

Independent or Entrepreneur?

**The Impact of Economic Rationalism on
Australian Fringe Theatre Practice**

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates how the introduction of economic rationalism within Australian cultural policy and the subsequent concept of the *creative entrepreneur* has impacted theatre practice in Australia at a grass-roots level, and questions how their sustainment within political and creative discourse has had a lasting effect on fringe theatre practice. This thesis considers how professional Australian theatre practitioners in the independent sector perceive, create, and deliver their work, and examines their practices against the model of *creative entrepreneurship*. I argue that the neoliberal cultural framework that has been established over the past fifty years, has compelled fringe theatre practitioners to develop a new professional position in a sector that once considered them to be amateur hobbyists, legitimising their output in the field as independent artists.

The research uses a qualitative multiple-case-study methodology. The data were collected through interviews with key personnel from six independent theatre companies and organisations from Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria, as well as from document and archival analysis. The data are situated using a review of the pertinent literature related to the creative industries concept (CIC) and the concept of creative entrepreneurship, and the development of independent theatre within the Australian theatre field.

The data are presented in two chapters. The first (Chapter Five) is a multiple-case study of three independent theatre companies formed between 1994 and 2002, which examines the establishment of these companies prior to and during the introduction of the CIC to the Australian theatre field. The second chapter (Chapter Six) is another multiple-case study of three more independent theatre companies formed between 2008 and 2013 which examines the establishment of these companies' practice after the CIC had been introduced.

The findings of the research indicate that these independent theatre models offer several ways for the Australian theatre industry ecosystem to become more cohesive through the work of this sector. Independent artists work collaboratively using the structures of the field as a way of developing financial and creative sustainability and moving forward, gathering resources and developing projects by using existing platforms, but also adding to this through unconventional means. Because independent artists are intrinsically entrepreneurial, they seek out opportunities in the space *between*, rather than move in the same direction as the structure of the wider group; or they try to penetrate the *field of power* (Bourdieu, 1983) and find ways of operating outside of the conventional habitus of the field in order to develop a model that is legitimate, creatively self-sustaining, and not wholly reliant on government funding. These conclusions suggest that government subsidy and institutions like the Australia Council¹ (AC) should be used in the way that Keynes (cited in Upchurch 2004, p. 204) originally proposed: as “a model for public funding that ensured some degree of creative freedom for the recipient ... structured to maximize its flexibility and independence from the government bureaucracy” and as a means for the arts to develop a more sustainable practice.

This thesis makes an original contribution to the fields of creative and arts entrepreneurship, and arts policy by providing a deeper understanding of independent theatre practice in relation to the Australian theatre ecology.

¹ On Thursday 24 August 2023, the Australia Council was replaced with Creative Australia. More at www.creative.gov.au

The un-funded or under-funded fringe will continue to bear the burden of creativity into the foreseeable future. Whatever funding structure is in place ... it will be those who really want to do it – who are prepared to subsidise their own art practice regardless of personal income or government policy – who will make waves into the future.

Geoffrey Milne (2004)
(theatre practitioner, academic, author, critic, historian)

To accept the notion of a 'whole' theatre is not just to give the nod to a plausible idea that deserves polite acceptance. It is to throw into reverse the intellectual tendencies of the past twenty years that have mistaken fragmentation for pluralism, and hidden behind the notion of cultural *différence* when they should have been trying harder to culturally connect. It is to see the distinct levels of Australian theatre as profoundly interdependent, and to accord each level the respect it deserves.

Julian Meyrick (2005)
(theatre historian, cultural policy analyst, theatre director)

KEYWORDS

creative industries, creative entrepreneur, creative entrepreneurship, independent theatre

MAIN ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Australia Council (1973–present)
ACfA	Australian Council for the Arts (1968–1973)
AETT	Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust
AMPAG	Australian Major Performing Arts Group
BCC	Brisbane City Council
CEc	Creative economy
CE	Creative entrepreneur
CI	Creative industries
CIC	Creative industries concept
CITF	Creative Industries Task Force
CIMD	Creative Industries Mapping Documents
DCMS	Department for Culture, Media and Sport (UK)
FYFO	Four-year funded organisations
ICT	Information and communication technologies
MEAA	Media Entertainment Arts Alliance
MPA	Major performing arts
MTC	Melbourne Theatre Company
NIDA	National Institute of Dramatic Art
NORPA	Northern Rivers Performing Arts
QMF	Queensland Music Festival
QPAC	Queensland Performing Arts Centre
QPAT	Queensland Performing Arts Trust
QT	Queensland Theatre (formerly Queensland Theatre Company)
QUT	Queensland University of Technology
S2M	Small-to-medium
STC	Sydney Theatre Company
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VCA	Victorian College of the Arts

DEFINITIONS

Australian Major Performing Arts Group (AMPAG)

Also referred to as the major performing arts (MPA) sector, these are performing arts companies and organisations funded by the federal and state governments via “tripartite, rolling, triennial agreements” (Bailey 2008).

Australian theatre

This term refers to both the for-profit (commercial) and not-for-profit (subsidised, independent, fringe and amateur) theatre sectors.

Economic Rationalism

The term *economic rationalism* was originally coined by Australian sociologist Michael Pusey in his seminal book *Economic Rationalism in Canberra: A Nation-Building State Changes its Mind* (1991). Pusey characterised *economic rationalism* as a dominant policy framework used by the Australian government during the late twentieth century, which prioritised market mechanisms, efficiency, and individual self-interest over broader social values. This framework included “(d)eregulation, privatisation, labour market reform, micro-economic reform, user pays, tax reform, cutting government spending, more competition, privatisation, tax reform (the GST), (and) welfare reform” (Pusey, 2003). *Economic rationalism* is viewed as a subset of *Neoliberalism* (see following definition).

Four-year funded organisations (FYFO)

These are arts companies and organisations funded by the Australia Council (and in most instances, by state governments) on a four-yearly basis. FYFO include theatre companies from the Australian small-to-medium theatre sector.

Independent Theatre

Independent theatre, also referred to as alternative, fringe, profit-share or co-operative (co-op) theatre, is “an umbrella term used to embrace a wide range of new and experimental theatre styles” performed in alternative venues, offering a “more intimate, more edgy” type

of theatre product (Foreman 2009, p. 5). In recent years, independent theatre has also been defined as theatre practice that is self-sustaining and not reliant on government funding.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is an economic, political and social framework that advocates for free markets, limited government intervention, and individual liberty, proposing that “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” and that “the role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices” (Harvey 2007, p.2).

Small-to-medium (S2M) theatre sector

These are Australian not-for-profit theatre companies and individual practitioners not included in the AMPAG cohort. This group includes FYFO, and companies funded on a project-by-project basis by government funding bodies.

Theatre Ecology

This term refers to the “systems-based thinking” which enables us to view the theatre sector as “a complex and protean ecosystem” which includes government, organisations, producers, artists and audiences and “to explain how elements in this system act and interact; and to evaluate its effects on Australia’s social fabric over time” (Makeham, Hadley and Kwok, 2012).

ETHICAL CLEARANCE

This doctoral research project received approval from the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee on 30 July 2015. The Committee approved naming the interview respondents throughout this thesis on the proviso that consent forms were signed, and a record of these forms was kept. All respondents named consented to being identified in this thesis.

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

1.1. Background

This thesis is the culmination of a ten-year part-time PhD candidature which commenced in March 2012. In March 2013, a year into my research, the Australian Labor Party (ALP) was in power, and Prime Minister Julia Gillard and incumbent Minister for the Arts Simon Crean launched *Creative Australia*, the successor to Paul Keating's 1994 *Creative Nation* and the first national cultural policy in nineteen years (Eltham 2016). Australia appeared to be heading full steam into an ambitious creative future with "a vision for the arts, cultural heritage and creative industries that draws from the past" (Office for the Arts 2013, p. 6). Gillard, in her foreword, stated that the policy was "a fresh expression of the values and priorities that will sustain Australia as a richly creative society in the 21st century", which continued "the spirit of engagement with the arts embraced by my predecessors Gough Whitlam and Paul Keating, and affirms the centrality of the arts to our national identity, social cohesion and economic success" (ibid, p. 2).

The Creative Australia policy set out five overarching goals, which are summarised by Jennifer Craik as "recognition of ATSI [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] culture as at the heart of Australian identity; recognition of diversity as shaping identity; supporting excellence and 'the special role of the artist'; enhancing the impact of culture on national wellbeing; and promoting digital cultural forms" (2013, p. 49). The third and fifth goals, which respectively emphasise "the special role of artists and their creative collaborators" and "the development of new creative content, knowledge and creative industries" (Office for the Arts 2013 p. 6) are particularly pertinent to this research. Creative Australia's primary goals were to "modernise funding and support; focus on creative expression and the role of the artist; and connect to national life for a social and economic dividend" (ibid, p. 7). The policy proposed that "the existing Australia Council Act 1975 would be repealed by proposed new legislation to revamp and modernise the governance of the Australia Council" and that

“through the Creative Australia policy, the Australian Government will provide \$235 million to place arts and culture at the centre of modern Australian life”, which included a further \$75 million allocation to the Australia Council (AC) (ibid, p. 10).

Two weeks after this ambitious cultural pronouncement, Crean lost his Arts portfolio following an ill-advised call for a leadership spill. Three months later, Gillard’s prime ministership was ceded to Kevin Rudd. By September that year, Rudd and the ALP had lost the federal election to Tony Abbott’s Liberal Government and George Brandis had become the new Minister for the Arts (Eltham 2016). The Creative Australia policy was effectively sentenced to a quick but painful death.

In May 2015, without warning or consultation, Brandis appropriated \$105 million of the funding allocated to the AC and, in Ben Eltham’s words, “set up a ministerial slush fund” named the National Program for Excellence in the Arts (NPEA) which had the sole purpose of pursuing “excellence as a central value of cultural policy” and challenging the arms-length and peer-reviewed processes of the AC (Eltham 2016, p. 22). Although Brandis was admonished for his actions, his portfolio given to Mitch Fifield, and half of the funding returned to the AC, the impact of this action sent shockwaves across the theatre field and effectively laid waste to the small to medium (S2M) theatre sector. On Black Friday (13 May 2016), when the four-year funded organisation (FYFO) recipients were announced, of one hundred and twenty-eight that had previously received federal government support, sixty-five S2M theatre companies and performing arts organisations were defunded.

Since Black Friday, the cultural landscape in Australia has shifted dramatically. It is a somewhat paler version of the field that existed when I first started my research, eroded by the actions of Brandis and other governmental and economic factors, including the recent COVID-19 shutdown. These events, however, enabled me to form a deeper understanding of the position of Australian independent theatre practice, and how the work of individuals and groups in this sector may provide some alternative models and possible ways for the

industry to move forward into one that is cohesive in its creativity, rather than one that is divided by government cultural and economic policy.

1.2. The Catalyst For Change?

John Howkins argues that the broad recognition across the world by governmental, business, and cultural sectors of the substantial economic value of creativity in the form of artistic product and intellectual property (copyright, patents, trademarks and designs) has given rise to the cultural concept of the *creative economy* (CEc) (2001). With this concept, governments developed policy and discourse around the notions of *creative industries* (CI) and the *creative entrepreneur* (CE), placing creativity at the forefront of global cultural and economic politics, with cultural and economic implications for the traditional role of the artist.

Writing in 2013, Geoffrey Milne observed that globalisation and advances in technology had enabled, over the preceding twenty years, the strategic development of Australia's theatre and performance sector, expanding the number of venues and production companies and increasing direct employment opportunities for performers, directors, designers, writers, and arts educators, as well as production and stage managers, arts managers, and administrators (Milne 2013). By the end of the second decade of the century, Australia's CI constituted a significant component of its national economy, and reportedly contributed more than \$115.8 billion, or a 6 per cent share of Australia's gross domestic product (GDP) between 2018 and 2019 (Bureau of Communications, Arts and Regional Research (BCAR) 2021).

The last twenty years has also seen a major upheaval in the field of Australian theatre, principally due to an economically rationalised approach to the management of the arts, and the development and protection of certain cultural assets in preference to others. In response to this rapidly burgeoning CEc, Australian governments moved away from the Keynesian state-supported model of arts funding, originally used to expand the field, towards

the consolidation of the sector along neoliberal lines: applying business models from the private sectors designed to minimize costs and to maximise market efficiency. A key effect of this, I argue, was to curtail the growth and development of the theatre industry, and to reduce the government's financial support of theatre to a select few, elite companies and organisations.

While the creative industries concept (CIC) has been part of the conversation around neoliberalism, economic rationalism and the arts, one question remain unanswered: with the shift away from Keynesian economics in government arts funding towards a neoliberal approach, did the economic focus of the CIC serve to strengthen the legitimacy of the performing arts within the fields of Australian politics and culture or did it strengthen the economic rationalism that already informed cultural policy?

The impetus for this research was to investigate whether the introduction and sustaining of the CIC within Australian federal and state cultural policies and discourse over the past twenty years had impacted professional theatre practice in Australia at a grassroots level, pushing local practice towards the idea of a creative economy. More importantly, noting a marked change from what I characterise as the prior *co-operative (co-op) fringe* approach to an *independent professional* approach, I wanted to know if the ways in which independent Australian theatre practitioners perceive, create, and deliver their work had been directly influenced by the notion of the creative entrepreneur (CE). This discussion will begin by defining the CIC and CE concepts, and considering the debate that arose in relationship to them and other factors that enabled their introduction to the field of Australian theatre.

1.3. The Creative Industries Concept

The term *creative industries* (CI) was defined by the United Kingdom's (UK) Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Creative Industries Mapping Report (2001) as "activities

which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (DCMS 2001, p. 5). The discourse of CI was taken up in policy by Prime Minister Tony Blair and the UK New Labour Government after the 1997 election. New Labour had come to power after eighteen years of conservative government, during which the arts had been relegated to the outer regions in terms of focus and policy, and, as Stuart Cunningham observes, artists were widely derided by the media and the public for wasting taxpayers’ money (Cunningham, 2003). CI was to forge a new direction for post-Thatcher Britain and as a remedy for Britain’s ailing post-industrial economy (ibid), bringing the arts and cultural sectors to the fore and, Terry Flew argues, introducing a new way of looking at their contribution to both national culture and economic prosperity (Flew 2012).

The CI concept (CIC) emerged from a series of thirteen “mapping” papers—the Creative Industries Mapping Documents (CIMD)— authored by the DCMS— published in 1998. These documents covered advertising, architecture, art and antique markets, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video, interactive leisure software (electronic games), music, performing arts, publishing, software and computer services, and television and radio (DCMS, 1998). The first defined the CI as economic sectors that harnessed individual creativity in order to actively develop products or services that could be sold, subjected to copyright, trademarked, or patented and which would attract a financial return. The second CIMD (reproduced three years’ later in 2001) highlighted the value of the CI for advanced economies, emphasising that the sector was already contributing a significant component to gross domestic product (GDP) in terms of exports and jobs, and was growing at twice the rate of the rest of the economy (Cunningham 2006).

Both Cunningham and Flew note that the rationale for the mapping was to research and develop new sectors that could potentially replace old industrial sectors, such as mining, which were no longer seen as contributing to the UK’s economic position globally (Cunningham 2006; Flew 2012). By drawing together these different sectors under the CI

umbrella, the second CIMD highlighted similarities in terms of creative production, but at the same time differentiated the amount of economic contribution that each sector made to overall GDP. By acknowledging the CI sector, the UK's Labour Government heralded a major shift in economic policy towards the idea of a CEC which effected a marked change in cultural policy, one that encouraged an entrepreneurial edge to creative endeavour and mediated strong growth for these sectors (Flew 2012). Most significantly, the CIC used the convergence of information and communication technologies (ICT) and media as an illustration to argue that the future of the arts and cultural industries lay in *creativity* itself; the CIC was a future built on the transformation of both economic and cultural policy towards a productive, creative engagement with digital technologies (ibid).

The CIMD's definition was ambitious in its assessment of CIs' economic potential and tapped into the emerging enthusiasm for the knowledge economy brought about by this convergence. The mapping documents focused on creativity with an entrepreneurial edge, the product of which, they proposed, would galvanise and revolutionise Britain's economic position (Cunningham 2002; Flew 2012). Prime Minister Tony Blair praised the vitality that the CI offered to the future of the British economy and signalled his government's intention to invest in *creative enterprise*, to "create a nation where the creative talents of all the people are used to build a true enterprise economy for the 21st century – where we compete on brains, not brawn" (1999, p. 3, cited in Flew 2012, p. 10). With the advent of digitisation and the flourishing of media platforms, this was set to be the golden era of potential with creativity and intellectual property the new forms of economic sustenance. The global flurry of mapping documents that followed the CIMD demonstrated the uptake by other countries, including Australia, to follow this new analytical definition and the purported benefit of CI to their respective economies (Potts and Cunningham, 2008, p.233). The studies undertaken by these other countries highlighted the economic value of CI as being more than "just the manifest production of cultural goods or the employment of creative people but may have a more general role in driving and facilitating the process of change across the entire economy" (ibid).

Importantly, such policies were framed as broad-brush assessments of ongoing creative activity; although they acknowledged the creative individual within the rubric of creativity, the mapping tended to be sectoral in scale, and did not directly take up the question of individual, or small-scale collaborative creative practice. Nor did this mapping encourage the individual artist to see themselves as members of the CI, even though it was their individual creativity that provided the spark for the concept and discourse. Kate Oakley suggests that while the CIC boosted the visibility and standing of the CI sectors in terms of a broad political agenda, the very idea of CI risked blurring the lines between some very different industries and overlooking the individual creative vision in favour of a “market” that determines the output (2004, p. 9).

The original list of sectors provided by the CIMD was by no means definitive. Consequently, the CIC was criticised by academics, economists, sociologists and artists for its ambitious merging of existing cultural sectors, its limited (or unlimited) scope and seeming inability to be clearly or satisfactorily defined, yielding “a lively set of academic as well as industry and policy-related debates about its utility and implications for research, criticism, and creative practice” (Flew and Cunningham 2010, p. 1). These debates centred on digitisation, communication, and convergence and a move towards a more conducive relationship between the creative arts, cultural industries, and digital technologies, and more detailed ways of revealing the true economic contribution of individual creativity to the CI.

Commentary from economists suggested that the division of the CI into thirteen sectors was fundamentally incoherent, overlooking the specifics of the relationships between inputs, products and services, and outputs in distinct areas of practices. For some, the model itself was “uneconomical from a traditional economics point of view” (Cunningham, 2003). For Justin O’Connor the CIMD insufficiently defined the structural complexities offered by the grouping of the creative industries sector, nor did they articulate the employment and remuneration arrangements within the individual sectors subsumed under the creative

industries umbrella (2007, p.44). Instead, as O'Connor argues, the CIMD encouraged "a deeper delusion that policies to support and encourage such creative entrepreneurialism would suffice as an industrial strategy" (ibid). Andy Pratt sees an agenda at work, suggesting that the term *creative industries* was merely a clever way in which to repackage the creative arts and cultural industries sectors together in order to elicit more financial support from government, and that the selection of sectors under the umbrella of the CIC was arbitrary, convenient, and either too broad or too narrow (2005, as cited in Flew, 2012, p.19).

Key aspects of these debates were centred on how the suggested change in terminology from *creative arts* and *cultural industries* to the umbrella term of *creative industries* would affect creative production and consumption from a policy perspective in the cultural field, and the *autonomy* and position of the artist within creativity and cultural production. This discussion will now briefly review the discourse surrounding these debates in order to ascertain their relevance to individual creativity, artistic autonomy and creative entrepreneurship as defined by the CIC.

1.4. No Autonomy and too much Industry

One of the most contentious issues that arose from the CIMD definition was the exclusion of the word 'arts' from the rubric. Indeed, rather than differentiate between the *creative arts* or *cultural industries*, the CIC attempted to include sectors that had not necessarily been organised together historically, in terms of their practices, or culturally, reconciling them within the notion of a single industry encompassing all creative sectors regardless of their creative practice regimens. O'Connor pushes hard on this point, arguing that the debate surrounding the CIC was not simply an argument over a choice of words but "a matter of definitions; all these terms come with complex historical connotations operating in ways that can make the debate both passionate and completely self-referential" (2011, p.30) Nicholas Garnham agrees, observing that the change in terminology is not "a mere neutral change of labels" and "that there are both theoretical and policy stakes involved in this shift" (2005,

p.15). The policy stakes in the fields of the creative arts and cultural industries had long been established. Historically there has been “a clear division between policy towards the arts and mass or popular culture, which are ‘based broadly on principles of patronage and enlightenment and on assumptions of an inherent opposition between art and commerce” (ibid, p.16).

Susan Galloway and Stewart Dunlop propose that CI was “purposefully adopted” as a replacement for the other two terms because it was “regarded as a ‘unifying’ and ‘democratising’ notion”, bridging the divides “between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture – between the mass market, popular cultural products of the cultural industries and the high art of the creative arts” and “between ‘art’ and ‘industry’ – between the demarcations of what is ‘publicly supported’ and what is ‘commercial’” (2006, p.35). Essentially, the contested development of the term *creative industries* was “a redrawing of these boundaries: redefinitions of the grounds, purposes, and instruments of policy” (ibid). However, it is the redrawing of the boundaries of art, culture and industry and the protection of what is termed *artistic autonomy* that lies at the heart of this debate (Bourdieu, 1984; O'Connor, 2011).

As O'Connor reminds us, the social concepts of *art* and *artist* emerged in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as derivatives of the development of technology, the division of labour and the separation of the different *arts* into distinct practices (2011). As a device of this distinction, patronage identified and elevated the labour of the artist, and clarified the organisation of production. Employment for the skilled writer, performer or painter consisted of long-term patronage, one-off commissions, commercial enterprises such as theatre, or large-scale print runs (ibid). The concept of *artistic autonomy* developed from this demand and artists in some fields were separated from artisanal guilds to establish their own practice and trades, which inevitably created a hierarchical distinction between the labour of artisans and that of individual *artists*.

David Hesmondalgh acknowledges the experiential and aesthetic value of art within culture,

noting that since the nineteenth century, art has been considered the highest form of human creativity and that artists are perceived to be “different from the rest of society” (2007, p.4). He suggests that the practice of artists is not aligned with the notion of everyday creativity and “involves a particular type of creativity: the manipulation of symbols for the purposes of entertainment, information and perhaps even enlightenment” (ibid). Webb et al. concur with this definition and argue that while the term *art* refers to “practices and institutions connected with creative production” the goods and services produced in the cultural context are intended to be aesthetic, “are in the first instance symbolic rather than material” and are designed to make a “statement about the artist’s vision or the social universe” (2002, pp.149-150).

The term *creative arts* has conventionally referred to literature, performing arts and visual arts; it has come to be associated with the subsidised or sponsored “public” arts which engages with the idea of aesthetic enlightenment, derived from the early modern philosophy of civic humanism promoted in the early nineteenth century by the Earl of Shaftesbury (Galloway and Dunlop, 2007; Hartley, 2005; O’Connor, 2011). Shaftesbury constructed an intellectual ideology for *public* art, linking it to a community with taste which was capable of understanding and appreciating art, and establishing a distinction between the “liberal” (or free) arts and the “servile” (or useful) arts (Hartley, 2005, p.7). “Taste”, therefore, as O’Connor observes, “was not just about social distinction but also deeply political” (2011, p.38). It was thought that the uneducated did not have the capacity to understand art and were therefore more likely to be attracted to more popular forms of creativity. The notions of *taste* and *autonomy* which helped distinguish the concept of *high art* became an elitist mechanism used to divide the different social classes within Europe: the lower classes from the bourgeoisie and upper classes; art from craft; and the artist from the artisan. These distinctions still resonate within contemporary *culture*.

The definition of CI cited above, which outlined the creative industries as “activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent” (DCMS (1998) 2001), reflects the

dominant discourse about the role and practice of the artist prior to the CIC. This discourse has effectively shaped how policymakers, academics and artists think about the skill, talent and individual creativity named within the definition. Because *creative arts* is listed as a distinct category among the CI sectors, the value of art and its commercial purpose within culture is brought into focus, associating, if not defining the value of the artist in terms of individual creativity, rather than creative genius. The relationship of skill, talent, and individual creativity to cultural policy demonstrates a pattern of accepted social attitudes towards art within culture that informed the CIMD, indicating an expectation of how art should be made by artists and should be received or consumed by spectators.

The twenty-first century's development of new technologies, methods of production and modes of communication has encouraged a wider public consideration of what *art* is and attributed artistic value to alternative sources other than those of exclusive *distinction* and understanding (Flew, 2012). While these fundamental changes to the reception of *art* should elevate the *artist* to even greater heights, the CIC definition has seemingly reduced the function of the *artist* to being merely the first link in an industrial value chain leading to creative outputs, rather than the overall visionary and producer of the creative product. Stefano Harney argues that the rise of CI is an invasion of the arts by management because management implies organised labour that is "massified and industrialised" (2010, p.432). *Industry* is subsequently defined as managed processes within a value chain progressing from inception to finished product. The management of this process is overseen by non-creatives (or other creatives, depending on the sector) and delivered in accordance with its relationship to the greater *cultural field* (Bilton, 2007). It is not simply the idea of *individual creativity* subsumed within the CI definition that has challenged the cultural position and value of the *artist*, but the repositioning of the creative product itself. The direct causal relationship between how the product is derived from the creativity of artistic practice and managed into cultural production, and how this cultural production is manipulated into commercial enterprise for consumption.

In addition to repositioning artists and their labour in relation to an industrial production chain, the CIC combines creative and performing arts with mass media and communications in a “digital knowledge economy” where consumers are the drivers of content and co-creators (Flew, 2012; Hartley, 2005). The commercial viability of the *creativity* (wealth and job creation) named within the CIC definition is aligned with that of the *cultural industries*, a term that suggests a commercial approach to creative production and is usually associated with large creative operations that develop and offer products to be consumed, *en masse*, for profit (Flew, 2012; Hesmondalgh, 2007). According to the UNESCO definition, *cultural industries* are those that “combine the creation, production and commercialisation of contents which are intangible and cultural in nature” (2006, as cited in Flew, 2012, p59), which are usually protected by copyright and take the form of a good or service. The term *cultural industries*, in this sense, refers to what are now known as the “classic” cultural industries: film, recorded music, broadcasting and publishing. As an expression of governmental cultural policy, the term was initially deployed to incorporate forms of commercial entertainment which were mass produced by industrial methods (Galloway & Dunlop, as cited in Eisenberg et al., 2006).

Eisenberg et al. observe that although the term *cultural industries* was “coined to address the production and dissemination of cultural content in mass media” it eventually came to include the producers of art forms normally associated with the creative arts (2006, p.7). Ironically, Flew observes, the Frankfurt School’s argument that mass culture and *commercialisation* debased traditional *arts* and *cultural* activities laid the foundation for the concept of *cultural industry* to be reimagined through arts and cultural policy (Flew, 2012). For O’Connor, Theodor W. Adorno’s writings about the *cultural industry* “ran parallel to the founding of the different national arts and cultural ministries and foundations across Europe, and indeed to the emergence of a distinct discourse of cultural policy per se” (2007, p.9). This brought about a governmental focus on protecting cultural activities from the evils of *commercialisation* and *mass culture*, thus segregating traditional art forms in a social context.

One of the points of contention within the CIC debate, as already mentioned, was the use of the term *individual creativity* within the practice of the creative arts, as distinct from the use of creativity in terms of the “instrumental” function of art (usually economic or social) (O’Connor, 2011, p.31). The term *individual creativity* arguably does not bear the same resonance as a word such as *artistry*, or its cognates. There is a long-standing appreciation that the epithet *artist* is hard-earned, conferring distinction through both a recognition of creative output and the skills and talent which are acknowledged to be uniquely theirs. To forego the title of *artist*, then, is to surrender the prestige associated with a very specific type of creativity, *restricted* and *distinct* from other forms of creativity.

This discussion has noted that individual creativity, skill and talent were used in the CIMD as markers to determine the scope of the industry sectors to be included. However, it was the origin based in *creativity* and the outcome of this *creativity* (potential for wealth and job creation and generation/exploitation of intellectual property) that narrowed the field for which sectors would be included in the CIMDs’ sectoral mapping. The distinction between *high* and *low* art presents the key to the argument against the CIC by those wanting to retain the position of *artists* within the pre-existing cultural field and not allow them to be swept up in the commercially oriented focus of mass production that the CIC seemingly offers. The argument, then, is not just about sectors, policy, terminology, or industry, but also about the autonomy of the individual *artist*, the cultural role of the *artist* and the established practices of *high art* within the field of cultural production. In the next section I turn to the concept of the *creative entrepreneur* within this new field of cultural production to determine its approach to creative practice and compare this against that of *artistic autonomy*.

1.5. Artist or Entrepreneur?

As explained above, the focus by the CITF on *creative entrepreneurship* refocused UK arts policy away from “flagship cultural institutions and major events” towards small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs), which included “a myriad of individual enterprises, small companies,

and networks of creative talent” (Flew & Cunningham 2010, p. 121). According to Flew these SMEs revised creative practices and enabled a “high degree of autonomy for artists and other creative professionals” as well as “a relatively loose division of labor in the production process” (2005, p.351). In terms of the CIC, then, the role of *artist* within cultural production was transformed into a *creative entrepreneur* (CE), a hybrid of the *restricted* and *unrestricted agent* (Bourdieu, 1984) who is encouraged to reconfigure their artistic practices in order to embrace “the entire process from creating the artefact to its marketing, retailing and consumption” as well as “joining forces with production and distribution companies in a shared enterprise” (Rae 2007, p. 56).

However, for practitioners who identify themselves as being part of the *creative arts* sector, the CIC effectively debases and devalues their practice as *artists* and their part in *culture*, relegating their relationship to the artwork as perfunctory; thus, they serve only an economic purpose rather than an aesthetic or expressive one. Richard Florida disputes this, suggesting that the *creative entrepreneurship* concept promoted by the CIC draws the “spheres of innovation (technological creativity), business (economic creativity) and culture (artistic and cultural creativity) into one another, in more intimate and more powerful combinations than ever” (2002, p. 201).

Flew offers that the creative entrepreneurship strategies developed through the CI focus on culture and creativity and draw on human capacities and small-scale initiatives rather than large-scale capital investment. These initiatives “have enabled a more human centred development that achieves both economic goals of job creation, innovation and export growth while also contributing to social inclusion, cultural diversity and environmentally sustainable growth” (Flew 2014, p. 12). Opposing this view of economic well-being is the objection that the creative nature of art is subordinated by the economic aspect of the CIC and that creativity in its purest form is being stifled by arts management. Higgs et al. agree that the CI are seen as having “a stronger degree of commercial focus rather than the predominantly aesthetic objective of the traditional cultural industries” and although many

widely recognised cultural activities are included in the CI, “they exploit symbolic knowledge and skills, often through adding value, commercialisation, distribution and marketing” (2007, p. 4). This sentiment is echoed by Harney, who suggests that the benefits of conjoining arts and management processes would be “economic growth, expanded circulation and distribution, access and participation, and profit” but the perils would be “the degradation of the artist, they become an invidious technique for getting at the souls of workers and consumers, with possibilities of exploitation lurking in both conditions” (2011, p.435).

It is important to acknowledge here that the privileging of the idea of the *creative entrepreneur* over that of the *artist* within the logics of the CIC is not arbitrary but is consistent with a political-economic approach that has its roots in *neoliberalism*. Two decades prior to the introduction of the CIC, countries such as the UK, the USA and Australia began shifting away from the predominant Keynesian approach to cultural policy, towards what is (sometimes problematically) referred to as a *neoliberal* approach. Dominant since the end of World War Two, the macroeconomic theories of British economist John Maynard Keynes promoted the central idea that “aggressive government action was needed to stabilise economies and manage markets and (he) advocated a larger role for the state” (Upchurch, 2011, p.70). Neoliberalism is a broad—and characteristically pejorative—term designating a series of reforms proposed by, among others, the Austro-British economist Friedrich Hayek and in the United States, Milton Friedman and the Chicago School in the early 1970s. As a critique of Keynesianism, the new economics argued for a limit on government intervention and an embrace of free-market principles, proposing that “human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization (sic) of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2007, p.22). The concept found enthusiasm in political leaders wrestling with the economic crises of the early 1970s, the social impacts of those crises, and the apparent limits of conventional policies in terms of finding policy responses to economic and social conditions. Key policy shifts included attacks on organised labour which, it was argued, distorted the market’s ability to control

inflation, the floating of currencies, which allowed individual states to weather external shock by devaluation, the suspension of government industry subsidies and tariffs and the privatisation of national enterprises to promote the productivity through competition and rewarding entrepreneurialism. Politicians such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher—and, indeed, Paul Keating in Australia—were able to make political capital of the neoliberal appeal to individual freedom and the promises of the wealth that would flow from dismantling of government structures and interventions no longer fit for economic and social purpose. The “emphatic turn towards neoliberalism”, in political-economic practices and thinking in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, Harvey explains, (ibid, p.3) has resulted in “much destruction, not only of prior institutional frameworks and powers (such as the supposed prior state sovereignty over political-economic affairs) but also of divisions of labor (sic), social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life, attachments to the land, habits of the heart, ways of thought, and the like” (ibid, p.23).

