was felt that this reflected the large number of people wishing to enter the profession and did "not indicate a need to expand the number of places". *But What Do You Do For A Living? op. cit.* p. 18.

⁵⁸ The final section of the chapter will focus in the problems associated with the methodology of this series of surveys on 'Public Attitudes to the Arts' commissioned by the Australia Council. J. S. McDonnell. *Public Attitudes to the Arts: 1992: Report on Surveys of Public Opinion for the Australia Council* and *Public Attitudes to the Arts: 1994: Report on Surveys of Public Opinion for the Australia*

relationships and conditions in total paradox to each other, that were and (as will be shown) are nonetheless able to sustain themselves and each other. The total lack of acknowledgment by established arts organisations to perceive any fault in the system of subsidy (beside a lack of it or to how it should be allocated) was not the result of some elaborate cover up. Rather it was evidence of the immense reproductive power of the therapeutic/educative ideologies inherited by the Australia Council from institutions such as the AETT and NIDA which informed this model and enabled it to sustain itself despite all empirical evidence suggesting its imminent collapse.

The journey to this point was a process more complex than simply the accumulative effects of collective delusion on the part of the arts industry. As was demonstrated in Chapter two, Australian cultural analysts and practitioners have made continuous attempts to identify what was wrong and provide solutions to the problems' of the subsidy system. Yet all these solutions from calls for devolution of subsidy, increases or decreases of peer assessment, changes for criteria on applications or making the Council more 'answerable', have simply had the Council jiggling and shifting its priorities from year to year and negligible effect upon the model which underpinned it⁵⁹.

The continuity of operation in the changeover from the AETT, as the major recipient and disseminator of Government funds, to ACFTA in 1967 and then to the Australia Council in 1973 had (as noted in the last chapter) been carefully orchestrated. However, certain critical elements essential to the ongoing justification of subsidy had diminished. While all the State and National performing arts companies and institutions initiated by the AETT had finally secured a strong endorsement (in the form of increased financial

Council. Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research. University of Melbourne. Australia Council for the Arts. 1993 and 1995.

⁵⁹ The Australia Council's most recent "revamp" of its funding policies came in response to a report issued by Dr Margaret Seares in March 2001. The report had found that "Art is being seen as increasingly redundant in a materialistic society" and "of primary concern, across all arts sectors was the need for greater level of engagement with community. A recurrent theme was the lack of community ownership, the failure to connect with local communities. 'Australia Council Flags Radical Revamp of Funding'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Thursday 1st March. 2001. p. 14.

support) from ACFTA and then the Australia Council, what had also changed was a notable fall in the demonstrable educative value from these rapidly growing companies.

The concentration of funding to prestige flagship companies that were the showcases of excellence in the performing arts, increasingly marginalised smaller companies promoting education and access between 1967 and 1973⁶⁰. This would be radically challenged by the Industries Assistance Commission Inquiry into the Performing Arts initiated in 1974.

Part. 2. The Industries Assistance Commission Inquiry into the Performing Arts

When Prime Minister Gough Whitlam instituted an official inquiry into subsidy for the performing arts in October 1974, there was little indication amongst the companies or practitioners invited to give evidence that their assumptions about the social and cultural value of their respective activities were not universally held. While there was an increasingly contentious debate concerning the allocation of arts subsidy, between the elite companies who promoted excellence, (and who consumed most of the funding), and those smaller, less solvent companies who promoted access, neither side seriously questioned why their activities should receive funding in the first instance. When representatives of these companies came to give evidence to the Commission in June and July of 1975, it was clear that almost all of them had seriously underestimated the scope and nature of the Inquiry.

The Industries Assistance Commission was a newly formed body whose responsibility was to examine industries that received government assistance⁶¹. Their function was to collect evidence to ascertain whether this

⁶⁰ Tim Rowse. *Arguing the Arts*. Penguin Books. Australia. 1987. p. 31.

⁶¹ The IAC was originally established to challenge producer domination of Boards in the rural industries. It replaced the relatively ineffectual Tariff Board (operating from 1921) in the job of assessing primary industry assistance levels. Whitlam argued that the IAC had the advantage of reviewing government assistance, "either by way of subsidy, bounty, ban, quota or tariff, in an independent and rational fashion away from the day-to-day political pressures often exerted on

assistance should continue, and if so, what form it should take. The IAC would then present these findings in a report to parliament. This process was the same for any assisted Australian industry and the same principles of examination applied by the Commission, to the textile or dairy farming industries, were now to be applied to the performing arts. Evidence was to be taken from all forms of live performance including opera, ballet, vaudeville, puppetry, music, drama, commercial theatre, music hall “and the like”, whether they were the recipients of subsidy or not.

The importance of the IAC Inquiry and their findings (presented as a Parliamentary Paper in November 1977⁶²) cannot be underestimated. Perhaps for the first time in contemporary Western history an entire nation’s subsidised performing arts industry was subjected to the rigorous economic (and ideological) analysis that would be accorded to any protected goods producing industry. The breadth of the evidence submitted to the Inquiry was enormous. Representatives from every major arts organisation, including the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the Australian Opera, the AETT, the Australian Ballet, the Australia Council, each of the State theatre companies and the National Institute of Dramatic Art, appeared as witnesses before Commissioner Robert Boyer and Deputy Commissioner P. D. J Robinson. Also appearing, as witnesses, were a large number of representatives from smaller community and educational arts bodies, which ranged from the Polish Folk Theatre to the Adult Education Board of Australia. Over the fourteen days of public hearings, every significant player in the performing arts in Australia for the previous 20 years (and indeed the subsequent 25) submitted either written or oral material to the Commission. Collectively, their testimony provided a fascinating insight as to how certain self-perpetuating ideologies sustain the subsidised performing arts in contemporary culture.

governments by lobby groups”. Gough Whitlam. *The Whitlam Government. 1972 – 1975*. Viking. Australia. 1985. pp. 264-5.

⁶² Industries Assistance Commission. *Assistance to the Performing Arts*. Parliamentary Paper No. 290. 1977.

The Findings

The arts organisations and practitioners appearing before the Commission were asked to submit material providing justification of why the performing arts should receive public monies to support them. For the most part, representatives of arts establishments and individual practitioners invoked arguments that appeared to them to be self-explanatory, and that had been used since the inception of Government subvention 20 years earlier. Jean Battersby, the Executive Officer of the Australia Council, argued that, “in the view of the Council, a society which does offer opportunity for talented people and creative people to work within that society, is more likely to turn out to be a good society than an average or mediocre society”⁶³. This statement differed little from those that had been made at the launch of the AETT in 1954. While other justifications were provided, such as the demise of patronage and the increased costs of production, it was the perceived general benefit to a society that was most frequently cited. This was articulated in a variety of forms. Dennis McLaggan, from the Australian Opera, believed their activities were developing an “indigenous creative identity”⁶⁴ for the country. George Ogilvie, the Artistic Director of the South Australian Theatre Company, felt that drama gave the spectator, “an opportunity for identification in their lives and that theatre could perhaps help an audience to pursue a thought process which will affect their lives”⁶⁵. Many of the justifications were also similar to those made by UNESCO in the era of post war reconstruction, characterising the legitimate performing arts as ‘good’ for spectator and participant alike and as being intrinsic to the health and identity of a nation. One Arts Council administrator succinctly summed this up by arguing,

The arts are important to the development of man into a fuller and better life. By experiencing the arts a man

⁶³ Evidence, Jean Agnes Battersby, Executive Officer, Australia Council. *Official Transcripts, Industries Assistance Commission. Assistance to Performing Arts*. Sydney Monday 2nd June 1975 at 10 am. Australia Council Library. Sydney. p. 4.

⁶⁴ Evidence, Dennis McLaggan, Company Secretary and Budget Control Officer of the Australian Opera. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* p. 54.

⁶⁵ Evidence, George Buchan Ogilvie, Artistic Director, South Australian Theatre Company. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* Adelaide Thursday 3rd July 1975. p. 990.

becomes more aware of himself and the world and the people around him and so leads to the improvements in the quality of his or her life. As such, they have importance in a similar way as education, health and other services being paid for out of community funds.⁶⁶

The Commissioners accepted none of these arguments as satisfactory or even rational justifications for assistance to the performing arts. Their final report noted that “the grounds for government subvention... are by no means overwhelming”⁶⁷. In the overview of this report, Boyer and Robinson outlined how completely they felt industry representatives had failed to acquit themselves with credibility. They began by stating that, for them to recommend assistance, they had to “demonstrate that the benefits expected to flow to the community as a whole” were commensurate with the subsidy provided. They also accepted that in regards to the performing arts it was sometimes difficult to judge and quantify the benefits of that assistance. Nevertheless, Boyer qualified this by adding that the Commission,

clearly could not recommend assistance, which it believed, was not matched by community benefits. It had to seek assessments of how the performing arts benefited the nation and how subsidising them would enhance these benefits. Faced with this need, the Commission sought from witnesses an articulated, rational basis for community involvement in the arts from which assistance criteria could be derived.

But in spite of this inquiry, the large volume of evidence and the efforts of more than 200 witnesses, no coherent rationale was presented, {with} many witnesses claiming that the nature of the performing arts did not lend itself to such rational assessment. That the community should assist the performing arts was apparently considered self-evident – a matter of faith and, for many, obviously of profound personal belief.⁶⁸

The Commissioners had found this attitude particularly prevalent in testimony from companies receiving high levels of subsidy, such as the Australian Opera and the Australian Ballet. They pointed out however, that

⁶⁶ Evidence. Paul Anderson. Administrator of the Arts Council of South Australia. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* Adelaide Thursday 2nd July 1975. p. 875.

⁶⁷ Industries Assistance Commission. *Assistance to the Performing Arts. op. cit.* p. 49.

their Inquiry was related to *all* the performing arts, of which the “high arts”⁶⁹, that many witnesses had associated with an “intangible and undefined ‘cultural’ life”, were only a small part.

The report was equally dismissive of the ‘flagship’ philosophy of culture. Those “museum pieces” produced by the Australian Opera and Ballet or the State Theatre companies, supposedly in the pursuit of ‘excellence’ were found to be catering to a particular minority taste⁷⁰. The idea that this tiny audience had a right to have a considerable proportion of their extremely expensive needs met by the entire community was not acceptable.

The IAC recommendations to Parliament consisted of two main proposals. First, that funding for flagship companies be phased out after eight years, allowing them time to find alternative sources of patronage. And second, that subsidy for the performing arts be aimed exclusively at activities that showed evidence of promoting any or all of the three areas of education, innovation and dissemination, because it was in those areas that community benefits for all could be identified. No value was to be accorded to the content of the cultural activity carried out in any of these three areas. Whether 19th century opera or rock music, the level of assistance was to correspond with the relevance to, and response from, the general community. Notions of the superiority of one cultural activity over another were deemed to be specious, as were distinctions between commercial and non-commercial companies⁷¹. Those activities that simply could no longer sustain themselves in the current economic climate and reflected only the tastes of the unrepresentative few were to be left to either die out or find private sources of subsidy.

⁶⁸ *ibid.* p. 2.

⁶⁹ *ibid.* p. 2.

⁷⁰ *ibid.* p. 4.

⁷¹ The Commissioners recommended strongly that commercial managements be able to seek subsidy for productions. They could see no reason why seeking to make a profit or attempting to draw a large audience precluded them from assistance. These motivations, they argued, would in fact result in productions of a “high standard of competence”. Industries Assistance Commission. *Assistance to the Performing Arts.* *ibid.* p. 134.

By the time the findings were presented to parliament in 1977, the Whitlam Government, which had commissioned the Inquiry, had been dismissed and then lost an election to the Liberal party. Contemporary cultural historians and commentators often used this fact to argue that the Fraser Liberal Government simply shelved this unpopular report and acted on none of its recommendations. As a result, the consequences of this highly provocative parliamentary paper have often been characterised as insignificant. Justin Macdonnell in his history of Arts Ministers in Australia, described the report as,

Never {being} acted upon in any substantive way... it absorbed, needlessly, time and energy in the almost two years of deliberations. That the Fraser government conveniently lost the report only served to underline the extent to which the mountain had laboured and indeed brought forth a mouse.⁷²

It was true that that the Fraser government rejected outright the Commission's recommendation to phase out assistance to the major performing arts companies⁷³. However, it was also true that the Liberal Party clearly heeded the report's advice about the need to improve the areas of education, innovation, and development. While the Inquiry may have been extremely unpopular amongst the cultural elite, it had given voice to the small, increasingly dissatisfied, community orientated arts organisations. Not only did these voices need to be appeased, the lack of empirical evidence, as to the calculable social benefits of elite/flagship company activities (which had caused embarrassment to these organisations during the Inquiry) also had to be addressed.

⁷² Justin Macdonnell. *Arts Minister: Government Policy and the Arts*. Currency Press. Sydney. 1992. p. 144.

⁷³ Whitlam noted, "I was not a little relieved that {the IAC's} provocative, well-reasoned and widely misunderstood and in many ways salutary examination of the issues involved in public subvention for the arts finished up on Fraser's desk rather than mine". It was of no real surprise to him that a Liberal Government would shy away from dismantling subsidy given to the prestige companies. Whitlam observed, almost ten years later both the Australian Opera and Ballet still maintained stagnant policies and "incestuous boards". Whitlam. *op. cit.* p. 564.

All the Government reactions to the report made sure that in dismissing the idea that flagship funding would be phased out, they included statements indicating they took very seriously the Commission's recommendations about making the social benefits of the performing arts more ostensible. Tony Staley, Minister for the Arts agreed that "subsidisation {was} needed in innovation and education"⁷⁴. John Howard, the then Minister for Business and Consumer Affairs, concurred, stating that, "there {was} scope in improving the availability of the arts and their benefits to the community {and} the Commission's recommendations might be incorporated into existing arrangements to complement and strengthen government activity in this area"⁷⁵.

There was little question too, that the Inquiry had rocked the ideological core of the subsidised performing arts industry in Australia. The very premises upon which all the major institutions were based had been held to ridicule and the rhetoric deployed to defend them was repeatedly shown to be little more than unsubstantiated opinion. Boyer criticised the Australia Council's arguments about subsidising the elite arts, because they were based on,

Beliefs, feelings and thoughts {that needed} to be substantiated {with more than} just the fact that you believe. Because somebody else can believe with equal strength and equal validity precisely the opposite. We will have people here from the pop arts, who are perhaps reaching far more people than the performing arts are, saying these sorts of things with equal validity... so we just must face up to these hard facts, difficult and all as they may be intellectually, and again I emphasise that we are not helped in facing up to these, by assertions that are not supported - {with} feelings, {or} beliefs - or what have you - no matter how authoritative they be.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Tony Staley. Minister for the Arts. *Theatre Australia*. November/December. 1976. p. 7. Tony Staley acted swiftly on these convictions and agreed to the creation of the Australia Council's Community Arts Board in 1977.

⁷⁵ John Howard. News Release. 11th April 1977, in Macdonnell. *Arts Minister. op. cit.* p. 205.

⁷⁶ Evidence. Jean Agnes Battersby. Executive Officer, Australia Council. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* Sydney Monday 2 June 1975. p. 4.