In the arts, this turn towards neoliberalism has entailed a shift away from government subsidy towards market-driven approaches to cultural production. This commercialisation of cultural production entailed an increased focus on the economic value of the arts, with government funding and support increasingly tied to the ability of artists and cultural organisations to generate commercial returns (Segbars, 2019). Jo Caust observes that it was during the 1990s when Australian federal and state government support “became characterised by the desire to support arts activity which was commercial, exportable and cost-efficient”, and was focused on economic benefits such as “employment creation, cultural tourism, cultural export, and the market-multiplying effect of cultural activity to justify their involvement (2003, p.52). Hilary Glow agrees, arguing it was Australia’s first national cultural policy, *Creative Nation*, released in 1994 by the then Labor Prime Minister Paul Keating, that compelled creative producers “to focus on market expansion through cultural development” and exposed arts organisations “to the same market forces as non-arts industries” (2007, p.3).

Thus, when the CIC was introduced to Australia by the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in 2001 as part of its new Creative Industries Faculty and Creative Industries Research and Applications Centre (QUT, 2001), and subsequently adopted by state and federal governments over the course of the next twelve years (Cunningham, 2015), a set of cultural policies were already in place which had the effect of including the *creative arts* within the broader rubric of CI. That is, cultural policies had already been refracted through various forms of *economic rationalism*, as I will show in the following chapter, in which I review the approaches, structures and organisation of the Australian cultural field.

The neoliberal economy was embraced and was characterised by a series of key concepts. As Hesmondhalgh observes, by the early 1990s, the intertwined phenomena of *globalisation*, *marketisation* and *managerialism* were already embedded within economic and cultural policy around the world, transforming prevailing understandings of cultural production and consumption (Hesmondhalgh 2007). *Globalisation* encouraged interconnectedness through free trade and the sharing of international monetary and cultural policies amongst first world countries. A related concept, *marketisation* is the process “by which market exchange increasingly came to permeate the cultural industries and related sectors”; a process that was buoyed by governmental actions such as the privatisation of government-owned enterprises and institutions, and the de-regulation of business activities to encourage profitability and expand private ownership (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, p.110).

Hilary Glow and Stella Minahan acknowledge that it has been since the 1980s that the arts have been recognised as an “industry” and note that *managerialism* “commenced as a policy and process in Australia in the 1980s as a means to increase efficiency and economic performance in public agencies” (2008, p.134). They define the managerial process as “privileging political and economic measures of success (such as meeting budgets and reporting deadlines), rather than seeking to facilitate the cultural value of the arts as integral to the nation’s intellectual and social capital”, which has effectively promoted and ensured “the dominance of the business paradigm in the cultural sector” (ibid). The introduction of

the World Wide Web accelerated and further consolidated these processes as the century ended.

As significant was the concept of *entrepreneurship*, which although existing as a broad idea as early as the 17th century, was defined by the early 20th century economic theorist Joseph A. Schumpeter as behaviour which was innovative, introducing new goods and services or a method of production which effectively meant the disruption and reorganisation of an industry (1934, in Goss, 2005, p.206). By the end of the 20th century, the term *entrepreneur* evolved to mean “organise, manage and assume the risks of a business” (Frederick, O’Connor and Kuratko 2013, p.7). As Frederick et al show, in the first two decades of the 21st century this definition was expanded further to include:

a social or business innovator or developer who recognises and seizes opportunities; converts those opportunities into workable/marketable ideas; adds value through time, effort, money or skills; assumes the risks of the competitive marketplace to implement these ideas; and realises the rewards from these efforts” (ibid).

Such innovators can also be seen as *enterprising*: an entrepreneur is someone who is “marked by imagination, initiative and readiness to undertake new projects”, whilst an *enterprise* can be defined as “the process of identifying, developing and bringing a vision to life, be it an innovative idea or simply a better way of doing something” (ibid). In business, Frederick et al explain *entrepreneurship* is characterised as the interaction of the following skills: ‘inner control, planning and goal setting, risk taking, innovation, reality perception, use of feedback, decision making, human relations and independence’ (ibid, p.11). Essential traits of *entrepreneurship* include “the willingness to take calculated risks in terms of time, equity or career; the ability to formulate an effective venture team; the creative skills to marshal needed resources; and, finally, the vision to recognise opportunity where others see chaos, contradiction and confusion” (ibid, p.40).

According to Charles Leadbeater and Kate Oakley, *creative entrepreneurs* can be defined as “independents” who provide a cultural product, service or experience, and bring together the resources to exploit this as an enterprise (Leadbeater & Oakley, 1999). Unlike traditional *artists*, *creative entrepreneurs* do not expect public subsidy or funding but “want to make their own way in the market”, often positioning themselves as “producers, designers, retailers and promoters all at the same time” (ibid, p.11). In this sense, Leadbeater and Oakley identify that the purpose of *entrepreneurship* is about self-employment or creating and retaining independence within the CI, rather than attempting to disrupt or reorganise the market:

They opt for self-employment or micro-entrepreneurship because independence will give them a sense of authorship and ownership: it is the best way for them to develop their own work. These independents are negotiating a space within the market economy where they can pursue their interests and develop their own products. Their acceptance of the market is pragmatic. They are not ideologically committed to it: they see it as the best way to pursue what they want to do (1999, p.23)

According to Howkins, while not everyone wants to be an entrepreneur and start their own creative business, many want to pursue their own ideas and become independent (2002, p.137), an ambition shared by artists who freelance or are self-employed. In most cases, the choice to pursue arts and creative entrepreneurship is due to ‘cultural displacement’ and is necessary for survival and ‘individuals will not pursue a venture unless they are prevented or displaced from doing other activities’ in the professional field (Ronstadt in Frederick, O’Connor and Kuratko, 2013, p.13). O’Connor notes that although artists acknowledge that they are working within markets, and even consider themselves to be entrepreneurial, they “seek to ‘make a living’ not to pursue unlimited economic growth” and to balance “the need to make a living with their wider creative aspirations” (2011, p.81).

Importantly, the most compelling obstacle for artists is the limited opportunities for remunerated work, for direct employment. One response to this, proposed by proponents

of the CI paradigm, involves the idea of career self-management or *arts entrepreneurship* (Bridgstock, 2012). Margaret Chang and WoongJo Wyszomirski define arts entrepreneurship as “a management process through which cultural workers seek to support their creativity and autonomy, advance their capacity for adaptability, and create artistic as well as economic and social value” (2015, p.11). Arts entrepreneurship emphasises thinking, collaborating, making, and managing work, learning about different performance techniques and the industry as a whole, creative collaboration and the development of production skills, and effectively, learning how to practice in real-world terms. For others, the prospects of a portfolio career enable them to operate both within their given discipline and outside of it, working across multiple CI sites and using different skill sets. By learning how to enter and operate within the field and network with more established artists, artists learn how to maximise their capacity and maintain their visibility whilst gaining cultural capital within the cultural field. Instead of being focused on the development of a given *creative enterprise*, then, arts entrepreneurship is focused on the development and management of the artist within their own career trajectory. This has, arguably, strengthened the possibility of the artist remaining active, visible and connected to their chosen creative discipline, and, ideally, to the wider CI, rather than disconnecting and seeking employment in alternative sectors such as hospitality and retail (ibid).

Long-term employment in the arts has been replaced with a project-based system reliant on short-term hiring, creating a work environment where “artists learn to manage risk and to stay alive through multiple job-holding, occupational versatility, diversification of job portfolios and occasional income transfers from social security or other sources” (Menger, 2006 as cited in Throsby and Zednik, 2010, p.10). Creative employability then “occurs through an ongoing interaction of reflective, evaluative and decision-making processes, based on ongoing information gathering about one’s own needs, and the requirements of industry and the world of work in the arts” (ibid, p.17). This yields what has become known as ‘the portfolio career’.

For Ruth Bridgstock and Lauren Carr, an artist engaged in a portfolio career pattern “should possess well developed arts entrepreneurship skills (those associated with the application or sharing of creative work), as well as highly developed skills associated with arts practice, that is, creation, making or performing of artistic work” (2013, p.14). As David Throsby and Anita Zednik explain, ‘the portfolio career pattern comprises a continually evolving patchwork of grant-based (i.e., publicly subsidised) and/or commercial projects, jobs and educational experiences. A portfolio of arts work may be supplemented by additional concurrent work activities – the ubiquitous “day job” – in order to meet the artist’s financial obligations’ (2010, p. 10).

Although, then, the CE model appears to offer numerous benefits to the artist in terms of position and cultural capital in the new cultural field of CI, Rae cautions that the model entails, for the artist/entrepreneur, the challenges of any small business: namely those involved in “building and sustaining a business from creative activities; finding and attracting their market to grow the demand for their businesses; attracting able people, financial and technical resources; making strategic choices on how to compete, collaborate and specialize in order to adapt to the changing environment” (in Henry, 2007, p.59). The synergies to be derived from the CE paradigm requires the involvement “of many agents, some large and capital-intensive, some small and skill-expert, in its productive processes” (ibid, p.56).

I have noted, above, that the concepts of the CIC and the CE function at high levels of abstraction, driving policy decisions and the distribution of resources, and seeking to re-engineer the very conception of what it is that an artist is and does. This thesis takes up the perspective of the working artist, seeking to understand the impact of the CIC and CE concept on Australian independent theatre, in terms of what Pierre Bourdieu calls *logics of practice* (Bourdieu, 1990). This requires that I first locate this independent theatre sector within the broader field of cultural production—and specifically theatrical production—as it was prior to the implementation of these changes. What were the opportunities for these artists within the field as it existed then? Has the CIC succeeded in shifting the logics of

practice of independent artists? Is a new *habitus* apparent, taking up the idea of the cultural entrepreneur? In the following section, I consider how the Australian theatre industry has been structured and organised, both in relation to government and within itself.

1.6. The Australian Theatre Industry

When this research was conducted in 2019, the Australian Federal Government's Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications had an overview of the Australian theatre sector within its Office for the Arts portfolio (Office for the Arts 2019). The OfA's aim was to:

develop policies and deliver programs that encourage excellence in the arts, help to protect our cultural heritage and support public access to and participation in, arts and culture in Australia ... delivering strategic advice and policy development, effective program and grants management, regulatory management and collaborative stakeholder engagement" (ibid).

The key sectors of the Arts portfolio identified by the OfA were cultural heritage, screen, indigenous arts and languages, literature, performing arts, regional arts, museums, libraries and galleries and visual arts (ibid).

Australian funding structures, both federal and state, are consistent with the patronage model, which Craik defines as involving "direct support to artistic and cultural forms favoured by the regime and tastemakers", and which effectively nurtures and endorses "forms of art and culture deemed to epitomise *cultural excellence*" (2007, p. 1, emphasis in original). The distribution of funds is indirect and utilises "arms-length" mechanisms via "a niche, or specialist, arts council that relies on peer evaluations of cultural practitioners' excellence or worthiness" (ibid). While commercial theatre is part of Australia's free market economy, subsidised theatre at a federal level is financially supported by the OfA portfolio and is overseen and managed by the Australia Council (Office for the Arts 2019).

The Australia Council (AC), originally created as an independent statutory body under the Australia Council Act of 1975, was effectively re-established under the Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997. Since its inception, the AC has “been the primary national funder of artistic work of excellence and of the framework that supports that work” building its support “from a narrow focus on organisations working in more ‘traditional’ artforms, to a broad agenda supporting artists and organisations from the smallest artist run initiative to major performing arts companies” (Trainor & James, 2012, p.7). The AC is accountable to the Council Board, a group of professionals appointed by the Minister for the Arts with a “range of expertise across artistic practice, arts management, business, management, public policy, corporate governance and administration, regional issues, gender, multicultural and Indigenous community participation in the arts, finance, philanthropy, legal affairs, corporate strategy and research” (Australia Council (AC) 2020).

Guided by the arms-length principles of peer assessment, the AC enables the Australian Government to “champion and invest in Australian arts and creativity” by supporting “Australian arts practice that is recognised for excellence” and “fostering excellence in Australian arts practice by supporting a diverse range of activities” (AC 2019b, pp. 8-9). In addition to operational and project funding received by the AC, state funding still comprises a significant part of investment in the field through the subsidised theatre companies which receive financial support from state arts funding programs and governance bodies Create NSW (formerly Arts NSW), Creative Victoria (formerly Arts Victoria), Arts Queensland, Arts NT (Northern Territory), Department of Culture and the Arts (Western Australia), Arts South Australia, and Arts Tasmania, as well as local government arts funding authorities which are too numerous to list here.

The Australian theatre sector, as defined by the AC, is a “broad and complex ecology” which is comprised of “artists working independently and in groups with those who produce, present and promote the arts” as well as “arts companies of all sizes, festivals, publishers,

producers, venues, and many other commercial and not for profit entities” (AC 2019a). This ecology includes various “spheres of activity” including “commercial, professional subsidised, unsubsidised independent, participatory, community, and amateur theatre” which contain diverse genres such as “plays and scripted work, music theatre and cabaret, circus and physical theatre, installation theatre performance, puppetry, media-based theatre work, live art, and contemporary inter-disciplinary performance” (AC 2019a). To this sectoral definition, Arts NSW in its *Theatre Sector Snapshot (2013)*, adds that this activity is contained within “high profile and local festivals, MPA companies and venues, commercial musicals and touring works, a strong network of regional performing arts venues, well established S2M companies, many with their own resident venues, and a strong independent theatre sector” (Arts NSW 2013, pp. 1–2). Alongside these festivals, producers, and venues there are “further subdivisions as to the type and structure of the organisation” that exist simultaneously in the subsidised Australian theatre sector which underline the Australian theatre sector’s complex ecology (ibid). These organisational structures can be understood by using the typography of British theatre practice proposed by Foreman (2009) who categorises these as: receiving houses, producing houses, independent production companies, independent theatre companies, and fringe theatre.

Receiving houses are “theatres that produce no original work of their own” but host or receive touring productions, which are overseen in-house by a small permanent management team that expands to include additional staff as each production requires, while producing houses are generally “building-based” theatre companies and mostly consist of national, state, and regional theatre companies who produce their own original productions within their own performance venue/s (Foreman, 2009, p. 3). Independent production companies are commercial operations headed by one or more successful producers who develop multiple shows but have no permanent venue, and who hire rehearsal and performance spaces as required and maintain a small number of permanent operational staff. The third category comprises the independent theatre companies, S2M operations that usually receive funding from project to project, and can have close relationships with

producing houses, “regularly staging their work at the venue or developing projects together” and are “often driven by a specific set of ideas or a particular performance philosophy” (ibid, p.5). They may have a permanent team of company members or a community of artists who collaborate semi-regularly (ibid, pp. 3–4). The last category, fringe theatre, tends to inhabit the “alternative venues” not usually favoured by commercial endeavour, forging a “wide range of new and experimental theatre styles” by offering a “more intimate, more edgy” type of theatre product (ibid).

Commercial professional theatre within the independent production company category “runs on business principles, aimed at returning a dividend to the shareholders” (Brisbane, 2003, pp. 5–6). In Australian commercial theatre there are several major independent production companies that are wholly responsible for the large-scale theatre and musical theatre productions mounted in Australia. Commercial productions are usually presented in capital city receiving houses with seating capacities of between 1,000 and 2,000; these include the Lyric Theatre at the Queensland Performing Arts Complex (QPAC) in Brisbane, the Theatre Royal and Capitol Theatre in Sydney, and the Marriners Theatres group (Regent, Princess, Comedy, and Forum) in Melbourne (Live Performance Australia, 2016).

The larger theatre sector, also known as the Major Performing Arts (MPA) group, are theatre companies that are predominantly producing houses, “funded by the Federal and State governments via tripartite, rolling, triennial agreements”, while the S2M sector contains the “not-for-profit theatre companies and practitioners not included in the MPA cohort” (Bailey 2008, p. 6). The latter sector includes the four-year funded organisations (FYFO) recipients, formerly known as Key Organisations (KO), which are theatre companies funded by the federal and state governments, as well as “a large number of companies and individual practitioners who are not funded by government (or which may be funded from time to time on a project basis)” (ibid).

In 2019, the MPA cohort included twenty-nine prominent producing houses, described as the “leading companies in dance, theatre, circus, opera and orchestral and chamber music”, which included eight theatre companies (AC 2019b). The MPA companies are described as being “integral to the arts ecology in Australia” creating “arts experiences of the highest standards for significant audience numbers nationally and internationally” and supporting “the careers of Australian performing artists and creatives and the creation of new Australian work (ibid). The federal and state government funding awarded to the MPA companies is under the auspices of the AC through the National Framework for Governments’ Support of the Major Performing Arts Sector (the MPA Framework), and is subject to a range of criteria, including “the demonstration of the highest artistic standards, a sizeable audience base and having a minimum average income of more than \$1.6 million over the previous three-year period” (AC 2011, p. 6). Like the commercial sector, the MPA presents large-scale work, which contributes to the theatrical ecosystem, employing approximately 60 per cent of the subsidised sector and touring to regional areas, providing outreach and education as part of the “service level agreement” with the federal and state governments (ibid, p. 7). MPA companies are created directly by state patronage as they are not selected by a peer review process but are chosen and agreed upon by ministers within both levels of government (ibid, p. 10). Because of this, MPA companies “must remain highly accountable for the significant public funding they receive, continue to meet the definition of an MPA company as articulated above, and meet all KPIs (key performance indicators) in their service level agreement”, as outlined above (ibid, p. 6).

Underneath the MPA Framework is the S2M sector, which encompasses S2M arts companies, organisations, and enterprises. Acknowledged by the AC for their “critical role in the arts landscape as a leading public activator of Australia’s arts and cultural life”, the S2M sector is considered to be “vital to arts sector ecology” with “hundreds of small to medium Australian arts organisations” occupying the “significant territory between individual arts practitioners and larger scale companies” (AC 2019b). Described as “responsive and exceptionally diverse” the S2M sector “embraces and engages local artists” and “provide(s)

an environment for creative risk, innovation and experimentation, and a platform for new and emerging work” (ibid). Of the one hundred and twenty-eight FYFO funded in 2018, twenty-four were theatre companies and organisations (ibid).

As is the case with MPA organisations, FYFO must be “Australian organisations of regional, national and international standing” which “support annual programs of arts and cultural activities” (AC, 2017). Unlike MPA groups, these organisations must formally apply to be considered for funding and these applications must be assessed by a selected panel of expert arts practice peers (drawn from the organisation’s particular sector) and measured against a criteria of *artistic merit* (achievement and vision), *quality of services to the arts* (benefit, relevance, activities, and partnerships), *organisational capacity* (strategic plan, governance, and management arrangements), and *contribution to the strategic goals of the AC* (ibid). Within the funding application, potential FYFO must outline a “compelling four year plan” which demonstrates their “artistic achievement and ambition”; and provide evidence of strong governance, effective management and resilience, and the ability to “generate diversified income streams” (ibid.). Unlike the MPA groups, successful FYFO need only provide annual reports that specify quantitative data, demographic information, and audited financial accounts. Notably, the four-year program offered by the AC is designed to “support vibrant artistic programs by contributing to organisational overhead costs and/or the direct costs of delivering successful programs”, rather than aiming to support FYFO across all operational aspects (ibid).

While the commercial and subsidised sector must work within award guidelines² to pay creatives, performers, and production staff a wage, participants in the independent sector are usually remunerated by a stipend or honorarium and/or offered a percentage of the box office takings (Watts 2017). Because independent theatre companies receive little to no

² The Live Performance Award is a modern award sanctioned by the Fair Work Ombudsman. The Award covers employers and their employees throughout Australia in the live performance industry, and is negotiated on a tri-annual basis between the Media Entertainment Arts Alliance (MEAA), Live Performance Australia (LPA), and the Australian Entertainment Industry Association (AEIA) (Fair Work Ombudsman, 2021)

government funding, the reportage and governance demands for the independent sector are far less onerous than for the other sectors. In some respects, the independent theatre sector shares the amateur theatre sector's philosophy of working voluntarily for little to no remuneration, but it is important to note that the former sector embraces the same professional approach to theatre-making found in the commercial and subsidised sectors, which is how it distinguishes itself from amateur theatre. This has become more prevalent in recent years as independent companies embrace a hierarchical structure not too dissimilar to that of MPA companies and FYFO, moving away from the traditional co-op model of organisation, where artistic approach and financial risk is shared equally amongst all members (ibid).

Gathering these diverse sectors together is the Australian festival circuit, which is comprised of "national and international arts festivals and fringe festivals in most capital cities" that present annually or bi-annually and showcase existing companies and productions in multiple venues across cities. It also commissions "the creation of performance material deemed to be suitable to such popular and prestigious occasions" (Milne 2004, p. 375). Major festivals such as the Sydney Festival, the Brisbane Festival, the Adelaide Festival of Arts, the Melbourne International Arts Festival, and the Perth International Arts Festival, as well as their Fringe Festival counterparts, attract international productions as well as those transferred from interstate companies and those presented by local companies.

1.7. Division in the Ranks

In the early 2000s, the Australian theatre industry was characterised by an array of perspectives in terms of structure and organisation, with approaches to practice broadly construed as professional and non-professional and grouped according to three main sectors: commercial (for-profit), subsidised (not-for-profit), and amateur (not subsidised) theatre (Brisbane 2003, pp. 5–6). Traditionally, commercial theatre receives no direct funding from government, with "its money coming from the profits of previous productions

and funds from investors” (Foreman 2009, p. 2), whilst subsidised theatre makes little or no profit in the commercial sense and is primarily funded through government and private sponsorship as well as audience revenue (Brisbane 2003, pp. 5–6).

Subsidised or not-for-profit professional theatre is “made up of people who earn their living by the theatre and are concerned about professional and artistic standards and ethics, career paths, and the pursuit of excellence in performance” (Brisbane 2003, pp. 5–6). Its work force “is highly contract-based and casual, with most shows in Australia being staged by cast and crew employed on a project-by-project basis” (Bailey 2008, p. 7). Despite the AC’s approach to funding this sector which “separates the larger companies from the small-to-medium sector, and divides companies within the small to medium sector between those receiving triennial, annual and project-based funding”, the *subsidised* theatre sector is characterised by well-established interpersonal and professional relationships and is “inherently collaborative: practitioners come together to develop ideas and put on shows” (ibid, p. 2). The AC divides subsidised companies within the Australian theatre industry into the Australian Major Performing Arts Group (AMPAG), the FYFO companies, and the remaining S2M sector, which contains further subsectors comprising individual artists, independent or fringe theatre companies, community and amateur groups (AC 2019a).

Fringe theatre is a model of theatre-making that has existed in Australia in some form or another since the 1950s and is synonymous with a co-operative (co-op) profit-share model of production where artistic approach and financial risk are shared equally amongst all members (Milne 2004, p. 300). However, it was during the 1980s and 1990s that fringe theatre flourished in Australia and became widely acknowledged as the seed bed of new theatre, increasingly serving a “vital mainstream function” at the grassroots level of Australia’s theatre ecosystem (ibid, p. 301). It is now better known as the *independent* theatre sector, moving from the outskirts of festivals to the edges of mainstage theatre, inhabiting the “alternative venues” not usually favoured by commercial endeavour, forging a “wide range of new and experimental theatre styles” by offering a “more intimate, more

edgy” type of theatre product (Foreman 2009, p. 5). The sector includes individuals, performance groups, artist-run initiatives, co-ops, key production houses, and theatre companies across Australia, who produce a variety of ground-breaking new work both within and outside of the mainstage theatre and festival context (ibid).

Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s (1983) field theory analysis, Milne argues that artists who operate in the fringe theatre sector generally do so to be noticed by the field’s centre to join their ranks (2004, p. 300). In effect, he suggests, the Australian fringe theatre sector functions from the outer edge of the field’s centre, gravitating around it “in order to achieve success in the centre’s terms” or drawing strength from it “by freely rotating around it in a self-determining orbit” (ibid). Alternatively, they choose to operate “outside the mainstream” in order to “work on challenging material or with interesting personnel” on projects that are unlikely “to be funded or favoured elsewhere” (ibid).

Current models of independent theatre reflect both these perspectives. While there are still groups that practise co-operatively, the independent theatre model has superseded the traditional fringe co-op model to embrace organisational structures that emulate the hierarchical structures of the MPA and S2M theatre sector companies. Milne defines the latter as groups “where actors (and other creative/production personnel) work on a project in the short term and do not have financial or creative authority over it”, with some groups evolving into companies that creatively produce and co-present with MPA and S2M companies, venues and the major festivals (ibid). This approach has enabled higher levels of professionalism in the development and presentation of independent theatre productions, paralleling the commercial and subsidised models in many ways except in terms of financial support from government. As the MPA and S2M theatre sectors continue to absorb most of the federal and state funding, this leaves little money for individual project funding. The independent sector has no choice but to finance its work independently or look for alternative means to produce its work (Milne 2004).

Bailey notes that the “future vibrancy and sustainability” of the MPA and, indeed, the overall viability of the Australian theatre sector is dependent on the “health of the Australian theatre ecology”; that is, it depends upon cross-pollinating between the work of independent and MPA, FYFO and S2M companies, as well as between venues and festivals (2008, p. 4). More than just a pipeline for new work and new artists to the MPA and festivals, it is the mercurial ability of independent artists and artist groups to initiate, develop, and assemble people and projects that challenge conventional working practices and produce the creative vision of different groups of artists from across the MPA, FYFO, and S2M sectors to provide financial stability.

1.8. Significance of the Research

Governments have used the CIC to justify their investment in the arts because of its focus on cultural and economic input. This research investigates the impact of economic rationalism on the independent sector of the Australian theatre field and interrogates whether the CIC has played a role in shaping this sector. It questions whether the focus on *creative entrepreneurship* through government policy has directly enabled artists working in fringe theatre to reposition themselves as independent professionals by legitimising their practice within these parameters.

This research is significant because it identifies various positions held by independent theatre practitioners and defines alternative logics of practice within the Australian theatre field, strengthening arguments around a theatre ecology.

1.9. Research Questions

This thesis argues that it is possible to discern in contemporary Australian theatre, an emergent entrepreneurship, which, in Bourdieu’s term, I will designate a *habitus*. I argue that

this habitus has its roots in the independent theatre sub-sector in the years prior to the 1990s and that the introduction of the CIC in the 1990s in effect legitimised the practices associated with this habitus. To test this hypothesis, this thesis asks:

1. To what extent have government policies, influenced by the CIC, changed the working practices of Australian fringe theatre artists?
2. How, if at all, has the CIC and its focus on creative entrepreneurship encouraged a new type of independence?
3. To what extent has CIC legitimised the professional position of Australian fringe theatre artists?
4. What does evidence from the field reveal about the claim that the CIC model enables fringe theatre artists to function entrepreneurially across the field as independents?

To answer these questions, the thesis takes the form of comparative analysis of independent theatre practice and the practice of theatre artists from the S2M sector. At the basis of the inquiry is the question of whether the arts workers/artist in question explicitly addressed, engaged with and responded to the paradigms of the CI and CE.

1.10. Overview

Chapter One presents the background and rationale for the research and outlines its significance for the scholarly field. It provides an overview of the historical context, introduces the research questions, summarises the key findings, and states the scope of the thesis.

Chapter Two introduces the research methodology and defines the key theoretical framework used to inform the overall research, which has been guided by Bourdieu's (1993)

field analysis, presenting the research design, and outlining the methods and processes used to collect and analyse the data and inform the case studies.

Chapter Three adds to the conceptual framework by discussing the development of Australian theatre structures using a retroductive analysis of the history of theatre practice in Australia in relation to its logics of practice from the beginning of the twentieth century to 1967.

Chapter Four continues the discussion of Australian theatre structures using a retroductive analysis of the history of theatre practice in Australia in relation to its logics of practice from 1967 to the present day.

Chapter Five presents the first multiple-case study of independent theatre companies formed between 1993 and 2002: Darlinghurst Theatre Company (NSW), Matrix Theatre (QLD), and Red Stitch Actors' Theatre (VIC) against the conceptual framework.

Chapter Six presents the second multiple-case study of independent theatre companies formed between 2008 and 2013: Elbow Room (VIC), Sport for Jove (NSW), and Belloo Creative (QLD) against the conceptual framework.

Chapter Seven discusses the significant findings of the research, particularly the different models of independent theatre and their position of power within the Australian theatre field. This discussion reconciles the findings of the research with the conceptual framework.

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis. It summarises the research and provides responses to the research questions and the conceptual framework. The chapter reviews the findings of the research and concludes by suggesting directions for future research in the areas of independent theatre and sustainable practice.

Chapter Nine discusses key events and highlights any changes that have occurred since the primary data for this thesis was collected, offering a summary of each case study.

The next chapter will introduce the theoretical framework, which is informed by Bourdieu's *field analysis* paradigm.

CHAPTER TWO: Methodology and Research Design

2.1. Introduction

This thesis aims to analyse the positions taken by artists working in independent companies in the field of Australian theatre field. It uses a qualitative multiple-case-study methodology to examine a sample of independent companies, both in terms of their own practices, and their relationships with other sectors in the field of theatre. The research seeks to determine whether, and how, government policy changes informed by the CIC have influenced the practices of the independent theatre artists in these case studies. This chapter details the methodology used to conduct this research and defines the mode of inquiry employed. It concludes with a presentation of the research design and a description of the methods used to collect and analyse the data.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

The epistemological approach to this research is reflexive sociology: an eclectic, post-modern conflation of structuralism and functionalism advocated by French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1992). Bourdieu's philosophy insists that the task of sociology is "to uncover the most profoundly buried structures of the various social worlds which constitute the social universe, as well as the 'mechanisms' which tend to ensure their reproduction or transformation" (1989, p. 7, cited in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 7). Bourdieu's theoretical framework proposes three stages: the construction of the research object, field analysis, and participant objectivation (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Having already established the construction of the research object above, my primary focus here is on the second stage identified by Bourdieu: field analysis. Bourdieu's concepts of "field", "capital", "habitus" and "doxa" constitute the primary analytical tools for field analysis, together forming "the central organising concept" of his work (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992,

p.94). It is necessary, then, to define these concepts before his theoretical tools can be applied.

Bourdieu's definition of the term "field" is three-fold: a *field* is, first, "a structured social space"; it is also "a field of forces" and "a force field" (1998, pp. 40-41, cited in Thomson 2014, p. 72). As a "structured social space", Bourdieu likens *field* to a space in which a sporting game might be played, shaped by rules, actions, and competition, and "occupied by dominant and dominated actors who attempt to usurp, exclude and establish monopolies over the mechanisms of the field's reproduction and the type of power that is effective in it" (De Clerq and Voronov 2009, p. 399). This *social space* "operates semi-autonomously" and is constructed by its own "logic of practice": a "set of beliefs which rationalize the rules of field behaviour" (Bourdieu 1990, p. 68). Collectively, the rules of a *field* and its *logic of practice* are structured by "doxa" and "illusio" and are further enabled by "capital" and "habitus" (Wacquant 2007, p. 267). *Doxa* is the "practical reasoning behind a group's own vision and experience of the world" and is also referred to as a "pre-reflexive, intuitive knowledge shaped by experience" (Deer 2014a, p. 115), while *illusio* exists as a system of belief whereby the participant is aware of "the game" the field presents and is willingly caught up in it "believing that the game is worth playing and recognising its stakes" (Webb et al. 2002, p. xiii). For Bourdieu the stakes are the "product of the competition between players", while the *illusio* is the "investment in the game" and the *doxa* sets the boundaries of belief in the game and its stakes (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 68).

Within a field, agents compete for *capital*: for Bourdieu, "the currency of the field". *Capital*, as Bourdieu uses the term, has "three principal species: economic (material and financial assets), cultural (scarce symbolic goods, skills and titles) and social (resources accrued by virtue of membership in a group)" (Grenfell 2009, p. 19). The three species of *capital* interact with each other and have different values depending on the rules of a field; in some fields, *economic capital*—the accrual wealth—confers prestige; in others, *social capital*, or the key relationships and networks developed by agents is important; in still other fields, agents

compete primarily for, or possess, *cultural capital*: the “symbolically powerful cultural attributes derived from education, family background and possessions” (Grenfell 2014b, p. 222). In the artistic field, it is generally not necessarily economic capital that confers prestige, but rather cultural capital, which refers to non-material things holding symbolic value, and confer prestige, status, and authority on agents within the artistic field (Barker, 2004, p.37).

Unlike *field* and *capital*, which refer more to objective relations, Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus” takes account of the subjectivity of agents in a field. According to Loic Wacquant *habitus* is a system of “transposable dispositions through which we perceive, judge, and act in the world” along with “a principle of both social continuity and discontinuity” (2007, p.268), which reinforces normative practices but can also encourage innovation. For Karl Maton, *habitus* connects an agent’s past, present, and future, but more importantly, creates a connection “between the social and the individual, the objective and the subjective, the structure and the agency” (2014, p. 52). Ian Maxwell adds that *habitus* constitutes a “complicity” which “provides us with the wherewithal to function” as agents and “renders the world with which we are familiar – its logics, its values, its tastes, all embodied as our own, as our self – as a natural world, and one in which, because it has shaped us, we feel at home” (2010, p. 13). As will be explored throughout this thesis, the *habitus* embodied by theatre artists informs their interaction with their field and the species of capital that they compete for; principally, cultural capital which can confer a certain amount of economic capital. Artists also compete for social capital (who wishes to work with who, who can provide opportunities for advancement). The cultural capital (prestige, status and authority) artists seek is manifested by the logics of practice of excellence and professionalism determined by the artistic field. As my case studies reveal, being seen as an “entrepreneur” (creative or otherwise) was not seen as conferring capital within the artistic field and was strongly resisted by most of my interviewees.

According to Bourdieu, when a researcher analyses a field, they undertake a “construction of a relational analysis; both within and between fields” on three levels (Bourdieu and

Wacquant 1992, pp. 104–107, cited in Grenfell 2014b, p. 221). On the first level, the researcher reviews the overarching social space and tries to isolate the structure of the field being investigated in relation to the “field of power”.³ Within each field, there are other fields and subfields: at the second level, therefore, the research tries to determine how these are positioned against each other. After establishing these objective relations in the first two levels, in the third the researcher establishes the *habitus* of the individual participants within the different fields and subfields, and the different levels of *distinction* and *autonomous* or *heteronomous* practice with which they engage, in relation to each other (Grenfell 2014b, p. 233). Field analysis, then, takes into systematic consideration the structural perspectives of a field and its logics of practice and how these are actualised from an objective to a subjective perspective. This process enables the researcher to “compare correspondences between individuals, groups and the way structures intersect and resonate in the homologies set up in the course of the operations of this field with other fields” (ibid), and also to consider the strategic positions held by the different entities within the field itself and their relationship to each other.

The practice of an artist is informed both by their *habitus* and the positions they occupy within the artistic field (*habitus* and *field* being opposite sides of the same coin), producing differing levels of what Bourdieu (1984) refers to as “distinction”: a quality of difference and/or capital valued within a given field. An artist’s *habitus* is informed, in part, of their background (parentage, class, education), and what they have accumulated as a set of dispositions through their engagement in a given field. This, in turn, is compounded by what they believe will earn rewards, the tastes and trends of their potential audience (distinction earned through cultural capital), the changing positions of agents in the field and how they see themselves in relation to these when making the work (social capital). Aspects of the field of power – such as cultural production, industry, and economy – determine the overall scope of the cultural field and its relational structures (Webb et al. 2002).

³ The *field of power* is a social field or space formed by the intersection of the cultural field with the economic and political fields (Bourdieu, 1984)

Bourdieu's field analysis is integral to my research design and data analysis. By positioning the cultural field in relation to government and politics (the field of power) and within that, the field of Australian theatre and the subfields therein, this level of Bourdieu's field analysis has enabled me to understand how capital is configured, what the relationships and logics of practice are, and what the structure of relationships is between the six case studies. By analysing the field and its logics of practice, which includes the dispositions of agents in the field and what the field constructs as capital, I have been able to determine the relationship between the field of power and the Australian theatre field, and to clarify its relationship to the independent theatre subfield. From here I was able to identify a conceptual framework, develop research questions, and design a methodology to conduct the research.

2.3. A Bourdieusian Perspective of the CIC

As discussed in Chapter One, prior to the introduction of the policies constituting what I have identified as the CIC, the cultural field, consisted of two sectors characterised by different values and functions: the *creative arts* and the *cultural industries*. In the field of artistic production, Bourdieu distinguishes between what he calls "restricted" fields—those which produce "cultural goods (and the instruments for appropriating these goods) objectively for a public of producers of cultural goods", which can be further described as small-scale production or art for art's sake, and "unrestricted" fields: those which are "specifically organised with a view to the production of cultural goods destined for non-producers of cultural goods", or which are mass productions for "the public at large" (1984, pp.4-5).

Within the "field of production", the *restricted* and *unrestricted* fields are in opposition to each other and operate under different "rules": the *unrestricted* fields agree to the commercial laws of competition, seeking "the conquest of the largest possible market", while the *restricted* fields develop their own criteria and achieve "truly cultural recognition

accorded by the peer group whose members are both privileged clients and competitors” (ibid).

Following Bourdieu, I characterise the field of the *creative arts*—as a *restricted* field, and that of the *cultural industries* or the commercial sector as an *unrestricted* field.

To understand this distinction, we need to grasp the relationship between the field of the creative arts to the broader field of culture. For Bourdieu *culture* (or the whole social world) and *Culture* (art) are closely related, and *art* does not exist evidentially in or of itself but in relation to the social world. This means that a full comprehension of cultural production and artistic practice can only be attained if “*culture*, in the restricted, normative sense of ordinary usage, is brought back into *culture* in the anthropological sense” (1984, cited in Webb et al. 2002, p. 152, emphasis in original).

In the act of creation, Hartley suggests, the artist realises “specific disciplinary procedures and artistic conventions” and shapes the institutionalisation of training, the conditions of work, perceptions of value, and the marketplace for such works (Hartley et al. 2013, p. 41). This means that any instance of artistic production is not just an original and unique work for sale, performance, or display, but also consists of the practice and training of the artist and the relationship between their artistic works and society. By using Bourdieu’s theoretical tools – *field, capital and habitus* -- we can understand how artists themselves are shaped by culture and interact with the parameters of cultural production (Wacquant, 2007, p.267).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the debates over the use of the words *creative* or *cultural* that erupted with the introduction of the CIC were framed in terms of this dichotomy. This division between fields provided a way for the government, artists, and audiences to understand these sectors, and to intrinsically know how each sector operated within itself and in relationship to the others. The discourse of the CIC suggested new rules of practice

that amounted to a collapsing of this fundamental, structuring distinction, working heterodoxically against the *illusio* and *doxa* of both the creative arts and commercial sector. Within the logics and conditions of the CIC, artists were required to amend their *illusio* (beliefs) and *doxa* (accepted practice) and to take up new logics, disrupting what had become the conventional manners in which things were done. In Bourdieu's term, the dispositions which had 'worked' in the field as established—the *habitus* associated with the field—no longer worked as the field shifted.

In effect, government policy sought to subsume the restricted cultural and artistic fields to the unrestricted field, by asserting the currency and value of the species of capital for which artists competed (and which bestowed upon them distinction). The aim of the policies was to expose cultural products to the same economic conditions and values as other products in the field of power. While, of course, cultural products are never autonomous—all, to an extent, are subject to the conditions of the field of power; however, the potential of the restricted field of artistic production to refract the effects of the field of power was effectively collapsed. As units of economic production, according to the CIC model, cultural products were no different to any other produced by any other industry, and are therefore able to be measured, all but exclusively, in terms of their economic value to the (Australian) economy.

The CIC then, can be understood as an attempt to impose a new *doxa*: one that brings the artist into the *unrestricted* field of cultural production, essentially rendering their position as measurable against other economic agents and commodities. Within this new paradigm, the practice of the artist is valued by the creativity that it offers, which can be transformed into intellectual property and sold for profit.

By reframing the field of cultural production through an arbitrary linking of thirteen sectors in both *restricted* and *unrestricted* fields, the CIC purportedly challenges the existing artistic *habitus* and reframes artistic success in terms of collaborative ability or financial status. Within this redefined field of cultural production, the conditions of the CIC reframe the agent

formerly known as an artist as the creative entrepreneur (CE): a savvy operator who moves freely through the artistic field, and who now has the capacity to increase their cultural capital through their enhanced capacity to earn economic rewards from their creativity. The relative autonomy of the field of cultural production is collapsed. Cultural capital becomes, explicitly, a sub-species traded (solely) in terms of economic capital currency. The logics, practices, and aims of creative endeavour shift from an orientation toward art for art's sake to, instead, that of creative enterprise.

It is important to note, at the same time that, as Tony Moore and Mark Gibson observe, Bourdieu himself “liked to look at artists as cultural entrepreneurs”, noting that artists “compete as individuals, movements and generations, but also amass and deploy (cultural) capital”, which they describe as a “mix of knowledge, skills, contacts, style, personality traits, ideas, education and marketing savvy that enhances the raw talent gleaned from genetics and upbringing to make an artist not just good, but able to work and get noticed and work again” (2013, p. 37). For Throsby & Petetskaya the idea of being noticed as an artist is also perceived as “emerging” or “becoming established”, a doxa which they describe as the “first stage of starting out, setting the foot on the first rung of the ladder, looking for the first breakthrough” followed by “a period in which the artist consolidates these early efforts and works hard to achieve a level of professional acceptance” (2017, p. 41). In Bourdieu's terms, the artist must, at the beginning of their career, traverse the *restricted* and *unrestricted* fields to gain recognition or cultural capital. De Clerq & Voronov believe that “gaining of legitimacy by newcomers entering a field” is an “enactment of entrepreneurial habitus” (2009, pp. 396–397). Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice, they suggest that “newcomers” legitimacy in a field result not from deliberate planning or intentions but rather from the interplay between everyday practices and the social context or “the need for newcomers to ‘fit in’ and ‘stand out’” (ibid).

2.4. Methodology

Following Bourdieu's methodology, I constructed the object for this research from my own interest in creative entrepreneurship and professional background in independent theatre. I then developed the subsequent conceptual framework and research questions through a review of the literature pertaining to the development of the CIC and creative entrepreneurship, and through an historical analysis of the Australian theatre field. This literature review and historical analysis are presented in two parts: the first considers the development of the CI and CE concepts worldwide; and the second uses the first level of Bourdieu's field analysis to determine objective relations in Australian theatre, historically and currently.

By reviewing the literature on the CIC, I demonstrate how it started to be deployed in government cultural policies internationally. I then investigate how these changes to cultural policies impacted on the cultural field and logics of practice of artists. Next, I interrogate how the CIC and creative entrepreneurship influenced the logic of practice within the Australian cultural field, if at all, and re-defined the relational positions of its agents. Moving from the broad cultural field, my historical analysis focuses specifically on the structures and organisations currently present in the Australian theatre field and examines the positions occupied by its agents. In doing so, I establish the relationship, more generally, of the theatre field to the field of power.

2.5. Conceptual Framework and Research Questions

The aim of this research was to investigate the impact of the CIC on Australian fringe theatre practice and determine if the CE concept had been harnessed by this subfield, thus developing the notion of independent theatre practice within the Australian theatre field. The development of the current field of Australian theatre has taken place in less than a century and, significantly, has paralleled movements in cultural policy in Australia: from the

emergence of government-led patronage of the arts to, in recent years, a movement away from the patronage model towards a neoliberal focus. Through historical analysis I identify the habitus of agents in the field of Australian theatre, a habitus steeped in three logics of practice: a commitment to a national identity, professionalism, and the pursuit of artistic excellence.

These logics of practice evolved with the development of Australia as a nation and were formed by the national inheritance of circumstances and resources, structures, and industrial patterns. The Australian theatre field has been established not only as a consequence of this inheritance but through the actions of Australian theatre practitioners themselves. The analysis revealed a recurring practice of entrepreneurship that is intrinsic to the field of Australian theatre, particularly in the small to medium (S2M) sector, albeit on a predominantly amateur level. The independent theatre companies that formed in the late 1990s and early 2000s are the legacy of the alternative theatre movement of the 1970s and 1980s. Like the latter, many were artist-led and focused on the development of new work; however, a significant difference was that they did not rely on government funding. Rather than compete for restricted resources in order to move closer to the centre of the field, these companies operated within and around the field, using the cultural capital held by individual artists within the groups, drawing strength from their combined relationships and reputations, and operating across multiple positions.

Analysis of the Australian theatre field indicated that there was a trend, in recent years, by some major performing arts (MPA) companies to develop platforms for independent companies. These platforms, together with the inclusion of independent artists and companies in Australian festivals, have repositioned fringe theatre practice further, enabling independent companies to be seen and heard by a larger, international, audience. Independent companies achieve professionalism and legitimacy through recognition from these social agents, and the excellence of their work is established through inclusion in arts festivals, which bring larger audiences and critical attention.

I analysed the field of Australian theatre and its practices through Bourdieu's theoretical framework to understand whether, how, and to what extent, government policies influenced by the CIC paradigm may have encouraged the subsequent adoption of the CE model by independent theatre artists. The intersection between the independent and the MPA, four-year funded organisations (FYFO), and S2M sectors had legitimised practice that was previously seen as amateur and operating on the edges of the field, giving the work of fringe theatre practitioners distinction within the Australian theatre field.

2.6. Identification of Participants and Case Studies

In order to identify participants for this research, I initially considered prominent Australian theatre practitioners who self-identified or were publicly identified by the media as independent theatre-makers. This selection process also considered Australian independent theatre companies or individuals whose practices had elements of, or were largely driven by, entrepreneurial activities. Owing to the research focus on independent theatre companies, I immediately eliminated any theatre companies that were members of the AMPAG or FYFO at the time the fieldwork for this research was undertaken. To further refine the list of potential case studies, I focused on theatre companies that: had been operational for at least five years, thus surpassing their *emerging artist* status; claimed to be independent and identified with that term through their marketing; had produced at least five works in that time; and had gained a reputation for artistic excellence through critical acclaim, as well as a strong audience following. Evidence of self-sustenance through entrepreneurial endeavours or ancillary activities such as educational workshops was also a key consideration.

I reviewed peak body and industry-based websites, media archives, and funding databases from entities and organisations such as the Australia Council, Arts Queensland, Create NSW,

Create Victoria, Theatre Network Australia, Theatre Network NSW, *Real Time*, *Stage Whispers*, Melbourne Fringe Festival, Sydney Fringe Festival, Brisbane Festival, Brisbane Powerhouse, Metro Arts, and Theatre Works to produce a list of seventeen viable candidates from the independent theatre sector across Australia. Given the timeframe for this research project and the resources required, seventeen case studies was implausible, and it became clear that the list would need further refinement.

Research into the Australian theatre field has identified that approximately 86 per cent of Australia's theatre practice is located in the eastern states of Australia, with the strongest independent theatre practice in the cities of Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane (Windle 2017, p. 4). Correspondingly, I reduced the list of possible candidates to fourteen independent theatre companies in Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne, in order to select the final list of potential candidates. I then applied a selection method known as *purposeful sampling* using a strategy termed *maximum variation (heterogeneity)* (Patton 1990, my emphasis).

Purposeful sampling is the process of selecting cases that are “information rich and illuminative”, which focus on issues that are central to the research and which can be investigated to a level that “yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations” (Patton 1990, p. 230). Correspondingly, the maximum variation (heterogeneity) strategy is aimed at yielding different dimensions and perspectives from each individual case study as well as “capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon” across the multiple-case study (ibid, p. 235). In line with the aims of purposeful sampling, the cases I selected needed to offer an opportunity to learn “about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” whilst allowing me to focus on the practice of individual independent theatre artists from a subjective perspective, in an effort to understand and “illuminate the questions under study” (ibid).

By selecting diverse cases from Queensland, NSW, and Victoria, I would be able to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the practices of Australian independent theatre

companies. Based on these criteria, I compiled a list of nine independent theatre companies: three each from Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne. I approached, via email, fourteen individuals who I identified as key personnel from these companies to participate in the research. One respondent from Brisbane declined to participate, citing a lack of interest in the study and because they did not self-identify their theatre company as independent. Two other respondents from Sydney and Melbourne respectively declined to respond to several email requests for participation. However, the remaining eleven people agreed to participate, and six cases were selected for comparison within the multiple-case study.

2.7. The Case Studies

Of the six case studies, two are from Queensland (Matrix Theatre (Matrix) and Belloo Creative (Belloo)), two are from NSW (Darlinghurst Theatre Company (DTC) and Sport for Jove Theatre Company (SFJ)), and two are from Victoria (Elbow Room (ER) and Red Stitch Actors' Theatre (Red Stitch)). When this research was conducted between June 2018 and November 2019, the length of time the six case studies had been practising ranged from six to twenty-six years; two had been established in the past six years, two had been working for ten and eighteen years respectively, and two had been operating for twenty-six years.

On the one hand, DTC, the oldest of the group, has recently become a producing house with professional independent status through its fundamentally commercial approach. On the other, Matrix, Belloo, and ER exist as creative partnerships that are predominantly funded by the professional creative work of the individuals who run them, from outside their company structure, and who rely on their relationship with creative producers and venues to develop and present their work. In between these models, SFJ and Red Stitch are ensemble-based companies that rely on philanthropic donations to operate.

The first multiple-case study set includes the oldest case study participants, DTC, Matrix, and Red Stitch, while the second multiple-case study set includes the younger participants,

SFJ, ER, and Belloo. The companies have been grouped according to their time in existence rather than their location so that the data can reveal patterns and approaches to practice made against the introduction and subsequent implementation of the CIC in the Australian theatre field.

2.8. Data Collection: Qualitative Case Study Research Methods

As previously noted, the desired outcome of this qualitative design approach was a comparative multiple-case study, whereby an analysis of data taken from the six independent theatre case studies could determine how independent theatre practice intersects with the parameters of the conceptual framework. According to Patton qualitative findings are usually the product of “three forms of data collection: (1) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (2) direct observation; and (3) written documents” (1990, p. 4). The design for this case study fieldwork employed a mixed method of two of these three data collection methods: written documents in the form of archival research; and interviews with key personnel which were semi-structured using a series of open-ended questions.

Archival Research

After I had formally confirmed the six case studies, I conducted preliminary archival research for each against the parameters of the theoretical and conceptual framework and the key questions.

Following Patton’s definition of “organisational” archival research (1990, p. 4), I gathered relevant information from the pages of the different company websites and social media pages, and from the press in the form of direct interviews, media articles, and production reviews. I particularly focussed on material that identified the companies’ field positions; in

particular, material related to the establishment and development of each company, their professional status, and evidence of markers of prestige or distinction in the field.

To assess how each company was positioned in relation to the economic field (the field of power), I examined all public governance information such as annual company reports, Australian Business Numbers, and their status (if any) with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. Only two of the six companies annually generate a company report (DTC and Red Stitch). I found financial information relating to Matrix, ER, SFJ and Belloo, and the other case studies, by referring to state and federal funding notifications and annual reports generated by MPA organisations, FYFO, festivals, and S2M organisations, who sponsored or worked in partnership with the six companies on projects.

Artist biographies and production information were retrieved from company websites, social and print media, and cross-matched with biographical information found on LinkedIn or in databases such as AusStage, AustLit, Australian Plays, and Playlab. The archival research provided rich information about the impetus and drive behind the establishment of each company and anecdotal information about the companies and individual participants which would be triangulated through the interviews with the key personnel.

Interviews

I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with eleven individuals from the six cases, using the same list of open-ended questions to determine and set the research parameters and enable the replication design for the multiple-case study to be formed.

Using *semi-structured* interviews, rather than *structured* or completely *unstructured* interviews, allowed for a more holistic approach by focussing the ensuing dialogue around the logics of practice or other important issues as they arose (Brinkmann 2018, p. 581). The

interviews were conducted face to face in Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne with the following individuals between June 2018 and March 2019:

Case Study 1: Darlinghurst Theatre Company (NSW)	
Glenn Terry	Artistic Director, CEO (1994–present), and co-founder Other roles: Executive Producer
Case Study 2: Matrix Theatre (QLD)	
Michael Fletcher	Artistic Director (1994–present) and co-founder Other roles: Director, Writer, Actor
Case Study 3: Red Stitch Actors’ Theatre (VIC)	
Ella Caldwell	Artistic Director (2013–present), founding member Other roles: Director, Actor
Case Study 4: Elbow Room Productions (VIC)	
Marcel Dorney	Co-Artistic Director (2008–present) and co-founder Other roles: Director, Writer
Emily Tomlins	Co-Artistic Director (2008–present) and co-founder Other roles: Creative, Actor
Samantha Butterworth	Creative Producer (2015–present)
Case Study 5: Sport for Jove Theatre Company (NSW)	
Damien Ryan	Artistic Director (2009–present) and co-founder Other roles: Board Member, Director, Actor
Case Study 6: Belloo Creative (QLD)	
Caroline Dunphy	Co-Artistic Director (2013–present) and co-founder Other roles: Director, Actor
Katherine Lyall-Watson	Co-Artistic Director (2013–present) and co-founder Other roles: Writer
Danielle Shankey	Creative Producer (2013–2020) and co-founder
Kathryn Kelly	Dramaturg (2013–present) and co-founder

My questions were organised into five categories: knowledge of artistic terms used in the field; background and training; artistic practice (individual and company); company organisation; and the company’s relationship to field. These questions were designed to evoke a broad discussion around the Australian theatre field, creative entrepreneurship, and the practices of independent theatre; they also aimed to develop a greater understanding of each individual case and its relationship to the independent sector and broader theatre field.

Interviews were conducted either at the respondent's place of work or at a location that was convenient to them and were scheduled for an hour. In all cases, the interview exceeded this time limit, with two interviews exceeding one-and-a-half hours. Owing to participant availability, the interviews for ER were conducted over two sessions: the first with Marcel Dorney in June 2018, and the second with Emily Tomlins and Samantha Butterworth in May 2019. Similarly, Belloo interviews were conducted over two sessions: the first with Caroline Dunphy, Katherine Lyall-Watson, and Danielle Shankey in September 2018, and the second with Kathryn Kelly in February 2019. The remaining interviews for all other cases were conducted with personnel on an individual basis.

2.9. Conclusion

In this chapter I introduced the theoretical framework informed by Bourdieu's field analysis and discussed the key terms and concepts relating to the research methodology that I have used to design this research. I also discussed the logics of practice that support the investigation and presentation of the data. I detailed the qualitative multiple-case-study method I used due to its compatibility with Bourdieu's theoretical framework. Finally, I provided an overview of the data collection process involved in selecting the case study organisations and an introduction to these cases. As outlined in the first chapter, the idea of a fringe theatre has shifted, allowing these artists to differentiate in terms of their practices and approaches. The co-op model, so entrenched in the habitus of entry-level artists and emerging creative producers, has transcended the level of fringe status to carve out its own niche in the spaces between the MPA and S2M sectors as independents. The question remains: Why has this occurred?

CHAPTER THREE: Structures of Australian Theatre

3.1. Introduction

As discussed in Chapter One, when the CIC was introduced into policy, it blurred the distinctions between *creative arts* and *cultural industries* and sought to foster practices of *creative* entrepreneurship. In doing so, it occluded the traditional understanding of the artist as being autonomous, or, in the sense in which Bourdieu (1983) conceived of the artist, as participating in “the economic world reversed”. Banks and O'Connor note that, while the CIC “appears to provide recognition and a ‘place at the table’ for the artist”, the boundaries between “creative and non-creative industries, art and commerce and creativity and innovation” drawn by the CIC continues to raise the issue of distinctiveness and “threatens to redraw or efface significantly the boundaries between” (2009, pp. 366-367).

If the position of the artist has indeed been usurped, at least, notionally in policy, by the CE in the field of cultural production, then the artist has no choice but to shift their practice towards something consistent with the logics of *creative entrepreneurship*. In the case of Australia, since 1972 theatre artists have practised in a subsidised field of cultural production in which economic failure had been expected⁴. To refocus artistic creativity away from this orientation towards economic failure towards, instead, a positive fiscal outcome involved more than a change of name from *artist* to *CE*. For the artist, it intimates an entrepreneurial understanding of how to engage with this new cultural field; primarily, how to reshape their creative process and expand and widen their audience.

This returns us, then, to my central questions: To what extent have government policies, influenced by the CIC, changed the working practices of Australian independent theatre artists? How, if at all, has the CIC and its focus on creative entrepreneurship encouraged a

⁴ A detailed discussion about the development of government subsidy is continued in Chapter 4, page 96.

new type of independence? In order to understand the field of Australian theatre, the subfield of independent theatre, and the impact of the CIC and creative entrepreneurship on practices within that, we must unpack the logics of that field by reviewing how it came into being. The following two chapters will distinguish and identify key factors and events that have shaped the structures of Australian theatre by analysing aspects of cultural capital that serve as a reference point for agents operating within this field.

It is not possible within this chapter to present an exhaustive historical analysis of creative activity across the Australian theatre field to date. Instead, this review will survey the structures and organisations currently present in Australian theatre using Bourdieu's field analysis in order to determine the relationship of the theatre field to relevant aspects of the field of power (infrastructure, funding, policy, and oversight); the relationship of the field of theatre to itself (structure, organisation, and product); and the space of positions within the different theatre subfields. Specifically, this chapter will discuss how these structures came into being by examining the development of the field and its relationship to Australian government policy and subsidy prior to and after the introduction of the CIC. The historical review presented in this chapter will reveal key economic and social infrastructures that have influenced Australian theatre practice in its current form, citing influences and trends, and using Bourdieu's theoretical framework as an analytical tool to understand them.

3.2. Australian Theatre Then: Structures, Organisation and Approaches

The emergence and evolution of the logics of practice within Australian theatre are intrinsically connected to the cultural development of Australia as a nation, as well as an inheritance of circumstances and resources, structures, and industrial patterns. In 1987, Richard Fotheringham noted that the structures of Australian theatre were the "products of decisions by commercial managements, by cultural minorities, by artists themselves, and more recently by government and bureaucrats" which were "shaped by larger problems and conditions of history and demography" (p. 12). He argued that Australian theatre had, for a

long time, been “bedevilled by a recurring pioneering myth” that Australia was a “cultural wasteland”, which effectively dismissed “the long and vigorous history of professional theatre of many kinds in this country” (ibid).

In 1993 Jennifer Radbourne reflected on government’s role in the development of Australian theatre structures. She noted that, although governments at the time were led by “powerful individuals” who had “played a significant role” to establish the current structures, the government was “rarely the [sole] director, leader or innovator” (p. 8). Instead, “the catalyst for development, change, growth, challenge and innovation in performing arts practice in Australia has been a dual consequence of individual vision and considerable sustenance by the Commonwealth Government” (ibid). Five years later, Veronica Kelly described Australian theatre as “a highly reactive, economically conditioned and opportunistically pro-active cultural form” which has “responded with remarkable energy to the cross-currents of public life and to the specific exigencies of its own industrial patterns” (1998, p. 2). As Geoffrey Milne noted in 2004, it is apparent that the “notoriously ephemeral art-form” of Australian theatre has been subjected to the changing tastes, fashions, and approaches of theatre practitioners, but also that Australian theatre “is largely the story of subsidy” which has been strongly shaped by government funding policies and priorities (p. 3).

David Throsby identifies three stages or “broad periods” in the development of Australia’s public funding of the arts, which has directly impacted the logics of practice within the theatre field (2001, p. 2). The first, from Federation to the end of the 1960s, is construed as “a period over which [government] support for the arts was virtually non-existent”. The second stage represents the years between the early 1970s and the late 1980s when the scope of government funding rapidly expanded to reflect the economic importance of the arts in Australia. In the third stage, which covers the 1990s, government funding was reduced, although there were some significant advances in the articulation of cultural policy (ibid). Craik notes that policy interventions during the first stage were “ad hoc and episodic” and

arts and cultural initiatives were “not framed in specific cultural policy terms” (2007, p. 7). It was only towards the end of this phase that the Australian Government was “committed to cultural support, as part of its mission of creating a national culture across its disparate and sparsely populated continent” (ibid, p. 8). Julian Meyrick, however, argues that the oft-repeated story of “seventy years of struggle, neglect and frustration” which ended when the Whitlam Government came to power in 1972 and unleashed “fifty years of activity, creativity and achievement” is a simplified “grand narrative” that belies the complexity of Australian theatre’s structural development (2017, pp. 1-2).

Within Throsby’s three stages of public funding for the arts, Milne maps four “waves” of significant structural development in Australian theatre (2004, p. 2). The first commenced in the mid-1950s, “professionalis[ing] the repertory theatre movement in Australia largely along British lines”; it established the Australian Elizabeth Theatre Trust (AETT) which marked the beginning of the current model of state subsidy. The second wave, from 1966 to 1981, reacted against the Anglocentric emphasis of the first and effectively “Australianised” the Australian theatre through “nationalist political fervour” and initiatives in funding and further infrastructural development (ibid). The third wave, from 1980 to 1998, marked a period of “consolidation, repositioning and decline” but also of “great activity in the building of theatres and arts centres, regional touring, government infrastructure and increasing repertoire and stylistic prescription by subsidy bodies”; importantly, this period saw the inception of multicultural, community, and regional theatre, together with alternative theatre and the growth of the fringe (ibid).

Milne’s fourth wave recognises the period from the mid-to-late 1990s to 2011 as one of “consolidation, change and loss in Australian subsidised theatre” (2013, pp. 22-23). This wave saw a generous amount of federal arts subsidy consolidated to support the Australian Major Performing Arts Group (AMPAG) and the four-year funded organisations (FYFO), as recommended in the *1999 Major Performing Arts Inquiry*, to the detriment of the remaining S2M and independent companies, who were placed in a precariously insecure financial

position due to this change in cultural policy (ibid). As I will now discuss, Australia's cultural policy slowly grew alongside these four waves of Australian theatre's structural development.

3.3. An "Australian" Theatre (1901 - 1939)

John McCallum suggests that the field of Australian theatre between 1901 and 1939 can be "loosely divided into three categories", with entrepreneurial commercial theatre companies and touring circuits the dominant group, followed by the repertory theatre movement "which mostly dealt with the 'serious' contemporary repertoire from overseas", and "the nationalist theatre, which focused on local drama" in the minority (2009, p. 4). At the time of Federation, theatre in Australia was an entrepreneurial endeavour with a flourishing commercial industry of multiple companies performing in capital cities and throughout regional areas (ibid). Australian audiences in capital cities were fed a steady diet of entertainment imported directly from England, Europe, and America by commercial theatre entrepreneurs. These started with minstrel shows and melodrama and grew to include a combination of opera and operetta, Shakespeare, vaudeville, and variety and musical performances (Holloway 1981; Fotheringham 1987).

At this time, the repertoire of the plays performed on Australian stages was "virtually identical to those of the British and American stages" (Love 1995, p. 487), and theatre followed "English practice in everything from architecture to acting style", including the establishment of stock companies and the format of the performances themselves (Perkins 1995, p. 205). Prominent stock companies run by actor-managers during this phase introduced increasingly sophisticated models of performance and production. One of the most important of these actor-managers was James Cassius Williamson, who dominated the Australian theatre field for over fifty years with his theatrical touring empire J. C. Williamson's Pty Ltd (Carroll 1985, p. 9).

Established in 1880, “The Firm”, as J. C. Williamson’s was known, had a majority control of Australian theatres by 1904. By 1911 it was employing international stars as well as Australian performers, designers, and technicians and “negotiating the rights to thousands of plays, musical comedies and operas from London’s West End, Europe and New York’s Broadway, and touring them throughout their vast network of Australasian theatres” (Kumm 2016, p. 8). Williamson effectively “replaced slapdash, makeshift stagecraft with international professionalism” using a model of theatre practice that remounted plays and productions that had proven to be successful in London and New York (Dicker 1995, p. 643). As Holloway notes, the Firm’s productions and modus operandi “very much set the tone of Australian professional theatre in the future” (1981, p. xvii). Audiences were trained to believe that The Firm’s imported performances were better than those created and produced in Australia; “conditioned and comforted in that attitude” by the Firm, who “continued to mould the theatrical and dramatic tastes of Australia by importing overseas plays and players at the expense of the local product” (ibid).

Professionalism in Australian theatre in the first decade of the twentieth century was measured by the star quality of the acts provided, the lavishness of the set and costumes, and the show’s overall box office success. As commercial theatre continued to maintain its monopoly, there were ideas about a different kind of theatre and strong influences from Europe, Britain, and Ireland which encouraged an alternative approach to theatre production in Australia (Rees 1973; Carroll 1985; Perkins 1995).