Commissioner Boyer had likened the high arts to Zen Buddhism, to a new religion for the upper middle classes, and chastised company after company for their lack of research into their audiences, into new technologies and into the social benefits of their activities. Even after the rejection of the report's more extreme recommendations, these were not assaults to be forgotten quickly. Tim Rowse noted, that while the reactions to the report could not have been more hostile,

Had the IAC argued that it was economically salutary to slaughter all children under 12 months of age... the Commissioner's cold logic had {nonetheless} severely tested the nerve of the Australia Council and its allies. Things would never be the same again.⁷⁷

What became critical to the justifications of those in receipt of future subsidy was they had to now be seen to be investing in those three activities, education, innovation and dissemination, that the Commissioners had championed in their report⁷⁸. Out of these three, education was by far the most important and this was made clear in the Commissions' findings.

Education and the Performing Arts

Boyer and Robinson stated that they had found two important relationships between the performing arts and education. The Commissioners considered these two relationships, "relevant to the provision of assistance to the former". They were also relationships very similar to those found in the ideologies of acting methodologies.

First, there is the educative function of the performing arts themselves. Impressive evidence was received of the role that the arts, including the performing arts, can play in education – particularly of children. As an education tool the performing arts can contribute to the personal

⁷⁷ Rowse. 'A Vicarious Public'. Chapter 3. *op. cit.* p. 40.

⁷⁸ Wayne Harrison, the Artistic Director of the Sydney Theatre Company for much of the 1990s saw the immediate fall out of the IAC and the setting up of the Community Arts Board at the Australia Council as marking the beginning of a Civil War between the prestige theatre companies and the "revolution in Australian theatre practice, the community theatre movement". Wayne Harrison. The Theatre of War. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. December 19th. 1994. p. 14.

development of children and their general social awareness...

The second relationship is the contribution education can make to the performing arts. The justification for assisting education in this context rests on the assumptions that the performing arts can contribute to worth while cultural development and that this contribution will be enhanced if these are better and more widely appreciated. As shown later, appreciation of the performing arts can be greatly facilitated by education.⁷⁹

These two paragraphs provided a neat summary of what would become the ideological basis for the justification of future subsidy but they also obscured the rather peculiar and perplexing route by which the Commissioners came to make these stark conclusions. What, for example, was the “impressive evidence” upon which they made the above claims? This conclusion also contained certain contradictions. It was clear that the Commissioners had eschewed a narrow elitist definition of culture and rejected the “deliberate discrimination” involved in channelling the majority of subsidy to the elite performing arts that catered to a minority⁸⁰. Yet they then argued, with equal strength, that a major campaign should be undertaken to educate young Australians to acquire a taste and appreciation for these same art forms. Even more confusing was how the Commission, that many complained was inappropriately subjecting the performing arts to hardline economic rationalism, produced certain findings that were less to do with an acceptance of market forces than suggestions for social conditioning.

The reasons behind these contradictions can be discerned in the transcripts of the Inquiry. They revealed very clearly that Boyer and Robinson were inclined to be more receptive to the arguments of certain witnesses, principally because their evidence was better suited to the Commission’s terms of reference.

⁷⁹ ‘Introduction’. Industries Assistance Commission. *Assistance to the Performing Art. op. cit.* pp. 14-15.

⁸⁰ *ibid.* p. 1.

On the first day of the hearings, Boyer made it clear why the issue of education was so important. One of the first witnesses, Derek Nicholson, of the Drama Unit based at Sydney University, argued that if one's appreciation of the arts was nurtured when one was at school, such appreciation and the use thereof would last a lifetime, unlike other skills such as football or algebra. To this Boyer replied, "I think this is interesting because, among the few strings on which we might hang a case of assistance and perhaps one of the best analogies is that of education and the value of education. Education is one of our sacred cows and has stood up pretty well over the years"⁸¹.

Sacred Cows

The notion of the educative performing arts was useful to the Commission because, as Boyer indicated, there was justification in Government subvention if there was proof (such as there was for public hospitals or universities) that an activity and its institutions benefited an entire population. If substantial evidence could be presented that proved the performing arts (or which forms of them) increased the skills, knowledge and ability of the majority of Australia's citizens, then the Commissioners would be able to take such material to the Federal Government as an argument for assistance. It was critical however, that this evidence was concrete and could be depicted in quantifiable forms such as surveys, statistics or research papers. It rapidly became clear that these requirements favoured companies and individuals whose background was in institutional, educational and (to a lesser extent) community based theatre, over those involved with the prestige companies. These latter companies (whose evidence was primarily anecdotal) had repeatedly failed to produce empirical support for their claims that they contributed to the greater good of all society. Indeed the small amounts of evidence that had been submitted by the prestige companies often contradicted their claims⁸².

⁸¹ Evidence. Derek Nicholson. Sydney University. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* Sydney 2nd June 1975. p. 100.

⁸² The Australian Opera submitted as evidence a market survey profiling their audience base, for the express purpose of revealing its democratic social spread, only to have Boyer state that – "it probably does not tell us very much". Boyer felt, that if anything, the opera audience profile supported rather

The Commissioners were increasingly exasperated over the course of the Inquiry, that so many of the major companies, in receipt of public monies, felt so little compulsion to provide proof for their claims of public beneficence. By the third day of the inquiry, Boyer, on hearing that yet another institution had never bothered to conduct audience surveys, snapped that, “having examined many industries... I have never found one in which there was so little interest in defining what the public think of the product”⁸³.

In marked contrast, those organisations whose activities and/or submissions, which contained a strong educational element, were able to convey the impression that their arguments were derived from a substantial body of research. Unlike the Australian Opera or the Australia Council, organisations such as NIDA, the Drama Unit based at Sydney University, the Arena Children’s Theatre, and the Drama Project Trust presented submissions specifically to do with the beneficial effects that performing arts training had upon the individual. Unlike the testimony of the prestige companies, they avoided getting involved in unverifiable abstractions such as whether exposure to the arts was spiritually uplifting and/or morally edifying. Instead, they made reference to “detailed studies” on the educative function of the performing arts⁸⁴, and/or offered precise summaries describing the contributions they had made to the growth of the industry either by developing audiences of the future, or through the provision of trained

than challenged the assumption that opera audiences were unrepresentative and it seemed clear to him that “a relatively high proportion {did} come from professions that {were} highly rewarded” Survey. July/November 1973. Arthur Meadows & Co. Pty. Ltd. Evidence. Australian Opera. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* Sydney Monday 2 June 1975. pp. 60-61. Similarly, the testimony from the administrator and artistic director of the South Australian Theatre Company, about the Company’s elaborate, well documented yet ultimately failed efforts to increase working class audience numbers, also backfired. Boyer forced them to admit that not only was there a “major gulf” between the theatre company and the community but that it may have been the companies “pursuit of excellence” that was at odds with their drive to make its audience more representative. Evidence, George Buchan Ogilvie, Artistic Director, South Australian Theatre Company. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* Adelaide. Thursday 3rd July 1975. pp. 989-90.

⁸³ Evidence. Victorian College of the Arts. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* Melbourne. 19th June. 1975. p. 269.

⁸⁴ Evidence. Derek Nicholson. Sydney University. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* Sydney 2nd June 1975. p. 100.

personnel. Boyer congratulated John Clark, the director of NIDA, on his “comprehensive and valuable submission” and wished that other witnesses had presented their arguments “as specifically as {he} did”⁸⁵. These organisation’s goals were often pragmatic, access orientated and aimed at the young. Arena wished to increase its funding base in order to “reach more schools and children in the poorer suburbs”⁸⁶. The Drama Project Trust offered suggestions that education department employees could be seconded to theatre in education companies as actor/teachers or research advisers⁸⁷. NIDA proposed initiating the development of a national training policy for the performing arts to help encourage diversity and minimise wastage of resources and funding⁸⁸.

In conjunction with these small-scale, grass roots/access orientated activities, educational and community theatre groups stressed the therapeutic qualities associated with active participation in the performing arts. These qualities were quite distinct from the intangible benefits that were supposed to flow from exposure to prestige arts, such as “self awareness” and “enrichment”, which Boyer felt could be as well supplied by participating in Zen Buddhism⁸⁹. In contrast, it was argued that participation (rather than observation) in the performing arts could “help the relatively inarticulate ‘person in the street’”⁹⁰ assist, “in the healthy development of the child”⁹¹, in

⁸⁵ Evidence. John Clark. Director National Institute of Dramatic Art. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* Sydney 2nd June 1975. p. 109A.

⁸⁶ Evidence. Arena Children’s Theatre Company. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* p 705.

⁸⁷ Evidence. Drama Project Trust. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* p. 713.

⁸⁸ Evidence. John Clark. NIDA. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* p. 109A.

⁸⁹ “Nobody is stopping those who wish to participate in any form of endeavour, whether it’s opera or Zen Buddhism – that is part of our democratic ethic: but I don’t think it necessarily follows that because a very small minority wants to do this in either field, the majority should be required to support it”. Boyer to Michael Lanchbery, administrator of the Tasmanian Opera – Evidence, Tasmanian Opera Company. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* p. 823.

⁹⁰ Evidence. Drama Project Trust. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* p. 709.

⁹¹ Evidence. Arena Children’s Theatre Company. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* p 705.

prisoner rehabilitation⁹², in migrant integration programs, and be used as a ‘tool’ in psychiatric therapy⁹³.

Many of the educationalists present at the Inquiry supported arguments regarding the distinction between active and passive involvement in the performing arts. Many stressed that incorporating the performing arts into education programs enhanced a child’s overall ability to learn in other areas.

The Commissioners were also impressed that the evidence of these educationalists seemed to be based on substantial research. Barry Young and George Williams of the Department of Further Education testified that after a study of forty international programs of support for the performing arts, the single factor that stood out in all, was that those countries had established “a close liaison between education and cultural pursuits”⁹⁴. Joseph Wearing from the Adelaide College of Advanced Education provided a detailed historical analysis on the relationship between theatre and education, and argued that prior to the Restoration all theatre was largely community orientated and educative. Wearing also made frequent reference to theatre in education studies in the United Kingdom that proved that the main educational benefits came from participation not observation. Participating in drama as an art form was a “completely natural form of self-expression in a child”⁹⁵.

This ‘expert’ testimony had enormous influence over the Inquiry. Not only did it appear to provide empirical support of the existence of a vital relationship between education and the performing arts, it also carried with it certain pragmatic functions guaranteed to appeal to the Commissioners. Each of the educationalists stressed that encouraging the child/student to

⁹² Evidence. Richard Marshall, Administrator, Cottage Theatre, Adelaide. “We also regard our theatre as a form of prison rehabilitation. We have associated with the Cottage Theatre a house which is used as a type of half-way house for ex-offenders”. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* p 1027.

⁹³ Evidence. Australia Council. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* p 1175.

⁹⁴ Evidence. Barry Young and George Williams. Department of Further Education. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* p.956.

⁹⁵ Evidence. Joseph Wearing. Adelaide College of Advanced Education. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* p.905.

participate in the performing arts within an institution meant that one was also cultivating the audiences of tomorrow. Over the course of the Inquiry, Boyer had felt all the evidence indicated that the “high arts”, such as prestige opera, ballet and drama, were “an acquired taste {that} required a belief that these things {were} good, {and}... worthwhile pursuing”⁹⁶. This explained why the audiences of such activities were so small. On the third day of the Inquiry, Boyer began to pursue a line of questioning that suggested the educationalists had offered him an extremely efficient ‘economic’ solution to the Inquiry. Boyer started to argue that while there was no justification for funding the minority interests of any one group, there was justification for,

Helping create a climate in which more people could acquire these tastes – because it’s probably fair to say that without sufficient exposure to them they don’t really have a chance to make an informed choice as to whether they like them or they don’t.⁹⁷

Concentrating government assistance in the area of education would thus carry the benefit of assisting in a child’s personal growth as well as having the additional (and thus cost effective) benefit of potentially creating a much vaster market for those currently expensive and elite performing arts⁹⁸. The development of audiences of tomorrow would (it was imagined) assist in alleviating the need for such substantial subvention in the future⁹⁹.

⁹⁶ Evidence. Melbourne Theatre Company. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* p. 790.

⁹⁷ *ibid.* p. 854.

⁹⁸ As the inquiry proceeded, Boyer and Robinson became progressively more impressed with those performing arts organisations who promoted the educational/community benefits of their activities over their production output. Consequently, those who came to submit evidence in the latter part of the Inquiry tended to highlight their activities that had specific educational value. In the Australia Council’s second submission, Battersby avoided the esoteric rhetoric of the first and talked instead about the educative function of the artist and quoted liberally from a recent School Commission Report. Evidence. Jean Battersby. Australia Council. Second Submission. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* p. 1174. There seemed to be indications that the performing arts community was developing a new, more sophisticated way of justifying its activities as the Inquiry proceeded. Later submissions tended to shift their focus away from arguments about the need to create a ‘cultured’ nation in favour of the need to create a more ‘educated’ one.

⁹⁹ “Subsidy directed at the performing arts activities at school level could thus presumably be justified as market level development expenditure which will be ultimately recouped. It is tempting to

The Evidence

Was this evidence that proved the educational merits of the performing arts to the Commissioners as compelling as it seemed?

Despite numerous cited references to bodies of work and claims of hands on experience, none of the witnesses, who argued for the therapeutic value of participation of the performing arts, submitted material that offered incontrovertible proof attesting to this. In almost 2000 pages of testimony, there was no material from a single doctor, psychiatrist, psychologist or educationalist that specifically detailed the link between participation in the performing arts and the improvement of health, cognition, or associated skills. Furthermore, there were no references to authoritative texts of trials or studies that revealed the manner in which a community's involvement in the performing arts had causally contributed to a betterment of their lifestyle. Instead, the evidence, offered to the Inquiry by educationalists, was derived from within a self-referencing community of like-minded educative arts specialists. These experts operated from an a priori set of unsubstantiated premises that differed little from those espoused by their counterparts in the prestige companies.

Indications that the evidence was more flimsy or abstruse than it apparently appeared to the Commissioners, were dotted throughout the transcripts. Brian Peck, the assistant Chief education officer of the interim ACT schools authority, made numerous specific assertions as to the importance of the performing arts in helping "to prepare young people to occupy meaningful and satisfying places in society". Peck however, offered no material in support of this and stated instead that, "because of the limited time available... it has not been possible to carry out a proper investigation {and}... the submission therefore is a broad outline only"¹⁰⁰. The Association of Community Theatres cited findings of an UNESCO Conference on Cultural Policy and a United

theorise that subsidy requirements could in this manner be reduced over time". Evidence. Old Tote Theatre Company. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* Canberra 23rd July 1975. p. 1320.

¹⁰⁰ Evidence. Brian Peck, Assistant Chief Education Officer of the Interim ACT Schools Authority. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* Canberra 23rd July 1975. p. 1292.