Repertory Theatre

The repertory movement (repertory), which started in 1907 in Britain (Rowell and Jackson 1984), represented a change in the structure and style of theatre offered, as well as a different approach to the organisation of theatre companies themselves. Repertory put the playwright at the centre of the work instead of the actor–manager and was “dedicated to the plays of George Bernard Shaw, W.B. Yeats, J.M. Synge, Sean O’Casey, John Galsworthy,

Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekhov and others”; it engaged with a “new style of potent realism” (Comans 2009, p.10). Repertory companies saw themselves “as determinedly non-commercial in approach” and were established with the intent to serve “a specific community or region and providing a wide range of plays, new and classic, challenging and popular” (ibid). In Australia, individuals such as Bryceson Treharne (1879-1948), Leon Brodzky (1883-1973), Louis Esson (1878-1943), William Moore (1868-1937), and Gregan McMahon (1874-1941) established amateur initiatives to instil repertory’s drive for literary, playwright-centred drama into the Australian theatre field. As Katherine Brisbane (1995, p. 39) notes, “amateur” in this sense does not reflect “a pejorative implication of light entertainment for personal enjoyment” but is rather a comment on the approach and level of activities undertaken by these groups when compared to the highly commercial for-profit approach of The Firm and other commercial companies.

Repertory theatre in Australia gathered momentum with the establishment of repertory societies in all capital cities (Meyrick 2017). These societies are considered “the first alternative theatres in Australia” due to their chosen repertoires which “mainly avoided that of the higher profile commercial managements” and which contained classics, modern British, European, American and, notably, Australian plays (Milne 2004, p. 75). Like its British counterpart, Australian repertory aimed to “create a more intelligent theatre which relied on real-life issues and ensemble playing” (Brisbane 2003, p. 7); it focused on “the cultural enrichment” as well as the educational aspects “gained through the production of plays of literary and artistic merit” (Comans 2009, p. 10). These early repertory societies were influential in challenging the monopoly of the commercial theatre forms, developing an audience for literary drama, and essentially strengthening the call for an “Australian” theatre. The Great Depression (1928-1935) “ensured that not much ‘straight’ drama of any kind was produced in the commercial theatre” but, in a sense, this was beneficial for the development of “Australian” theatre (Carroll 1985, p. 63). The dearth of touring theatre productions, and commercial and repertory work opportunities for Australian performers encouraged a “do it

yourself” attitude that was to infiltrate the Australian theatre field and take theatre practice in a new direction (Rees 1973, p. 154).

Little Theatre and New Theatre

Between the Depression and the Second World War, the Australian theatre field changed rapidly, stimulating further initiatives and advancements in theatre practice. During this period, the Australian theatre field was directly influenced by two other amateur movements which diversified the field of theatre in terms of approach to organisation and production: Little Theatre and New Theatre. Flourishing in “practically every suburb and country town in Australia”, the Little Theatre movement encompassed the efforts of “hundreds of recreational amateur theatre companies and light opera societies” (Milne 2004, p. 75), carrying on the work of the early repertory societies by revitalising theatre as an art-form for audiences, and continuing to present productions of plays the commercial theatres avoided. Similar to the early repertory companies, Australia’s Little Theatre companies were “established by professional actor–managers who trained and cast amateurs” (Brisbane 2003, p. 7).

Radbourne defines Little Theatre in terms of organisations “comprising members engaged in the amateur preparation and performance of plays to local community audiences” (Radbourne 1979, p. 6). Little Theatre’s relationship to commercial theatre in Australia was reciprocal rather than antagonistic, and, as a result of the Depression, “drew the amateur and the professional much closer together than either would have preferred in other circumstances” (Brisbane 1995, p. 40). The purpose of Little Theatre was “to service the community as a training ground” towards professional participation in all aspects, which encompassed the provision of training experiences for actors, writers, and audience members “in a workshop of educational processes not found in professional theatre” (Radbourne 1978, p. 4).

Concurrently, and within a more urban setting, the New Theatre movement emerged as “amateur theatre’s strong socialist conscience amid the predominant middle-class influence” (Brisbane 1995, p. 42). New Theatre took the form of workers’ theatre groups which focused on agitprop (agitational propaganda) and political theatre along with other European avant garde forms and style (ibid.). While Little Theatre attempted to fill the gap left by commercial theatre, New Theatre was born out of “a loose international movement of workers’ theatres” which originated in the United Kingdom and United States during the 1920s, inspired by the agitprop theatre groups of the Soviet Union, and was affiliated with the Soviet-led New Theatre League which formed in 1935 (O’Brien 1995, p. 400). The New Theatre League’s slogan was “art is a weapon”; it was this doctrine that pervaded its activities (ibid.).

New Theatre presented “short propagandist pieces”, plays and sketches in its clubrooms, outside factory gates, on street corners, in trade union meetings as well as in Australian Labor Party and Communist Party branch meetings (Brand et al. 2007, p. 5). Members of New Theatre included “trade unionists, intellectuals, students, artists, journalists, theatre workers, Communists and unemployed people” (Heckenberg and Parsons 1984, p. 133) and performances by the groups were “unashamedly didactic”, focusing on war, fascism, labour issues, and advocating for socialism and satirising capitalism (O’Brien 1995, p. 400). New Theatre heralded the “beginnings of genuinely political theatre in Australia” with “social realist dramas” brought to centre stage. At an organisational level, this theatre also encouraged local writers, actors, designers, technicians, and directors to participate in all aspects of production (Carroll 1985, p. 64).

Commercial theatre was the accepted professional theatre form, but it was the amateur forms of repertory—the Little and New Theatres—that consolidated the notion of an “Australian” theatre. As a “force in national consciousness”, amateur theatre advanced “questions of community and cultural improvement, social and moral justice, and the need for Australia’s own playwrights and actors” (Brisbane 1995, p. 40). These amateur theatre

movements played an important role in the cultural life of Australia, serving as “active agents” for drama across the country, and keeping the public interested in theatre by “putting on plays, by reading them, by involving the community, through Festivals and inter-town and inter-regional visits, conferences and meetings” (Badger 1966, p. 57, cited in Radbourne 1978, p. 3). These groups provided communities with the opportunity to engage in intellectual plays and produce literary and social drama. This developed a taste for such plays, alternative approaches to theatre production, and a chance to develop acting and theatre-making skills, “thus serving a vital function as invaluable practical training grounds for countless theatre artists in an era where there were no professional theatre training schools” (Milne 2004, pp. 75–77).

While repertory and Little Theatre embraced the repertoire of new and classic plays abandoned by commercial theatres, all three movements coincided to introduce “an experimental stage for local playwrights and players, directors and all theatre craftsmen (sic)” (Radbourne 1978, p. 9). Although the commercial entrepreneurs dictated the parameters of professional excellence it was the amateur groups who encouraged the growth of an “Australian” theatre by introducing the Australian cultural voice through their production of new Australian plays (Rees 1973; Milne 2004).

3.4. Cultural Nationalism (1940–1968)

The years after the Second World War are regarded by Katya Johanson and Ruth Rentschler as a time for the “growth of institutions that sought to establish and professionalize the arts” in Australia (2005, p. 8). This growth coincided with “cultural nationalism” along with a “desire to define Australia as a cultural nation, and Australians as cultural citizens”, which motivated both government and citizens to intervene in the direction and development of the theatre field (ibid, p. 9). The notion of “state support for the arts” figured alongside post-war reconstruction and the “re-establishment of a peace-time economy, social and cultural developments” (Throsby 2001, p. 9). The arts “took on a whole new role in society” and

public authorities embraced the arts “as a binding agent with which to restore the social order disrupted by war” (Brisbane 2005, p. 2).

After the Second World War, commercial theatre companies such as The Firm revived their established entrepreneurial practice where “the name of the game was import” and continued to offer Australian audiences “polished productions of trivial but audience pleasing plays” which were mainly musicals and other “competent but superficial dramas from the West End and Broadway” (Sykes 1984, p. 202). At the other end of the spectrum were the amateur activities of the repertory, Little, and New Theatres, which had started to regroup and consolidate their members and purpose. In between was a “middle tier” of small but significant independent “semi-professional” theatre companies which began to develop as the new agents in the theatre field (Milne 2004, p. 74), recalibrating what Bourdieu refers to as the *space of positions* (Wacquant 2007).

These post-war independent theatre companies, along with the existing amateur groups, offered audiences seeking “thought-provoking content or the occasional Australian play” an alternative to the commercial theatre sector, in the same way that repertory and Little Theatre had done (Sykes 1984, p. 203). Amongst the notable semi-professional companies demonstrating innovative theatre practice in post-war Australia were the Independent and Ensemble Theatres in Sydney, and Emerald Hill Theatre and Union Theatre Repertory Company in Melbourne (Milne, 2004).

Towards patronage

The first Australian national cultural organisation with a direct relationship to the theatre field was the Council for the Encouragement of Music and Arts (CEMA), established in 1943. The purpose of CEMA was “to ensure access to the arts by all Australians, especially those living outside the capital cities” (Milne 2004, p. 79), to “bring art in all its forms to the people” (Throsby 2001, p. 3). CEMA was inspired by and named after its British equivalent: “an

organization established during the Second World War to employ artists and organize morale-boosting tours of the performing and visual arts” to regional areas (Upchurch 2004, p. 203). When its British counterpart was renamed the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) in 1946, the Australian CEMA followed in 1947 to become the Arts Council of Australia (ACA, successfully securing funding from the Federal Government to support its operations nationally from 1948 onwards (Kelly 1995, p. 61).

The ACA was fundamental to the development of cultural policy and approaches to theatre funding in Australia. With the first direct government involvement in the development of professional Australian theatre practice, it laid the foundation for the patronage model of arts funding that would surface thirty years later as the Australia Council (AC).

The ACGB (and correspondingly the ACA) was the innovation of British economist and Britain’s CEMA Chairman, J. M. Keynes. Keynes believed that “the state should invest in civic planning and architecture, to preserve the monuments of the past and create new ones for the future” (Keynes 1982, p. 344, cited in Upchurch, 2004, p. 209). His vision for the ACGB was a “semi-independent body” which was to be “provided with modest funds to stimulate, comfort and support any societies or bodies brought together on private or local initiative which are striving with serious purpose and a reasonable prospect of success to present for public enjoyment the arts of drama, music and painting” (ibid, p. 204). Keynes’ belief that “artists should not be left to the caprice of capitalism” and his vision for state-supported arts funding effectively instilled an anti-commercial theatre belief in the minds of post-war British and Australian bureaucrats (ibid). Prompted by the work and vision of Keynes, “public servants, business leaders and public figures” lobbied the Federal Government to establish a national theatre or a cultural council for Australia (Johanson and Rentschler 2002, p. 168).

Key events unfolded rapidly during this stage, and the progression from a decentralised, tripartite theatre field dominated by commercial, semi-professional repertory, and amateur

theatre groups, to a field centralised by a government infrastructure of state support and subsidy started to gather momentum (Milne 2004). When Prime Minister Ben Chifley took office in 1946, he “set up a committee to consider proposals for the development of a national theatre” (ibid, p. 10). The Labor Government thought that a national theatre would stimulate and repair the social and cultural aspects of Australian society damaged by the war, as well as help improve the country’s international position within the British Commonwealth (ibid). Propositions received from writers and Little Theatre leaders suggested a national theatre could mean “a professional company (or companies), not necessarily housed in its own building, but having its own essential permanency and special character” (Rees 1973, p. 247).

This discussion of an Australian national theatre was set against the backdrop of a seven-month tour of London’s Old Vic Theatre Company to Australia and New Zealand in 1948. Featuring Sir Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh, the tour was under the auspices of the ACGB and delivered the high-level results of the prestigious British repertory company model, planting “a number of seeds in the minds of Australian theatre-lovers” (Milne 2004, p. 80). The tour was subsidised under the state-supported model that Keynes had envisaged for the ACGB, and this fact was not lost on the audience nor the Australian Government (ibid, p. 100).

The notion of encouraging “the growth of a national rather than an imported culture” began to take seed (Sykes 1984, p. 204) and “cries began to arise with increasing fervour for more arts infrastructure generally, and for something to be done about a national theatre in particular” (Milne 2004, p. 80). Dr H. C. (Nugget) Coombs, as the Head of the Australian Government's Department of Post-War Reconstruction, lobbied Chifley to seek the advice of the ACGB and “send a specialist consultant to Australia to give advice on the formation of an Australian national theatre” (ibid). Taking the advice of the British Council, Chifley invited established producer and director Tyrone Guthrie to Australia to assess how to move forward with this idea (Rees 1973, p. 249).

The Guthrie Report

Tyrone Guthrie spent two weeks in Australia in 1949, looking at “a cross-section of activities” to produce the ‘Report on Australian Theatre’ (the Guthrie Report, as it is commonly known), an eight-page summary that critiqued the commercial nature of theatre in Australia and the lack of audience education and artist training (Guthrie 1949, p. 78). His assessment was that Australia should look at “a de facto national theatre”, rather than invest in buildings or infrastructure in the short term (ibid). Guthrie gave a scathing analysis of Australia’s theatrical “private enterprise” which treated theatre “not as an Art but as a Business” which “hardly seems a wise criterion by political, social or moral standards” (ibid). The Guthrie Report identified the deficiencies of the professional theatre industry as a decidedly amateur standard of performance, a lack of artistic personnel, no actor training institutions, few locally written plays, and no alternative production houses to the dominant commercial management with their reliance on foreign fare (Andrews & Brisbane 1995, p. 255). To educate Australian audiences, Guthrie suggested “a planned series of theatrical productions of the very first class” which would be predominantly British, and tour Australia over a three-year basis (Guthrie 1949, p. 80). The result would be an “increased quality of audience-appreciation (more, not less, critical), of press notice, and of stimulated standard of Little Theatre, Radio and school production” (ibid). His long-term development plan for Australian talent was to send the best Australian actors, directors, and technicians to England “to be trained to British standards in British plays, whereupon they could return to Australia to form a company” (Milne 2004, p. 10).

The Guthrie Report was received as a patronising overview of Australian theatre companies and the rudimentary state of its theatre field but “it did make clear that private commercial enterprise and the repertory theatres were between them inadequate to the job of building a proper theatre system” (Rees 1973, p. 249). Rather than a deterrent, the Guthrie Report was a catalyst for the professional development of the Australian theatre field and galvanised

a contingent of critics and bureaucrats to continue the fight for a national theatre with the newly appointed conservative government (Sykes 1984 p. 204). However, with Ben Chifley's demise as Prime Minister and the installation of Robert Menzies and the Coalition Government in 1949, "hopes for national theatre activity faded" (ibid, p. 249). Years later, Guthrie himself commented that his Report "aroused a tremendous head of steam" from people who held a "passionate rage against the sneering bloody Pommy who dared to suggest that the time was not quite yet" and noted that this may have been the impetus of the government's intent to finally form an organisation such as the AETT (Guthrie, cited in Love 1984, p. 234).

The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust

Johanson and Rentschler note that during the seventeen years of Menzies' conservative Liberal-National Coalition Federal Government there was a sense of cultural desolation in Australia (2005, p. 8). During this era "many erudite and sophisticated people, mainly university-educated admirers of British high culture and 'literary' drama", continued the argument that Australia's professional theatre was "debased by the popular taste for thrills and sensations", and formally agitated for "non-commercial, subsidised performing arts" (Fotheringham 1987, p. 13). Objections raised about imported shows came from a place of nationalistic pride, rather than an "intellectual or elitist" position, and were focused on the fact that "Australian actors and Australian playwrights were greatly disadvantaged by the mainstream's reliance on overseas stars and proven overseas success" (ibid) and calls for a national theatre became strident. In answer to these calls, Dr H.C. Coombs announced in *The Australian* newspaper that a national "theatre trust" would be established in Australia "for the encouragement, promotion and development of drama, opera and ballet" (Milne 2004, p. 10). The article outlined a "manifesto for the theatre", which indicated the Federal Government's involvement and launched a tax-deductible public appeal to raise sufficient funds for its operation (ibid).

The AETT was established in 1954 as a “non-profit public company limited by guarantee” to “provide a theatre of Australians by Australians for Australians” (AETT 1956, p. 10). Coombs, along with a “powerful committee” which included the General Manager of the ABC, Sir Charles Moses, and the editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, John Douglas Pringle, had persuaded the incumbent Prime Minister Robert Menzies to establish the AETT to commemorate the inaugural visit of the young Queen Elizabeth II, and to “provide £1 of commonwealth government money to the new Trust for every £3 raised” through public, business, and state government contributions (Milne 2004, p. 100). Even though Menzies had rejected Guthrie’s proposal for a national theatre as “an engine for socialism”, Waterhouse (1997, p. 152) suggests that he was more able to be persuaded by the notion of the AETT because it was “not a government organisation, and drew only a small portion of its financial support from the federal government”, and that he “saw the institutionalisation of high culture in Australia in the form of ballet, opera and drama companies as contributing to the ‘growing up’ process”. O’Neil observes that the creation of the AETT was “an unapologetic, nation-building exercise” and the subsidy model “was formulated and articulated as a conscious effort to create an Australian-based cultural industry” in order to demonstrate Australia’s independence as a nation (2009, online).

As “a private organisation with federal representation”, the AETT was initially funded by 1,400 members who each paid a subscription of £5 per annum, and received direct financial support from the federal, state, and local governments and businesses (Johanson and Rentschler 2005, p. 10). Commencing activities in 1955 with a financial reserve of more than £130,000, the AETT marked the beginning of subsidised theatre in Australia and the development of Australia’s professional theatre as it now stands (Milne 2004, p. 11). The AETT’s objectives were aligned with those of the ACGB, which were to “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” (Coombs, cited in Milne 2004, p. 11). Pointedly, the AETT’s mission was to assist companies that were “national in character” and “which give promise of becoming self-supporting within

a reasonable time” as well as “smaller ventures”, but its purpose was not to “build theatres or to give permanent subsidies” (ibid).

Under the chairmanship of Coombs, the AETT “focused its concern on the prestige that the arts could bring, both to the nation and to the individual, measured in relation to European artistic standards” (Johanson and Rentschler 2005, p. 13). Accordingly, the first Executive Director was Hugh Hunt (1911-1993), an experienced British producer and manager who had worked for the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, the Bristol Old Vic, and the Old Vic in London (ibid). Although the AETT was established as “an administrator of subsidy”, its purpose in the first five years with Hunt as Executive Director was entrepreneurial (Sykes 1984, p. 205). The AETT became a “dominant force in theatre infrastructure”, underwriting and assisting to develop companies and work that would foster excellence in Australian theatre and overseeing endeavours that would help to establish Australia’s reputation overseas (Milne 2004, p. 5).

In its first three years, the AETT acquired the 1,536 seat Majestic Theatre in Newtown, Sydney, and re-opened the venue as the Elizabethan Theatre in 1955; a “home theatre”, necessary for productions to be “mounted and tried out” (AETT 1956, p. 11), as well as its “first production house and launching pad for national tours” (Milne 2004, p. 101). September 1955 saw the establishment of the Australian Drama Company, which was touted as a permanent touring repertory company and Australia’s “first attempt at a national theatre company”. This was closely followed by the creation of the Elizabethan Trust Opera Company in 1956, which was to tour five operas per year to Australia’s capital cities (ibid). Notable AETT policies in its first year included “promoting the development of efficient Little theatre organisations in each State in order to assist them to reach fully professional status” and offering “guarantees against loss to local repertory companies prepared to try out new Australian plays” (AETT 1956, p. 11). These policies had a ground-breaking effect when applied to Melbourne’s Union Repertory Theatre Company (URTC) and the production of Ray Lawler’s *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, which was mounted in 1955 and toured to

sixty country towns in NSW and Southern Queensland with the ACA (NSW Division) for a period of three months (ibid, p. 21). The subsequent international tours of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* to London and New York in 1958 cemented the AETT's financial position and reputation as a producer of Australian theatre, drew attention to Australian playwrights, and encouraged the development of more Australian plays.

The rising confidence in Australian theatre enabled the development of a national training school for actors: "modelled along the lines of classically-based British schools like the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art", the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) was established by the AETT in 1958 in association with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the University of NSW Drama Foundation (Milne 2004, p. 103). In addition to producing and touring new Australian plays, the AETT toured other classical and imported productions and five operas per year to capital cities and regional centres in association with the ACA. Hunt commented in the AETT's Annual Report that through its drama and opera activities over the course of its four years of operations, the AETT had "become firmly established in the minds of the public as an organisation responsible for theatrical performances of high quality and as a valuable stimulus to Australian creative ability" (1958, p.8). However, the function and operation of the AETT was not without criticism and these activities were soon curtailed by a lack of resources and public support for its endeavours.

Meyrick notes that Hunt, over the course of three years at the helm, had manoeuvred the AETT "in a decisively entrepreneurial direction towards the staging of profit-making prestige productions" with a two-fold aim: to "educate the public via a range of classic revivals and to provide an outlet for domestic talent at the highest level" which would, in turn, develop "an avowedly professional industry" (2002, p. 28). However, producing and delivering national tours of large-scale theatre and opera productions was costly and in 1958 the AETT reported a substantial loss of £27,967 against the opera season, followed by an even larger loss of £68,998 in 1959 due to the overbearing costs on another opera company tour and the failure of the musical *Lola Montez* (AETT, 1959). This loss revealed the difficult dilemma

faced by the AETT as it “sought to institutionalise high culture in Australia through permanently established opera, drama and ballet companies and, at the same time, encourage the development of local performers, composers and writers” (Waterhouse 1997, p. 151).

It was at this point that the AETT’s Australian Drama Company was replaced with an ensemble touring company, the Trust Players, under the artistic direction of Robin Lovejoy (Milne 2004, p. 102). Although the company only lasted three years, Haddrick suggests that the model followed by the Trust Players “gave new distinction and direction to Australian theatre” (1995, p. 616). Lovejoy’s vision for the Trust Players was to provide “constant professional employment” to nine actors, who were placed on a long-term contract, to produce a season of five plays per year and “build a faithful audience for a professional company” (ibid).

By the end of the 1950s, the expense of touring the opera and theatre companies nationally compromised the bottom line of the organisation’s financial position (Rowse 1985, p. 7). Under Hunt’s direction, the AETT had “laid heavy emphasis on productions as well as other entrepreneurial activity” including touring, but there were also concerns from government about a “lack of coherent policy and even of incompatibility between its various functions” as administrator and entrepreneur (Sykes 1984, p. 205).

Not surprisingly, the costs of mounting full-scale tours and running the Elizabethan Theatre, poor attendance, and claims that the AETT was “focussing too much of its attention and resources on Sydney” led to the resignation of Hunt in 1959 and the abandonment of the Trust Players in 1962 (Waterhouse 1997, p. 42). With Hunt’s departure, the AETT changed its policy of entrepreneurship which “gradually wound down the drama production program” and saw the organisation enter into arrangements with other individual entrepreneurs rather than bear the total cost as a producer (Milne 2004, p. 104). However, the AETT went on to develop a national ballet company in 1962 from the extant Borovansky Ballet (which later

became The Australian Ballet) in conjunction with The Firm, as well as an orchestra to work between the two (Rowse 1985; Johanson and Rentschler 2005).

Out of the ashes of the Trust Players, another initiative supported by the AETT came to life. The Old Tote Theatre Company (the Tote) was formed in 1962 in Sydney by NIDA with a tri-fold purpose: “[t]o provide New South Wales with a professional arts theatre presenting classics and the best of modern writing; to provide the students of NIDA with an outlet and example; and to allow the staff to practise what they preached” (ibid, p. 35). Run by NIDA until 1969, the Tote exposed NIDA students to the work of professional actors such as John Bell, Gordon Chater, Neil Fitzpatrick, Ron Haddrick, Reg Livermore, Gwen Plumb, and Anna Volska and gave them “a taste of professional theatrical life by working backstage and front of house” (Milne 2004, p. 98).

Following Hunt’s departure, subsequent AETT Executive Directors Neil Hutchinson (1960–1962) and Stefan Haag (1962–1967) introduced a “grant program to independent theatre companies in the state capitals”, encouraging “existing semi-professional and even amateur companies” to become “part of its network of professional regional drama companies” (Milne 2004, p. 104). Subsidising regional companies, the AETT supported the growth of the URTC and the Tote, and by 1968, had enabled the National Theatre in Perth to become professional, sparking the creation of the South Australian Theatre Company (SATC), the Queensland Theatre Company (QTC), and the Tasmanian Theatre Company (Waterhouse 1997; Milne 2004).

As the decade drew to a close, the AETT was accused of bias towards certain individuals and companies and resented for “the authority and the competition that it represented” (Waterhouse 2017). Moreover, the organisation “did not have sufficient money, a good enough working relationship with the sector or a Board with adequate professional representation” (Meyrick 2017, p. 10), so it was forced to reduce its touring, consolidate its sponsorship to a few key metropolitan theatre companies, and intensify lobbying “for

Commonwealth patronage” (Rowse 1985, p. 8). Since its inception, the AETT had received support from the federal, local, and state governments but not enough to free it from commercial partnerships with The Firm. The organisation’s commercial aspirations were burdened by nationalist expectations that its work would be fair to each capital city, and it lobbied the Federal Government for funding that would enable it to be so.

In 1965 and 1966 the AETT received \$460,000 which was increased to \$845,000 in 1967, but the organisation’s fate was sealed (ibid). In the final years of its operations as the government’s funding agency for the arts, the complaints levelled at the AETT were that the organisation had “assumed too many responsibilities” as both funding administrator and entrepreneur. The Federal Government acknowledged these complaints in 1967, when the AETT was effectively replaced by the Australian Council for the Arts (ACfA) as the government’s funding agency.

This chapter has reviewed the establishment of the Australian theatre field, or, in Milne’s terms, the first wave of structural development, which included the dominance of commercial theatre, the rise and development of repertory, Little Theatre and New Theatre and the establishment of the AETT. The next chapter will discuss the second and third waves to determine the further development of Australian arts funding bodies and cultural policies.

CHAPTER 4: The Rise of Government Patronage

4.1. The Australian Council for the Arts

In November 1967, when the AETT was still a “dominant force in Australian performing arts”, Prime Minister Harold Holt announced the establishment of the Australian Council for the Arts (ACfA), an early prototype of the Australia Council (AC) (Milne 2004, p. 152). Several years prior to this announcement, Dr H.C. Coombs (as Chair of the AETT) had lobbied Holt with the idea for a “council-and-committees” model like the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB), “convinced that the performing arts would be better served in the long run if the commonwealth government would take a more direct role in ongoing subsidy and management” (ibid).

With the untimely death of Holt, Prime Minister John Gorton was left to deliver the ACfA, which he did in June 1968 (Throsby 2001, p. 9), appointing Coombs as its inaugural Chair. It is important to note that Gorton’s version of the ACfA was significantly different to the version envisaged by Holt and Coombs, which was along the lines of the ACGB: a statutory body that followed the Keynesian patronage model and focused primarily on the performing arts, working in collaboration with the AETT and other government agencies such as the Commonwealth Arts Advisory Board and the Commonwealth Literary Fund (Milne 2004). While Coombs pushed for the ACfA to be a statutory body, Gorton attached the committee to the Prime Minister’s Department, where he could take “a very close personal interest in the Council’s affairs” (ibid, p. 153).

Gorton’s incarnation of the ACfA was set up as an executive committee “acting under terms of reference with nine members and a chairman” to advise the Federal Government on cultural matters (Throsby 2001, p. 4). Johanson and Rentschler suggest that this initial entity “was still greatly inspired by the British institution, and embodied some of its social values”, which was “to nurture cultural interest and development amongst the populace and to

provide a good example of what such cultural interests should be” (2002, p. 172). Notably, the ACfA executive committee were not artists but “people with political and bureaucratic experience who could place the arts in a broader social and political context, thus justifying its role to a sceptical government and public” (ibid). Milne observes that this committee was made up of “politicians, academics and teachers, and other amateurs (in the strictest sense of that term) of the arts”, noting that only one “practising professional”, Adelaide poet and critic Geoffrey Dutton, was included (2004, p. 154).

The institution of this federal organisation had the effect of encouraging the state governments to “set up their own bodies to provide cultural support within their own jurisdictions”, with each devising their own “direct programs of support and advisory services for the arts through the early years of the 1970s” (Milne 2004, p. 153). Receiving an initial amount of \$1.7 million from the federal and state governments, the ACfA became responsible for Commonwealth funding and effectively took over from the AETT as Australia’s primary funding agency for the performing arts. Milne notes that this was an uneasy and difficult transition, and it “took some years for the place of each body in the hierarchy to become clear” (2004, p. 155). Rowse observes that the AETT was the “non-statutory prototype” of the ACfA and had the advantage of support from private as well as state funding but was slowly dismantled over the course of several years (1985, p. 9). At first it was difficult to understand which entity was responsible for which company and negotiations between each took place to determine who would take responsibility for what. An initial press release from Gorton’s office reflects a substantial amount of money being awarded to the AETT via the ACfA to continue its work in terms of entrepreneurship and touring, whilst the Council was to take responsibility for supporting the companies that had already been developed by the AETT.

The AETT continued to receive financial support from state and municipal authorities but eventually became a recipient of arts funding from the ACfA, as this new body assumed the duties of funding distribution (Waterhouse 1997). By 1970, the AETT had relinquished

control of the opera and ballet companies and “its future (and diminished role) in shaping the course of culture in Australia lay in the realm of production” (ibid). Relegated to the level of an “industry service organisation”, the AETT continued to act as an “administrative umbrella” for small arts organisations and funded the ACA’s state divisions to enable the touring of city-based companies to regional areas (Brisbane 1995, p. 69).

Gorton’s ACfA effectively instilled a government-run arts funding policy, shifting the logics of theatre practice from autonomy to the *restricted* creative arts field. While the commercial sector was already entrepreneurial, the impact of the Little and New Theatres had developed an artistically viable arts theatre with sufficient—albeit fragile—autonomy, capable of effecting the kind of reversal about which Bourdieu wrote. The institution of a government-funding model arguably had the effect of shoring up this model, establishing the *restricted* field, which came to define itself *against* the idea of the market, of entrepreneurialism, deciding where it was best to offer support through the criteria of excellence: a somewhat arbitrary criterion shored up by the institutionalising of peer-review, which had the effect of locating value and distinction within the restricted field itself. Unlike the AETT, which seeded amateur endeavour and encouraged entrepreneurial activity, the ACfA set a benchmark and an expectation that funding from the government would be forthcoming once this standard of excellence was achieved.

Within Gorton’s ACfA “the federal government began to amalgamate responsibility for all of the arts under one cultural body” (Milne 2004, pp. 153–154). Committees were set up to replace the existing Commonwealth Literary Fund and the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board and new committees were convened to represent film, Aboriginal arts, and the performing arts (ibid). Katherine Brisbane, a member of the drama committee alongside theatre practitioners such as directors Jim Sharman and John Bell, recalls that the committee rejected “the notion of a national theatre company”, instead suggesting that the ACfA build up the “subsidised companies in state capitals” such as the Melbourne Theatre

Company (formerly URTC), the National Theatre Company of Perth, the Tote in Sydney, the SATC in Adelaide, and the QTC in Brisbane (1995, p. 69).

Despite the AETT's relegation, Meyrick observes that Hunt's legacy with the AETT was the development of "an avowedly professional industry" made by "welding high art values to a sound practical approach" (2002, p. 28) which, by the end of his five-year directorship, had also seeded a commitment to a national theatre and an Australian performing arts infrastructure. The organisation had strengthened the notion of professional practice for artists, and provided the opportunity for Australian actors, producers, and playwrights to "see the possibility of a living from their work" (Grant, cited in Holloway 1981, pp. 6–7). The logics of professionalism and an "Australian" theatre was to evolve further through the energy of a new generation of theatre-makers and a rapidly changing social and cultural environment, but also in reaction to stronger levels of financial support and infrastructure by governments.

4.2. The 'New Wave' of Alternative Theatre

While, as Milne notes, the years prior to 1968 were "responsible for the birth and limited growth of non-commercial professional theatre along largely British repertory lines", he observes that theatre in the late sixties took a "distinctly different direction under new self-proclaimedly nationalist influences" (2004, p. 121). Towards the end of the 1960s there was a feeling of unease and social unrest as the post-war baby boomer generation fought the stifling attitudes of the previous generation; a generation of leaders who had allowed foreign cultural domination by Britain or had kowtowed to America through the ANZUS treaty and participation in the Korean and Vietnam Wars (ibid). The 1960s stand as "a unity of attitudes and values" held by a new generation who desired to "break from the long period of post-war conservatism" (Varney 2011, p. 55). Social issues such as Aboriginal suffrage, the feminist movement, and opposition to the conscription introduced by Menzies in 1965, were at the forefront of this cultural revolution (Meyrick 2002; Milne 2004). Under this social and

political milieu, demand for Australia's independence from its wartime allies was strong, both politically and culturally, and there was a "new nationalism in Australian culture" alongside a nationalistic theatre movement (Milne 2004, p. 123). This "New Wave", as it is known, changed and developed mainstream Australian theatre to establish "a wide range of alternatives to the established commercial and Trust-subsidised theatres" but, more importantly, it further "Australianised" the theatre, encouraged "the adoption of new ways of re-reading and re-staging plays from the classic repertoire", and strengthened the movement towards a professional theatre field (ibid, p. 78).

As Brisbane notes, the arrival of the Australia Council (AC) in place of the ACfA was an opportunity for "a host of new-style theatre groups that mushroomed during the late 1960s in shabby warehouse spaces" which were "no longer 'amateur' but rather 'alternative', or cooperatives, dividing the box-office equally among members, and in some cases the outside earnings of participants also" (2011, p. 397). Craik observes that this period provided an expanded role for the AC as well as "the emergence of specialist artform bodies, inquiries into performing arts, new innovations in the visual arts, film, television, crafts, museums, and in music" which would dominate discourse about cultural policy in future decades (2007, p. 11).

Between 1966 and 1970, Australia's New Wave movement emerged as a force within the theatre field, working to oppose and change "established patterns" (Milne 2011, p. 124). *Alternative theatre*, as it is known, was the result of the dissatisfaction felt by the new generation over the programming of the mainstream companies and "their lack of encouragement of Australian playwriting and performance styles" (ibid). Alternative theatre arose through activities initiated by venues such as the Jane Street Theatre (Jane Street) and Nimrod Theatre (Nimrod) in Sydney and La Mama and the Australian Performing Group (APG) in Melbourne (Meyrick 2002; Milne 2004).

The new drama developed by these companies was “aggressively and unapologetically Australian”, exploring Australian themes and subjects and portraying Australian characters “without any of the self-conscious cringing” that had marked earlier Australian writing (Radic 1991, p. 3). Meyrick suggests that the “shape and sensibility of the alternative theatre” was a synthesis of repertory theatre’s “artistic vision, literary skills and rehearsal methods” and new theatre’s “political commitment, community engagement and organisational proficiency, particularly as it applied to company structure and operation” (2017, p. 28). This tertiary-educated generation of artists was awakened by influences such as youth culture, rock and roll, “greater permissiveness and a relaxing of censorship”, the emergence of a “counter-culture”, and optimism about the dawning of a new age (Marwick, cited in Varney 2011, p. 55). Although most were not trained in drama, “they were able to immediately, freely and collectively test and communicate their ideas” (Wolf 2008, p. 5).

For Denise Varney this younger generation of artists “vigorously asserted an anti-imperialist rejection of imported British and American cultural products and delighted in making local Australian place and character intrinsic to its creative practice” (2011, p. 17). Unlike the established theatre companies, alternative theatre was intrinsically “connected to networks of influence and exchange that crossed national borders and mixed with local conditions” (ibid). Like many current independent companies, these artist groups grew from university student drama societies. NIDA and the growth of other university drama groups in Sydney (University of Sydney), Melbourne (Melbourne University and Monash University), and Adelaide (Flinders University) encouraged “a high level of activity and prominence” and generated the work of individuals who would become “prime movers in the next phase of Australian professional theatre” (Milne 2004, p. 123).

Student theatre during the 1960s favoured writing that was deemed “too risky by the established professional, commercial and amateur companies”, with performance styles influenced by practitioners such as Artaud, Brecht, Brook, and Grotowski (Milne 2004, p. 123). In 1966, the Tote took the first important step towards the development of this new

type of performance with the establishment of the Jane Street Theatre (Jane Street), a church hall in Randwick which was used “as a site for the presentation of new and not-so-new Australian plays” (ibid, p. 98). Jane Street was a joint venture of NIDA and the Tote’s management team; the 100-seat theatre was intended as a teaching theatre for NIDA students as well as “a site for experimentation in Australian drama” (ibid, p. 124).

Alternative theatre groups were also the initiative of entrepreneurial individuals primarily working against the “establishment” – commercial producers and government-funded state theatre companies. In 1967, Betty Burstall returned to Melbourne after a two-year stint in New York experiencing off-off-Broadway theatres and decided to create something similar in Australia by providing an “experimental home along the lines of New York’s La Mama for playwrights, poets, film-makers and musicians” (Radic 1991, p. 3). In its inaugural year, Melbourne’s La Mama ran only on Sunday nights to optimise the participation of available professionals and featured short pieces by local writers such as Jack Hibberd and actors like Graeme Blundell (Milne 2004, p. 126). The success of this first season enabled La Mama to operate as a “year-round venture”, attracting “experimental playwrights” from the Carlton area as well as recent graduates from Melbourne and Monash Universities (ibid). Milne observes that the development of La Mama was attributed as much to “the performers and performance theories” as to an interest in new Australian dramatic writing (ibid, p. 127). Acting workshops offered on Sunday afternoons focused on the more physical and gestural theatre of Brecht and Grotowski and were attended by young directors and performers such as Graeme Blundell, Lindy Davies, Bill Garner, and Bruce Spence, who formed the La Mama Group, which became the APG (ibid, p.128). Wolf notes that the APG (1970–1981) followed the Marxist notion that the working-class was a “potential agent of social change” and focused on creating a “class-oriented theatre” (2008, p. 19), observing that the APG members “expressed the ‘social energy’ of the counter-culture, the ‘zeal’ of nationalism, their generation’s ‘struggle’ against the establishment, and its ‘hope’ that it could transform the nation for the better” (ibid, p. 36). It quickly established itself as a company that performed mostly Australian work, developing a “rough ‘larrikin’ style” which was

“characterised not only by its contemporary local playwriting but also by its vigorous, anti-naturalistic performing style and production values” (Milne 2004, p. 130).

In Sydney at the same time, the Nimrod Theatre (1970–1985) was formed by John Bell and Ken Horler and took up residence in a tiny building in Kings Cross that later became the SBW Stables Theatre, now occupied by the Griffin Theatre Company (McCallum 1995). The company, which had a clearly expressed philosophy of producing “new Australian work and finding new Australian ways of doing classics, especially Shakespeare”, was “self-consciously ‘alternative’, reacting against the dominance of the Old Tote Theatre Company”, which was seen to be increasingly “Anglophilic and culturally conservative” (McCallum 1995, p. 407). In those early years, Bell and other alternative theatre directors such as Aarne Neeme, Richard Wherrett, and Rex Cramphorn, delivered shows in radically different styles, which established Nimrod’s reputation as having an “eclectic” approach to production (ibid). Meyrick (2002 p. 66) suggests that Nimrod’s early work had an “evolving sensibility” that included a “three-pronged program” of “firstly (and mostly) New Wave drama, some in a ‘popular’ style, others more ‘realistic’; secondary a revisionary interpretation of a classic play; and thirdly, a pick ‘n’ mix from the foreign repertoire”.

Much has been written about the role of the Nimrod and the APG in the development of Australian writers and Australian works during the New Wave. Just as important in the legacy of these two companies was the way they were organised. Meyrick observes that alternative theatre in the 1970s tended to operate “between egalitarian collectivism and charismatic authority” (2017, p. 47). This dichotomy is apparent in both the APG and Nimrod, which took up these two different approaches in their company structures. The APG was firmly established as a collective which shared creative, organisational, and operational tasks equally between members and “ardently opposed the notion of any members of the creative team having authority over others” (Wolf 2008, p. 34). When the APG moved from La Mama to the Pram Factory in 1970, committed to participatory democracy and worker control, the fifty-odd membership was expected to help run the theatre (Radic 1995, p. 75). The APG

described itself as a “co-operative group venture”, which sought to promote the values of “egalitarianism; anti-elitism” (Wolf 2008, p. 83). The company structure was focused by an administrator, John Timlin, but decision making and the artistic approach to production was by a monthly committee meeting which “delegated responsibility for individual productions (once approved) to a project group” (Milne 2004, p. 132). Wolf observes that the move to the Pram Factory “gave weight” to the company’s declarations “that it would create theatre by, for and about Australians in a venue dedicated to that aim” (2008, p. 35).

Correspondingly, Nimrod was loosely formed as a theatre co-operative (co-op) without APG’s “communal atmosphere” and was “dominated by directors” who were “empowered to achieve its acting, writing and design imperatives” (Wolf 2008, p. 34). Nimrod’s organisation reflected its production style: eclectic and alternative, particularly when compared with APG. Meyrick observes that Nimrod’s operation was “governed more by dominant personalities than any explicit artistic manifesto”, which meant there was no “systematic working through of company principles or priorities” and “unsystematic programming” (2002, pp. 65–66). When Nimrod moved premises in 1974 to the empty Cerebos tomato sauce factory in Belvoir Street, Surry Hills,⁵ the company developed a formal organisational and operational structure. The co-op approach to production evolved into a triumvirate of “working” artistic directors with Richard Wherrett joining Bell and Horler, each taking it in turns to manage the creative direction of the company, alongside a “part-time Board, full-time management and casually employed actors, designers and production staff” (Meyrick 2002, p. 94). Nimrod became more formal in its approach, moving away from its previously ad hoc performance style towards a professional writers’ theatre with “prominent Australian content” (Milne 2004, p. 136). There was a “gradual withdrawal from the rough-hewn, satirical-historical larrikin theatre position adopted when the company began” and a move “towards a more conservative – and more professional-looking – house style” (ibid). Rather than the collective approach taken by the APG, Nimrod invited all actors, creatives, and crew to become members, gathering them at Friday night drinks on a weekly

⁵ This venue is now known as Belvoir St Theatre and is occupied by theatre company, Belvoir.

basis to discuss whatever topic they wished – it was up to the artistic directorate to interpret these discussions. Whilst the Board operated in the conventional sense, offering financial and legal advice, the day-to-day running of the company fell to the artistic directorate and the General Manager (ibid).

Similar and different, Nimrod and the APG contributed “an unprecedented volume of avant-garde Australian plays staged in the late 1960s and 1970s, many of which depicted Australia and Australians” (Wolf 2008, p. 35). The formation and success of these two important alternative theatre companies gave rise to a new generation of Australian theatre-makers and playwrights, who were focused on Australian identity and demonstrating a diverse stage aesthetic. As Meyrick (2002, p. 64) notes, the “finest victory” achieved by the New Wave was a “new synthesised ‘idea of theatre’, based on the observation of the fundamental identity between theatre and the world” which pointed to the “greater significance of the stage play” and “infused the whole production process with new meaning”.

4.3. The Australia Council

In 1972, as the New Wave momentum gathered speed, Gough Whitlam and Labor were elected to govern Australia: the first Labor government since 1949. This led to a stronger focus on the development and support of the cultural field and the doubling of public subsidy, and the reconfiguration of the Australian Council for the Arts (ACfA) into the establishment of the Australia Council (AC). Gardiner-Garden observes that when Whitlam came to power, he brought with him “a passionate belief in the importance of the arts” (2009, p. 1), and the notion that “[i]n any civilised community the arts and associated amenities must occupy a central place” (ibid, p. 2). Whitlam’s assessment of the cultural field was that “the arts in Australia were sorely in need of encouragement”; he noted that Australia’s cultural institutions were “embryonic or non-existent”, “were largely relics of colonial or Edwardian times”, and that the “basis of a national arts and cultural policy did not exist” (ibid). Whitlam was aware that “there was no shortage of official arts bodies, boards, councils and funds of

various kinds”, but was also cognisant that these entities “were frequently without expert membership or representation by artists themselves” (Whitlam 1985, pp. 554-556, cited in Gardiner-Garden, 2009, p. 2). A confidential report to Whitlam by incumbent Executive Officer Jean Battersby outlined that the ACfA’s administration was “slow, cumbersome, ill-defined and tends to give decisions relating to areas of authority priority over those relating to the interests of the arts”, while some of the agencies differed in terms of “priorities, policies and even philosophies” (Battersby, in Whitlam 1985, p. 557, cited in Gardiner-Garden 2009, p. 2). In response to this lack of coherence and synergy, Whitlam immediately streamlined the administrative structure and bolstered the financial support being offered to the arts in Australia.

Whitlam was interested in the Keynesian arts council models adopted by Britain and Canada, believing that “[a] single council seemed to offer the prospect of a broad policy for the national development of the arts within a streamlined administration providing independence from political pressures and safeguards against centralised and authoritarian tendencies” (1985, p. 557-558, cited in Gardiner-Garden, 2009, p. 2). In 1973, he installed an interim Council that would “subsume the roles of the Arts Council of Australia, the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board, the Commonwealth Literary Fund, the Film and Television School and the Advisory Board for Commonwealth Composers” and “fall within the responsibility of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet” (Gardiner-Garden 2009, p. 3). This Council was comprised of twenty-four members who would each be appointed for up to two years. Most of these members were “prominent in the arts” and were to be “supported by others with legal, financial and other administrative skills and by several senior officials of Government departments whose work interlocked with that of the Council” (ibid).

Reorganising “the disparate collection of Commonwealth administrative arrangements”, Whitlam constructed seven Boards described as “Aboriginal arts, craft, film and television, literature, music, theatre (including opera and dance) and visual arts (Throsby 2001, p. 4). These new Boards would have “the authority to deal with their own budget allocation and in

consultation with the Council to appoint specialist staff and committees to implement their policies” and each would have a Chair who would be a member of the Council (Gardiner-Garden, 1994, p. 8). Inevitably, Whitlam asked this interim Council to make recommendations regarding “a more permanent structure for government administration in the arts” and in 1974, introduced legislation to establish the AC (Gardiner-Garden 2009, p. 3). The *Australia Council Act 1975* (AC Act) was proclaimed on 30 June 1975, and the AC became a statutory authority, remaining the ministerial responsibility of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Milne observes that Whitlam was “as determined to push through his agenda in the arts as he was in all aspects of Australian public life, and eventually the principles of ‘arm’s length’ funding and ‘peer assessment’ in commonwealth assistance for the arts became enshrined in Australia Council policy” (2004, p. 156). The existing logics of practice – excellence and nationalism – were reinforced within the AC. Section 5 of the *Australia Council Act 1975* (p.2) outlines the objectives and functions of the AC as: *i) to promote excellence in the arts; (ii) to provide, and encourage the provision of, opportunities for persons to practise the arts; (iii) to promote the appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of the arts; (iv) to promote the general application of the arts in the community; (v) to foster the expression of a national identity by means of the arts; (vi) to uphold and promote the right of persons to freedom in the practice of the arts; (vii) to promote the knowledge and appreciation of Australian arts by persons in other countries; (viii) to promote incentives for, and recognition of, achievement in the practice of the arts; and (ix) to encourage the support of the arts by the states, local governing bodies, and other persons and organisations.*

The establishment of the AC dramatically increased public expenditure for the arts, a move which was prolific for the burgeoning New Wave sector, and the professional theatre landscape began to change significantly. Gorton’s ACfA and Whitlam’s AC were both directly responsible for the professionalisation of New Wave companies in the cultural field. Milne writes that the theatre sector “did remarkably well during the 1970s”, in terms of receiving

large amounts of funding and “new and existing theatre organisations”, such as the APG and Nimrod, were “quick to seize the opportunity, and the funding, to get ahead” (2004, p. 157).

Government patronage in the seventies was significant; Milne notes that between 1969 and 1971, the AC funding increased by 42 per cent in parliamentary allocations and “there was enough in the pot to begin to reward the new alternative theatre movement with serious money” (2004, p. 155). The AC grant categories were widened to include “innovation and development in the industry” rather than “prescribe what should be happening in the arts” (ibid). Funding was closely aligned to nationalism, helping to inscribe this in the field’s logic of practice; the AC supported “professional non-profit companies giving Australian-made rather than imported productions of classic and contemporary drama, with Australian performing artists and (where possible) Australian writers”, which was applicable to the state theatre companies (ibid). It also “ruled out the commercial managements”, giving advantage to New Wave companies such as the APG and Nimrod who began to receive grants in the early 1970s (ibid).

In keeping with the changes made to Gorton’s ACfA’s administrative structure, federal funding for the arts through Whitlam’s AC increased with each successive year whilst he was in power. Between 1972 and 1973, the ACfA’s annual budget rose from \$1.7 million to \$5.7 million, the bulk of which was allocated to professional training schools (such as NIDA and the Australian Ballet School); national touring companies (ballet, opera, and associated orchestras); regional and state theatres; special projects; and international cultural exchanges (ibid). In the 1973/74 Budget, the ACfA received \$14 million, which was nearly triple the allocation of the year before. With the establishment of the AC, the funding allocation was increased to \$20 million in the 1974/75 Budget, reaching “an historic high level of some \$23 million in 1975–76” (Milne, 2004, p. 156). Milne (2004, p. 158) acknowledges that the instigation of the AC was significant and “signalled a political will not only to maintain excellence in the high arts as one of the cornerstones of arts policy, but also as a matter of policy to extend support for alternative, experimental and fringe art”.

4.4. Changing Cultural Policies

Following this surge in financial support for the Australian arts, two important enquiries into arts funding were held which “focused attention on the rationalisation of arts expenditures and the means for their delivery”, forcing the arts sector “to become more explicit about its economic base” (Throsby 2001, p. 10). The first, published in the first year of the Fraser Liberal-National Coalition government that succeeded Whitlam, was the Industries Assistance Commission’s (IAC) enquiry and subsequent report *Assistance to the Performing Arts* (1974–1976). This report set the tone for a future debate about arts subsidy that would be “suspicious, querulous, dubious about arguments for the public value of the arts, and thus of government involvement in their provision” (Meyrick 2017, p. 3). The second was an investigation into arts funding conducted by a Sub-Committee of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Expenditure, chaired by Leo McLeay, and producing the report, *Patronage, Power and the Muse* (1986). Published three years into the Hawke Labor government’s reign, the report “reviewed the broad effectiveness and efficiency of the procedures for the delivery of Commonwealth assistance to the arts” (Throsby 2001, p. 10) and offered a significant managerialist challenge to the perceived exceptionality of artists and the arts.

Ironically, it was Whitlam who referred the AC to the IAC in 1974. His intention was to determine the plausibility of the AC financially supporting commercial theatre organisations and his terms of reference were “whether assistance should be accorded the performing arts in Australia and, if so, what should be the nature and extent of such assistance” (Throsby 2001, p. 10). Unfortunately, these terms offered the IAC “a virtual carte blanche to examine the whole performing arts industry and the government’s role in it” (ibid). The IAC investigated the government funding of the performing arts sector, applying “an explicitly rational economic model that rejected arguments about ‘public good’ and ‘special pleading’”

and instead viewed the sector “as an ‘industry’ in order to assess its economic potential” (Craik 2007, p. 12).

The IAC enquiry portrayed the AC as “being elitist and unable to justify its operations” in objective, economic terms (Throsby 2001, p. 10). Rejecting assumptions of cultural “excellence” espoused by elite arts bodies, the IAC adopted a “broader anthropological definition of culture incorporating concepts of national and community benefit” (Craik 2007, p. 12). The enquiry rejected the AC’s “flagship philosophy” that the major arts companies needed to be subsidised “in order to produce ‘excellence’ that would somehow, intangibly, enrich the community at large”, finding that it was a “discriminatory policy that disregarded community values and the ordinary culture of citizens” (Craik 2007, p. 91). Meyrick (2017, p. 50) notes that the enquiry “scotched any remaining assumptive link between high art and cultural subsidy, portraying artists’ claims on the public purse as not more than the egregious angling for preferment” and that the AC “found itself under attack by those condemning arts grants as interference in the optimal workings of the market”.

When the IAC report was produced in late 1976, Malcolm Fraser had succeeded Whitlam as Prime Minister and the Coalition Government was in power. The report argued that “arts and cultural policy should be based on the three criteria of innovation, disseminating and education” and that “funding to the elite companies should be maintained for three years then phased-out over five” with funding then “re-directed towards the new objectives that met community expectations” (Craik 2007, p. 91). If companies were not able to find support by other means after those initial five years, they would “face the prospect of closure” (ibid).

Macdonnell notes that since its inception, the IAC report has been “misrepresented and misunderstood, [and] vilified, dismissed as *anti-arts*, *anti-patronage* and cast as the incarnation of all that is wrong with what later became known, pejoratively, as ‘economic rationalism’” (1992, pp. 142–3, cited in Craik 2007, p. 13). According to Craik, the report was received as “the withdrawal of subsidy to the elite performing arts and therefore as a

collective 'philistine', unappreciative of Australian culture" (2007, p. 13). However, she acknowledges it was also taking "a progressive stance on arts and culture, beginning from the question of what constituted the arts and culture and what public benefit flowed to the community" in today's terms, and "nonetheless set the terms for policy during the next decade" (ibid).

Surprisingly, Fraser rejected the IAC's recommendation of phasing out assistance to the performing arts, announcing to the Parliament in 1977 that "[t]he Government strongly affirms its support for the arts in virtually all its forms" and is "committed to the support of the major performing companies in Australia – the opera, ballet and drama" (Throsby 2001, p. 10). The Coalition considered "excellence in the arts" as of "primary importance" while the "continuation of assistance to the presently subsidised companies" was "consistent with this objective" (ibid). However, under the Coalition, "economic conservatism gained ascendancy, heralding a period of public sector restraint and cutbacks in government expenditure", so inevitably some changes to the AC were implemented (ibid).

The newly-appointed government saw the AC as "central to the future success of its policies for the performing arts" but noted that any future funding needed to be "weighed against the benefit that the assistance provides to the community and against the competing claims of other artistic activities (Gardiner-Garden 2009, p. 7). Fraser emphasised that the Coalition "would not aim to reduce grants to the arts, but aim to reduce waste, to create conditions under which the arts can flourish and to avoid over-bureaucratisation and too much Government control or direction of the arts or artists" (ibid). Priorities for funding would be assessed against the IAC's criteria of "improving education, encouraging innovation and expanding dissemination of the performing arts", while the AC was encouraged to devolve some grants to enable local government bodies to assist groups or individuals (ibid). Additionally, the AC would be given the "prime responsibility" to strengthen and "broaden assistance to the performing arts" by negotiating with the different state governments and private sources on the basis of matched grants (ibid, p. 4).

By 1980, the AC and state government arts ministries were working together to fund the “flagship companies” in each capital city, along with the “second tier companies”, which were “mixed-repertoire organisations, programming a mix of classic drama, contemporary overseas and Australian drama”; these included companies such as Playbox Theatre Company (Playbox) in Melbourne, Twelfth Night in Brisbane, and Nimrod in Sydney (Milne 2014, pp. 11–12). At the same time, funding increased towards individual project grants focused on the development of new Australian works as well as “limited life schemes”, which were “designed to enable independent groups to develop projects of some magnitude over two or three years” (ibid). The “considerable growth and diversity in alternative theatre” was offset by the loss of the APG and Nimrod, which both collapsed during this decade, while other companies such as Playbox, Griffin Theatre Company (Griffin) (Sydney), and La Boîte Theatre Company (La Boîte) (Brisbane) became more established (ibid, p. 16). Major performing arts venues such as the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC) and the Victorian Arts Centre were built by state governments and there was “a massive growth in the provision of theatre spaces, new and old”, which were being developed or adapted across regional centres and cities (ibid, p. 20).

In 1983, the Labor Government was returned to federal power under the leadership of Prime Minister Bob Hawke. Craik observes it was this government “that was, arguably, responsible for the greatest changes in Australia’s cultural policy landscape” (2007, p. 13). Hawke’s administration undertook “major culture changes” and began “a long flirtation with managerialism”, where government was “seen to be responsible in their spending of public money and to demonstrate greater efficiencies in activities they supported” (ibid). One of the core issues regarding the arts which arose during Hawke’s first term (1983–1985) was whether AC funds should continue to support the large traditional “flagship” companies or “whether in a major policy change, funds should be directed away from these ‘heavies’ and towards the smaller and more experimental groups” (Gardiner-Garden 2009, p. 15).

The investigation into arts funding conducted by the Sub-Committee of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Expenditure (the McLeay Report) was “a report on the administration of public funding of the arts” (McLeay, cited in Parsons & Chance, 1987, p. 35). It came after a “period of energetic development of the arts and cultural sector and expansion of policies designed to facilitate cultural activity” by the Hawke Government (Craik 2007, p. 92). The terms of reference for the investigation focused on procedures for the allocation and distribution of funds available for the arts through the Commonwealth Budget; the impact of the present level and allocation of expenditure and of other means of support such as taxation incentives; current issues and concerns in the arts industry; and the Commonwealth’s role in arts funding (Gardiner-Garden 2009, p. 16).

The McLeay Report’s committee perceived that the arts were “one component of culture” and viewed the government’s role “as one of maximising the benefits of the arts to society as a whole”, rejecting the stance that “Commonwealth assistance is a right of the arts because of their merits” and that “arts assistance is a specialised form of welfare for artists” (Craik 2007, p. 92). The McLeay Report suggested “ways of rationalising and coordinating the disparate means by which the Federal Government was providing both direct and indirect support for the arts in Australia”, using as its guiding principles “that the use of public funds demanded accountability and that expenditures should be commensurate with the benefits produced” (Throsby 2001, p. 10). Pertinent to this discussion, the Report suggested that the AC should be restructured, the number of Boards should be reduced, the AC should support its three largest clients – the Australian Opera,⁶ The Australian Ballet, and the AETT – through triennial funding and administer grants for major clients through a separate program, and the AC should devolve some areas of decision making to the state-run arts ministries (ibid).

⁶ The Australian Opera changed its name to Opera Australia in 1996 when it merged with the Victoria State Opera (OA, 2021)

The response from the AC and the artistic community to the McLeay Report was similar to the IAC Report offered ten years earlier in that it “ruffled some feathers”, but the recommendations “were implemented in one way or another over the ensuing years” (Throsby 2001, p. 10). In summary, Craik (2007, p. 13) recognises that Australian cultural policy in the period between the IAC Report and the McLeay Report “became infused with the rhetoric of economic rationalism by stealth through strategies aimed at demonstrating community benefit, measuring performance and evaluating outcomes of government support”, engaging with the notion of a creative economy and opening the door to the concept of creative industries.

4.5. Creative Nation (1994-2008)

Meyrick observes that the period between the late 1970s to the early 1990s “was both divisive and decisive for theatre in Australia” and saw “significant changes in accountability and compliance procedures” as well as “the establishment of the Major Organisations Board (the MOB) and the beginning of triennial funding” (2014, p. 135). Glow notes that during this time “Australian cultural policy continued to take an economic rationalist approach: tending to favour instrumentalist rationales for culture (measuring the value of culture in terms of its economic and/or social benefits) over the notion of its inherent value (art for art’s sake)” (2007, p. 3). According to Radbourne, this modern shift to industrial productivity, with both the federal and state governments recognising the economic benefits of the arts as an industry, heralded a shift towards the intrinsic development and implementation of arts administration that “enabled the development of Australia’s cultural policy” and “created a new approach to arts funding” which included the revision of arts organisation structures and operations “to equate more with a well-managed business” (1993, p. 13).

In 1994, the Labor Government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Paul Keating, released “the first national cultural policy in our country’s history” entitled *Creative Nation* (*Preamble, DCA 1994*). The document “represented one of the most comprehensive and

forward-looking statements of government policy towards culture that had been seen anywhere in the world”, proposing that “the *creative industries* could be seen as a significant force in generating employment and economic growth” (Throsby 2001, p. 11, emphasis in original). Craik argues that “the significance of *Creative Nation* lay in its dual emphasis on the national imperative to foster cultural development and the economic potential of cultural activity” (2007, p. 14).

The policy focused on the role of the AC and other cultural organisations, determining the mechanisms of cultural support needed as well as “the performance and potential of diverse cultural industries” (a term used in the Preamble), and defined “export potential and proposed a raft of new cultural programs and projects” (ibid). *Creative Nation* was supported by additional funding of A\$250 million to cultural institutions and emphasised culture’s importance to national identity – defining culture broadly to include film, radio, libraries, and other areas – as well as the economy (Department of Communication and the Arts (DOCA), 1994). Importantly, *Creative Nation* was positioned explicitly as both a cultural and economic policy, concluding the Preamble with the following statement:

This cultural policy is also an economic policy. Culture creates wealth. Broadly defined, our cultural industries generate 13 billion dollars a year. Culture employs. Around 336,000 Australians are employed in culture-related industries. Culture adds value, it makes an essential contribution to innovation, marketing and design. It is a badge of our industry. The level of our creativity substantially determines our ability to adapt to new economic imperatives. It is a valuable export in itself and an essential accompaniment to the export of other commodities. It attracts tourists and students. It is essential to our economic success (ibid).

Within *Creative Nation*, Keating also signalled the federal government’s changing position on patronage towards the arts, by noting that “government will not be the sole means of support” for artists and promoted the idea of creative entrepreneurship by proposing that artists “must work to develop self-reliance and self-sufficiency” (ibid, The Commonwealth’s Role in Australian Cultural Development). In 1996, before *Creative Nation* was fully realised,

Keating's Labor Government was ousted by Prime Minister John Howard and the Coalition Government. Lacking "a coherent cultural policy of its own" the Coalition continued with Labor's Creative Nation policy, some of which had already been implemented (Craik 2007, pp. 18–19).

In July 2000, the Howard government implemented major tax reform, which included the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the introduction of the Australian Business Number (ABN). The ABN was implemented across all industries as a "single identifier for all business dealings with the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) and for future dealings with other government departments and agencies" (ATO 2000). Consequently, the ABN enabled theatre artists to conduct business either as sole traders or in partnership with other artists or arts workers and be considered as practising professionals (NAVA 2018). The professionalism and legitimacy of artists was strengthened in 2005 by the ATO's *Public Taxation Ruling tax reform for professional artists in 2005* (TR 2005/1). The income tax entitlement guidelines provided by TR 2005/1 clarified the nature of art activity, including significant commercial purpose or character, profit motive, size, and scale of activity. It also stipulated how artists could define themselves in economic and management terms in order to be considered as professionals rather than as hobbyists for tax purposes (ATO 2009).

Notably, TR 2005/1 offers clear parameters about the intention of the artist's work as professional within this tax reform, which coincide neatly with the CIC definition; that is to have the intention "to carry on a business if they make the decision to commercially exploit the skills they may have developed pursuing the same activity as a hobby or pastime and this is reflected in their overt and planned activities" (ibid, p.5). These guidelines also recognise that the nature of arts activity had different characteristics to other businesses, which are "often motivated by creative purposes and the desire to influence public opinion" and that "a large part of being in business as a professional artist may involve activities directed towards reputation building and audience/market creation" (ibid, p.3). The ATO's acknowledgement of activities towards creating a "new market for [artistic] work" is

significant because it recognises that neoliberal trends and creative entrepreneurship were already apparent within the Australian cultural field in 2005. Through these two mechanisms, artists could legitimately start and conduct a creative enterprise from a governmental and public perspective.

According to Glow the “economic rationalist approach to arts policy and funding intensified under the Howard government”, which delivered “a new and heightened level of public recognition” of creative industries placed “commercial viability above other considerations”, resulting in programming “which guarantee bums on seats” (2007, p. 3). During this period, funding arrangements engaged with a “monopoly scenario” with the state theatre companies receiving “most of the support from governments at all levels”, even though it was second-tier companies such as Company B Belvoir in Sydney, Playbox in Melbourne, and La Boîte in Brisbane that were recognised as being more “vital and vibrant” artistically (Fotheringham 2013, p. 10). In 1998, Richard Alston, the Minister for Communication, Information Economy and the Arts, realised that the flagship companies “were teetering on the verge of financial collapse” and needed a “business analysis of their performance and potential” (ibid).

The Nugent Report

In response to Alston’s discovery, a formal enquiry into Australia’s thirty-one major performing arts companies (the Major Performing Arts Inquiry or MPAI) was conducted by Helen Nugent (Craik 2007, p. 96). The results of the MPAI, published in 1999 as *Securing the Future* (also known as the Nugent Report) was a “comprehensive dissection of the sector employing a business model as well as a review of the organisations’ performance in terms of training, administration and repertoire” (ibid). The MPAI was requested to “identify options and make recommendations on actions that can be taken both by governments and the participants to ensure that Australia has a financially healthy, artistically vibrant and broadly accessible major performing arts sector” (DOCITA 1999, p. 3). The terms of reference for

the MPAI were the current financial position of the thirty-one major performing arts companies, including the managerial and governance capabilities of the companies, their cost and revenue dynamics, financial health, accessibility, the forces driving change, governance barriers impeding the sector's sustainability and development; and measures for action "including structural, financial, managerial, and organisational initiatives" (ibid.)