Nations decade long survey of European patrons of prestige arts profiling them as unrepresentative of the general population. This, they argued, was proof of the value of the therapeutic/educative participatory arts¹⁰¹, but did not provide any similar profiles or statistics to show how or why individuals were ‘blooming’ as a consequence of their participation in the performing arts. Instead the Association resorted to their own form of motherhood statements,

There has been considerable growth in the participatory arts. The need is showing us that we are ready to reintegrate art into our daily lives... it is only from the grass roots an indigenous culture will emerge, bloom and bear fruit not fade like so many rare, imported exotic blooms that leave only infertile seeds behind.¹⁰²

These generalisations were in many ways similar to those so criticised by the Commissioners when made by representatives of the prestige companies¹⁰³. However, when made by advocates of the educationally orientated performing arts, they were accepted without comment. This was partially owing to the fact that the model of the educative performing arts they were promoting was still being implemented in schools and institutions. Because most of the programs targeted the young it could always be (and was) argued that the ‘fruits’ of participation, whether producing huge new audiences or better adults, would not be measurable for years. Indeed, it was clear in the final report that this was part of its appeal. The Commissioners had agreed that “any comprehensive program for education in the arts would... have a long gestation period and its effects within the education system would only be felt in the longer term”¹⁰⁴. These proposals were attractive because they were relatively modest in cost, accessible to all, were thought to have a cumulative

¹⁰¹ Evidence. Frank Ford, David Griggs. Association of Community Theatre. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* Adelaide 3rd July 1975. pp. 1015–1025.

¹⁰² *ibid.* p. 1025.

¹⁰³ The Commissioners had sufficiently problematised the term ‘culture’ to force companies to alter the manner in which they represented themselves. Whilst receiving testimony in Perth from the Australian Broadcasting Commission, Boyer repeatedly stressed that the word ‘culture’ was used as a nonsensical Motherhood expression that “could mean anything to anyone” Evidence. Australian Broadcasting Commission. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* p.1123.

effect and were progressive in nature. Importantly, they met the needs of the IAC at the time in the same way the model of the educative performing arts had met the needs of the AETT in the late 1950s. These factors must have partly explained the way the Commissioners themselves seemed to become absorbed in, and uncritical of, the self-referencing rhetoric embedded in the discourse surrounding the educative arts.

This discourse contained as many incoherent rationalisations and self-evident justifications as those made in defence of the prestige arts. The same process that had assisted in establishing the ‘scientific’ veracity of Stanislavski’s methodology of acting was used to authenticate the effects of the educative performing arts. In the same manner the child as performer was represented as the ideal – “most children left to themselves will act, sing and dance and express themselves with imagination and insight”¹⁰⁵. The adult corrupted by society was to be purified by active involvement in the performing arts and somehow returned to their natural state. Furthermore, the proper dissemination of the educative arts also required a teacher or ‘director’ to orientate the participant. There was no explanation provided, as there were none in acting methodologies, as to why, if such activities were so natural in the young, such a high level of supervision was necessary. It was not made clear why such performing arts *had* to be taught in the acting institution or the school and were not better left to the theatre or, in the case of children, to be engaged in, in playgrounds, after school.

The extent to which the ideological framework that sustained contemporary acting methodologies influenced the wider arena of the educative arts was evident in the manner in which the latter had begun to characterise itself as a ‘science’. Performing arts educationalists frequently asserted that their practices and ideas were not hypothetical but derived from observation and experimentation in the classroom or workshop. While they did not produce any empirically verifiable data detailing, for example, how particular drama

¹⁰⁴ Industries Assistance Commission. ‘2.5.1.1 State Education Departments’. *Assistance to the Performing Arts. op. cit.* p 56.

¹⁰⁵ Evidence. Frank Ford, David Griggs. Association of Community Theatre. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* p. 1025.

workshops might lead to better exam results in English, they were able to give the appearance of expertise. As a closed self referencing system, those within it simply had to cite the work of others in the field to lend credibility to their own activities. NIDA cited the setting up of a second school for actor training within the Victorian College of Arts, as evidence that “a philosophy of training {had} been established in this country”¹⁰⁶. So successful had this been, NIDA encouraged the hope such a school (or others that were being developed) would offer alternative philosophies. Yet at no point did the institution offer any definitions as what its, or these alternative, philosophies actually were.

Likewise, the representative of the Adelaide School of Performing Arts directed the Commissioners to the work of English drama educationalist Dorothy Heathcote. This was proof of the “natural phenomenon” linking drama education and enhanced learning in the child.¹⁰⁷ Yet beyond this reference to another professional working in the field, the school submitted neither supporting material of Heathcote’s work or of its own activities in this area.

The fact that most of the advocates for the educative performing art operated within the existing education system gave further legitimacy to their claims. Even if the educative value of participation in dance, music and drama could not be specifically quantified, they could be presented as a discipline whose components could be regulated and integrated. As a closed system, it was also difficult to disprove the therapeutic claims of the educative performing arts. As noted above, the period over which the benefits to the participant (whether child or adult) would accrue or manifest themselves were impossible to determine. Failure to achieve results could always be directed to other areas, such as the inadequacy or insufficiency of trained specialist teachers. This area too would require new institutions and time for their effects to come to fruition¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰⁶ Evidence. John Clark. NIDA. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* p. 106.

¹⁰⁷ Evidence. Adelaide School of Performing Arts. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* p. 312.

¹⁰⁸ The Victorian College of Arts stated that their new facility would be amongst the first to provide, urgently needed, training courses for performing arts teachers. These courses were to be run in

Boyer and Robinson had also accepted as unproblematic the belief that the term education had some kind of universal meaning. The idea that incorporating the performing arts into the education system was not to “mould tastes” but to disseminate information and increase awareness of the “experiences that the performing arts offer”, was based on an unrealistic understanding of the school system¹⁰⁹. Tim Rowse argued that the IAC’s recommendations were simply “naïve” because,

To decide to place something in the curriculum was surely to imply that it {was} important knowledge which {was} worth taking seriously, because like other knowledge learned at school, its mastery, conferred distinction. Calling it information dodged a number of vital issues of the cultural policy: which ‘arts’ {were} to be included? How {were} they to be taught? How {were} they to be assessed? How {was} the result of assessment to be weighted in the package of skills on which young people {were} to be graded?¹¹⁰

The IAC report also failed to account for how the kinds of unequal patterns of distribution located in the performing arts industry would be prevented from reproducing themselves within the school system. The teaching of performing arts within the school entailed much expense and necessary access to certain resources, which meant that schools in wealthy areas or students from wealthy backgrounds were naturally advantaged. Rehearsal spaces, musical instruments, specialist teachers and private lessons all absorbed considerable portions of a school’s budget and, for those institutions with limited funds, it would be an area of low priority. The Commissioners assumption that such cultural inequity would be simply solved by increased assistance denied, “the school’s historical function of distributing, or regulating access to, the forms of cultural capital”¹¹¹. To regard the performing arts as a vital part of the

conjunction with the new training courses for actors and dancers. Evidence. Victorian College of Arts. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* p. 759 and p. 789.

¹⁰⁹ Industries Assistance Commission. ‘2.4 Criteria for Allocating Assistance’. *Assistance to the Performing Art. op. cit.* p. 49.

¹¹⁰ Rowse. ‘A Vicarious Public’. Chapter 3. *op. cit.* pp. 40-45.

¹¹¹ John Guillory. *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*. The University of Chicago Press. London & Chicago. 1993. p. vii.

curriculum, over or equal to English, Mathematics or History was an indication of a set of inherited values and tastes; a set that would be recognised primarily by those (teachers, parents and students) who had also inherited such values and tastes¹¹².

The Commissioners who had been remarkably consistent in their attacks on the inequitable distribution of performing arts subsidy and upon the apparently neutral rhetoric about social benefits, which served to obscure social division, were unable to discern identical patterns inherent in the dissemination of education. As Pierre Bourdieu noted, in an analysis written around the same time as the IAC report,

The educational system, an institutional classifier which is itself an objectified system of classification reproducing the hierarchies of the social world in a transformed form, with its cleavages by 'level' corresponding to social strata and its divisions into specialties and disciplines which reflect social divisions ad infinitum... with every appearance of neutrality, and establishes hierarchies which are not experienced as purely technical, and therefore partial and one sided, but as total hierarchies, grounded in nature, so that social value comes to be identified with 'personal' value, scholastic dignities with human dignity¹¹³.

A few of the witnesses before the Commission did attempt to challenge assertions made by the educative performing arts representatives. Nigel Triffit, the director of the Fringe theatre Yellow Brick Roadshows, pointed out that theatre educationalists were as interested in maintaining the status quo as those involved in the prestige arts,

¹¹² Interestingly, there were hints that the education system was a great deal more circumspect about what the performing arts had to contribute to learning. A 1976 Australian Youth Participation in the Performing Arts report (quoted in the IAC findings) stated that the high resignation rate amongst drama teachers was because of a "lack of understanding of the value of drama as an educational tool by principals, parents and staff teaching more orthodox subjects". This led to drama teachers feeling ignored or actively thwarted in the school environment. This echoed the reluctance of the universities of the 1950s to accept vocational acting courses as a valid tertiary subject. A. Godfrey-Smith. *AYPAA Report of the Victorian Tour 1975-76* (8th August 1976). Industries Assistance Commission. *Assistance to the Performing Arts. op. cit.* p. 107.

¹¹³ This analysis was first published in France in 1979. Pierre Bourdieu. 'The Effects of Domination'. *Distinction: A Social Distinction of the Judgement of Taste*. Routledge. London. 1989. p. 387.

One of the dangers in a commission like this or any discussion about public funding for art forms, some of which are necessarily antagonistic towards existing social order, is that people are going to be nice all the time and do things the people giving out money want them to do.¹¹⁴

Triffit argued that equity would not be established in the distribution of funding until there was a recognition that the legitimisation of any cultural form – be it an elite opera performance or a drama class in a secondary school – was part of the means of one group in society maintaining power over another. The notion that drama or music or dance became stripped of its cultural markers simply because it left the prestige stage and entered the educational system was a misconception. It did not, for example, lead to “night-cruising the main drag in Blacktown” being regarded as a valid (or fundable) expression of culture¹¹⁵. The school as much as the stage would sanctify certain performing arts activities as valid cultural activities to the diminution of others. Legitimisation reinforced the “us-ness” of the dominant and “invalidated” the culture of “them” as it “inhibited”, “misinterpreted” and “trivialised” the “communication of particular events and/or myths of the other possible realities”¹¹⁶. As Triffit crudely summed it up, “a night at the opera {had} more propriety than a cunt hunt in the suburbs”¹¹⁷.

More specific criticisms regarding the relationship between education and the performing arts came from more established individuals. Representatives of the Melbourne based Australian Performing Group (known as the Pram Factory), perhaps the most successful independent drama company at the

¹¹⁴ Evidence. Nigel Wilson Triffit, Director. Yellow Brick Roadshows. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* Canberra, Friday, 25th July, 1975. p. 1555.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.* p. 1555.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 1556.

¹¹⁷ The Yellow Brick Roadshows promoted an alternative system of funding known as “The Big Pot of Money”. Based on a Californian idea, randomly appointed officers had to seek out (one could not apply) any arts activity they liked and provide them with a small lump sum – no questions asked. While the Commissioners never regarded this rather novel alternative with any seriousness, they did accept some of Triffit’s criticisms. Particularly that all evidence submitted was from within an unrepresentative paradigm of self-interested parties who did not reflect the culture of the majority of the population. *ibid.* p. 1556.

time¹¹⁸, argued strongly against both institutionalised practitioner training and against the ‘training’ of young audiences in schools. The A.P.G. felt that theatre’s responsibility was to locate rather than train the “taste of the unrepresented non-haute couture”¹¹⁹ audience and produce shows that appealed to them. The A.P.G representatives also believed that it was vital for actors, writers and technicians to be trained within the working environment of the professional theatre and not in separate institutions. The playwright John Romeril stated that there was no role for schooling actors, “I do not think that the history of such institutions has been a happy one. It is an extremely practical business best learned like an apprenticeship, on the job training”¹²⁰.

The most coherent and sustained attack upon the model of the educative performing arts came from theatre director and long term and vehement critic of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, Wal Cherry. While he stated at the outset of his evidence that he was representing no organisation, he was teaching Australian theatre and film at the Adelaide School of Performing Arts at the time. Cherry was the only member of the performing arts industry who offered a historical and industrial critique of the Australia Council. While many small performing arts organisations were highly critical of the Council regarding the inequitable distribution of funds, it was Cherry who asserted that the entire model for subsidy was “ill-considered”. He believed that the model of current subvention was based neither on logic or practice but was instead “a sideways shuffle” from the AETT¹²¹. The Australia Council seemed to him, “to be an organisation that comes between the funding and the performance. Why in fact that organisation ought to exist in the way it does really should be questioned”¹²².

¹¹⁸ The Australian Performing Group was one of the few companies before the Commission to present the Commission with evidence of both growth in attendance (23%) and in Box Office (33%) between 1974 and 1975. Evidence. John Romeril, Jon Hawkes, John Timlin, elected representatives of the A.P.G. *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* Canberra, Thursday, 25th July, 1975, p. 1437.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.* p. 1438.

¹²⁰ *ibid.* p. 1453.

¹²¹ Evidence. Walter John Cherry, *Official Transcripts. op. cit.* Adelaide, 2nd July 1975, P. 945

¹²² *ibid.* p. 945.

Cherry's admonition of the model rather than of patterns of allocation enabled him to question much of the evidence that had been presented to the Commission and which he had clearly been present for¹²³. He challenged one of the most popular assertions made during the Inquiry, that the performing arts would do much better and be much more self supporting if the wider community understood "what they were all about". The idea that the performing arts could solve its economic problems by training the community to "acquire a taste" for their activities was false. This pursuit simply reproduced the "classic highbrow-lowbrow division of public activities" which he felt Australia had to "a marked degree", more so, even than in other countries¹²⁴. What it also did, was break the natural empathetic link between audience and performer and thus destroyed the basic economic imperative essential to sustain a user/pay relationship. Cherry gave the example of a circus highwire act. The Circus could be self-supporting because it provided a basic bond between performer and the consumer. The consumer would say to him or herself "I will pay for my seat because I want to see performers do something I cannot" or "I would hate that to be me falling from up there". Unless there was an existing desire from a community to witness certain theatrical activities, all attempts to construct 'taste' would be artificial and economically unsuccessful.

Cherry was equally critical of the argument put forward, by way of analogy, that assistance should be given to the performing arts because it supplied a similar function to education. Boyer, more than half way through the Inquiry, asked Cherry what he thought of the evidence that, "the main value of the performing arts may be in the fostering of the activity of people as performers as a primary objective rather than providing entertainment for many in an audience"¹²⁵. Cherry's response was unequivocal. He disagreed with the education analogy and argued that the assumption that one's involvement in performance increased awareness had simply never been

¹²³ It was clear that Cherry had sat through a substantial part of the Adelaide testimony - "a very real problem facing us, and that is it has been asserted (here today) is that the performing arts would perform much more for the community and/or be much more self supporting if the community understood what they were all about". It was an argument he disagreed with. *ibid.* p. 948.

¹²⁴ *ibid.* p. 952.

proved. Such an assertion was instead, “a sacred cow of educational drama”¹²⁶. He denied that one could perceive a definite relationship between the educational process and that very “strained” and difficult process which resulted in a professional theatre production. Instead, what one had were the advocates for the educative performing arts, making claims that in his experience had never been conclusively demonstrated. He felt it untenable to accept that,

Because we have a lot of youngsters down here on the plaza making coat hanger men or putting up piles of boots, that we necessarily in any way increase awareness of other people or themselves. That is one of the sacred cows of modern educational processes. It is simply not proven.¹²⁷

While Commissioner Boyer appeared to have some interest in Cherry’s submission, the sheer volume of evidence in support of the educative model of the performing arts would have made his lone voice of dissent easy to dismiss. The final report contained no recommendations similar to those proposed by Triffit, the Australian Performing Group or by Cherry, and significantly scant acknowledgment of the concerns raised regarding potential inequities in performing arts education. Indeed, it can be argued that many of the conclusions reached by the Commissioners, in the sections detailing assistance for education, were deeply conservative. These conclusions revealed a very conventional perception of the role of the performer in the industry, something that the notoriety of their more radical suggestions (the devolution of flagship funding) had possibly hitherto obscured.

Part. 3. Interlocking Systems - Preserving the Therapeutic/Educative Model

The concluding section demonstrates the effect of the IAC’s recommendations, regarding education and the performing arts, on the arts industry of the 1990s. These recommendations, accepted by the Federal Government, the

¹²⁵ *ibid.* p. 952.

¹²⁶ *ibid.* p. 953.

¹²⁷ *ibid.* p. 953.

Australia Council and other major organisations at the time, were explicitly linked to the rises in training opportunities for artists and the corresponding increases in artist unemployment over the next 20 years. They were also linked to the massive proliferation of activities explicitly focused upon 'proving' the value of the subsidised performing arts. These activities had a distinct educational element, such as the explosion of performing arts training in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors, cultivating the tastes or potential of the future audience and artist. They were also connected to the rapid growth of arts organisations' educational outreach schemes that became a permanent adjunct to their more highbrow activities. The proliferation of therapeutic performing arts training would contribute to one of the few major growth areas in the industry - the training of and employment of teachers specialising in the area. The number of private and government training facilities for artists would spiral. These students, trained as skilled performers and practitioners, would often only find employment opportunities in teaching cultural activities within training facilities. Consequently, the performing arts training sector continued to expand rapidly and without reference to the performing arts industry in which the employment opportunities remained small and relatively static. Despite the apparent dysfunction of the model, it carried with it mechanisms to sustain government subvention for the performing arts more successfully than the earlier versions of the model. As will be demonstrated, this improved model deployed a series of more sophisticated strategies for deflecting criticism that ensured that it would be able, as was the ideology of Stanislavskianism, to reproduce itself in perpetuity.

These strategies emerged from a corresponding growth industry in the area of gathering and disseminating information to quantify the value (often the educative value) of the subsidised arts. The material generated from these endeavours, similar to those publications in Part one, was part of a continuous stream of commissioned research papers, skills analysis reports, statistic gathering and Inquiries by legitimate cultural institutions that were produced with greater and greater frequency through the 1980s and 90s. Collectively, these endeavours, in conjunction with the multiplying arts educations schemes, operated as a vast interlocking system of activities that

were able to support and sustain each other and were all contained within the model of the therapeutic/educative performing arts.

Employment

The advocacy by the IAC (and the acceptance by cultural institutions) that education was one of the critical factors in the development of the subsidised performing arts, differed little from those arguments made popular by the Arts Council and UNESCO after WWII. The AETT had adopted the same arguments in the late 1950s as justification for ongoing subvention and as an explanation for the inability of certain performing arts companies to attract substantial audiences or become financially self sufficient. As in the case of those arguments, the IAC's 1977 recommendations for a model of the therapeutic/educative performing arts contained within them a deeply reductive perception of how the performing arts could operate as an industry. Despite criticisms that the IAC had inappropriately applied economic criteria relevant to the textile or wheat industries, to the performing arts, the final report revealed very few indications that the Commissioners assessed the performing arts according to conventional industrial standards.

In the section of the IAC final report discussing employment, the Commissioners stated that, "one of the factors responsible for many of the present forms of assistance to the performing arts {was} the direct relationship between assistant measures and employment in the activities they support"¹²⁸. In contrast, the Commission's recommendation for future assistance was that it focussed on the triple goals of, education, innovation, and dissemination and toward optimising community benefits and increasing general interest in the arts. The provision of employment opportunities was definitely not the goal. The report argued there could be no justifiable reason why public resources should be used to foster the interests of particular

¹²⁸ Industries Assistance Commission. 'Employment'. *Assistance to the Performing Art*. Parliamentary Paper. *op. cit.* p. 35.

groups just, “because they have certain skills or have elected to follow certain careers”¹²⁹.

While the provision of employment was not an aim of the IAC recommendations, it was thought that the proposed education initiatives would provide more training and teaching opportunities. In addition, it was hoped that the recommendations for education and the performing arts would have the potential to increase demand by creating a ‘taste’ for such activities. If community and performing arts groups capitalised on this supposed upsurge and upon the technological and commercial opportunities available to them, then employment levels should increase. This kind of theorising was reminiscent of the AETT’s championing (over the previous 20 years) of policies that equated cultivating the tastes of the young with the creation of (vast) future audiences which would in turn, it was imagined, increase employment opportunities.

The above assertions, contained in the final report, carried two principal misconceptions. Firstly, that a direct relationship between assistance and employment did in fact exist in the model of subsidy at the time. And secondly, that the proliferation of training opportunities at all levels would increase the value of performers as employees and expand the opportunities available to them rather than simply flood an industry that already suffered from chronic unemployment.

The notion that there was direct link between government monies directed to the Australia Council (or the AETT before it) and the creation of specific work opportunities for artists was specious. It implied that there was a simple correlation between variations in funding levels and employment figures for performers. However, as was shown in the history of the AETT, a rise in subsidy could equally mean increased employment for administrators, executives, accountants, publicists, and employees of the agency distributing

¹²⁹ *ibid.* p. 35.

funds and not necessarily performers¹³⁰. Assistance could be distributed in such a way to mean more money for fewer performers or more money for sets and costumes and not cast. The correlation between assistance and employment further diminished when money from the Council could be directed to a theatre company or ballet company making up anticipated box office shortfalls for a season of 'difficult' productions¹³¹. A Company's expenditure could vary enormously according to the nature of its productions. The Australian Opera and Ballet could often have static employment numbers but huge variations in budget because of touring or overly ambitious set designs. State theatre companies alternatively were more vulnerable at the box office. Increased assistance could be sought to cover a loss caused by content and not for the numbers of a cast members employed. Finally, despite the fact that government subsidy increased by almost 20% in 1971 and more than doubled in 1973 (a rise of approximately 120% in three years), the number of performers employed by companies receiving government assistance only rose from 647 to 839, less than 30%, between 1971 and 1975¹³². Thus, while it was obvious that a proportion of government monies did provide a certain number of performers with work, it would be incorrect to say that there was an unequivocal link between that money and the creation of employment opportunities for performers.

¹³⁰ Many complaints made to the Australia Council over the years were about exactly this issue. A 1976 UNESCO Report on the Performing Arts in Australia published a section entitled, 'Criticisms of the Australia Council'. One criticism was that administration costs of the Australia Council and its predecessor had risen faster than total funds (8.4% increase for 1972-73; 16.7% increase for 1975-78). Another was that the Council had misled the Prime Minister over a grant supposedly given to Music Viva Society for administration and training that in fact went to fund an additional Council Board member. Yet another criticism was that the Australia Council spent government funds for the performing arts on "extravagant and wasteful working lunches". Section B. 'The Performing Arts'. *Entertainment and Society in Australia*. UNESCO Report. *op. cit.* pp. 20-21.

¹³¹ An example of this was the large amounts of Government funds diverted to the Old Tote Theatre Company in the late 1970s in attempt to keep it from bankruptcy. This was due to the company's consistently poor performance at the box office. The Council finally decided in 1978 that it could no longer continue to support this ailing company and funding was stoped in 1979. Occasional Papers. *Theatre Board: Support for Professional Theatre Companies*. *op. cit.* pp. 74-78.

¹³² These are the figures taken from employment data from the 19 major subsidised companies in Australia during the period 1971 to 1975. Industries Assistance Commission. 'Employment Effects'. *Assistance to the Performing Arts*. *op. cit.* p. 81.

The manner in which assistance was allocated made it difficult for individual performers to operate as independent traders. Subsidy was administered from the top down to centralised bodies and thence on to companies with recognised administrative structures¹³³. The executives/directors of these companies would then fill roles available in productions in any manner they saw fit. The companies were not obligated to hold open auditions, or regard the bulk of performers as anything but a passing parade of casual labour on short-term contracts. Significantly, this meant that performers had virtually no means to access government assistance and thus also no means to autonomously access the marketplace.

Artificial constraints or interventions upon the market place were one of the most consistent areas of criticisms directed toward to the performing arts industry by the IAC. The Commissioners had argued that interference between the natural development of supply and demand distorted the manner in which a nation's culture developed. Thus it would seem likely that one of the IAC recommendations would have been to encourage those that supplied the goods - the performers - to have greater access to the customer - the audience. This would then allow the performer to orientate their services to suit existing or emerging demands. While it was possible that had *all* the IAC recommendations been carried out and flagship funding been dismantled, then performers would have had greater independence in the market, this seems unlikely given their ideas pertaining to the function of the artist. Not only had the IAC made erroneous assumptions about the links between

¹³³ The Australia Council's 1993 -1994 Annual Report contained a listing of all grant recipients of that financial year. While there were individual performers who did obtain access to subsidy, it tended to be exclusively in the category of 'creative development'. These grants were given to artists to develop skills, material or gain further training. They were seldom given to individual artists more than once and they were insufficient to pay for production costs. The total figure for them was also extremely small in relation to the grants given to companies. In the area of individual drama performance funding (as opposed to annual company grants) the majority of grants went to (albeit smaller) companies, but occasionally were granted to individuals and/or collectives. These grants were much smaller than annual grants and the companies/individuals receiving them had the added burden of having to often pay expensive rental costs for performance spaces rented out by the much more substantially subsidised recipients receiving annual grants 'Grants: Performing Arts'. *Australia Council: Annual Report 1993-1994. op. cit. pp. 96-104.*

assistance and employment, they also accepted, with little analysis, certain stereotypes about performers with regard to industrial practice.

Rather than perceive the chronic levels of unemployment existing amongst performers as an even partial consequence of the existing model of subvention, the Commission accepted that this was simply part of the nature of the profession itself. Based on material supplied by Actors' Equity, the Musicians' Union, and NIDA, the Commissioners concluded that the number of people seeking work would consistently exceed both the training and jobs available. At the time of the Inquiry, figures from Actors' Equity indicated that 60% of its 7000 members were not employed either in a full time or part time basis. The Musicians Union also submitted statistics that revealed that of its 16,000 members, a similar percentage were unemployed. This was not however, according to the Commissioners, to be considered as serious a situation as it might have been in the wool or wheat industries, owing to the "unique motivations" of those seeking employment in this sector. While they did not wish to suggest that "a high level of unemployment, or under-employment, {could} be regarded with equanimity in any industry"¹³⁴, they did believe certain qualifications could be made in the case of the performing arts.

NIDA had submitted 'evidence' asserting that the therapeutic benefits accrued by its acting students, were an explanation as to why actors were able to tolerate such uncertain employment conditions¹³⁵. It was an argument the Commissioners felt could be extended to all those training and participating in all the performing arts. Thus the IAC utilised certain ideological assertions, contained in the actor methodologies, underlining NIDA's teaching practices – particularly Stanislavskianism – to serve as the ideological legitimisation of poor working conditions for all professional performers. The Commissioners stated that because there was, "clearly a strong factor of personal satisfaction of individual expression - involved in the performing arts, {this transcended}

¹³⁴ Industries Assistance Commission. '2.9.1.3. Employment Effects'. *Assistance to the Performing Art. op. cit.* p. 79.

¹³⁵ *ibid.* p. 79.

the normal operations of the job market and their influences on long term employment patterns”¹³⁶.

In this interpretation, the performer was effectively infantilised. The image of the performer being divorced from economic concerns or necessities was reminiscent of the split between management and creative employees advocated in Stanislavskianism. Their almost childlike desire to seek employment in the performing arts elevated them above the practicalities of a ‘normal’ career. It also seemed to absolve a government subsidised industry from obligations that it might have had in providing performers with a more controlled employment environment. The employer within this interpretation was assigned a role of inordinate power. The Commissioners accepted the view, propounded by Actors’ Equity, that some unemployment was necessary and, “indeed must be encouraged to some extent, as employers must have a wide variety of performers from whom they can choose”¹³⁷.

The final report presented this version of the performer’s place in the industry, as a set of universal, self-evident, historical truths. There was no acknowledgment, for example, that before the 20th century the existence of guilds in Europe and Britain had regulated patterns of employment for performers and supported their role as sole traders. It failed to account for alternative contemporary performing arts industry models, such as those in Eastern Bloc countries, in which strict entry conditions created an environment of full employment for State trained artists. Further more, the report’s opinions regarding employers “need for wide variety”, discounted the existence of the traditional star system that was very much critical to the economic success of the international film and commercial theatre industries. This system proved that in at least a section of the industry, a wide variety of employers would in fact vie competitively for the services of a few performers.

¹³⁶ *ibid.* p. 79.

¹³⁷ *ibid.* p. 81.

The IAC could have in fact suggested many alternative models for the performing arts industry than the one it did. For example, it could have proposed a shift in the direction of subsidy from production to infrastructure or asset acquisition, in order to break the pattern of perpetual funding. By diverting some subsidy into the purchase and maintenance of venues, the Australia Council could have removed one of the greatest costs facing smaller companies or individual performers¹³⁸. If companies were to be encouraged to be in immediate contact with the market, access to venues rather than production funds may have stimulated focus on customer demand. Alternatively, the Commission could have urged that the number of government subsidised places available for professional training were severely limited, in an attempt to check the growing oversupply of employees. Indeed, it could have discouraged the existence of separate training facilities altogether and suggested that companies select a small number of candidates for apprenticeship each year and thus match the number of trained personnel to the growth of the industry.

The Commission's characterisation of the infantilised performer was directly connected to its selection of the therapeutic/educative performing arts as a model for future subvention. It was not however, a characterisation taken from professional performers themselves, although they did have a high degree of complicity in this perception. Individual actors, musicians, and dancers were, for the most part, unrepresented throughout the course of the Inquiry. Instead, it was an image promulgated by performing arts educators and community theatre representatives whose model of the educative performing arts the Commission had found so compelling. Because this model was predicated upon notions of training that made little differentiation

¹³⁸ At one stage, there was acknowledgment about such problems by the Australia Council Theatre Board. Companies had alerted the Theatre Board, "to the strain venue costs, both rental and servicing, have placed on their budgets". Despite this, the Council decided that the provision of venues was not its obligation and the issue should be taken up with State Governments or other Government Departments such as Public Works or National Parks and Monuments. There was little recognition that practitioners (or companies for that matter) scarcely had the time or resources to embark on ventures such as lobbying Government Departments for venues. Even if these Departments built venues, they would still be charging rents to companies that would have to come out government grants. 'Problems and Possibilities'. *Theatre Board: Support for Professional Theatre Companies. op. cit.* p. 6.

between the amateur, the school student and the adult professional, the benefits of such training were not measurable by fiscal reward¹³⁹. The professional performer like the child participating in the performing arts was rewarded through ‘personal development in the areas of, “self-expression, communication and self-understanding”¹⁴⁰.

The IAC accepted, without critique, unsubstantiated assertions justifying why performers lacked certain industrial rights. It had done so in a manner that differed greatly to its treatment of unsubstantiated submissions from the prestige companies. Consequently, the Commission accepted a perception of the performer in which a basic level of working conditions essential to employees from other industries was regarded as inapplicable. The acceptance of this model thus had specific consequences for how the professional performer’s role in the industry would develop.