The MPAI clarified the "structural weaknesses" of these companies and emphasised their "overriding dependence on traditional forms of government patronage" (Craik et al. 2003, p. 24). It found that these major companies could not be sustained through partnerships, sponsorship, and audience development initiatives alone and needed to be supported by government in order to survive (ibid). In conclusion, the report recommended "an interesting mix of the new and the old – adopting rigorous performance indicators and industry aids such as business planning and financial modelling but arguing for a return to government patronage as the only viable basis for supporting the sector" (ibid). The MPAI argued that the major performing arts companies made "an enormous artistic and financial contribution to Australian life" and that the implementation of these recommendations would "stabilise" and "reposition" the sector and thereby "secure [its] artistic vitality, accessibility and financial viability" (DOCITA, 1999). Kelly acknowledges that there was "bi-partisan political will to provide new investment through the findings" of the MPAI which resulted in a \$70 million contribution by the federal and state governments, but notes that "[t]his political support did not extend to the 'small-to-medium' sector, which comprised the bulk of theatre companies" or to "script development organisations and other theatre-making infrastructure or services, the pool of funding for individual project grants, and responsive money for initiatives and new programs" (2013, p. 82).

Craik states that "as a result of the funding changes that followed the Nugent Report" the S2M sector "lobbied for similar consideration and attention to their circumstances" (2007, p. 98), and in 2000 the Cultural Ministers Council (CMC) commissioned the *Small to Medium Performing Arts Report* (SMPA Report). The SMPA Report examined the "factors influencing

the artistic and financial position” (CMC 2002, p.3) of S2M organisations, and found strong evidence that the sector was “essential to the artistic vitality and the ongoing development of Australia’s performing arts ...is the main source of new Australian works in the subsidised performing arts ... provides access to the arts (and) offers many employment opportunities and in particular gives young and regionally based Australians opportunities to participate in the arts”; a view that was shared by the AMPAG (ibid, p.5).

The SMPA report offered four solutions for the CMC to consider in the development and sustainability of this sector, which included clarifying the “governments’ expectations of the SMPA sector either towards greater self-sustainability or excellence in artistic development”; providing more resources for training, networking and “strengthening the administrative capacity of the SMPA sector”; improving “inter-governmental communications and co-funding arrangements”; and “facilitating international tours” to enhance “the role of the SMPA sector in promoting Australia’s culture” (Craik 2007, p. 99). When the report was published in 2002, no “new financial arrangements resulted” leading to “widespread resentment within the SMPA sector” (ibid).

The S2M sector was left to languish, despite evidence that the sector was the “‘research and development’ incubator for experimentation and innovation in Australian performing arts” which required additional funding from government (Craik 2007, p. 9) and the report “showed clearly that organisations at this level demonstrate the greatest diversity in art forms; that they commission and perform more new Australian work; and that they are the showcase for Australian culture overseas” (Hunt & Shaw 2008, p.31).

The establishment of the AMPAG created a “great schism in subsidised Australian theatre”, with the S2M sector falling into further decline due to limited funding and opportunity for support and growth (Fotheringham 2013, p. 9). Whilst the AMPAG was supported by the Major Performing Arts Board of the AC, thirty-five triennially funded theatre organisations (TFTO) from the S2M sector were supported by the AC’s Theatre Board, who noted that

these companies were underfunded and unable to keep up with inflation and rising costs. In 2002, the Theatre Board commissioned research to be undertaken towards their sustainability (Baylis & Joshi 2006, p. 11). This resulted in a report⁷ which commented on the “significant demonstrable contribution to Australian culture” made by the TFTO which surpassed the AMPAG in terms of new work development and cultural export (AC 2003, pp. 1-2).

The report also indicated an impending “spiral of decline” caused by a “declining percentage of core government funding to turnover” which was “threatening the rate and quality of production in the sector” and causing an overall deteriorating cash position for these companies; fourteen of the thirty-five companies had recorded operating deficits and eighteen were considered to be financially at risk with working capital less than 1:1 (ibid). To ensure the survival of the TFTO, the report made five key recommendations to the AC and state governments, aimed at “maximising existing investment in this unique infrastructure, capitalising on its strengths and increasing the social, economic and creative benefits available from a committed and able pool of Australian talent” (AC 2003, p. 10). These included “increasing the Theatre Board budget by \$1,000,000 per annum to support the creation of new work within the TFTO sector”; establishing a “*Business Development Initiative* for the TFTO sector” supported by the AC and the states; streamlining and enhancing “communication and collaboration between TFTO companies”; introducing a “streamlined system of rolling triennial funding for the TFTO sector” supported by the AC and the states; and providing a “stabilisation package for financially 'at risk' companies within the TFTO sector” (ibid, pp. 11-12).

⁷ *An Analysis of the Triennially Funded Theatre Organisations of The Theatre Board of the Australia Council*, was undertaken by Ian Roberts and Associates on behalf of the Theatre Board and published in 2003 by the AC (Baylis & Joshi, 2006, p. 11)

In response, the AC's Theatre Board "implemented as many of the Robert's report's recommendations as it could afford" which included the Theatre Biz initiative⁸ and full indexation for three years to protect the TFTO from inflation (Baylis & Joshi 2006, p. 11).

Make It New?

By 2006, the thirty-five TFTO had become thirty-two Key Organisations (KO), and the Theatre Board of the AC was faced with the dilemma of supporting this group of triennially funded organisations whilst developing pathways for newer ones. According to Kelly, "the 'small-to-medium' sector was boiling over" with an "explosion of new forms in performance-making" and the "existing funding structures became gridlocked" with newer S2M theatre companies unable to "move up towards recurrent funding or to leverage additional resources from the shrinking funding pools for unfunded companies and individual artists" (2013, p. 83). As Milne notes, without the injection of "serious additional money", the Theatre Board would need to spread the existing funding pool "ever more thinly" or to "part company with existing clients in order to make room for the new" (2013, p. 31). Referencing the previous SMPA and the TFTO reports, the Director of Theatre, John Baylis acknowledged that the infrastructure of the performing arts had "become increasingly complex" and had "grown and diversified" exponentially over the previous fifteen years (Baylis & Joshi 2006, p. 1). Subsequently, he began a consultation process with the theatre sector by launching a discussion paper titled *Make It New? Some Proposals for the Future of Theatre Funding* (Make it New?) in April 2006 (ibid).

The aim of *Make it New?* was to "strengthen theatre as a vibrant contemporary artform" by "encouraging a diverse yet networked theatre culture within Australia"; "sustaining a number of key organisations to be hubs in this network"; and "empowering an enabling infrastructure for artistic development" by creating "pathways, linkages, connectors" (ibid). As part of the

⁸ The Theatre Biz initiative became CreateBiz, which was an Australia Council resource "to help artists to access government support programs" by providing "state-by-state and national lists of business, research, innovation and export programs that may assist artists to access new sources of income" (Clayton & Travers, 2009, p. 39).

discussion on cross-collaboration and ecology, the paper stated the need “to create an environment in which there are a variety of pathways for artists to realise their work” and questioned the role of the Theatre Board, the criteria used to select triennially funded companies, and the level of support offered to the S2M sector (ibid). Notably, the paper recognised the important role that was being played by venue-based producers who were commissioning new works, presenting work and “supporting artists (to a greater or lesser extent) beyond their intermittent use of the space”, as well as independent producers “who often work within for-profit corporate structures and cross-subsidise the aspects of their businesses that they value with the income from more commercial work” (ibid, p.5).

Following eighteen months of rigorous consultation with theatre sector constituents, including public meetings held in major capital cities and submissions made to online forums by over forty artists and organisations, the final strategy was released in September 2007 (AC 2007). This process enabled changes to be made to the 2008 AC theatre funding programs, which aimed to provide increased support for emerging theatre-makers, a stronger network of presenting companies to take new works into production, and a clearer focus for triennially funded organisations (ibid). These changes included *New Work Production* grants that “encouraged applicants to seek a presenting partner” such as “venues, festivals, other theatre companies, local governments, museums or independent producers” for their work before approaching the Theatre Board; twelve-month grants for *Emerging Key Organisations* (EKO), “designed to create a clear pathway for organisations aspiring to receive Key Organisations Triennial funding”; as well as a recalibration of the KO criteria, which would only be offered to organisations that identified as *Artistic Hubs* “producing contemporary theatre work at a consistently high standard as well as offering opportunities for new artists or new companies to emerge”, or to *Artistic Explorers* who were “pursuing their own unique artistic goals to create distinctive contemporary theatre work”, or *National Service Organisations* with “demonstrated ability to provide high quality essential nationwide services to theatre artists and companies” (AC 2007).

However, despite extensive industry research and consultation and a restructuring by the AC and state funding bodies of the funding criteria and opportunities for independent artists and companies, there was an insufficient increase in funding allocation from federal and state governments for the S2M theatre sector to provide substantial creative employment opportunities for freelance artists. Although the connections between the different sectors had been encouraged with these programming changes, government patronage continued to favour the big end of town thus creating a chasm between the MPA, the KO and the remaining S2M sector. The working lives of independent artists seeking regular employment became increasingly precarious within the field of power.

4.6. Conclusion

The historical analysis presented in the previous two chapters has argued that the continuous changes of cultural policy by the Australian federal government has fundamentally affected the theatre field, both enabling and impeding its growth. When the Menzies government instituted the AETT in 1954 it began a “process of change” within the Australian theatre field which “seriously disrupted the established balance between the amateur and professional theatre” (Brisbane, 2003, p.10). As I have noted, over the course of the next thirteen years the activities of the AETT assisted a myriad of individuals, amateur groups, semi-professional companies and organisations and expanded the Australian theatre field. The logics associated with the discourses of professionalism, excellence and an “Australian” national theatre evolved through the energy of a new generation of theatre makers and through a rapidly changing social and cultural environment.

This evolution was also encouraged by stronger levels of financial support and infrastructure provided by Gorton’s Australian Council for the Arts and Whitlam’s Australia Council. Additionally, burgeoning alternative and fringe theatre practices between the 1960s and the 1980s saw the emergence of relatively smaller companies, which proliferated, fuelling the rapid development of the Australian theatre field. This created fierce competition for the

limited financial support offered by Australian governments at a federal and state level. With this growth, the federal government struggled to maintain the Keynesian state-supported funding model administered through the AC. Both the Fraser and Hawke governments of the late 70s and early 80s redefined the logics of excellence and professionalism by applying economic rationalist and business principles to the arts and expanding the idea of culture to engage with wider community development. The emerging neoliberal hegemony effectively came to undermine the social and cultural role of theatre upon which the Keynesian state-supported approach was predicated. The role of the artist in a social and cultural sense was questioned and economic justification was sought by the Australian government to rationalise a continued investment in the arts.

The Keating government's *Creative Nation* policy of 1994, five years prior to the DCMS version of the CIC, introduced the phrase *creative industries*, along with the notion of creativity in economic terms (Cunningham 2015). This reflected government thinking about the fiscal value of the arts, as well as the idea of excellence on an international level. The net effect of this was to provide a platform for the reinforced government patronage of and support for the older flagship companies. There was growth in performing arts infrastructure and technology and an expansion of small to medium (S2M) theatre companies in the late 1990s, which the Howard government was not inclined to financially support. The neoliberal approach of the previous decades remained and was compounded by the introduction of the CIC to Australia in 2001 and subsequent uptake of this approach by state governments (particularly Queensland and Victoria) and at a federal level.

The next two chapters present the six case studies selected for this research, undertaking a comparative analysis of the data against the changing cultural field. Chapter Five presents the first multiple-case study of independent theatre companies formed between 1993 and 2002: Darlinghurst Theatre Company (NSW), Matrix Theatre (QLD), and Red Stitch Actors' Theatre (VIC). Chapter Six presents the second multiple-case study of independent theatre

companies formed between 2008 and 2013: Elbow Room (VIC), Sport for Jove (NSW) and Belloo Creative (QLD).

CHAPTER FIVE: Towards Creative Industries (1993–2003)

5.1. Introduction

As outlined in Chapter One, the introduction of the CIC in 2001 to the Australian cultural field encouraged the idea of *artist as creative entrepreneur*. This research seeks to understand if the introduction of the CIC to Australian cultural policy has influenced or altered the practice of independent Australian theatre artists, moving it towards the ideas of self-employment, professionalism and financial sustainability promoted by the *creative entrepreneur* concept. Understanding the sustainability of independent theatre practice was also an important consideration for this research. For Hunt & Shaw:

the most common image used to describe a sustainable arts practice or enterprise is that of the three-legged stool. One leg stands for the product (the art), the second for the operating structures it uses to make and sell the product (the operation) and the third for the way in which the whole is financed (2008, p. 6).

In these terms, a successful—that is *sustainable*—creative practice involves “more than just money”; success should also be interpreted in terms of the “quality of artistic work and services” which build both audience and reputation, and “the efficiency of an organisation’s operating systems” which enable the organisation to build networks and develop partnerships (ibid, p. 8).

On a national level, the establishment of the Australian Major Performing Arts Group (AMPAG) and Key Organisation (KO) companies widened the field in terms of new work development and industry sustainability. Additionally, the funding of producer programs and service organisations by the Theatre Board of the AC and the states broadened the development of the field and provided further opportunities for new and alternative forms of theatre practice. However, further changes of federal government in the decade following this and shifts in cultural policy and priority served to strengthen the funding position of the

Australian Major Performing Arts Group (AMPAG) and Key Organisation (KO) theatre companies in the cultural field and erode that of the S2M sector, to the detriment of independent theatre artists.

Demonstrably, the AMPAG “have been characterised as occupying a privileged position in the Australian cultural funding landscape” whilst “the hundreds of smaller organisations and thousands of individual artists who are not part of the major companies are competing for the minority share of the Australia Council’s funding” (Eltham and Verhoeven 2020, p.82). As Kelly observes, “neither the flagship theatre companies nor the ‘small-to-medium’ sector could provide sufficient employment and production opportunities to sustain full-time employment for freelance theatre-makers” who instead were left to “juggle a mosaic of potential funding (in-kind as well as cash), networks and favours needed to collect enough resources to buy time to create” (2013, p. 87). Instead of functioning as a means through which to come to the attention of the centre of the field (the MPA and S2M sectors), alternative theatre became a professional option for freelance artists who wanted to explore different types of practice and storytelling or embrace a stronger social message and social groups in terms of audience development and play development.

Fotheringham notes that professionalism within theatre “has always been a contested term” due to the varying economic structures which vary from profit-share to state funded and fully commercial enterprises (1998, pp. 34–35). Artists, he explains, “have a vested interest in defining the company they are working for as ‘professional’; the symbolic capital of being a ‘professional’ artist is more closely tied to the economics than to the culture of the arts” [ibid]. In the early 2000s, newly graduated artists from “creative industries, humanities, Education and Applied Theatre” programs, Kelly observes, began “working in small company structures” and “mimicking the business structures” of the AMPAG and KO theatre companies (2013, p. 88), creating “a sub-sector within the already under-resourced ‘small-to-medium’ sector” comprised of freelance performance-makers, and a new term –

independent – which embraced “the professional aspirations and quality of the work emerging” (ibid).

These chapters will present the primary data gathered over a nine-month period (June 2018 to March 2019). The three independent theatre companies examined in this, Chapter Five, were all founded prior to the introduction of the CIC; the three presented in Chapter Six were formed after the CIC. Each case study will detail how these companies are organised, how they operate and are positioned within the wider theatre field, in terms of their development, as well as the financial sustainability of their creative practice, and how they relate to the *field of power*.

5.2. Case Study 1: Darlinghurst Theatre Company

Overview

Since its formation in 1993, Darlinghurst Theatre Company (DTC) has evolved from a co-operative (co-op) fringe theatre ensemble into one of Sydney's most prolific, financially independent, and self-sustaining theatre organisations. Within the Australian theatre field, DTC positions itself as a creative producer and producing house “that produces professional artists' theatre production concepts—from concept to major production” (DTC 2020). Working collaboratively with independent theatre artists, DTC takes full artistic and financial responsibility for the curation, development, and production of its annual performance season (ibid).

From 1993 to 1999, DTC occupied the Wayside Chapel (Wayside) in Paddington and from 2000 to 2013, the Reginald Murphy Hall (the Hall) in Potts Point. Since 2014 DTC has been the resident company of the Eternity Playhouse (the Playhouse), a 200-seat theatre owned by the City of Sydney in Darlinghurst's Burton Street (ibid). Located approximately one block from the bustle of Sydney's premiere nightclub strip, Oxford Street, the Playhouse gives DTC a prime, central location to tap into Sydney's night-time economy and its accompanying zeitgeist, whilst positioning itself as both a theatre company and an arts organisation with a community heart.

Organisational Structure

DTC was incorporated as a not-for-profit organisation in 1996 and registered in 1997 as a public company limited by guarantee with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC 2018) under the name Darlinghurst Theatre Limited. Registering for Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2000, DTC was listed as a charity by the Australian

Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) in 2012 and has subsequently produced a public annual report since 2013 (ACNC 2023). The company's 2013 constitution frames the objects of DTC as engaging in "the business of professional theatre as a producer or presenter including but not limited to the development, production and presentation of professional theatre productions", as well as working to "engage as a co-producer or co-presenter of professional theatre in collaboration with theatre artists" and "to develop, produce and present theatre artists' concepts for theatrical productions" (DTC 2013, p. 3). There is additional focus on further opportunities for Australian theatre artists and fostering links within and between local community (ibid).

According to the DTC 2019 Annual Report (ACNC 2023), the organisation has a full-time equivalent (FTE) staff of seventeen, which includes a core staff of six full-time, fifty-eight part-time, and twenty-one casual employees and twelve voluntary staff members. Staging approximately 300 performances in 2019, DTC employed over 240 professional and emerging artists and theatre workers (ibid). At this time, DTC's Board of Directors included Jim Behringer, Penny Bowring, Ian Enright, Kevin Farmer, Victoria Middleton (Chairperson), Suzanne Pereira, Patricia Skalsky, and Dominic Tayco (Treasurer) (DTC 2020). DTC's key production staff include Glenn Terry, Executive Producer and CEO; Amy Harris, Creative Producer; Sophie Blacklaw, Communications Manager and Associate Producer; Fairlie Goodwin, Production Manager and Associate Producer; Rebecca Michel, Front-of-House and Events Manager; Jacqueline Tooley, administrator; Jansson Antmann, publicist; and Evi O and Susan Le, graphic designers (ibid).

Audience Relationship

From a marketing perspective, DTC has an official website (www.darlinghursttheatre.com.au), which outlines its various activities and services, including an in-house restaurant and public venue hire (DTC 2020). The company encourages public interaction via a free subscription to an e-newsletter and social media

channels Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (ibid). Patrons can purchase single tickets and a package subscription to the annual DTC season, which offers benefits such as pre-sales, best seats, flexibility, and access to subscriber briefings and events. Furthermore, DTC solicits financial support through the DARLO ANGELS program, which encourages tax deductible donations from \$50 to \$5,000+ (ibid). Patrons are also encouraged to donate the tax-deductible cost of a ticket (in 2020, \$46) through the SHARE THE LOVE program, which enables DTC to gift that ticket to “young people, adults and seniors who are experiencing financial difficulty and hardship” (ibid).

Financial Position

DTC’s activities are funded through a combination of state government funding, box office income, donations and private sponsorship (individuals and corporate), and local government in-kind support (ACNC 2023). For the reporting period 1 January to 31 December 2019, DTC declared an income of approximately \$1.46 million. Of this, 81.45 per cent (\$1.19 million) came from the sale of goods and services, 10.34 per cent (\$151,261) from in-kind support, donations, and bequests, and 8.21 per cent (\$120,000) was received through government grants from Create NSW (ACNC 2023). At the time of this research, DTC was not receiving project or ongoing funding from the Australia Council (AC). Importantly, DTC claims to be “the only company and theatre in Australia working under an independent / curated theatre model to pay MEAA award wages and industry rates to all artists in its program” (ibid).

Creative Approach

DTC maintains a core belief that “theatre is a democratic platform, a place for exploration and diverse reflection on our lives, society and existence”; this determines its collaborative and community-based organisational approach (DTC 2020). As part of its vision and mission, DTC seeks out “work and provocations that explore discuss and engage with contemporary

Australia and topical issues” and to promote a “democracy of ideas” which places the vision of theatre artists at the centre of their work and enables a strong connection between the company and its audience (ibid). As part of its curation process, DTC invites artists to submit proposals with a director attached “who has a particular and distinctive vision for the production” as well as a wish list of creative personnel that might fulfil that vision (DTC 2020). However, instead of operating as a receiving house or a venue for hire by an existing production team, DTC fulfils the creative producer role of the process by managing all the production aspects, such as performance rights, casting, marketing and publicity, design, and venue management, and funding the entire production process, including all artists’ wages and creative fees at award rates (ibid). The company encourages artists to submit new Australian and international plays, innovative versions of classic and modern classic plays, musicals, and music theatre for their consideration (DTC 2020). Additionally, the work selected for production must also “display a significant level of creativity and expertise” and align with DTC’s core values, which are outlined as innovation, adventure and courage, excellence, diversity, and gender parity (ibid).

Origins

DTC was officially founded by Glenn Terry, Iain Knight and Matt Stewart in 1997, with the intention of building a presenting company focused on producing the work of independent artists at a professional level (ACNC 2023). In its current form, DTC embodies this vision and at the time of this research, continued to be creatively directed by Terry, in the position of Artistic Director and CEO. His first foray into the creation of independent theatre was writing and directing a large-scale rock opera while studying classical guitar at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, which amplified his own ambitions about artistic collaboration and taught him about leadership and breaking boundaries. Graduating around the mid-eighties, Terry learned more about acting and stage craft through amateur and professional experiences in both Australia and England, which exposed him to the processes of producing at a higher level. Several years working with The Rocks Players (1978–1985), a

Sydney fringe theatre company which, he recalls, was “very left-wing ... very socio-political”,⁹ introduced Terry to playwrights such as Stephen Berkhoff and Edward Bond. Working alongside acting and directing brothers Peter and Christopher Snow, director Alyssa Hittman, and producer Derek Glynne, who were “professional artists and sort of rat-bag types who sat on the Fringe ... with literary degrees”, Terry became exposed to “[!]ots of new plays. It was all about new plays. It was quite exciting”. Terry admits that although “people were pushing it” and it was creatively challenging, “it was people doing it for the love ... no one got paid”. This short stint with The Rocks Players led to Terry working for the Sydney Theatre Company (STC) for a few years as a properties buyer before heading to Europe for his “obligatory year overseas”, doing a stint as a stagehand with the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford-upon-Avon.

Returning to Australia in the early nineties, Terry found a different career path for himself, presenting new plays and developing a sustainable model that would enable their production. He started Darlo Drama (DD) in 1992 “purely to fund doing shows”. DD was an acting school aimed at adults that “provided a non-elitist, egalitarian and accessible environment in which people from all walks of life were encouraged to explore drama and performance” (DTC 2018). The DD classes were an opportunity for professional actors to teach their craft to adult students who were interested in acting for social reasons and for fun (DD 2019). According to Terry, DD was about “self-expression and taking care of people” rather than “that hard-core approach to stripping people back or anything”.

In 1993, the profits from the DD classes enabled Terry to fit out and set up a 100-seat theatre within the Wayside Chapel at King’s Cross (Wayside), where he staged theatre productions that featured amateur actors from the classes alongside the professional actors and directors who taught there (DTC 2018). Terry notes the impetus to create DD stemmed from the need to develop a platform for the professional actors who were leading the acting classes and a

⁹ Unless otherwise cited, all comments attributed to Executive Producer/CEO Glen Terry in this case study are derived from the personal interview I conducted with him in the foyer of the Eternity Playhouse, Darlinghurst, on 5 July 2018.

desire to cultivate a season of independent work that was curated and *artist-driven*, which was the aim for DTC. At this stage, the company was following a professional–amateur (pro–am) model, which meant that “we had amateurs in with professionals on stage” and not everyone was getting paid. The next model Terry wanted to create was “working with professional artists” and “artist-driven work”.

In 1999, a severe storm damaged Wayside’s roof and the company was forced to find a second performance home in the Reginald Murphy Hall (the Hall) at Potts Point, a 1950s community hall owned by the South Sydney Council (DTC 2018). The Hall required extensive renovations to transform it into a black box theatre with a bar and foyer, and Terry accepted the challenge. He developed plans for the new venue with designer Peter Vassallo, submitted a development application to South Sydney Council and with the help of his brothers and other DTC staff, raised \$246,000 in cash and \$139,000 in goods and services from Arts NSW, local businesses, and individual donors and a further \$115,000 from DD contributions (DTC 2018). By July 2001, the internal renovations of the Hall were completed, and DTC began its second phase. Terry acknowledges that the development of this new theatre for DTC shifted the focus of the company’s practice away from the pro–am model towards the artist-driven, self-sustaining model of theatre he had originally envisaged for the company.

Artist-Driven

The concept of artist-driven work and developing a sustainable model stayed with DTC in this second iteration, and it was the creative and business approach taken by Terry which differentiated the company from other alternative and fringe theatre companies and festivals at the time. Terry wanted to separate the work produced by DTC from the fringe festivals “because the fringe was not curated” and the fringe venues were “[b]asically, venues for hire and they were sort of lumped in all as the fringe”. Artistically, Terry “wanted to notch up the quality of the work, because there was an unevenness happening in the venues” and

wanted the work that DTC produced “to say ‘well, there’s going to be a level of quality of work’ that we’re aiming for, shooting for, and it needs a different name”. Inspired by *IF: the magazine for Independent Filmmakers*, in 2000 Terry coined the phrase ‘independent theatre’ to distinguish this kind of work from that of fringe theatre, and to deliberately delineate the work of DTC in these terms.

Artistically, Terry wanted to avoid the ad hoc curation of works with other fringe venues seemed to encourage, focusing on quality, selectivity, and generating the best possible work. This meant encouraging groups to offer DTC written proposals which would enable them to see the creative team’s abilities, as much as the parameters of the specific project. Terry admits that the selection process in place in the early days of this second iteration of DTC was “fairly loose”: the selection of work to be mounted was motivated by the possibility of collaborations with particular artists, as well as the commitment to new work. As Terry recalled of the process:

new work to Sydney, new Australian work, new international work which wasn’t being produced [...] was one curatorial thing. The other thing was that the director was right for the job; that they were in fact able to execute what they were talking about.

Terry managed DTC and curated the programming in the Hall, developing an approach that supported the vision of both emerging and established individual artists and artist groups, and provided “a creative platform” which included marketing, technical and production support for each production programmed as part of the annual season (DTC 2018). Instead of forming a performance collective within its venue, the DTC approach was focused on presenting “the visions of multiple artists over the course of a season” (ibid). Terry insists that this approach was absolutely artist-driven: it “was about an artist coming to us with a project and a production concept that they wanted to do and execute” and were passionate about. Whilst resident in the Hall, DTC assisted many artists in the development and production of new work, also supporting emerging artists and “enabling them to secure further employment in the industry” (ibid). DTC was producing and developing existing plays

and new work, but also developing teams and collaborations with other independent companies such as Sport for Jove Theatre Company, which premiered one of its earlier theatrical productions - *The Libertine* - with the company in 2011. The model that DTC followed was that of a creative producer but “the venue’s sustainability often relied on professional artists donating their time to a production” (ibid). This created a level of “discontent” for Terry because the reality was that DTC was still not able to pay people.

Financial Sustainability

DTC worked hard to cultivate a relationship with local businesses and the wider Darlinghurst community so that they would view the Hall as a valuable cultural asset and support it financially through donations and sponsorship. While the DTC constitution outlines a clear mandate of engaging “in the business of professional theatre as a producer or presenter” it also stipulates an altruistic focus to “operate as a theatre and a promoter of the theatrical arts within the local community”, fostering relationships with other community organisations (DTC 2013, p. 3). Over its 27-year history, DTC has contributed significantly not only to the independent theatre sector but also to its surrounding community through its co-development with the City of Sydney of two theatre venues – the Hall and the Playhouse – and the instigation and development of three other initiatives: DD, Critical Stages (CS), and the community-based organisation Milk Crate Theatre (MCT) (DTC 2018).

MCT was developed and managed by DTC between 2000 and 2010, as a joint initiative with the South Sydney Council¹⁰ (the Council) and the Wesley Mission’s Edward Eager Lodge (the Lodge) (ibid). While DTC was still resident at the Hall, Terry was approached by the Council about devising a production with the Lodge that would involve the homeless community. Funded for a year by the Council and sponsored in-kind by the Lodge, DTC ran workshops using Augusto Boal’s Forum Theatre technique and artists from DTC and DD to devise shows with the residents, which were then performed at the Lodge. When asked why

¹⁰ The South Sydney Council was amalgamated with the City of Sydney in 2003

there was no hesitation on becoming involved with this initiative, Terry observes that it is part of DTC's constitution, and was "our way of participating in the community that surrounded us". After six years of this initiative, MCT secured a grant of over \$45,000 from the AC's Skills and Development fund to support the appointment of a full-time Artistic Director, Beck Ronkson, and later, a General Manager, Katy Coote (AC 2019a; DTC 2018). Over the next four years, the work of MCT and its management team attracted strong sponsorship from individuals and organisations; by 2011 MCT was self-sustaining, becoming incorporated and a theatre company in its own right (ibid). By managing MCT and engaging the talent of DTC and DD artists to run the workshops and improvised productions, the wider community became more aware of DTC and its activities.

Between 2003 and 2008, DTC received a small amount of funding from the AC (\$100,550) and Arts NSW (\$70,525) for venue costs and programming, but this was not enough to pay creative teams and performers at minimum professional industry rates (AC 2019a; Create NSW 2019). Terry was unsurprised by the lack of financial support from state and federal government agencies because funding at that point was locked into the AMPAG structure and anything remaining had already been allocated to the S2M sector theatre companies that were more established than DTC. He admits that the "idea that your company could be professionally sustained by funding" was not a possibility for DTC and he was aware "that we needed to make our own money". For the first five years at the Hall, DTC continued with a profit-share model that divided its box office; the co-op approach made popular by other fringe companies and venues in previous decades. However, instead of a fifty/fifty split, the artists took seventy per cent of the box-office, whilst DTC retained the balance. In addition, the company kept the bar takings, hired out the venue, and used the proceeds from DD classes to supplement its operating income. However, the income from these sources and community fundraising was not enough to fully professionalise in the way Terry had envisaged, and he realised that something else needed to be done to progress the company towards professional practice and sustainability, another aim that was articulated in the DTC constitution.

As part of DTC, Terry developed Critical Stages (CS) between 2005 and 2011; a touring arm that aimed to sustain the “great shows” that were being independently produced and to further support the artists by securing touring work for them. CS has since become an entity in its own right and “a leading National touring organisation for independent theatre” (DTC 2018). Terry remembers thinking that setting up this touring arm for independent shows was “a window of opportunity”, but also recalls that the AC “laughed” and said, “there’s no way the regional venues are going to take what you’re doing”. However, Arts NSW “were looking for someone to go out into tiny towns, to tour stuff (and) I said, ‘We’ll do it’ and so they funded us. They gave us \$30,000 or something to get out there, to spruik it and to develop some tours”.

Terry drove around NSW with newly appointed DTC tour manager Sean Parady, talking up the proposed independent touring program to “bigger performing arts centres but also to smaller towns, presenters, and writers and so on”. Despite advice from the AC that the risk would not be sustainable for larger venues, Terry discovered that many were interested in the independent productions that CS was offering and made a “brave choice” to include the shows in its annual season, even if only for one performance. Many of the venue presenters were “tree-changers” who were previously arts managers and production people and were “actually interested in the arts”; they welcomed CS shows and included them in their annual seasons. CS focused on promoting successful independent productions beyond the DTC stage and the NSW border and also on developing audiences for this type of theatre. In 2007, DTC sent the first three productions out on tour under the auspices of CS: two were independent productions from the Seymour Centre’s BITE program (*Bangers and Mash*) and Belvoir’s B Sharp program (*Wilde Tales*), and both were partially funded by Arts NSW; the third was a larger independent DTC production (*The Memory of Water*), which was fully funded by the company. Terry recognises that DTC funding its own tour of this larger production was a huge risk, but he wanted to prove that CS could fill the larger venues, and this was the only action that would be truly sustainable for DTC in the long term.

That same year, DTC was granted \$59,000 from the AC's Theatre Board under Projects and Initiatives funding and the company was able to successfully and sustainably tour; it began the process of developing CS into an entity in its own right (AC 2019a). From 2008 onwards, CS activated extensive tours across Australia for productions from Adelaide, Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne, including a one-person show from La Mama (*The Pitch*) which toured for twenty-six weeks in 2008 and a five-hander from the Old Fitz (*Dealer's Choice*). Terry notes that this was a deliberate strategy to interest the various venue circuits in each state, but also to tap into the wealth of independent theatre around Australia, recommended by the "curatorial advisory person" that DTC had in each state. As outlined in its 2011 constitution, the primary objective of CS was to "advance the professional opportunities of independent theatre artists" (ACNC 2023); this meant assisting independent artists, who did not have the infrastructure of a large theatre company, to tour nationally, thus extending the life of successful independent productions (Critical Stages 2019).

These three initiatives — DD, MCT, and CS — extended and sustained DTC's main activity of producing independent theatre. As envisaged, Terry used the profits from DD, which included "contributions of \$115,000 towards the 2000 Capital Campaign to construct the company's Potts Point venue and a further \$664,000 towards DTC's running costs and programs from 2001 to 2012" to finance DTC and the other two initiatives (DTC 2018). Although DD existed as a fun venture to raise revenue for DTC, it had also enabled the company to develop a loyal audience for its annual seasons. While MCT was not able to contribute financially to the development of DTC in the same way as DD, the benefits were still reciprocal for both organisations. MCT benefited from the expertise of DD and DTC staff, and, in return, the community and local government embraced the company and its work. As a touring organisation, CS not only enabled independent productions to be seen by the wider theatre-going community it also "created the additional revenue that DTC needed to take their activities to the next level" (DTC 2018). CS developed a larger audience and a stronger professional network for DTC, with the national focus of the touring program enabling successful indie productions from multiple producers (including DTC) to have an

extended life, earn money, and pay their creatives and performers. The touring arm created another income stream for DTC, added a level of professional legitimacy to its work, attracted creatives of a higher professional calibre, and attracted more sponsors and more government funding.

Terry acknowledges that DTC worked reciprocally with the other three entities from a financial and administrative perspective with admin and publicity shared to develop all four simultaneously, but “all the various things were drawing heavily” on the company. The symbiotic relationship between DTC, DD, CS, and MCT continued for the next few years, with important repercussions from a social and government funding perspective. As the resident company in the Hall, DTC had a long-standing relationship with the Council (now City of Sydney), but it was the company’s relationship with Arts NSW and changes to the rules around not-for-profit charities which directly nurtured the next stage of DTC’s development into a professional theatre company.

Professionalism

In 2008–9, between spearheading the development of CS and MCT, Terry was able to realise his vision for making DTC “sustainable as a professional theatre” when the company moved from the Hall to what would later be known as the Eternity Playhouse. Over the eleven years the company was in residence, the Hall had been leased to DTC under the Council’s subsidised accommodation program, which enabled the company to report directly about its ongoing activities and cite any issues that arose (DTC 2018). This included the need for “a larger and more prominent theatre venue” which “would greatly contribute to a viable and financially sustainable platform for artists” (ibid). In 2008 the Council approached DTC with its plans to “tear down” the Hall in order to “fund projects”, and to relocate the company to the 200-seat Tabernacle Church in Burton Street, Darlinghurst (DTC 2018). DTC convinced the Council to retain the Hall, a resource they had worked so hard to develop, as a performance venue; the company donated the fittings, seating, and other equipment as a

parting gesture (ibid). When DTC vacated the space, the lease was taken over by a coalition of independent producers of music theatre works in 2014 and renamed the Hayes Theatre (HTC 2018).

Over the five-year development of the Playhouse, DTC was given the opportunity to “consult with the City of Sydney and architectural firm Tonkin Zulaikha Greer in order to create a technically advanced theatre, café and meeting hub for patrons and artists alike” (DTC 2018). Although DTC would continue to be supported by the City of Sydney’s accommodation grants program, the company’s rental costs, which were approximately \$76,000 per annum for the Hall, would increase to \$122,000 for the Playhouse (City of Sydney 2020). DTC’s strong relationship with the City of Sydney is exemplified by the “100 per cent rental subsidy for the period 1 January 2013 to 31 December 2014” granted to the company, which allowed it to save close to \$200,000 and “earn an income following the transfer across to the Eternity Playhouse” (ibid). In addition, this two-year period would determine how the new space could be used and also the level of income that might be reached annually through DTC’s activities (ibid). Correspondingly, the City of Sydney decided that the level of subsidy offered to DTC would be reduced to 80 per cent in 2015 and then to 70 per cent in 2016, with a final subsidy amount to be determined after this period had concluded (ibid).

Despite the generosity of the City of Sydney, it became clear that a further financial injection would be needed to advance DTC towards its vision of sustainability in this new, larger venue. As the resident theatre company at the Playhouse, “there was an expectation of technical equipment and fit out” by DTC, which included lighting and sound equipment. While the bulk of the venue-related structural and renovation costs rested with the City of Sydney, this meant that DTC needed to raise “over half a million dollars” in order to technically equip the theatre. While the prospect of applying for state and federal funding was a logical option, Terry did not believe that DTC could be professionally sustained in this way in the long term, because existing government money “was all pretty much locked up by different groups and program funding”.

Nevertheless, the development of the new Playhouse venue to house DTC and the ongoing success of the company's primary and secondary activities was enough to secure financial support from Arts NSW¹¹ in 2010, with a grant of \$40,000 for the appointment of a sponsorship manager and \$80,000 for project funding (Create NSW 2020). In 2011, DTC was granted another \$120,000 towards program funding from Arts NSW, which acknowledged DTC as an "exemplary service organisation that develops, produces and presents high quality theatre productions in collaboration with NSW artists" (ibid). Concurrently, CS was awarded \$120,000 from Create NSW, enabling the appointment of dedicated Producer Luke Cowling to develop, manage, and deliver the tours of "outstanding NSW independent theatre productions for the specific demands of the network of community and volunteer managed presenters across Regional NSW" (ibid).

In the throes of its fundraising efforts for the new venue costs, DTC was awarded Triennial Program Funding (2012–2014) by Arts NSW towards "the development, production and presentation of a season of theatre works in collaboration with independent theatre artists" (Create NSW, 2020) – an annual injection of \$120,000, which it received until 2018. In 2012, CS was granted another \$120,000 towards the expansion of the Producer role and growth of the organisation, enabling it to "serve as the vital link between outstanding NSW independent artists and the NSW regional communities serviced by the community presenter circuit". This level of funding from Arts NSW continued in 2013 and 2014 until CS was also awarded Triennial Program Funding between 2016–2018 (Create NSW 2020).

Despite this government support, it was the box office takings and in-kind sponsorship, as well as philanthropic donations, that made up the largest part of DTC's income. Changes to the field around this time enabled DTC to attract private funding and corporate sponsorship.

¹¹ Create NSW was created via an amalgamation of Arts NSW and Screen NSW on 1 April 2017 (Create NSW 2020).

The establishment of the ACNC¹² in 2012 by the Federal Government “as an independent regulator for charitable organisations” enabled not-for-profit theatre companies such as DTC to register as a charity (ALCA 2015). Endorsed by the Australian Tax Office as an entity with deductible gift recipient (DGR) status, meant that DTC could receive donations from individuals and companies who could then claim these donations as tax deductions. Under Terry’s leadership, DTC raised \$700,000 over the five-year lead-up to the move with the help of donors and a drive for sponsorship within the community, similar to the fundraising efforts the company had engaged with for the Hall. Terry’s strategy for this type of fundraising is finding something that people “are interested in ...something that was valuable” from a cultural perspective, such as the venue itself. He notes that there were people in DTC’s existing audience who were “philanthropic or interested” so the strategy “was about interesting the smaller donors and a strategy to capture first the larger donors who might be interested, you know. It’s all relationship-building”.

From 2009 onwards, DTC’s relationship with independent theatre artists was also an important factor as the company began to refine its business model with a view to moving to the larger Playhouse venue. The artistic programming reflected a “strengthened” collaboration with “established artists who came with a body of exceptional work” (DTC 2018). This curation signalled DTC’s direction for the third stage of its development, that of a “high profile and professional platform upon which these practiced artists could stage their work” (ibid). In 2011, DTC began the process of separating from the MCT and CS initiatives to enable the company to “focus on its core business and launch of the Eternity Playhouse” (ibid). By 2012, with a combination of subsidised accommodation from the City of Sydney, triennial funding from Arts NSW, and substantial philanthropic donations as well as box office takings, DTC had become “financially self-sufficient and no longer required assistance” from DD and CS. Terry’s vision for sustainability and independence was realised and the company entered its third stage.

¹² *The Charities Act 2013* (ACNC 2023) lists charitable purpose under twelve different categories, including cultural and social remit that was part of DTC’s constitution.

Independence

DTC opened the Playhouse in November 2013, and from 2014 onwards the company focused on producing an annual season of work with independent artists, as well as developing the venue into a vibrant creative hub. Maintaining its original aims of sustainability and professional engagement with the independent sector, DTC transitioned its practice into a commercial model focused on maximising box office and services revenue as well as funding relationships and other philanthropic opportunities. This model also provided a revamped approach to artists who wanted to work with them. At this stage of the company's development, independent theatre for Terry meant harnessing the energy of independent theatre artists with a view to supporting their vision and forming a collaborative enterprise with them as creative producers:

So, it's about a director, a writer, a writer/director team generally who come to us, and we get on board for their creative team and then we work with them on the casting to make sure that's right. So, we produce, that's what we do. We don't actually work with producers. We make the show. So, it's from concept to stage to audience type thing.

For DTC, the terms *independent artist* and *independent theatre* reflect an approach to practise rather than how a show is funded. However, being labelled an independent theatre company now has a different connotation for Terry, who feels that the term has been somewhat devalued over the past two decades. Although Terry used the term *independent theatre* to help differentiate the company's practice from the fringe, he no longer identifies DTC as being independent because the term means "unpaid":

They're not paid, they're paid token fees, or they're paid a fee or sometimes not at all. That creates a tension and that creates a feeling of obligation on both parties. Between the person who is producing this work, and often it is the artist and they're pulling in a favour for them to be in the show. So, there's an expectation from the artist that this will be doing something for them. Either 'I get to work with you and

create this work' or 'I get to be seen and be part of this work', and that's an expectation on the work. You know, 'I've invested so much in the work'. It's as multi-levelled as the bunch of people that you've got in the room. It becomes a more complex picture.

Terry notes that independent theatre from a field perspective has become interchangeable with the co-op fringe model and the idea of what fringe theatre used to be, when DTC was first formed. He suggests that independent theatre has also been “categorised and almost normalised by things like the Sydney Theatre Awards¹³ and the Media Entertainment Arts Alliance (MEAA): this is what “‘independent’ is” and the “category is artists who are self-funding their stuff”. Terry observes that the term *independent theatre* has been defined by the theatre field from a financial perspective and feels that it is now synonymous with unpaid work. Additionally, he perceives “there is an investment by the artist themselves to develop the work” which he suggests is the process of “reaching into their back pocket and their credit card and paying”.

In 2015, DTC claimed it was “the only theatre company in Australia supporting independent professional artists that pays award wages and industry rates to all its participating artists and theatre workers”. The Playhouse is now a regulated venue, which meant that all performers and stage management staff are paid at the Live Performance Award rates (DTC 2018). A key reason for DTC taking this action was not only to “improve pay conditions for Sydney artists” but, by paying performers award wages, the company ensured that “professional artists continue to be paid a living wage” (ibid). Terry explains that this is why DTC now distances itself from the term *independent theatre*, preferring to use the term *professional theatre* in its dealings with the public. For Terry, professionalism means “achieving the best” or “a level of expertise that an artist, a practitioner brings to something”, so it is defined by “the work that’s going to be generated and at the highest level it can be generated at”. Other initiatives introduced by DTC since the move to the Playhouse include

¹³ The Sydney Theatre Awards were instigated in 2005 and are “an annual awards scheme” originally given by a group of Sydney theatre critics to “recognise the strength, quality and diversity of theatre in Sydney” (Sydney Theatre Awards, 2019).

a gender parity scheme, which has been in place since 2016, and a strong community mandate, which ensures that DTC services both the theatre and local community with various activities and schemes. In 2017, DTC hosted fifty not-for-profit events by organisations such as The Walkley Foundation journalism conference, the Playwriting Australia Festival, Amnesty International, SJB architects, the University of NSW, the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, the Australian Graphic Design Association, The Japan Foundation, ACON Health Limited, and Sydney Women’s Fund (DTC 2020). In total, eight thousand people walked through the doors of the Playhouse, engaging with the company as a venue within their community (ibid).

Conclusion

DTC’s activities and income have grown exponentially since its first full season at the Playhouse in 2014. The company earned just over \$1.2 million in 2014, but in 2019 this figure doubled, increasing its overall income to an impressive \$2.34 million (ACNC 2023). Just over 5 per cent of DTC’s 2019 income is attributed to government funding and in-kind support from City of Sydney and Create NSW, while just under 5 per cent is attributed to donations and bequests. The remaining 90 per cent is entirely self-generated.

The next steps for DTC are about “bedding down the sustainability of this place and the model” and making plans to tour more of its shows. In a nod towards its professional status, the company will use Arts on Tour instead of CS for this endeavour, because the latter is “set up to tour people who aren’t resourced, who don’t know how to do it, who don’t know how to pitch a show, who don’t have the money to get them to ... that’s not for a professional company”.

Although DTC’s income and sustainability are now comparable to other S2M theatre companies, it is not Terry’s intention to try and elevate the company’s status to that of an MPA company:

I think we want to be quite different... the thing for the artists, because you can sort of say independent artists ... they're artists, professional artists ... is the glass ceiling. They want work, they need jobs and what are pathways for them to be involved in our organisation, in our company? How do we open the doors? Do we do general auditions? Are we genuine about that? How do we be a professional company but still serve the industry well?

Over its 25-year history, DTC has developed a reputation as a producer of new work and deepened its practice in terms of collaboration and artist-driven work. DTC has deliberately worked against the fringe philosophy of co-op theatre, and instead, has chosen to function as a producing house for curated work that aligns with its philosophy of independence and sustainability. DTC is the product of slowly evolving independent practice, utilising multiple entities to become financially self-sufficient, and its cultural capital is grounded on artistic innovation and collaboration.

DTC has positioned itself within the theatre field as a S2M theatre company rather than an independent company, distinguishing itself from other fringe or independent companies by not being afraid to embrace a commercial approach to theatre-making whilst encouraging collaboration and a co-production approach with other independent artists. Notably, DTC has focused on diversifying its activities in order to develop other entities that will enable it to pay its actors and other creatives. The company's strong social conscience has led it to embed itself as a theatre company and venue in each of the neighbourhoods it has occupied. This has enabled it to become an intrinsic part of its community and solidify its relationship to the wider world, including local and state government funding age

5.3. Case Study 2: Matrix Theatre

Overview

Matrix Theatre (Matrix) is a creative partnership between joint Artistic Directors and husband/wife team, Michael Futcher and Helen Howard. The company is best known for developing, writing, and co-presenting new work and collaborating with other creatives, companies, producers, and venues to realise their artistic vision (MT 2023a). Under the Matrix name, Futcher and Howard have written and produced multiple original award-winning plays together, including the nationally recognised classic *A Beautiful Life* (1998), and *Cutting Loose* (2000), *Citizen Jane* (2002), *The Drowning Bride* (2005), and *The Wishing Well* (2008) (ibid). Other Matrix projects include the highly successful production of Sasha Janowicz's *The Kursk* (2007 and 2009), which toured to 35 venues around Australia, and tours of two-handed adaptations of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* for schools (2011–2013) and *Piano Lessons* (2011–2015), based on Anna Goldsworthy's critically acclaimed memoir (ibid).

Organisational Structure

At the time of this research, Matrix core executive staff consisted of Futcher and Howard as joint Artistic Directors (MT 2023a). Matrix is not a company limited by guarantee but is registered as a business, acquiring an Australian Business Number in 1999 as an “other unincorporated entity” under the name Matrix Theatre Company (ABR 2018).

The company is not registered for GST or listed as a charity by the ACNC, so they are not entitled to receive tax deductible gifts (ACNC 2023). Matrix does not produce an annual report.

Audience Relationship

From a marketing perspective, Matrix has an official website (www.matrixinperformance.com) which provides detailed profiles of Futchter and Howard, and a history of the company's development and individual productions. The website outlines Matrix's various activities and services and encourages further public interaction via social media channels (Facebook and YouTube), which notify audiences about creative development and behind-the-scenes work and showcase previous and upcoming productions (MT 2023a). Matrix does not offer a subscription season or encourage donations or sponsorship via its website or social media.

Financial Position

At the time of my interview with Futchter, Matrix was not receiving ongoing operational funding from local government, Arts Queensland (AQ), or AC, but had just been funded \$29,835 by AQ in the 2018 round of the Queensland Arts Showcase Program to creatively develop a new play, *Haneef*, "based on the true story of the arrest and detention of Dr Mohamed Haneef, accused of participating in the terrorist bombing of Glasgow Airport" (AQ 2019). Matrix operates on a project-by-project basis and the company's activities are financed through a combination of federal and state government project funding, box office income, and co-productions with other theatre companies, arts and touring organisations, and venues. Futchter and Howard also generate income from their freelance careers as directors and actors as well as from the services they offer through Matrix. These include training actors in private and tertiary acting schools; coaching for film, television, and stage; undertaking in-school residencies and productions; and offering drama workshops (MT 2023a).

Creative Approach

Matrix is an informal creative hub which allows Futcher and Howard to initiate projects and work collaboratively with other artists within a company framework, without the overheads that accompany a venue-based company. The name Matrix reflects the time the couple like to take and the environment they like to develop in their creative process; “the stone in which a gem forms, implying processes over time, something beautiful hiding inside a strong natural crucible” (MT 2023a). Correspondingly, the purpose of Matrix is to “create works with actors in a very equitable way – sharing ideas, developing them through improvisation and experiment. Digging up and exploring ingredients for theatrical stories from within everyone in the group” (ibid). As writers, actors, and directors themselves, Futcher and Howard prefer to work collectively as theatre-makers, with the intention of producing original scripts and adaptations which are “fully professional shows, but also maybe smaller-scale works that were more experimental, that we would get put on in venues”. They believe their success is due to “the authenticity of the work, its inspiration, realisation and heart-felt aspirations, and the energetic, even passionate, story-telling to which actors and audiences connected” (MT 2023a). From a strategic perspective, Matrix aims to “create works that are self-generated, self-written, that employs largely Queensland actors” (ibid).

Origins

Matrix debuted its first production season, *The Woods* by David Mamet and *Lunch* by Steven Berkoff, on the top floor of Woolloongabba’s nightclub-turned-fringe-theatre venue Van Gogh’s Earlobe in 1994. Produced, designed, and performed by Futcher and Howard, the season “played to small but enthusiastic audiences, and successfully launched the company” (MT 2023a). The couple were lauded as “a strong double-act”, a portent of what was to come from them under the umbrella of Matrix (ibid). Futcher and Howard had both trained as actors, in Australia and England, respectively. While Futcher was born in England and raised in Scotland, he moved to Australia when he was nine, living in Cairns and then

Townsville and graduating from James Cook University in Townsville in 1985 with an Associate Diploma in Performing Arts. Futchter noted that the course was one of three possible actor training opportunities for him at the time and offered him a well-rounded education in that “all the students did everything, acted, made the sets with stage managers”, working “just like a theatre company” and “how to put a show together”¹⁴. This approach had a lasting impact on Futchter. Although he had secured some work with what was then known as the Royal Queensland Theatre Company¹⁵ not long after graduation, Futchter was mainly working with Crackerjack Theatre Company (Crackerjack), a theatre-in-education company he had formed with friend and fellow actor John Eastman “in the notion of entrepreneurs”. He recalls that they “rang up kindergartens and preschools and we got this huge lot of bookings, which kept us going for months basically”, performing two shows per day. On the strength of this work, Crackerjack was approached by Mark Keyworth from the Queensland Arts Council, and commissioned to write a play called *Bush Genie*, which toured Queensland for three years. This effectively funded Futchter’s dream of returning to England to work in repertory theatre and learn more about the craft of making theatre.

Arriving in London in 1988, Futchter soon discovered that there were few opportunities in England’s repertory system, which had all but collapsed by that point. Instead, he found himself in his “next stage of learning”, seeing “heaps and heaps” of shows and doing “a lot of classes over there” before managing a youth hostel and landing a role in a fringe show. Simultaneously, UK-born Howard had graduated from the prestigious Mountview Theatre School (now Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts) in London and, after three years trying to earn an Equity card, had become an understudy and assistant box office and stage manager with Kent Repertory Theatre Company at Hever Castle, which earned her “just enough to support a couple of roles in fringe theatre” (MT 2023a). The couple’s fate was sealed during the preparation for one of these fringe theatre roles, when Futchter stepped in to direct a

¹⁴ Unless otherwise cited, all comments attributed to Futchter in this case study are derived from the interview I conducted with him at the Open Book café in Everton Hills on 1 March 2019.

¹⁵ According to the QT website (2019) “Alan Edwards founded the Queensland Theatre Company in 1970; it took the regal title of Royal Queensland Theatre Company in 1984; it dropped the “Royal” in 2001; and it dropped the “Company” in 2016”.

production of *Macbeth* in 1989, with Howard playing the role of Lady Macbeth. They designed and produced the show together, staging it in a converted bar off London's Oxford Street. For Futcher, it was "a meeting of the minds ... we suddenly realised that we could spark off each other.

When Futcher and Howard watched a performance of *The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol* by British company Théâtre de Complicité (Complicité), they were "impressed beyond measure because it showed us the value of ensemble work and devised work and a really creative approach to new material". Not long after their first foray into producing theatre together, Michael was invited to return to Australia to work with renowned director Jean-Pierre Voos and Townsville-based theatre company Tropic Line as a member of its ensemble. The opportunity gave Futcher the repertory experience he had craved, but the position was short-lived, and he returned to England in 1992, marrying Howard a year later. Buoyed by their previous creative spark, Futcher and Howard wrote *Disobediently Yours, Edmund Kean*, which they produced and performed at the Hen and Chickens Theatre bar in Highbury, London and "which opened a door to the prospect of writing original material, of running a company" (MT 2023a). Futcher and Howard moved to Australia permanently in 1993, and both were quickly employed by what was then Queensland Theatre Company, with Futcher starring in a production of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1993 and Howard employed across three productions, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, *Peter Pan*, and *The Winter's Tale* in 1994 (MT 2023a). Assimilating quickly in the Brisbane theatre scene, the couple "started to make a bit of a name" for themselves and after the success of *The Woods/Lunch*, they decided to form their own company to develop ensemble-based work.

Futcher recalls that he and Howard were cognisant of modelling Matrix on "the anarchy" of Complicité, but they were also influenced by French touring company *Footsbarn Travelling Theatre*, a group that combined acrobatics, playing instruments, and performing in a circus tent with "incredible ensemble playing" (AusStage 2020). Correspondingly, Matrix's first incarnation was as a professional co-operative (co-op) ensemble, with Futcher and Howard

seeking out like-minded individuals to join them and harnessing the energy of emerging artists to assemble a group of players who were passionate about developing new work (MT 2023a). Futcher recalls that the main goal of Matrix Theatre with these early ensemble-based productions was to empower young actors and give them “a different platform for their performance style”.

Co-Producer

With “no venue and no budget to mount their second production”, the couple “thought outside the square” and planned a series of ensemble-based productions (Matrix 2020a). Matrix began this co-op ensemble phase in 1995 with what was to be “an ambitious two-production open-air experiment” that included “large ensemble casts, live musicians and braving the winter elements” at the Botanical Gardens (ibid). The first of these productions, *The King and the Corpse*, was devised by the ensemble and improvised “from a handful of Sanskrit tales”, which were “written up by Futcher and Howard every night across a six-week period” (ibid). Supported by Brisbane City Council (BCC) and Mt Coot-tha Botanic Gardens, the production was a critical success, won a Matilda Award¹⁶ and was subsequently picked up for a fully funded remount a year later in the City Botanic Gardens as part of the inaugural 1996 Brisbane Festival (ibid). The second of these outdoor productions was *1347*, a companion piece to the first, based on Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (ibid). Produced by Matrix prior to its Brisbane Festival appearance, the work was developed under a similar six-week process with a large ensemble of actors and musicians in the Mount Coot-tha Botanic Gardens, again supported by BCC. Earlier in 1996, Futcher had rekindled his relationship with La Boîte Theatre Company (La Boîte) to produce a professional co-op production of Frank McGuinness’ *Someone Who’ll Watch Over Me*, outside of La Boîte’s main annual season (AusStage 2020). Directed by Lewis Jones and featuring Futcher as one of

¹⁶ The *Matilda Awards* are an annual event that honours and celebrates the achievements of the Brisbane theatre industry (Matilda Awards 2019).

three actors, the production was highly lauded and received three Matilda Awards (MT 2023a).

Developing and producing two outdoor adaptations and a professional co-op production in quick succession put Matrix on the map as a theatre company of high artistic regard. Futcher offers that working with actors to develop a script also allowed Matrix to evolve into “more of a writing aesthetic where we would ... concentrate very much on creating over a long period of time, works that could then be put on”. The critical success of *The King and the Corpse* and *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, and the seminal relationships developed between Matrix, John Kotzas, the Brisbane Festival, and La Boîte, would culminate in the production of the company's most famous original play, *A Beautiful Life*, in 1998. The impetus for *A Beautiful Life* was a story told to them by Mohammed (Cieavash) Arean, an Iranian musician who worked on *The King and the Corpse*. After working with Futcher and Howard, Arean was compelled to tell the couple about his escape from the Iranian regime and “felt that Matrix was the right crucible in which to develop it for performance” (MT 2023a). The initial draft of the script was workshopped with three actors and playwright Janis Balodis, who was the dramaturg for the development process. Balodis provided Futcher and Howard with “crucial advice about plot, character and dialogue” and determined “the foundations of a professional and private association” which would take their written work to a higher level (ibid). Futcher acknowledges another integral relationship established during this workshop process, which was with then Brisbane Festival Managing Director John Kotzas. Kotzas was “the main man” behind the remount of *The King and the Corpse* and, as he was “very supportive of Matrix's early stuff”, became one of the company's champions.

Futcher notes that this professional relationship with Kotzas intensified in 1998 with the presentation of *A Beautiful Life*, which was mounted as a co-production between Matrix Theatre, the Brisbane Festival, and La Boîte, funded by AQ and the AC. The project was initiated by Matrix with a successful application to the AC for a creative development grant, which enabled them to present the outcome of that process as a rehearsed reading to

engage potential producers. Futchter recalls that Matrix “did a reading of it and then we put it out there for producers ... and Brisbane Festival came on board and then La Boîte came on board much later”. Additionally, Matrix successfully applied for production funding from AQ and the AC “because we wanted live musicians, and we wanted a bigger cast”. Because of this, Futchter observes, “we were able to actually contribute a good amount of money and we became proper co-producers, you know, not just producers in name, but we were able to pretty much equally contribute, in a monetary sense to the production, as much as La Boîte and Brisbane Festival”.

This was a turning point for Matrix, setting the tone for the company’s co-production approach. Combining deeply personal narratives and political issue-based themes with Matrix’s physical and ensemble approach proved to be a winning combination (MT 2023a). The strength of this professional co-production catapulted Matrix from Brisbane’s theatre fringe on to the main professional stage of the Brisbane Festival, where the production was highly acclaimed; the play and production received “four Green Room Awards¹⁷, plus two nominations, a Matilda Award, a nomination for an AWGIE Award¹⁸ and was short-listed for the Queensland Premier’s Literary Awards¹⁹” (ibid). In 2000, *A Beautiful Life* toured with Performing Lines to Melbourne, Hobart, Sydney, regional NSW, and Brisbane, and was also recorded for ABC Radio. The national tour developed a wider following for Matrix’s work and cemented its artistic reputation, opening up the possibilities for further collaborative projects with other artists and companies. *A Beautiful Life* was published by Currency Press and is still studied widely in schools and universities throughout Australia (ibid).

Between the initial production in 1998 and the 2000 tour of *A Beautiful Life*, Matrix initiated two other independent projects which would cement its place in the Brisbane independent theatre sector. The first was a two-hour adaptation and production of *Hamlet*, which bore all

17 The Green Room Awards are Melbourne’s premier peer-presented, performing arts industry awards (Green Room Awards 2019).

18 The *AWGIE Awards* are the Australian Writers’ Guild’s annual awards for excellence in screen, television, stage, and radio writing (AWG 2019).

19 The Queensland Premier’s Literary Awards were an Australian suite of literary awards inaugurated in 1999 and disestablished in 2012 by Campbell Newman (Hurst 2012).

the hallmarks of the Matrix ensemble approach, featuring Futcher as the Prince of Denmark and directed by Lewis Jones; it was a co-production between Matrix and the Queensland Performing Arts Trust (QPAT) and was staged at QPAT's Merivale Street Studio²⁰ (MT 2023a). The second was an original work written by Futcher and Howard and directed by Futcher called *Cutting Loose*, which was staged at the Princess Theatre in Woolloongabba. Described as an “accidental production”, *Cutting Loose* was the “result of a concerted attempt by a group of Brisbane’s independent companies to save the wonderfully atmospheric Princess Theatre from eternally going dark” (ibid). This absurdly funny, dark contemporary comedy was well-received and proved that Futcher and Howard were firmly entrenched in the Brisbane theatre community, with Matrix a seemingly unstoppable force.

As part of the wider theatre community, Matrix was provided with opportunities and development support, particularly in its early years. As Matrix was finding its feet as a company, Futcher recalls that the company belonged to the Brisbane Association of Co-operative Theatre (Brisbane ACT - now defunct), a large group of eighty members, which included other independent companies. The group met regularly at Brisbane’s Metro Arts, with the intention of forming a political body and lobbying to “fund artists, artist projects, not institutions” and “support the people who are actually trying to create a career for themselves”. “[T]he best part” of being in this group was the co-operative and networked environment that was created, which enabled members to share news and information as well as space, personnel, and resources. The downside was that the group soon became “bureaucratized”, which is when Futcher decided to go his own way with the development of Matrix, because “once you become bureaucratized, the money that you’ve got becomes more about paying admin than paying artists”.

Futcher perceives paying artists as “another ethical dilemma that is a perpetual one, because you've got to pay people equity, you know, or nothing”. He acknowledges that Matrix operated *The King and the Corpse* on a profit-share basis and insists that there was

²⁰ The Merivale Program was “an initiative to provide support to independent companies to stage their own works” (MT 2023a).

probably only one occasion on which the actors were not paid something. As the company attracted sponsorship and received grants, this dilemma became easier to manage, but it was still a struggle to find the artist salaries, particularly when the development of the work was at the centre of the project. Futcher believes that “everyone knows what they’re getting into” and “as long as you are up front” about the financial situation then this practice is acceptable “if you want to develop yourself or you want to do a good role” but it is different for a company that is “professionally funded”.

Financial Sustainability

Futcher admits that, given the momentum of two performances with the Brisbane Festival, awards, and critical acclaim for these and the company’s other professional co-op productions, as well as the national tour of *A Beautiful Life* in those first six years, Matrix should have become a full-time S2M theatre company. In addition to their independent work with Matrix, Futcher and Howard were working as actors with QT, La Boîte, and Tropic Line, and Matrix had received project funding from BCC, AQ, and the AC, and sponsorship from the QPAT and the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC), the Brisbane Festival, and La Boîte. Futcher “hoped to have got” and contemplated applying for annual operational funding “to channel into productions and all that sort of stuff” but felt that Matrix “needed to get more runs on the board before that happened”.

Circumstances including having two children and a lack of ongoing financial resources in 2001 meant that the couple had to abandon their plans of developing Matrix into a full-time theatre company and concentrate instead on earning money through their individual freelance careers. Leveraging the creative work that he had done with Matrix and the cultural capital he had accumulated in terms of reviews and awards, Futcher found himself as a director-for-hire, working for other theatre companies and university acting courses. Meanwhile, Howard garnered further acting accolades in the titular role of Brian Friel’s *Molly Sweeney* for QTC and found herself working as an acting and vocal coach in theatre,

television, and film during and in between acting roles (MT 2023a). Futchter observes that there was a “cooling-off period at that point ... we’d reached a bit of a watershed” which lasted for a few years, due to ongoing work with other theatre companies taking precedence and a lack of interest from the major companies to support the company’s new ideas:

We started getting lots of TV work and film work that took our (focus). And so basically, Matrix lost its impetus as it always happens, you know, when you’ve got these things. But rather than just let it die, we said ‘Come on’. It was the stage where we lost our creative entrepreneurship. We lost the goal of making it an active functioning company.

Between 2001 and 2002, the Matrix name was kept alive in projects such as a children’s show for Grades 4–9 called *Citizen Jane*, which was commissioned by the Premier’s Department of the Queensland Government, in association with the Queensland Arts Council, to celebrate the consolidation of the new Queensland Constitution; it toured for four years (MT 2023a). Simultaneously, Matrix developed its own adaptation of Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita* as part of the Brisbane Powerhouse Incubator program, which received two staged readings at the Visy Theatre. However, Futchter notes the work proved to be “too big” for the Brisbane Festival and it was not picked up for production. Just when the couple thought Matrix might dissolve under the weight of other creative work, they were approached in 2003 by Brisbane visual artist Elise Parups, who told them the incredible story of her grandmother and asked Futchter and Howard to turn it into a play. This ignited discussions about the development of a second Matrix/La Boîte co-production, *The Drowning Bride*, in 2005.