One consequence was the Australia Council’s adoption, soon after the Inquiry, of a definition of the artist that was not contingent on employment. Beginning in 1982, all the reports specifically focusing on the economic status of Australian artists used as their ‘starting point’ the UNESCO definition of an artist¹⁴¹. This definition (formulated by UNESCO in 1980) declared that an artist was,

Any person who creates or gives creative expression to, or recreates works of arts, who considers his artistic creation to be an essential part of his life, who contributes in this way to the development of art and culture and who is or asks to be recognised as an artist, whether or not he is bound by any relations of employment or association.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Hugh Hunt, in his support of Stanislavski’s methodology as the basis for Australian actor training, had made this same claim. The actor had to be motivated by love not money and had to be willing to “make the necessary sacrifice in their income to devote themselves whole heartedly to their art”. *The Making of the Australian Theatre*. F. W. Cheshire. Melbourne. 1960. p. 28.

¹⁴⁰ Industries Assistance Commission. *Assistance to the Performing Art*. *op. cit.* p. 54.

¹⁴¹ *The Artist in Australia Today*. Australia Council for the Arts. 1982. *When Are You Going To Get A Real Job?* Australia Council for the Arts. 1989. *But What Do You Do For A Living?* Australia Council for the Arts. 1994. *op. cit.*

¹⁴² *When Are You Going To Get A Real Job*. *op. cit.* p. 4.

The Council clearly accepted the notion that the therapeutic benefits gained through involvement in the performing arts explained why practitioners should not be compared to other workers. The explanation for the appalling and increasing falls in artist earnings given by the Australia Council came in a two-part answer to the question they themselves had posed “What are the reasons for these low returns for artist earnings”? The first reason was that the large number of practitioners and potential practitioners available for work were “putting the brakes” on what could be earned in that occupation. Second, was the limited market for many types of artistic labour such as ‘live stage acting’. These points, in the Council’s view, did not “mean, however, that there is an oversupply of artists, since the questions of supply and demand in this context should be judged in broad social terms rather than against narrow ‘financial’ criteria”¹⁴³.

The Australia Council’s use of the UNESCO definition disavowed the perception of artist as worker and helped to contribute to their increasingly marginalised status in the arts industry. This was noted as early as 1985 in a submission to the Australia Council Arts Employment Inquiry by the Women’s Bureau of the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations. This submission stated that the use of the UNESCO definition was hindering the potential of the “artist to be accorded the real status of worker” because it did not allow artwork “to be considered an industry” and made it difficult for the wider community to consider it as such¹⁴⁴. However, even with this insight, the report swiftly retreated to citing solutions to low income, poor working conditions and high unemployment as lying in the provision of more training¹⁴⁵. This pattern of solving employment/industrial problems with a call for better/increased more centralised training opportunities would

¹⁴³ *ibid.* p. ii.

¹⁴⁴ Women’s Bureau Department of Employment and Industrial Relations. ‘The Artist as Worker’. *Women in the Arts: Submission to the Australia Council Arts Employment Inquiry*. Australian Government Publishing Service. Canberra. 1985. p. 5.

¹⁴⁵ The Department of Employment and Industrial Relations felt that “the specific disadvantages that women face within the arts industry need to be addressed through training”. They did not explain how this would help women artists in the performing arts combat sexism, the paucity of roles, unequal pay, help them challenge agents who favoured youth and ‘looks’ over skills or the under representation of them in mainstream theatres. *ibid.* p. 9.

proliferate over the years. Arts Training Australia, the peak advisory body on vocational education and training for the arts and cultural industries, and the Senate Standing Committee's Arts Education Inquiry, in 1994 both simply reiterated the proposal that improvements in training would causally lead to improvements in employment for the artist¹⁴⁶. None of these studies provided any evidence of how this had been, or would be, achieved in relation to the existing constraints within the industry. Calls for providing artists with greater business skills to enable them to either "generate further significant employment"¹⁴⁷ or increase their ability to become self-employed, simply ignored the unfettered exclusionary practices of subsidised performing arts companies. A basic example of this misunderstanding of the relationship between training and employment was found in many reports on inequitable representation in the theatre¹⁴⁸. They all simply formulated and produced 'solutions' that called for greater training opportunities for women, Aboriginal and non-white actors, failing utterly to explain how this was to impact on the casting policies of State Theatre Companies that were exempt from the Anti-Discrimination Act¹⁴⁹.

The idea that training acted as a panacea for industrial problems was for the most part willingly endorsed by performing artists, who frequently claimed (particularly actors) that there were insufficient training opportunities

¹⁴⁶ Arts Training Australia. *National Vocational Education and Training Plan for the Arts and Cultural Industries*. Arts Training Australia, March 1994. Senate Standing Committee on the Environment, Recreation, and the Arts. *Arts Education Inquiry*. November 1994. Volumes 1 –7.

¹⁴⁷ Arts Training Australia. *op. cit.* p. 10.

¹⁴⁸ Anna Kanaris. *Give us a Break: Equity and Access in Arts Training*. Arts Training Western Australia, March 1994. Hilary Robinson & Alex Ankrah (Editors) and Phyllida Shaw (Final Draft). *Women in the Arts: A Strategy for Action*. Australia Council, 1985. *Women in the Arts*. National Arts and Media Strategy Unit Arts Council, Australia Council, 1990.

¹⁴⁹ Aboriginal actor and director, Lydia Miller described the representation of indigenous actors on Australian stages in 1993 as "stereotyped and discriminatory". She wondered whether it was time to cease letting the mainstream companies self-regulate their casting policies and instead asked "should there be stringent financial controls on companies that are dependant on government funds to ensure Aboriginal actors are equally represented? Should their programming content be controlled, or should they be sued in the Anti-Discrimination Board?" '1993 in Review'. *Equity Section Yearbook: December 1993*. Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance. p. 10.

available¹⁵⁰. Arts Training Australia stated in 1994 that practitioners had identified that training was offered only at entry level to the industry and that for the majority of performers there was “no structured post-level vocational educational and training available”¹⁵¹. The provision of such training, it was argued, would be particularly beneficial to the artist employed on a part time, casual, contract and or freelance basis. Pierre Bourdieu, identified this tendency to offer more and more training as encouraging a “new” system, (of a state of perpetual “studenthood”), “that favours the development of a less realistic, less resigned relationship to the future than the old sense of proper limits, which was the basics of an acute sense of hierarchy”¹⁵². Instead, training gave the illusion that artists could enter an open market and not one that was strewn with innumerable obstacles and limitations. The trained actor, ultimately forced to earn a living as a waiter or in advertising, who continued to consider him or herself as a “true” artist and insisted that the “mercenary trade” was only as a temporary expedient soon to be abandoned, was part of the,

Allodoxia which the new system {encouraged} in innumerable ways {and was} the reason why relegated agents {collaborated} in their own relegation by overestimating the studies on which they {embarked}, overvaluing their qualifications, and banking on possible futures which {did} not really exist for them.¹⁵³

Complicity of Practitioners

Despite being the recipients of some of the most negative effects (particularly unemployment) of the therapeutic/educative model, performing arts

¹⁵⁰ This percentage did drop between 1989 and 1994 when the number of actors “dissatisfied” with training opportunities fell from 51% to 39%. It was possible that this drop coincided with the enormous 44% fall in actor’s incomes between those years. *When Are You Going to Get a Real Job?* *op. cit.* p. 9. *But What Do You Do For A Living?* *op. cit.* p. 16. None of these findings affected Arts Training Australia’s calls for increased training opportunities in 1994.

¹⁵¹ Arts Training Australia. *National Vocational Education and Training Plan for the Arts and Cultural Industries.* *op. cit.* p. 47.

¹⁵² Bourdieu. ‘The Social Space and its Transformations’. *Distinction.* *op. cit.* p. 155.

¹⁵³ *ibid.* p. 155.

practitioners were amongst the principal contributors to sustaining its ideologies. Their complicity in this process was multifaceted.

First of all, the majority of practitioners were drawn from a minority of the population who were highest in cultural capital. Like the audiences of the activities in which they sought to work, practitioners tended to be well educated and from wealthy backgrounds. This made sense given that that an 'appreciation' and comprehension of legitimate cultural practice came through a combination of education and social origin and thus individuals from such backgrounds were advantaged in comprehending certain cultural codes, less coherent to those who were not.

Whilst there has been very little research into the socio-economic origins of practitioners in Australia one can reconstruct their demographics from certain clues provided in related studies. The Australia Council's various economic studies of artists identified that a third of all artists had begun their training as young children¹⁵⁴. These findings suggested that these artists came from backgrounds with a certain level of income and inherited a sense of the 'value' of legitimate culture from their parents. More compelling was the evidence provided about the education levels of practitioners. Only 9% of Australian artists had not completed secondary school compared to 32% of the general workforce. In addition, 48% of all artists held a diploma, degree, higher degree, or post-graduate degree compared to only 13% of the Australian workforce¹⁵⁵. A Live Theatre Performers Skills Analysis/Skills Audit project commissioned jointly by Actor's Equity, ATA and the Entertainment Employers Association in 1994 indicated that in the performing arts, artist qualifications were even higher¹⁵⁶. All these reports used the high levels of education amongst artists as the basis for arguments for either increased subsidy or for increases in award minimums. Yet, none of them indicated that

¹⁵⁴ *But What Do You Do For A Living?* *op. cit.* p. 15.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.* p. 14.

¹⁵⁶ Opera Singers. Post Graduate Qualification 24%, Degree 29%, Diploma 65%. Dancers. Post Graduate Qualification 1%, Degree. 6%, Diploma 70%. Actors. Post Graduate Qualification 8%, Degree 16%, Diploma 52%. Ian Predl and Associates. *Live Theatre Performers. Skills Analysis/Skills*

these levels might signal an over representation of individuals who, because of their origins, had greater access to tertiary arts training.

Another reason for the astonishingly high percentage of tertiary qualifications amongst artists was that it was becoming harder for an individual to enter the industry without attending one of the growing number of Government training facilities¹⁵⁷. This narrowing of entry points into the industry could only be viewed with equanimity if access into these institutions was the same for all individuals. While not all of these vocational training facilities required that certain marks be attained in secondary school as a condition of entry (although almost all stated that they favoured those that had completed High School) they did require a certain level of assumed knowledge about legitimate culture. An example of this practice was that all the government actor training schools made it compulsory that students auditioning for the course perform a monologue from one of Shakespeare's plays along with two other pieces. This required a level of assumed knowledge about how to read and understand such a piece of classical literature. It also required knowledge of Shakespeare's plays in production, as the 'proper' pronunciation of the language cannot be derived from the text and required one to have heard it 'properly' performed. Given that many students left school at the Certificate stage or took lower entry or remedial English classes that did not include Shakespeare, it was possible that such a requirement could act as a disincentive to apply for such institutions¹⁵⁸. Such assumed knowledge could

Audit Project. October, 1992. Equity Section. Media and Entertainment and Arts Alliance. p. 6, 27, 44.

¹⁵⁷ 70% of artists had responded that they had some form of basic qualification in their art form. Interestingly only 53% thought that this type of training was the most important they had received with the rest (particularly older practitioners) responding that the best training "was on the job". *ibid.* pp. 15-16.

¹⁵⁸ It could also act as a disincentive to those from a non English speaking background. A recent Australia Council report on representation of NESB people in theatre, film and television quoted a community theatre worker as saying that they knew of two young people from a NESB background who "were quite shattered by the audition experience" and asked – "How can our kids compete with private school kids from the eastern suburbs, who are perfectly comfortable reciting Shakespeare?" Santina Bertone, Clare Keating, Jenny Mullaly. *The Taxidriver, the Cook and the Greengrocer: The Representation of Non-English Speaking Background People in Theatre, Film and Television*. Workplace Studies Centre in association with Effective Change and Communications Law Centre, Victoria University of Technology. Australia Council. 1998. pp. 36-37.

also include knowledge of languages, access to instruments, equipment or private teachers for extra-curricular involvement in music, dance or drama. It also favoured a certain confidence and ease with a particular level of cultural capital and favoured those from educational backgrounds for whom such legitimate cultural knowledge and practice was the norm.

It was these kinds of hidden discriminators that were not addressed by the various reports investigating equity and access in arts training during the 1990s. For example, the 1994 report "Give Us A Break" focussed on seven groups, "seen to be disadvantaged in accessing training" – Aboriginal People, People with Disabilities, Prisoners and Ex Offenders, Women, 'At Risk' Youth, People of Non-English-Speaking backgrounds and People living in regional and remote locations¹⁵⁹. While it found that all these groups (except Women) were under-represented in arts training courses, all their recommendations for inclusion did not address notions of social origin or access to, or interest in, legitimate culture amongst these groups. There was an assumption that it would be 'good' for them to be trained in this form of dominant culture without acknowledging that this form of culture reflected the tastes and values of a particular group that may exclude other types of culture. It also assumed that more inclusive training would lead to greater representation of these groups in employment, failing to account for already massive oversupply of trained graduates, the high unemployment, low wages and the inordinate power of employees to pick and choose who they wished to employ. No prestige subsidised theatre, dance or opera company was obligated (then or now) to follow equitable employment quotas for artists citing as they could, the need to employ the most 'talented' in their pursuit of excellence. Smaller community companies who alternatively did attempt to hire equitably, in part because it assisted in their applications for assistance, employed far fewer artists and remained marginalised to the mainstream, ensuring that their 'more representative' employees did too¹⁶⁰.

¹⁵⁹ Anna Kanaris. *"Give Us A Break: Equity and Access in Arts Training. op. cit. p.1*

¹⁶⁰ The recent Australia Council report on NESB representation in the arts did acknowledge that simply creating more inclusive training practices did not automatically solve the problem of representation in the industry. "The numbers thing is fairly clear – wog voices, appearance and cultural interests mean that you are marginalised, finding a life in the circus, puppetry and community

Institutional training also gained significance amongst performers because while it could have no structural impact on the industry, it was often the only resource they could use in attempts to make minor improvements to their position in the industry. An example of this was when the Entertainment Industry Employers Association (EIEA), Actors' Equity section of the MEAA and Arts Training Australia (ATA) commissioned 'The Live Theatre Performers Skills Audit Project' mentioned above¹⁶¹. The purpose of this project was to use the findings to mount a case before the Australian Industrial Relations Commission to vary "re revision of classification structure and minimum rates" in the Actors Theatrical Award¹⁶². While the EIEA's and the MEAA's citing of the high level of qualifications attained by many performers made a significant contribution to the success of this case, it was also clear from the evidence that the skills of performers could have also been acquired through employment and not institutional training. However, the case also made it extremely manifest that performers (particularly actors) had no alternative but to attend institutional training, because the high levels of employment and oversupplied markets meant that most would never be able gain enough experience and skills through work. There was of course an incipient irony and circular logic within this, for it could be argued that most practitioners were gaining higher and higher levels of qualification and skills that they would never be able to use.

Of course, the greatest contribution practitioners made to facilitating the survival of the therapeutic/educative model of the performing arts, was their active endorsement of the ideologies within it. Although an area that was difficult to quantify, it was true that many artists supported the idea that

theatre... Someone has to break the circle of exclusion; waiting for generational change three generations after post-war immigration began is too slow a pace". However the reports' recommendations that the Australia Council should "now take on the responsibility of...illuminating a pathway into a more creative and diverse cultural future" did not lead the funding body to make any specific demands for equitable representation amongst the performing arts companies they subsidised. *The Taxidriver, the Cook and the Greengrocer. op. cit.* p. 68. and p. 70.

¹⁶¹ Ian Predl & Associates. *Live Theatre Performers: Skills Analysis/Skills Audit Project. op. cit.*

their art and their training therapeutically enhanced their lives. Performers were attracted to the kinds of 'sanctified' and 'sacred' spaces provided in training systems and institutions that appeared to offer them respite from engaging in the less pleasant realities of their industry. While this was hard to dispute (or criticise) because it lies in the realm of feeling and belief, it was apparent that it was also a means for sustaining their infantilised status within that industry. An example of this, was the kind of training, offered to student actors at NIDA, which was a 'phantasm' of an idealised industry. The three year course provided full time engagement in production and skills training, the equitable sharing of lead roles amongst the ensemble, infinite resources and constant audiences. This meant that upon graduation these actors would have little conception of what the 'real' industry was like and very few means to utilise what was learnt during their training to improve their access to, or rights within, the industry. This was not to say an actor in a State theatre production was not protected by Actors' Equity concerning issues such as minimum wages or clean dressing rooms. However, it could not assist an unemployed female actor to comprehend why that Government subsidised company was not required to hold open auditions or produce seasons that employed the same number of female artists as male artists. What artists wanted was for the 'real' industry to be transformed so it mirrored the idealised industry they experienced during training. This was of course impossible unless unimaginable increases in subsidy were provided to sustain the uneconomic legitimate performing arts. Yet, it was unlikely that the majority of the population that did not participate in this form of dominant culture would ever countenance such a change.

Masking Inequity

The absence of alternative models of subvention in the IAC parliamentary report owed much to the Commission's final decision to stay within the existing perimeters of the excellence versus access debate that preoccupied the performing arts at the time. This debate represented on the one side, the

¹⁶² Australian Industrial Relations Commission. Entertainment Industry Employers Association and Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance. Actors (Theatrical) Award 1992. *Transcripts of Proceedings*.

large well-funded prestige companies, and on the other, the much smaller community orientated more erratically funded groups. This division bore many similarities to the kind of ‘David and Goliath’ battles the Commission had engaged in when addressing the inequitable rural policies inherited by the Whitlam Government. In those cases, the IAC had found itself tackling systems of rural assistance installed in 1949 that were widely regarded as “narrow, self interested and even corrupt”¹⁶³. These systems favoured the needs of the large producers at the expense of the small producer or the inhabitants of country towns and supported industrial practices in which the rich simply got richer and the poor did not. The task of the IAC was to expose these inequities and propose just and rational alternatives for future policy. It was understandable, therefore, that IAC felt that the inequities apparent in the performing arts could be addressed according to the same criteria.

The Commission, swayed by statements about participation and access for all made by educators and community theatre workers, failed to detect that these ‘small producers’ were in fact from the same unrepresentative minority as those involved in opera. Despite the Commission’s avowal that it accepted Raymond Williams definition of ‘culture’ as “the expression of a community’s life”, it did not seem aware that almost all those that submitted evidence (prestige and community theatre alike), represented the ‘expressions’ of an Australian community that were predominantly the product of the white, the well educated and the upper middle-class. The mistake of the Commission was to assume that those who favoured the access orientated educative performing arts were representatives of the culturally disadvantaged. More often, such performing arts practitioners were in fact advocates of the conservative modernist pursuit (so despised by Williams) to culturally educate the masses.

The most significant legacy of focussing debate on the ‘division’ between flagship companies pursuing excellence and community companies pursuing access, was the manner in which it came to be the dominant area of dispute

regarding subsidy ever since¹⁶⁴. However, while the subsidised performing arts appeared to have clear lines of advantage and disadvantage, these divisions were extremely misleading. For example, while it appeared that the advantaged were the wealthy minority audiences of the prestige companies it failed to acknowledge that the community orientated companies often catered to audiences that were similarly unrepresentative.

A variety of studies of audiences from the late 1970s to the early 1990s suggest that there was little difference between those attending 'prestige' productions or those attending community ones. Data collected from the Nimrod theatre in 1979¹⁶⁵ from Belvoir St theatre, the Melbourne Workers Theatre, the Sydney Theatre Company, the Filef Theatre Group¹⁶⁶, the State Theatre of South Australia, the Melbourne Theatre Company¹⁶⁷ and the Street Art Community Theatre Company in Brisbane¹⁶⁸, revealed that they all shared an audience that was mainly white, highly educated, affluent and regularly attended cultural events. If anything, the tendency was that the more avant garde or political (in the case of the Nimrod or Belvoir St theatres) a work, the more unrepresentative the audience became. Bourdieu had mapped this exact tendency in his surveys of cultural habits amongst the French population in the late 1970s¹⁶⁹ He pointed out that,

Whereas the ideology of charisma regards taste in legitimate culture as a gift of nature, scientific observation

¹⁶⁴ Rowse. *op. cit.* Philip Parsons (Ed) *Shooting The Pianist; The Role of Government in the Arts*. Currency Press. Sydney. 1987. Hon. B. Cohen, Minister for Arts, Heritage and Environment. *Patronage, Power and the Muse*. Report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Expenditure. Parliamentary Debates. Commonwealth of Australia. 28 May, 1987. Justin Macdonnell. *Arts Minister; Government Policy and the Arts. op. cit.*

¹⁶⁵ Throsby and Whithers quoted in Tom Burvill's, *The Politics of the Popular in Contemporary Australian Theatre*. Australasian Drama Studies. Vol. 1. No. 2. April 1983. p. 21.

¹⁶⁶ Maria Shevtsova. *Is the Social Elite a Cultural Elite? Audiences for the STC's Three Sisters. op. cit. Theatre in Society. op. cit. Audiences for the Filef Group's L'Albero delle rose/ The Tree of Roses and Stories in Cantierre, Stories in Construction. op. cit.*

¹⁶⁷ State Theatre of South Australia's. *Subscriber Profiles. 1992*, and the Melbourne Theatre Company's. *Attendance and Season 1992*.

¹⁶⁸ Dean Tuttle. *Street Arts: Counting the Community*. Australasian Drama Studies. No. 20. April. 1992. pp. 33-53.

¹⁶⁹ Bourdieu's *Distinction* was first published in French as *La Distinction, Critique sociale du jugement* by Les Editions de Minuit, Paris. 1979. *op. cit.* pp. 3-7.

shows that cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education... and that the influence of social origin is strongest... in 'extra-curricular' and avant-garde culture.¹⁷⁰

Even those subsidised community performing arts companies funded explicitly to increase more representative audiences, or education schemes mounted to provide avenues for the 'mass' to experience legitimate culture, carried with them the ideologies of the minority elite. Tom Burvill observed, that the "invention' of 'Popular' theatre" in Australia during the 1970s and 1980s was in fact "a kind of confidence trick",

The nationalistic larrikin style in modern Australian theatre functions to reassure the cultural section of the petit-bourgeois class that in spite of their superior taste, cultivation and knowledge they still have contact with 'the people'... Their dimly perceived but guilty separation from the great Australian egalitarian mass is assuaged by the idea that there is a community (rather than a struggle of competing interests in which they may be implicated) and that it is all basically jolly and vigorous.¹⁷¹

The theatre director Peter Brook, too, had stated that one should ask of all attempts to introduce legitimate culture to the uninitiated masses – "What are they truly selling? {They} are implying to the Working Man that theatre is a part of culture – that is to say, part of the new hamper of goods now available to everyone. Behind all attempts to reach new audiences there is a secret patronage – 'you too can come to the party' – and like all patronage, it conceals a lie. The lie is the implication that the gift is worth receiving"¹⁷².

Public Benefits of the Arts

{The sociologist} must also question that relationship, which only appears to be self-explanatory, and unravel the paradox whereby the relationship with educational capital is just as strong in areas, which the educational system does not teach. And he must do this without ever being able to appeal unconditionally to the positivistic

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.* p. 1.

¹⁷¹ Burvill. *op. cit.* p.29.

¹⁷² Peter Brook. *The Empty Space*. Penguin Books. London. 1968. p. 147.

arbitration of what are called facts. Hidden behind statistical relationships between educational capital and this or that type of knowledge or way of applying it, there are relationships between groups maintaining different and even antagonistic, relations to culture, depending on the conditions in which they acquired their cultural capital and the markets which they derive most profit from.¹⁷³

The need to justify subsidised legitimate arts activities by emphasising the educative/therapeutic benefits that they brought/could bring to the uninitiated mass underscored the intent behind a series of reports commissioned by the Australia Council to provide evidence of the public benefits of the arts. These studies (based on public surveys) were produced regularly from the mid 1980s on, and were explicitly designed to “reflect the relevance of the arts to contemporary Australian life”¹⁷⁴. These surveys, however, displayed the kind of questionable methodology that was detected in the calculations regarding participation and employment rates in the Australia Council’s *Artburst!* While collectively the survey findings were not always easy to compare¹⁷⁵ they did all share the same intent to establish that there was a far greater interest in the arts amongst the public than was indicated by their participation in these activities. This intention was clear from the questions posed in the survey’s introductions. “Are people willing to have their taxes spent on supporting the arts, even if they themselves do not attend?”¹⁷⁶ and “Who in the community benefits from arts activities?”¹⁷⁷

While each of these surveys emphasised that their findings should be interpreted with caution, they were orientated (and published) to ‘prove’ that the public overwhelmingly supported subsidising the arts whether they

¹⁷³ Bourdieu. ‘The Aristocracy of Culture’. *Distinction. op. cit.* pp. 12–13.

¹⁷⁴ Max Bourke. General Manager. Australia Council. ‘Preface’. J. S. McDonnell. Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research. University of Melbourne. *Public Attitudes to the Arts:1992; Report of Surveys of Public Opinion for the Australia Council.* Australia Council for the Arts. February. 1993.

¹⁷⁵ The first survey *What Price Culture?* was conducted by David Throsby and Glenn Withers and surveyed only a small group from the Sydney population. The subsequent two surveys *Public Attitudes To the Arts: 1992* and *Public Attitudes and the Arts: 1994* were done on a national scale and conducted by J. S. McDonnell. Each survey asked a different set of questions.

¹⁷⁶ David Throsby and Glenn Withers. *What Price Culture?* Australia Council. 1985. p. 2

¹⁷⁷ J. S. McDonnell. *Public Attitudes to the Arts:1992. op. cit.* p. 8.

attended these events or not and therefore these events deserved ongoing (and increased)) subsidy. However, the methodological problems within these surveys were multiple¹⁷⁸.

To begin with, they did not ask their respondents to differentiate between the subsidised and unsubsidised arts yet, like the *Artburst!* publications, used the results to indicate support for Australia Council's own subsidised activities. For example, 91% of respondents agreed with the question "Please tell me if you personally agree or disagree with... *The success of Australian painters, singers, writers and actors gives people a sense of pride in Australian achievement*"¹⁷⁹. But there was no indication as to whether respondents included in their answers, pop stars, Australian movie stars, crime novelists or commercial artists such as Ken Done. Even if the respondents were referring only to artists working in legitimate non-commercial art forms, generalist questions such as these seemed to be of a leading nature that encouraged the respondent to answer in the affirmative. In a similarly leading way, there was a sense that if one agreed with a question like, "do you agree/disagree that *art events are boring*"¹⁸⁰ it indicated a certain ignorance on the part of the respondent in a manner that a more neutral question such as 'What are the reasons you don't attend arts events?' would not. The clearest evidence of the generalist questions being weighted to elicit a certain response was found if one compared them to those (rarer) questions that invited much more specific answers. In these more precise questions, the findings were

¹⁷⁸ The first of these reports *What Price Culture?* was also the most problematic. It did not include statistical data in the report (thus making it difficult to interpret its calculations) and surveyed only a relatively unrepresentative and small sample group. The report also presented some quite bewildering figures. In its "total" picture of exposure to the professional arts (taken to be those activities within the "domain" of the Australia Council p. 6) they stated that 80% (p.10) of the adult population had attended at least one professional arts event in a year. This percentage was 50% higher than the inflated figures published in *Artburst!* ten years later. This was despite an earlier statement (p. 8) saying that only one in five of all respondents (20%) had stated that they had an "interest" in any one of the following areas opera, theatre, crafts, ballet or classical music. While the report qualified the 80% stating that only 25% of adults showed "active participatory involvement in an art form" (p. 14) it was genuinely difficult to ascertain how they concluded that their survey proved that there was a massive "latent" interest in the arts from the general public and that, "most people approve of arts subsidy, and... many would support an increase in assistance to the arts" (p. 14).

¹⁷⁹ J. S. McDonnell. *Public Attitudes to the Arts:1992. op. cit.* pp. 16-17.

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.* pp. 10-11.

substantially different. For example, a 1992 survey asked the question “*In your opinion, who benefits from the arts*”. While 30% responded, “Everyone, society”, 39% stated that it was the “The participant” or the “The elite, arty” who were the beneficiaries. Interestingly, when one examines the break down of these percentages based on the age the respondents left school, an even more stark division emerges. Only 22% of those of the lowest education level (less than 15 years) agreed that “everyone, society” benefited compared to 42% of those who finished secondary schooling. Even more significant was that 29% of youngest school leavers responded that they “Don’t know” the answer to the question, compared to only 12% of the oldest¹⁸¹. The very high percentage of “don’t knows” in the former group supplied an important clue to the innate bias of surveys of this kind, because they were predicated upon the idea that that the giving of personal opinion was not affected by education or social origin. But in fact, the “opinion poll, by urging all respondents, without distinction, to produce ‘personal opinions’ - an intention underlined by all the ‘according-to-yous’... and ‘what-do-you-personally-thinks’ - or to choose, by their own means, unaided, between several pre-formulated opinions implicitly accepts a political philosophy”¹⁸². The opinion poll further hides a bias to those, who often by dint of their greater access to legitimate cultural capital, feel more able than those who do not, to have and give an opinion about ‘culture’. This was clearly evident in the very high percentage of ‘don’t knows’ for early school leavers which was in fact far greater *than any other of their answers*¹⁸³. Surveys of this kind do not accept, however, that such ‘abstention’ through the disavowal of knowledge has any impact on their findings and instead regard them as a ‘hiccup’ in the analysis. Perhaps most interesting about this question, that elicited such different responses to the generalist ones, was that it was *not* included in the subsequent 1994 survey. Instead, it was replaced with another

¹⁸¹ Another example of a more specific question having a very different answer to the general ones was, “Please tell me if you agree or disagree with...All live theatre, opera and ballet companies and public art galleries should be made to survive on their ticket sales alone”. 40 to 43% of those who had left school before 15 agreed and 17 to 19% of them said they “didn’t know”. *Public Attitudes to the Arts:1992. op. cit.* pp. 6-7 and *Public Attitudes to the Arts:1994. op. cit.* pp. 22-23.

¹⁸² Bourdieu. *Distinction. op. cit.* p. 398.

¹⁸³ Everyone, society 22%. The participants 16%. The elite, arty 17%. Young People 2%. Sponsors 1%. No one 7%. Other answers 21%. Don’t know 29%. *Public Attitudes to the Arts:1992. op. cit.* p. 9

general 'motherhood' question - "Tell me if you personally agree or disagree... Professional artists help make Australia a full and rich place to live"¹⁸⁴?

All these extraordinary attempts, fuelled principally by the Australia Council through the 1980s and 1990s, to 'prove' that the subsidised arts were relevant, inclusive, representative and beneficial to the entire community were, without question, actively obscuring genuine inequity in the performing arts industry. Again, this was not to subscribe to the notion of a cover-up, but rather an indication of that those commissioning, constructing and publishing these surveys, reports and findings were contained within the 'habitus' of dominant legitimate culture themselves. Despite forty years of government subsidy and innumerable educative schemes to inculcate the uninitiated into the beneficial effects of the performing arts, audiences at these subsidised activities have remained as unrepresentative in 1994 as they were in 1954. Nonetheless, the invocation and successful dissemination of the therapeutic/educative model provided a failsafe process to continually subsume empirical anomalies such as this. The 29% who 'didn't know' who benefited from the arts would, within the terms of this model, eventually be reached through community and educational outreach programs increasingly contained in all performing arts companies who sought assistance. If these attempts failed, efforts could be renewed to make changes to arts education policies such as those contained within the Arts Senate Inquiry of 1994.

This Inquiry, set up to get an overview of all the arts education courses available in schools, vocational and higher education institutions, simply reiterated a series of self-evident statements that reflected once again "the ideology of charisma" which regarded "taste in legitimate culture as a gift in nature". The Senate Inquiry accepted without question, as had UNESCO and the AETT (in the 1950s), the IAC and the Australia Council (in the 1970s), that arts education was vital because of its therapeutic qualities. Despite stating that arts and cultural education was "crucial" for economic and employment development in Australia, there was complete absence of data such as the Australia Council's or the ABS studies on the poor economic status

¹⁸⁴ *Public Attitudes to the Arts: 1994, op. cit.* p.11.

of artists. Instead the Inquiry orientated its investigation through beliefs stated at the outset that “Arts education enhances the quality of learning and fosters personal satisfaction” and was “crucial... for the national consideration of what it means to be Australian”¹⁸⁵. There was evidence too that this Inquiry was operating with a fairly confined realm of belief and simply reproducing unsubstantiated or misleading findings disseminated by others operating within the domain of dominate legitimate culture. This was part of the interlocking nature of self-sustaining processes within the model of the therapeutic/educative arts. The Senate Arts Education Inquiry reproduced a substantial extract of the Arts Training Australia policy statement to substantiate its argument of the contribution of the arts and cultural industries to “Australia’s social and economic well being”.

Figures released in December by the ABS show that over 1.6 million Australians or 11.8% of the population were involved in some kind of work in the culture/leisure industries in 1992/93, with at least 533,000 of these in paid part-time or full time employment.¹⁸⁶

Not only did the Senate Inquiry repeat the ATA’s inaccurate quoting of the ABS statistics (the figure of 533,000 should have been 555,200) it was also participating in the dissemination of misleading and incomplete information. Both Arts Training Australia and the Senate Arts Education Inquiry had misleadingly stated that the 11.8% were “involved in some kind of work” in the culture/leisure industry. However, the ABS source from which they quoted had clearly stated that this percentage was for those ‘involved’ and did not intend to imply that they were ‘working’ in the conventional sense of the word. In fact, the ABS source had stated that only a third of the 11.8% had received *some* payment (rather than paid part time or full time employment) for their involvement, with two thirds receiving nothing. They had also stated that, “most involvements were of a short term and part time nature, involving 13 weeks or less duration and less that 10 hours a week”¹⁸⁷. Both the ATA

¹⁸⁵ ‘Introduction’. *Inquiry into Arts Education*. Submissions to Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Recreation and the Arts. Arts Education Inquiry. Volume 1. *op. cit.* p. 2.

¹⁸⁶ Attachment B. ‘The Arts and Cultural Industries’. *ibid.* p. 28.

¹⁸⁷ Ian Castles. Australian Statistician. *Work in Selected Culture/Leisure Activities. Australia, March 1993*. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Catalogue No. 6281.0. pp. 1-2.

and Senate Inquiry had also omitted the ABS information that many of the 'involvements' were in areas such as 'fete-organising' which could be described as falling outside the perimeters of the industry each of these bodies were seeking to reform. They also omitted to include the ABS findings that indicated that practitioners were amongst the highest receiving no payment at all and represented only 0.2% of the 11.8% "involved in culture/leisure activities". What was perhaps most curious, particularly in the case of an organisation such as Arts Training Australia, was that it made reference to this particular rather broad ABS survey at all, rather than to those many specific ABS surveys on employment in the culture sector. Given that the ATA's objective was to make "vocational education and training more relevant to the arts and cultural industries¹⁸⁸", it seemed imprecise to use a survey that was primarily intended to gather the number of amateur/voluntary involvements in culture that fell outside their own interpretation of an professional industry. In order to reflect a more accurate image of the Arts and Culture industries it seems genuinely inept on the ATA's part (in terms of their objective of reform) that they did not reference¹⁸⁹ a critical ABS survey on cultural employment available at the time. This survey, *Employment in Selected Culture/Leisure Occupations*, provided detailed breakdowns of cultural employment patterns by selected industries, Sex, Birthplace, Income, Age, Hours Worked, Highest Qualification and Residence. In comparison to the 'involvement' survey that estimated 1.6 million people were "engaged" in various forms of cultural activities, the 'employment' survey found that "the number of people working in cultural occupation as their main job (which included, amongst others, those in the film, architecture and print industries) was actually only about 120,000"¹⁹⁰. This figure represented approximately 0.8 of the population compared to the 11.8% cited in the 'involvement' survey. Importantly the 'employment' survey contained all the data that revealed how low practitioner incomes were. This survey would have also provided data on the fact that that the number of

¹⁸⁸ Arts Training Australia. *National Vocational Education and Training Plan for the Art and Cultural Industries*. *op. cit.* p. 9.

¹⁸⁹ The publication was not cited in Arts Training Australia's extensive bibliography. *ibid.* p. 116.

¹⁹⁰ Ian Castles. Australian Statistician. *Employment in Selected Culture/Leisure Occupations Australia, August 1991*. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Catalogue No. 6273.0. p. 2

employment opportunities was being outstripped by the number of trained graduates seeking employment.

Arts Training Australia and the Senate Arts Education Inquiry that had quoted ATA's statements verbatim were part of the continuing process that was manufacturing a distorted image of the arts industry. Each chose to insufficiently represent or investigate the true state of the industry at the outset of their respective analyses. It was thus inevitable that their respective findings - the need to provide more or different forms of arts training - simply contributed to this interlocking system of organisations that ensured the perpetual reproduction of the model of the therapeutic/educative performing arts of which they were a part.

Evidence for the reproduction of this model and the ongoing distortion in the representation of the performing arts can be found in various government reports from the mid 1990s on. The 1999 'Nugent' report *Securing the Future* represented an Inquiry established to find ways to assist the major performing arts organisations, the 'flagship' companies, to become more financially viable¹⁹¹. Unlike the IAC Inquiry seventeen years earlier, there was no question that these 31 major performing arts organisations (representing 17% of all companies yet receiving 49% of all funding) should receive a "disproportionate" amount of the money allocated to the "subsidised performing arts sector". This was because, the report argued, they made a "disproportionate" artistic contribution to "Australian life" providing 86% of the employment and reaching 71% of the paying audience¹⁹². The Nugent report considered it self evident that,

Australia should have a vibrant major performing arts sector that enriches Australian life and builds its image as an innovative and sophisticated nation; that Australia should cost effectively deliver broad access to the major performing arts - recognising that the arts are for everybody; and that Australia should have a financially

¹⁹¹ 'The Inquiry's Origins'. Appendix 2.2.1. Discussion Paper Material. *Securing the Future. op. cit.* p. 99.

¹⁹² 'Overview'. Final Report. *ibid.* p. ix.

viable major performing arts sector that supports artistic vibrancy.¹⁹³

The report produced a range of detailed strategies for stabilising the financial future of these major organisations, from proposing a new funding model that established a normalised cost base for each company to making suggestions regarding resource sharing between companies. Not surprisingly, “building audiences”¹⁹⁴ and targeting developing audiences through school education programs were seen as primary goals for the future. The Inquiry applauded the major companies for having assumed a leadership role “in educating both future and existing audiences through schools programs and audience briefing programs”¹⁹⁵ and urged them to continue doing so. However, what was most startling about this report, which stated it was not interested in “art for arts sake” but in making “hard nosed {judgements} about audience needs and expectations”¹⁹⁶, was the highly problematic manner in which it reported audience participation rates. The Nugent report not only based many of its findings on these reported rates but also used them to substantiate certain arguments regarding the importance and relevance of the major companies. The Discussion Paper section of the report (on which the Final report was based) quite clearly stated that,

In 1997, two million Australians in the capital cities paid to attend main stage performances by Inquiry Companies. This is the equivalent of 24% of the total capital cities’ population over the age of 18, *assuming that each person attended only once*.¹⁹⁷ (My emphasis).

While it was to the report’s credit that it stated it was estimating participation rates on the total number of ticket sales, the authors must have been aware that calculating participation rates in such a way led to wildly over-inflated and misleading figures. Evidence of this could be found when one compared the tabled figures of attendance for each major company, in the body of the report, with the data provided by the companies themselves in the

¹⁹³ *ibid.* p. ix.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.* p. xii.

¹⁹⁵ ‘Range of Education Initiatives’. Appendix 2.2.2. Discussion Paper Material. *ibid.* p. 119.

¹⁹⁶ ‘The Way Forward: Overview. Final Report. *ibid.* p. 17.

¹⁹⁷ ‘Size of Audience’. Discussion Paper Material. *ibid.* p. 118.

appendices at the back. For example, the report calculated the total number of paid attendances at the Sydney Theatre Company in 1997 to be 248,000 representing 12.4% of the capital city population¹⁹⁸. However appendix 2.3.2 stated clearly that the “STC presents an 11-play subscription season in Sydney which attracts over 20,000 subscribers”¹⁹⁹. Even with the most generous of calculations this meant that if, at the minimum, 220,000 of the paid attendances were by 20,000 subscribers and the remaining 18,000 attended only once (which was unlikely) the more accurate percentage of attendance was around 2% and not 12.4%.

The report’s misleading percentages were not difficult to adjust provided one obtained access to detailed company records (or indeed the information available in some of the appendices) which were presumably within the scope of the report commissioned by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts²⁰⁰. While one could carefully break down each of the attendance figures to produce a realistic portrait of the population’s participation, it seemed clear that the report intended to convey the impression that the participation rates at the major company productions were much higher than they actually were. None of the tables detailing “paid attendance” appeared in the Final Report. Instead there was the statement that “Australians in 1998 bought over three million tickets to the companies’ performances” which was evidence that “the 31 companies that are the subject of this Inquiry make a substantial contribution to Australia’s cultural life”²⁰¹. What was not stated was that these ticket sales could represent as few as 150,000 to 300,000 individuals across Australia. While it is very difficult to establish exact participation rates using current research, one can provide broad estimates using the findings of the Australia Council report, *Selling the Performing Arts*, conducted the same year as the Nugent report. While this

¹⁹⁸ ‘Exhibit 2.12. Paid Attendance by Company and Capital City: 1997’. Discussion Paper Material. *ibid.* p. 119.

¹⁹⁹ ‘Sydney Theatre Company Limited’. Appendix 2.3.2. *ibid.* p.259.

²⁰⁰ The report did state that not all companies collected “comprehensive audience or box office data” they clearly could of factored in subscriber numbers of which all the major companies keep careful account of. *ibid.* p. 118.

²⁰¹ This was based on an estimated extra 1,000,000 attendances through regional performance and touring on top of the 2,000,000 in capital cities. *ibid.* p. 11.

report provided survey results on the frequency of attendance for *both* commercial and subsidised performing arts, thus having higher figures for one-off participants attending commercial ‘hits’, the general patterns of attendance do provide a more accurate breakdown of the 3 million tickets sales. The *Selling the Performing Arts* survey found that 32% had not attended the performing arts in the last 2 years, 25% attended between 1 and 3 times, 25% between 4 and 10 times and 18% over 11 times²⁰². Given that the adult population at the time (1996 Census) was estimated by the ABS to be 14,040,303²⁰³ and using the same calculations tabled on pp. 270-271 (*excluding* a certain percentage of those attending commercial productions) the percentage of the adult population buying the 3 million tickets of the 31 companies was approximately somewhere between 3% and 7%. Even if the percentages were at the higher end they were nothing like the Nugent report’s assertion of “24% of the total capital cities’ population over 18”²⁰⁴. The report’s failure to present accurate data in its supposedly “hard nosed” examination of the major performing arts companies makes it difficult to surmise how they were to develop strategies based on the “recognition that the arts are for everyone”²⁰⁵ if they failed to ‘recognise’ how low participation rates actually were.

Other recent publications reproduce distortions similar to those found in reports and surveys of the mid 1990s. As indicated, *Selling the Performing Arts* conducted at the same time as *Securing the Future*, did examine attendance patterns and audience demographics but did not distinguish between subsidised and commercial performing arts nor between the differences in audiences and attendance patterns attending community or flagship productions. In addition while the report clearly found that those attending the performing arts in the late 1990s tended to still be predominantly unrepresentative of the general population remaining white,

²⁰² Figure 1: Frequency of Attending the Performing Arts’. Attendance Patterns. *Selling the Performing Arts*. *op. cit.* p. 3.

²⁰³ Australian Bureau of Statistics. Resident population over 15 years of age August 7th 1996. Table BO1. *Selected Housing and Social Characteristics of Australians*. Catalogue. No. 2015.0.

²⁰⁴ *Securing the Future*. *op. cit.* p. 118.

²⁰⁵ *ibid.* p. ix.

well educated and wealthy²⁰⁶, the purpose of the study was not to conclude that such art forms were perhaps irrelevant to those who chose not to attend but instead to suggest ways to “persuade and motivate” them to go ²⁰⁷.

²⁰⁶ ‘Who Attends (and Who Doesn’t)?’ *Selling the Performing Arts. op. cit.* p. 9.

²⁰⁷ ‘Using this Research in Developing marketing Strategies for Performing Arts Organisations’. Chapter 12. *ibid.* p. 95.

Conclusion

Smoke and Mirrors

The reproduction of the model of the therapeutic/educative performing arts continues and will continue to underpin and orientate the legitimate performing arts in Australia, principally because it serves to protect the interest of the dominant elite extremely well. There remains a continuing misrecognition and denial of this simple fact. This denial is upheld by those who regard legitimate culture as both neutral and natural and who actively promote the idea of training (both artist and audience) as the essential legitimising principle that justifies why these particular forms of culture deserve, while others do not, to be subsidised in perpetuity.

Almost all the public debates about performing arts subsidy in the last decade focus exclusively on the 'civil' war between the prestige theatre and the community theatre. This most recent 'war' erupted as a result of the Federal Labor Government's decision (specifically the decision of Prime Minister Paul Keating) to inject an additional 250 million dollars into the arts industry as part of the Government's 'Creative Nation' initiative in 1994. This was almost exactly 20 years after the Whitlam Government's decision to establish the Australia Council and double Federal arts funding in 1973. The resonance was not lost on the press who announced, *PM's \$250 million arts plan: it's Gough revisited*,

The amount pledged - more than \$250 million over four years - is significantly more than had been speculated and will be hailed by Mr Keating as the biggest one-off spending boost on the arts by any Australian government. The statement will provide the biggest boost to the \$13 billion arts business since the election of the Whitlam Government in 1972.¹

¹ Geoff Kitney, Peter Cochrane and Andrew Perrin. 'PM's \$250 arts plan: it's Gough revisited'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 24th. 1994. p. 1 and p. 14.

However quite distinct from Whitlam, who had accompanied his injection of funds with the setting up of the IAC that had so savagely attacked the pre-eminence of the prestige companies, Keating accompanied his cash cow with the announcement of the establishment of a Major Organisations Board (MOB). This new board, separate but connected to the Australia Council, was to take over the funding of flagship companies such as the Australian Opera, the Australia Ballet, the Sydney Theatre Company and was to be instrumental in setting up a new “world-class” symphony orchestra and a national Music school in Melbourne.

Rather than there being a rush of gratitude from impoverished practitioners or greatly enriched and now greatly protected major organisations, their reactions were overwhelmingly negative. What was fascinating was the manner in which these reactions mirrored and echoed critiques, complaints and arguments that had appeared since the inception of the AETT and were contained within the paradigm of the therapeutic/educative model of the performing arts. Wayne Harrison, the then Artistic Director of the Sydney Theatre Company (whose funding was to now come from MOB) reacted to the Creative Nation announcement in his Philip Parsons Memorial Lecture entitled *The Theatre of War*. For Harrison the basic problem with the subsidised performing arts was that a “large-versus-small, mainstream-versus-alternative battle has stunted the growth of the Australian theatre for more than a decade”². Harrison recounted the history of this ‘Civil War’ as beginning in the late 1970s and quoted extensively from both Philip Parsons’ *Shooting the Pianist* and Justin Macdonnell’s *Arts Minister? Government Policy and the Arts*. Like them, he viewed this pitting of the prestige companies against the community companies as creating open warfare in which “any large company was fair game” and the “robbing of Peter to pay Paul” by the creation of funding ceilings on major companies, simply forced them into inappropriate competition with the commercial theatre³. Ironically, Harrison viewed the Government’s ‘solution’ to this problem, the creation of a Major Organisations Board, which would remove the prestige companies from the orbit of the day

² Wayne Harrison. ‘The Theatre of War’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. December 19th. 1994. pp. 14-15.

to day funding decisions of the Australia Council, as “potentially, yet another instalment in the war”. For Harrison the net result was the engendering of an environment in which practitioners became obsessed with carrying out sniper attacks on one another and indulging in “my company is better than yours” antics⁴.

For Donald Horne, a former Chair of the Australia Council, Harrison’s reduction of the debate to an account of incendiary infighting was precisely what was at fault with the arts industry. While Horne cared even less for the ‘Creative Nation’ initiatives than Harrison because he thought it was simply a “trivial and glitzy performance” lacking substance, he argued that the problem was that neither practitioners nor politicians were focussed on the most important issue - “the public benefits of the arts”⁵. Horne felt that artists spent the bulk of their time “complaining about the grants they or someone else didn’t get” instead of concentrating on the social arguments for supporting artists. These arguments were that in Australia, as a liberal society, there should be a diverse market place of values, knowledge and ideas for opening out “human potential”. Government assistance was necessary to broaden what was offered by the commercial market. Australia as a democracy should also provide its citizens with opportunities to engage in (and not just access) cultural activities. Horne also listed other public benefits of the arts; they helped to increase tolerance and intelligent interest in Australian society. Citizens had a ‘right’ to their nation’s cultural product (both traditional and new) and the right to “engage with a diversity of cultural experiences”⁶.

Wayne Harrison’s ‘civil war’ argument echoed precisely the debate of excellence versus access that was being ferociously contested twenty years earlier - before, during and after the IAC inquiry. Likewise, Horne’s ‘motherhood’ statements were identical to sentiments, about the public

³ *ibid.* p. 15.

⁴ *ibid.* p. 15.

⁵ Donald Horne. ‘Five Good Reasons for Promoting Cultural factors’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*. November 22nd. 1994. p. 18.

⁶ *ibid.* p. 18.

benefits of the arts and thus the urgent moral imperative to subsidise them, that had emanated from the post war National Theatre Movement, UNESCO, Tyrone Guthrie and eventually became the *raison d'être* for the AETT.

Also contributing to this environment of mirrors and echoes were the spattering of reactions to the release of David Throsby's 1994 Australia Council report *But What Do You Do for a Living?* that revealed the large falls in artist earnings from the mid 1980s on. The reporting of this publication reiterated the misinformation (that had originated in the Australia Council's *Artburst!*) that this drop in earnings coincided with "unprecedented growth in the arts and related culture industries"⁷. Throsby was quoted as regarding the "current situation as a paradox" but could offer little explanation as to why, if there was such growth, artists were earning less and less to the point at which acting had "become one of the country's lowest paid professions"⁸. The poor level of earnings and high levels of unemployment were constantly compared to their incredibly high levels of training and qualifications yet there was no analysis offered by any of the journalists or commentators at the time as to the possible correlation between them. One exception to this appeared in Padraic McGuinness's column in *The Sydney Morning Herald*. For McGuinness, the problem was obvious, while he stated he would be happy if arts expenditure doubled or trebled overnight (this was after the 250 million Creative Nation boost), he also argued that there were simply too many people who could reasonably expect to make a living out of their creative activities calling themselves artists. McGuinness's 'solution' for how those "genuinely" talented artists could boost their earnings, was to call up the ghost of the IAC Inquiry,

Ever since the Industries Assistance Commission looked at this issue the direction to go is obvious - it is a matter of education and habituation of more and more of the public to take an interest, to develop reasonably sophisticated tastes in various

⁷ Angela Bennie. 'Nobody's willing to Pay the Piper'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. February 21st. 1995. p. 15.

⁸ Karen McGhee. 'Fame without Fortune'. Employment Section. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. September 23rd. 1995. p. 25A.

art forms. However, the direction of much education has not been to train the “palates” of the population but to persuade lots of kids that they can and ought to be artists: and then when they enter the portals of tertiary training to destroy whatever natural talent they might have.⁹

While few concurred with McGuinness with his opinion about reining in the arts bureaucracies at educational institutions “which proliferate like rabbits” at the Local, State and Commonwealth level (making them the “fastest-growing element in the “cultural industries””¹⁰) all agreed that the way forward was in education and habituation.

As it had for the AETT in the late 1950s, the Australia Council’s ‘vision’ of creating a “higher level of demand from arts consumers {and} developing audiences for Australian creative work¹¹”, became the route to take it away from accusations of failure and mismanagement. This panacea of training the palates of the ‘don’t knows’ and the ‘don’t goes’, as the way forward was as effective at placating critics as it had been for the last forty years. The Creative Nation statement and the creation of MOB were reported enthusiastically in some sections of the press in a manner that was reminiscent of the eager anticipation of Guthrie’s National Theatre report in 1949 and the launch of the AETT in 1954. Not only would Creative Nation initiatives focus on training the tastes of the local audience, it would be critical in educating and informing other nation’s views on Australia. Senator McMullan, the former Arts Minister, asserted that,

As Creative Nation says... we need to be concerned about what other nations think of us because the impressions others carry of us influence their attitudes toward us in the most concrete ways, such as our ability to engage them in co-operative economic and security arrangements, our ability to export to them the world-quality goods and

⁹ Padriac P. McGuinness. ‘Sorting the Wheat from the Chaff’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. February 22nd. 1995. p. 15.

¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 15.

¹¹ Donald Horne. ‘A New Direction, but where to?’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*. March 1st. 1995. p. 18.

services we produce, our appeal as a place to invest, and our appeal as a tourist destination.¹²

However, some cultural commentators regarded this new initiative of exporting Australia's cultural 'image' with extreme scepticism. Jaslyn Hall, the black broadcaster and music consultant, responded a few weeks after the article; *They're a happy MOB as Creative Nation takes off*, with the statement that,

Anyone in Australia with an interest in cultural diversity has plenty to be angry about at the moment... specialist {'non-white' cultural material} ... have remained firmly in the cultural ghetto, with little appeal for non-ethnic and non-Aboriginal Australia... By marginalising its ethnic citizens, mainstream Australia has retained the comforting illusion (which it has, by the way successfully exported to the rest of the world that {multiculturalism} still holds sway in this wide brown land.¹³

Furthermore, the arts community were not the 'happy MOB' they were reported as being. The whole debate gathered steam and grew more positional until it erupted into a full out assault on the Australia Council by arts practitioners, with the Council being defended by Donald Horne on the one hand and the artists being championed by Prime Minister Keating. This very public stoush was almost identical to the one thirty years earlier that had been conducted between practitioners and the AETT, coinciding with the organisation's tenth anniversary. The 1995 criticisms mirrored those directed at the AETT between 1964 and 1966. The Australia Council in 1995 was accused of being "stale and {having} done little or nothing for artists" it was top heavy, overly bureaucratic, run by cliques who lived in style while impoverished artists suffered at its domineering ways¹⁴, in much the same way that the AETT, in the mid 1960s, had been attacked as "Disastrous,

¹² 'They're a happy MOB as Creative Nation takes off'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. April 11th. 1995. p. 6

¹³ Jaslyn Hall. 'Our Sanitised Multiculturalism'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. April 25th. 1995. 11.

¹⁴ Paul Keating. "The Council was stale- you could smell the thing': Horne v. Keating Round 2'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Spectrum. May 20th. 1995. p. 14A.

unfair, high-handed and resented”¹⁵. Even more remarkably resonant was Donald Horne’s defence of the Australia Council in the article *What has Fairness got to do with the Council?*¹⁶ that bore an uncanny resemblance to the AETT Executive Director Stefan Haag’s public defence of the AETT in 1966 - *We Stand On Our Record...Who would Take Over Anyway?*¹⁷. Despite the level of vitriol reached, like the outcome of the ‘war’ of the mid 1960s, the one in the mid 90s settled fairly quickly, partly due to the fact that injections of cash quelled or silenced practitioner attacks but also because of the defeat of the Keating Government in 1996 temporarily united both the Council and artists in their attempts to ensure that Government subsidy would not be decreased.

While the focus may have shifted more recently to from infighting to efforts from the performing arts community to maintain existing levels of subsidy, the therapeutic/model of the performing arts with all its dysfunctional industrial consequences has remained unexamined and unchallenged. The 1999 Nugent report may have attempted to rationalise and rein in spending on the Major flagship companies however, as was shown in the last chapter, it was clear the notion that such organisations should receive substantial public funding on the basis of their contribution to the public good was now regarded as self evident. Likewise, while the 1999/2000 research overview *The Arts Economy 1968-98: Three Decades of Growth in Australia*¹⁸ revealed that performing artist’s incomes continued to decline¹⁹, as training opportunities spiralled, the report was unable to offer any specific analysis as

¹⁵ ‘Verdict on the Trust’. *The Australian*. Saturday 11th June. 1966. p. 6-7.

¹⁶ Donald Horne. ‘What has Fairness got to do with the Council?’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*. September 27th. 1995.

¹⁷ This was title of Haag’s speech about the future of the AETT in the episode of the Crawford Productions’ 1966 ‘Fighting Series’. Excerpts from the program were quoted in *The Australian* on June 11th 1966. p. 7.

¹⁸ Hans Hoegh Guldberg. *The Arts Economy 1968 – 98: Three Decades of Growth in Australia*. Australia Council. 2000.

¹⁹ “While the number of artists and other related cultural workers has increased rapidly, incomes have suffered to a greater extent than in the workforce as a whole”. “The annual decline in the median for all arts professionals was 0.7%, compared with minus 0.4% per annum for the total workforce”. *ibid.* p. 45. and p. 43.

to how this state of play came into being²⁰. The report's author did ask "does supply exceed demand?" and "What are the policy implications for the funding authorities?" but he concluded that there was "insufficient evidence to answer these questions" suggesting instead that a "future study of our artists might be usefully directed towards identifying the underlying problems".

All these echoes and mirrors had little to do with the 'don't know' and 'don't go'. There was little acknowledgment in the various reports or articles on the performing arts during the last decade that the majority of the population never attended the subsidised performing arts. It was not their cultural activities that were of significance but the 'legitimate ones'. Not a single article about the war between flagship and community companies noted that audiences for legitimate activities were declining or that the audiences and practitioners were not representative of the Australian population. The notion of the therapeutic benefits of the arts was now so inculcated as to be beyond question. Also beyond question or criticism were the ongoing attempts and initiatives to educate those who were lacking this vital 'legitimate' culture into, if not attending, at least acknowledging that they were 'good' for everyone. What was also overlooked was that these attempts and these processes were more than simply acts of well-intended public beneficence²¹. All attempts to inculcate legitimate and therefore dominant culture actively denies the existence of other cultural practice and in doing so they carry with them all those difficult to detect discriminators against those who lack the necessary cultural capital, to enter certain institutions, gain certain educations or get certain jobs. It is impossible for those who inherit a certain vocabulary of the dominant elite to imagine why or how this may deny access

²⁰ The report also found that the percentage of people working in the arts from a non-English speaking population was lower than in the workforce as a whole. *ibid.* p. 26.

²¹ There was no greater evidence for this than in the Australia Council's latest survey and report about the public benefits of the arts *Australian and the Arts*. This glossy tome repeats many of motherhood assertions of the earlier versions such as locating the 'problem' being that many "non goers" possessed outdated perceptions" of the arts and that the vast majority of non participants represented an untapped market – "a sleeping giant". However, this report was much more transparent about the fact that it was selling something to the public, commissioned and undertaken as it was by the advertising giant Saatchi and Saatchi. *Australians and the Arts*. Saatchi and Saatchi. Australia Council. June. 2000.

to others. These regular ‘catfights’ that have broken out in the performing arts since the inception of subsidy were extremely useful in obscuring big obvious questions or sober historical analysis of why for almost fifty years this ‘system’ has been inherently dysfunctional. By consistently diverting attention, these battles assisted in the reproduction of the therapeutic/educative model and the most potent element of this model was exclusion²².

Despite the endemic crises that have flared up in the subsidised performing arts since 1954, like the most recent one in March 2001 in which the arts industry was found to have “failed to connect with local communities” and was “being seen as increasingly redundant in materialistic society”²³, the model on which it is based in fact functions extremely well. The therapeutic/educative model of the performing arts works very efficiently to serve and protect the interests, advantages and ‘tastes’ of the dominant elite in Australia. The model is sustained by the interlocking system of institutions, schemes and endeavours which generate an ‘ideological smokescreen’ over inequity and industrial chaos and serve to sanction other ideologies that sustain economic and social inequality. None of this is likely to change as long as the subsidised performing arts are seen as transcending the material reality of this world and thus not accountable for perpetuating the injustice within it.

²² There appears to be glimmers of recognition of this amongst the arts press. Bernard Zuel recently stated, “Every arts company, every performer or artist with even the slightest pretension to creating something new, is living at best an illusion, at worst a lie. The illusion is that people care, that people want good or new or challenging art in any field. The lie is that anybody in the arts can change that. The biggest lie is that it has ever been different... the vast majority doesn’t want them now, and will never want them. It’s all a bit too hard. The sooner the arts world accepts that it’s by the elite and for the elite the better”. Bernard Zuel. ‘Just don’t think of it as art’. Spectrum. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. August 25th–26th. 2001. p. 6.

²³ Lauren Martin. Discussion Paper. ‘Australia Council Flags a Radical Revamp of Funding’. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. March 1st. 2001. p. 11.

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