By this time, La Boîte had moved from Hale Street, Milton to the newly appointed Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Kelvin Grove campus, where it was the resident theatre company in the Roundhouse Theatre. The artistic directorship had changed from Sue Rider to Sean Mee, but the reputation of Matrix was enough to commission the play for production. Written by Futchter and Howard with dramaturgy by Janis Balodis, *The Drowning Bride* was co-produced with Matrix (which had received development funds from AQ) as part of La

Boîte’s annual mainstage season (MT 2023a). The production picked up several Matilda Awards, including Best Playwright for the couple and Best Director for Futcher, putting Matrix firmly back on the map in terms of new work development (ibid).

Futcher recalls that *The Drowning Bride* was “a very successful show” and “went within a whisker of touring nationally” in a similar vein to *A Beautiful Life*, but the tour was derailed by two venues cancelling at the last minute. The production lost its funding from Playing Australia,²¹ and the tour was abandoned. This took the company into what Futcher refers to as its second phase, which follows the philosophy that Matrix “will exist to do long-term shows” instead of trying to “produce lots of shows, get a following, you know find a venue, get known”, the company “became a creative entity” that developed shows “over a long period of time” and finding “producers that can mount these productions and put them on when they’re ready”.

While *The Drowning Bride* was being developed and written, Sasha Janowicz was finalising the first draft of *The Kursk*, a play about the disappearance and failed rescue of the K-141 Russian submarine in 2000 (Playlab 2019). Janowicz had spent six years researching and conducting interviews with the victims’ families about how the tragedy had occurred and approached Matrix to help further develop the play, “with a view to producing it at Metro Arts” (MT 2023a). *The Kursk* had been initially developed by QT before being “further workshopped with Michael and the cast in an exceptionally brief rehearsal period” (MT 2023a). At the time, Metro Arts CEO Liz Burcham had introduced a strong entrepreneurial focus to the development of independent artists through her work on Metro’s Biz Arts Makers program²² in the three previous years (Frost 2020). Strengthened by a recent funding

²¹ Playing Australia is the Australia Council’s Regional Performing Arts Touring Fund (AC 2019a).

²² Metro’s Biz Arts Makers program “was launched in 2003 to support the development of artists’ practices as sustainable businesses. The program provides business skills workshops, mentoring and needs-based coaching, strategic planning and administrative support through industry consultants from across the creative industries” (Clayton & Travers, 2009, p.47).

injection from the AC, the Metro Independents program²³ provided the perfect platform for Matrix to develop and co-produce this work with Janowicz.

The play debuted at the 97-seat Sue Benner Theatre at Metro in August 2007 (MT 2023a) and the production was “recognised as an exceptional new independent work – winning three Matilda Awards (Best Independent Play, Best Director, and Best New Work) and the Bell Award for Best New Play” (ibid). In 2009, *The Kursk* embarked on what was to be “one of the largest ever tours of Australia of an independent theatre company work”, touring to 34 venues and playing to over 16,000 people (ibid). The tour was produced by Critical Stages (CS), and financially supported by Playing Australia. DTC / CS Executive Producer Glenn Terry noted at the time that the tour of *The Kursk* was “an extraordinary victory for the independent sector” as “competition for Playing Australia’s support is fierce and tours of this scale are traditionally the domain of large established theatre companies” (Metro Arts 2020). Futchler recalls that *The Kursk* “had no plan beyond just being a show at Metro” and the tour was “a classic case of an amazing thing that happened”, which started trending not long after with other independent productions:

[T]hat wasn't the first time it had happened, but it was one of the earliest times that that had happened in Brisbane. And that's happening a lot more now. Companies are sort of negotiating with, with theatres, like, you know Wollongong or whoever, creating relationships directly with people and setting up their own tours, and then applying for funds independently to fund that tour, without necessarily going through like a (government) body to do it.

Before *The Kursk* embarked on its lengthy tour, Matrix negotiated another co-production with La Boîte, using a \$44,000 production grant from the AC towards its development (AC 2019a). Included in La Boîte’s 2008 annual mainstage season, *The Wishing Well* was based

²³ Metro Arts Season of the Independents was “a professional platform to develop and showcase new work” which offered space and marketing support to independent individual artists and artist groups on an annual basis (Burcham, in Cooper 2011). The program was about “putting responsibility back in the hands of artists; in exchange, theatre-makers brought their initiative and their own people – from actors to set designers” (Benner, in Frost 2020).

on Howard's own family history and saw Matrix return to the "extreme actor-driven work of the mid 1990s" which embodied a "highly physical storytelling style coupled with songs and choral work" (MT 2023a). Once again, Futchter won a Matilda Award for Best Director and the production was nominated for four others, including Best Mainstage Production and Best New Australian Work.

As these various Matrix projects were being developed, Futchter and Howard found themselves securing continuous professional work as a director and actor respectively, working with Queensland Theatre Company (QT) on several projects separately and together. This ongoing professional working relationship with QT bore fruit for Matrix in 2011 when the company was invited to collaborate on a fully funded co-production with QT's schools' program. Matrix's adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* was designed for two actors and supported by arTour,²⁴ toured to Queensland schools in 2011. This was followed by a 45-venue Australia-wide tour in 2012, and short seasons at the Gold Coast Bleach Festival and Brisbane Festival in 2013. The show remains part of the company's touring repertoire, as does its production of Anna Goldsworthy's *Piano Lessons*, which was based on the highly popular memoir of the same name.

Originally commissioned by the Queensland Music Festival in association with QPAC, *Piano Lessons* was a two-hander adapted by and starring Goldsworthy herself with dramaturgy and direction by Futchter. The show had originally played to enthusiastic audiences at the Cremorne Theatre at QPAC in 2011, before touring Queensland with arTour in 2013 (MT 2023a). Futchter notes that there was still demand around Australia for the work after the QMF had completed the initial tour, so he decided to continue to tour the work under the Matrix banner and teamed up with Metro Arts, who produced the work and organised the tour, liaising directly with the venues on behalf of Matrix (ibid).

²⁴ arTour "supports performing artists and producers to tour work through regional Queensland and nationally" and "assists Queensland presenters to program performance work for their local audiences" (ArTour 2019).

Professionalism

Individually and together, Futchter and Howard have worked with an impressive list of national theatre companies, festivals, arts organisations, venues, drama schools, and television production companies, both within Queensland and nationally. In addition to the aforementioned companies, producers, and venues, the couple has worked with World Interplay, shake & stir theatre co.²⁵ (shake & stir), Zen Zen Zo, STC, Performing Lines, Malthouse Theatre (Malthouse), the Adelaide Cabaret Festival, the Brisbane Writer's Festival, the Brisbane Cabaret Festival, the Sydney Olympics Festival, Just Us Theatre Ensemble, Queensland Arts Council/Artslink, Opera Queensland, Queensland Conservatorium, QUT, University of Southern Queensland, UQ, the National Institute of Dramatic Art, Griffith University, Playwriting Australia, Out of the Box Festival, Backbone Youth Arts, ATYP (Australian Theatre for Young People), and Playlab (MT 2023a). Futchter and Howard have leveraged the recognition of their professional work across the MPA and S2M sectors and invested this in their independent creative development work with Matrix. This has allowed them the time to gather the resources and support necessary to co-produce their work with other entities on their own terms. The professional relationships Futchter and Howard have built with theatre companies, arts organisations, and venues over the past twenty-seven years, as well as the accolades they have received for their work, have enabled each of them to accrue capital as individual artists. This capital has been compounded by their combined work under the Matrix banner which has, in turn, reciprocally enhanced their status as actors, writers, directors, producers, and acting teachers. Futchter (TheatreINQ 2019) observes that this “diversification had been the key for surviving in the industry” but that forming a company had also “created a certain positive energy” about the couple’s work:

People started to want to work with us, we attracted funding and we started to get co-productions with other professional companies, and national tours. We really started to have a proper career, not just acting, but directing, writing, and

²⁵ shake & stir is a contemporary theatre for young people company which burst onto the Brisbane theatre scene in 2006 and began producing an annual mainstage touring season alongside their schools' education product (shake & stir 2019).

television, and we've been doing that for over 20 years now. We've had ups and downs, but we've managed to survive.

Whilst making work under the Matrix banner, Howard developed a close actor/director working relationship with David Berthold, who took over from Sean Mee as the new Artistic Director of La Boîte in 2008. Howard was featured in productions of *Hamlet*, *Colder*, *As You Like It*, *Holding the Man*, and *The Glass Menagerie* between 2010 and 2013 (MT 2023a). Similarly, Futcher found himself working closely with shake & stir in 2011, directing Matilda Award-winning adaptations of *1984*, *Animal Farm*, and *Dracula*, all of which toured nationally; *Tequila Mockingbird*, which toured Queensland; and *A Christmas Carol*, which has enjoyed sold-out repeat seasons at QPAC since 2018 (ibid). Whilst running and developing work with Matrix, Futcher and Howard also worked in artistic management capacities for other companies: Futcher as Resident Artist of World Interplay from 2006–2007 and both Futcher and Howard as Co-Artistic Directors of Zen Zen Zo²⁶ from 2011–2013.

Taking up the appointment with Zen Zen Zo was a strategic move for Futcher and Howard. As an independent company, Zen Zen Zo had enjoyed similar success to Matrix under the support of Kotzas and an ongoing co-producer relationship with QPAT and QPAC but, unlike Matrix, had grown exponentially along a more commercial line. Zen Zen Zo had developed an in-house acting ensemble, training centre, and in-schools program, and attracted consistent funding from BCC, AQ, and the AC (Zen Zen Zo 2019). As Co-Artistic Directors of Zen Zen Zo, Futcher and Howard drew further attention to their writing prowess and creative ensemble approach. Whilst leading the company, the couple rewrote *The King and the Corpse* to produce a new work called *Vikram and the Vampire*, directed by Futcher at the Old Museum in Brisbane in 2012; adapted and produced *Therese Raquin*, also at the Old Museum, with Howard making her professional directing debut and winning the Matilda Award for Best Director; and adapted *1001 Nights* from *The Arabian Nights*, which was co-

²⁶ Zen Zen Zo is a Brisbane-based physical theatre company of contemporary performance and training in Australia founded by Lynne Bradley & Simon Woods in 1992 (Zen Zen Zo 2019).

produced with the Brisbane Music Festival and QT at The Greenhouse, directed by Futcher and won four Matilda Awards, including Best Director and Best New Australian Work (Zen Zen Zo 2019). Futcher and Howard's Co-Artistic Directorship with Zen Zen Zo lasted for two years and provided the opportunity for them to work with an existing ensemble of actors. However, Futcher notes, it also impressed upon them that they were not cut out to be producers in the commercial sense or "an administrative body".

Independence

The couple's desire for independence has always outweighed any desire to develop a formal theatre company structure. Futcher confesses that although the couple tried to do this when they first started Matrix, they "would have to have made a lot of compromises, not so much just in the type of shows that we put on, but in the way the company was run". Despite a lack of formal structure, their creative partnership has been enhanced by a creative team of sorts: a long-held relationship with dramaturg Janis Balodis and "a loose collaborative sort of connection with other artists" such as actor Eugene Gilfedder, who has featured as a key performer in three of their original plays – *A Beautiful Life*, *The Kursk*, and *The Wishing Well*. Although Matrix has literary advisers like Balodis, with whom Futcher and Howard meet "quite often", and the company uses a core group of actors and creatives in its shows, Matrix has never appointed an artistic advisory committee or engaged a resident producer to work strategically with the company towards a more commercial status. Matrix is thus a "very fluid sort of entity" which has the advantage of being "totally free" but the disadvantage that "it doesn't produce often".

Independence is something that Futcher values, as it allows the couple to work in their other artistic capacities outside of the parameters of Matrix, to develop key relationships with other theatre companies and arts organisations as individual artists. Working alongside and with independent companies such as shake & stir, and Zen Zen Zo has enabled Futcher to make a direct comparison between the practice of those companies and that of Matrix. He

observes that Matrix is “a very long-term sort of theatre company” and different in that “we don’t produce as many plays”, which makes it “an anomaly” in that it doesn’t “really fit in to any neat category”:

[B]ecause we haven’t invested our time in the producing side of it and I suppose in the admin side as well, we’ve not produced enough shows consistently to be able to cash in on our successes. So, what tends to happen is we have a great success and then we get distracted by freelance careers.

Futcher differentiates between independent, commercial, and subsidised theatre in terms of purpose as well as financial perspective. He suggests that commercial theatre “is based on production, which is completely based on its ability to pay for itself” and that “its main purpose is to generate income”, while in subsidised theatre “the political slash social slash artistic values of the production are being valued higher than its ability to make money”. To him, the term *independent* means “a production which is produced without any need to make any compromises with other funding bodies, theatre companies, anything which has a political agenda” and is “an expression of what you want to do”. Although he acknowledges that some of its shows are commercial in purpose, Futcher identifies Matrix as being independent “[b]ecause we’ve always striven to ... express art in a way that isn’t compromising with agendas”.

Conclusion

The creative partnership between Futcher and Howard is the driving force behind Matrix and the reason for the company’s continued independent success over the past twenty-seven years. Since its first, modest co-op production at Van Gogh’s Earlobe in 1994, Matrix has expanded its theatrical footprint to include co-productions with MPA, S2M, and independent theatre companies, venues, and touring organisations. However, the company has not grown beyond the partnership initially formed between Futcher and Howard, and its

operating income is derived from ancillary activities such as acting classes and school workshops, as well as from external sources such as Futcher's and Howard's freelance work and project grants from AQ and the AC.

Although the couple's original intention of forming a permanent theatre company has never come to fruition, Futcher and Howard have worked across multiple sectors in a freelance capacity, separately and together as needed, giving them the time to properly develop projects for Matrix. Futcher identifies the development of new work as Matrix's biggest achievement and the heart of its success. This has given voice to stories that need to be told and enabled actors and audiences to connect with those stories. As a result, Matrix has built "lifelong relationships with people" and made "those deep artistic connections and personal connections through a production":

I really believe strongly about really trying to create product which is grown here and stuff. Create something like A Beautiful Life or, you know, to a lesser extent, The Kursk where, you know, you can actually nurture a product here that can go anywhere. And for me it's always going to be. I don't care if we just do one show every two years. To me the line is still there, and it will always be there. Even if we were not the most prolific company, but we're not, our interest really isn't in any longer becoming a company which could be subsidised or anything like that. It's just to be an expression of what we want to work on. That's it. I mean, it's not very grand, but we hope that if we can create projects that are important and of interest to people, they'll attract the sort of, the producing interests that will be able to employ people, you know, which is also important to me.

Through this creative partnership, Howard and Futcher have the freedom to initiate, write, and develop projects that are close to their hearts and attract like-minded artists and producers with whom they most want to work. The risk of producing projects is mitigated by the long-tail aspect that eventually pays a dividend; where projects that might have taken several years and several rounds of funding to develop are put into the company's repertoire and remounted for touring when required. Touring shows such as *A Beautiful Life* and *The Kursk* has developed a strong national following for the company's work, which has enabled further consolidation of its cultural capital.

5.4. Case Study 3: Red Stitch Actors' Theatre

Overview

Established in 2002 and based in Melbourne's St Kilda East, Red Stitch Actors' Theatre (Red Stitch) started as a co-operative (co-op) venture between a group of fifteen actors and has evolved over the past eighteen years to become an established, venue-based "actors' ensemble co-operative which performs contemporary Australian plays and award-winning new writing from around the world" (Red Stitch 2023). Positioned as an alternative to MPA theatre companies such as Malthouse and Melbourne Theatre Company (MTC), Red Stitch has been "lauded for its innovative productions and as a springboard to bigger things for many of its alumni", staging an average of eight productions per year, with an annual audience of up to twenty thousand people (Cuthbertson 2018). The company defines its purpose as advancing "the vitality of theatre in Australia by nurturing artists and promoting integrity in our craft" (Red Stitch 2023).

Organisational Structure

Red Stitch was registered in 2004 as a not-for-profit Australian Public Company limited by guarantee under the name Red Stitch Actors' Theatre Limited with the ASIC; at this time the company was also registered for GST (ASIC 2018). In 2012, Red Stitch was listed as a charity with DGR status by the ACNC and has produced public annual reports since 2014 (ACNC 2023). The Red Stitch Actors' Theatre Limited Constitution (2018, p. 3) states that the company's chief purpose is "to develop and produce professional contemporary theatre that contributes to vitality of the art of theatre using the unique artist-led model". Its principal aims include the promotion of "Australian theatre culture through outstanding new work of uncompromising standard", the increasing of artist wages "to ensure greater sustainability for the organisation" and "the continuation of key initiatives, including the creation of new Australian plays of the highest standard" (ibid). In 2019, Red Stitch had an FTE staff of 5,

which included a core staff of four full-time, one part-time, and four casual employees and thirty voluntary staff members (ACNC 2023). Key production staff included Ella Caldwell, Artistic Director; Fiona Symonds, General Manager; Greg Clarke, Production Manager; Tayla Gane, Production Assistant; Angelica Clunes, Development Manager; Anne Henderson, Finance Manager; and Hannah Bullen and Penelope Thomson, Front-of-House Managers (ibid). Red Stitch staged approximately 279 performances in 2019 and employed 193 artists and arts workers (ibid). The company's Board of Directors included Anthony Adair, Ella Caldwell, Catherine Cardinet, Humphrey Clegg, Sieglind D'Arcy, Sophia Hall, Damon Healey, Tim Jacobs, Michael Rich, Nic Thomas, and David Whiteley (ibid).

Audience Relationship

From a marketing perspective, Red Stitch has an official website (www.redstitch.net), which provides a detailed history of the company and outlines its various activities, including the INK playwriting program, Graduate Program, and Kindred fundraising program. The website also includes an overview of their performance venues and encourages public interaction via a free subscription to a monthly e-newsletter and social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram (Red Stitch 2023), and a Vimeo channel, which give the audience insights into upcoming productions and behind-the-scenes content (Red Stitch 2020).

Patrons can purchase single tickets as well as subscription packages in the annual Red Stitch season which offer benefits such as savings and flexibility to patrons (Red Stitch 2023). Through the *Random Acts of Theatre* program, patrons are also encouraged to purchase an annual (\$180) or bi-annual (\$95) subscription for a “young theatre enthusiast” to “build new audiences and make theatre more accessible” as well as “give someone a life-changing experience” (ibid). Additionally, Red Stitch gathers financial support through the Kindred program, a gift-giving associate membership which encourages tax deductible donations from \$1,000 to over \$50,000 (Red Stitch 2023).

Financial Position

According to its 2019 Annual Report (ACNC 2023), Red Stitch’s activities are funded through a combination of state, and local government annual and project funding; box office, bar, and merchandise income; and donations, fundraising, and philanthropic income. For the reporting period 1 January to 31 December 2019, Red Stitch declared an income of \$999,710, attributing 60.92 per cent (\$609,066) of this to the sale of goods and services; 39.08 per cent (\$390,644) to donations, fundraising and philanthropic income, and government grants from Creative Victoria and other local government funding such as the Port Phillip City Council (Port Phillip) (ibid). When I interviewed Caldwell, Red Stitch was not receiving ongoing funding from the AC, although the company was previously a key organisation (KO) and had been awarded \$80,000 on an annual basis over an eight-year period between 2008 and 2016 (ACNC 2023). This funding was rescinded in 2016, when Red Stitch was unsuccessful in securing a place in the new four-year funded organisations (FYFO) model, primarily as a result of Black Friday (see Chapter One). In response to its funding shortfall, Red Stitch initiated the Kindred program in 2016 to fill the void left by the AC funding, thereby giving Red Stitch a stronger financial position to work from whilst enabling a different approach to audience development.

Creative Approach

Red Stitch is led by its resident ensemble of twenty-seven actors and creatives, and supported by a “small, dedicated staff and board” (ACNC 2023). The ensemble works collaboratively to choose the different plays and projects, with Caldwell acting “as a voice or guide more than an authoritative presence” (Simons 2013). The company offers eight productions annually as two four-play seasons and enjoys a reputation of “presenting bold

theatre produced with raw integrity” across two theatre venues²⁷ (Red Stitch 2023). The company’s commitment “to produce the best in contemporary playwriting from around the world” has allowed Red Stitch to market itself as an alternative to Melbourne’s mainstream theatre companies (ibid). The plays the company produces range from what it claims is “exceptional new writing from around the world” as well as Australian plays that are developed by the company as part of the INK playwriting program. INK is a bespoke play development program launched in 2015 “with a strong commitment to production outcomes”, which evolved out of the Red Stitch Writers program that was started in 2007 to encourage “a meaningful engagement with Australian playwrights” (Red Stitch 2023). INK offers playwrights an opportunity “to have an ongoing relationship with other artists alongside the resources, structure and support of a program that is flexible and personal enough to accommodate each writer’s strengths and needs” (ibid).

Since 2014, Red Stitch has produced PLAYList, a site-specific, one-day-only mini-festival of “bite-sized plays” or playlets, inspired by love songs played by local musicians, written by Australian playwrights, and performed by actors from the ensemble in various locations around Melbourne (Red Stitch 2023). The purpose of this hybrid event is to expand the community of Red Stitch and fundraise, with proceeds going towards Red Stitch “to help the company maintain their quality of work and increase artist wages for everyone involved in the theatre they create” (ibid). Further artist development is offered through the Graduate Program, which was established in 2008, and is “designed to guide and enrich the transition from training institutions by providing a professional platform for artists to work in the industry” (ibid). Red Stitch invites graduates from acting and performance courses to audition each year and selects two people to join the company as full ensemble members for the following year (ibid). Additionally, Red Stitch has remounted and toured its productions, developing partnerships with major venues and arts organisations such as Queensland Theatre (QT), QPAC, Critical Stages, Regional Arts Victoria, Performing Lines,

²⁷ The original eighty-one-seat venue nominated as Red Stitch St Kilda (or Red Stitch @ Home), located behind All Saints’ Church St Kilda East on Chapel Street and the newly launched Red Stitch @ South Yarra, a one hundred and twenty-seat venue located behind St Martin’s Church in Cromwell Rd, South Yarra (Red Stitch 2023).

The Arts Centre (Victoria), the Melbourne Festival, the Darwin Festival, and the Brisbane Festival (ibid).

Origins

According to Caldwell, Red Stitch was the “brainchild”²⁸ of Melbourne-based actor Vincent Miller, who returned to Australia in 2001 after living in London, where he became inspired by the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs and the American actors’ ensemble Steppenwolf Theatre Company. According to founding member and Red Stitch’s second Artistic Director David Whiteley (cited in Fairfax 2004, p. 9), Miller recognised a gap in the Melbourne theatre field which gave him the idea for a new theatre company:

He could see that there was a place for an ensemble doing some of the good, new plays which weren’t being done by other companies around town. Plays that were strongly written and not afraid of naturalism, that had an excellence of craft and could be produced with a minimum of set and props with the concentration on good writing and up-close acting.

The auditions for Miller’s actors’ co-op group attracted “hundreds of people” for the fifteen places being offered in the company. As a creative arts student from Melbourne University and the youngest of the group, Caldwell found herself vying for a spot in the Company alongside Whiteley and other actors such as Brett Cousins, Verity Charlton, and Kate Cole (Red Stitch 2023). In addition to proving acting skills, Caldwell recalls that the auditions were focused on the collective “working together and collaborative kind of learning” with potential members demonstrating their capacity to skill-share and work together as an ensemble; an ability that was to become an important part of Red Stitch’s future success.

²⁸ Unless otherwise cited, all comments attributed to current Artistic Director Ella Caldwell in this case study are derived from the interview I conducted with her at the Leaf Lane café in South Yarra, Melbourne on 30 April 2019.

In 2002, the yet to be named company became an ensemble of twelve actors, working on a profit-share basis in a tiny black box venue at 80 Inkerman Street, St Kilda, a warehouse that Miller had leased to live in and use for company performances (Safe 2002). Miller had renovated several other warehouses in London and sublet them, using the income from that endeavour to set up and fund this one in terms of space and equipment (Perkin 2007). The intimate venue was modelled on the “bare bones” thrust stage of London’s Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs and seated approximately 40 people (ibid). Caldwell recalls that once the ensemble was selected, the collective was “head down, bum up”, reading scripts and renovating the Inkerman Street warehouse, where the company would be based until 2003. Whiteley (cited in Fairfax 2004, p. 9) notes that when the group formed, they “threw around a few names but we wanted to steer clear of anything that sounded like a typical actors’ collective, anything too worthy or wordy”. However, Miller had already decided upon the name Red Stitch and “furthermore that it would be Red Stitch Actors’ Theatre as it was to be the actors calling the shots and running the place” (ibid).

Artist-Led

The initial Red Stitch company structure was similar to that of earlier influential theatre companies from the 1960s such as Nimrod and the APG, and comparisons were also drawn between Red Stitch and fellow Melbourne-based Emerald Hill Theatre Company (Fairfax 2004), whose work was “based on an ensemble with a core group of regularly appearing actors” (Milne 2004, p. 112) with a focus on European, American, and English plays. Caldwell recalls that the idea behind this initiative was “about starting a company that was artist-driven”, which for her was “about being proactive ... making work that we believed in”. The ensemble engaged in the play selection process together with new, “cutting edge” international works that had not been produced in Australia, which the actors were “inspired by, excited, could sink their teeth into”. The ensemble chose the work collectively through “quite a rigorous process” and the selection of material was driven by plays “that the actors

were passionate about” in terms of “exceptional writing” rather than commercial concerns or as a vehicle to “showcase” particular actors.

Although the actors were engaged to work with the company according to a co-op profit-share model, Miller’s end goal for the company was entrepreneurial. His vision for Red Stitch was to have a “financially viable company” by the end of three years with actors “paid to work as part of a fully functioning theatre company” (Miller, cited in Safe 2002). To maximise profit, the ensemble did everything from cleaning, taking bookings, publicising the shows, selling and collecting tickets, and staffing the bar, as well as performing (Fairfax 2004). As Red Stitch’s first Artistic Director, Miller set an ambitious goal of producing twelve plays in twelve months in the inaugural season, each with a four-week season (Red Stitch 2023). The season showcased the actors and garnered glowing reviews from the press, whilst exposing Melbourne audiences to myriad new international plays in a short time frame. Delivering the season also taught the ensemble about the rigours of running a theatre company themselves. Whiteley (cited in Fairfax 2004) noted at the time that the twelve-play season was “a lot” and proved difficult in terms of making time for performance work “when you take into consideration that the actors also do everything else”.

Although critically successful, the press reported that the first few productions ran at a loss (Safe, 2002). Red Stitch eventually made a small profit, but the ensemble members were only earning around \$200 each per month, which was mainly due to the size of the seating capacity in the performance space (Roberts 2003). By the end of 2002, the Inkerman Street warehouse space became untenable due to Port Phillip’s concerns about its use as a theatre (ibid). In January 2003, Red Stitch moved from Inkerman Street to what is now the company’s main performance space: an eighty-one-seat theatre behind the All-Saints Anglican Church in Chapel Street, St Kilda. The following year, Red Stitch offered a ten-play season in the Chapel Street space rather than twelve (AusStage 2020). According to Caldwell, this was necessary to balance the other work the company needed to do in between performing, which included the conversion and fit-out of its new performance space.

She recalls that, at the time, Playbox Theatre Company was forging ahead with a focus on developing new Australian works, so Red Stitch found its niche in the market with its selection of “new international works by these playwrights that really suited intimate spaces”. This informed the company’s style and became the point of difference between Red Stitch and its mainstream competitors. The move to a larger space accommodated the intimate types of plays the company wanted to perform but also introduced the company to a much wider audience and enabled Red Stitch to become embedded in the St Kilda community, further growing its reputation whilst working towards a more sustainable model, from both a creative and financial perspective.

Financial Sustainability

Sustainability needed to be at the forefront of the Red Stitch ethos for Miller’s three-year plan to become financially viable to succeed. Miller started three initiatives in the first two years which focused the company on this goal: the bi-annual subscription package, the development of new Australian work, and an annual fundraising activity. Caldwell remembers that Miller had launched the subscription package before Red Stitch had even announced its first full season. She suggests that this was to build on the company’s success with its first production, *Extremities*, attract audience loyalty, and encourage cash flow. Miller then developed a “symbiotic relationship” with The Store Room²⁹ in North Fitzroy, restaging its Inkerman Street production of *Uncle Bob* at the bigger venue in late 2002, and offering a “joint subscription season” in 2003, which “entitled theatregoers to choose between works by any of the involved companies” (Roberts 2003). Miller commented at the time that the initiative was “about cross-pollination of audiences” as well as creating “a united front” between Red Stitch, The Store Room, and other independent companies such as The Hoist, Eleventh Hour, and Ranters, in order to have stronger “seating power” and in the hope that it would “show funding bodies that these companies can really work together” (ibid). The

²⁹ The Store Room was “an independent theatre company and venue” founded in 1999 “which quickly established itself as a significant hub for small-scale, independent theatre in Melbourne” (Piening, 2007).

“unprecedented step” of two independent theatre companies combining forces to offer a dual subscription succeeded in attracting the attention of Arts Victoria³⁰, which supported this partnership in 2004 through its Creative Capacity Plus policy³¹ (Arts Victoria 2003), giving Red Stitch and The Store Room “the chance to consolidate through the joint subscription offer” (Usher 2004).

By 2004, Red Stitch had slimmed down its annual season from ten to eight plays, which matched the season of plays being offered by The Store Room. With the joint subscription offer, patrons could subscribe to attend the seasons of both companies for \$250 (ibid). The initiative assisted the development of audience for Red Stitch and drew further attention to the work of the company, putting it at the forefront of the independent theatre movement which had started to gather momentum in Melbourne during the early 2000s (ibid). This movement was seen to fill the gap between the MTC and the experimental Malthouse (formerly Playbox), with companies like Red Stitch and The Store Room, both Green Room Award winners, exposing audiences to different types of plays whilst enabling the actors performing in their productions to remain in the public focus (ibid).

Sustainability also took the form of audience development and connectedness with the wider arts community. Whilst the development of new Australian work was not at the forefront of Miller’s vision for Red Stitch, it was a local short play competition that enabled the company to connect with the St Kilda community and develop a closer relationship with Australian writers. Supported by Port Phillip, *Red Shorts* was a program of three short, new Australian plays to be performed by Red Stitch actors as part of the 2004 season and the result of an “almost year-long competition” (Roberts 2003). Attracting approximately two hundred entries from established and emerging writers, the winning plays were chosen by six actors from the ensemble, who argued over their personal favourites and looked for stories and

³⁰ Arts Victoria was replaced with Creative Victoria in 2015 which “was established to pursue a more integrated approach to the creative industries, spanning not just the arts and culture but the full spectrum of screen and design industries as well” (Creative Victoria 2020).

³¹ The Creative Capacity Plus policy was introduced by the Victorian Government in 2003 and aimed to “increase engagement with the arts for all Victorians and improve access to diverse cultural experiences” (Arts Victoria, 2003).

characters they would enjoy playing – standard practice for the company (ibid). The purpose of this competition was to unearth Australian writers to develop new work and a professional relationship with the company and connect with the local community. These goals were also pursued in three other programs offered by Red Stitch in the following years: Red Stitch Writers (2006–2013), INK, and the PLAYList Festival (from 2014 onwards), which I will discuss later.

In order to capitalise on growing support from the state and local governments and move the company towards a more professional status within the theatre field, Miller “realised the company needed to be incorporated and have access to a boardroom of expertise if it was to survive” (cited in Perkin 2007). At the beginning of 2004, Miller removed himself from the role of Artistic Director to a position on the newly formed Board of Directors under Chair Anthony Adair, while founding member David Whiteley took over from Miller as Red Stitch’s second Artistic Director. The change in Artistic Director and the appointment of the Board brought about a shift for Red Stitch in terms of operational and administrative responsibilities. Caldwell recalls that it had reached a point where the co-op approach to managing Red Stitch was “not efficient anymore”, because the ensemble were professional actors and directors and their “other skills were fairly hodgepodge”. Once the board was established, some funding was forthcoming from the state and local governments, and a part-time staff member was appointed; the “business side of things” then “become a bit more professional”, although “the artist-driven thing” still remained an essential part of the ensemble’s creative responsibilities.

Professionalism

Being professional for Red Stitch meant streamlining the processes instigated by Miller and taking the company to the next level, which included developing its audience base and securing program funding. Although Red Stitch did not receive government funding for the first seven years and publicly laid claim to independent theatre company status, the company

offered audiences the professional parameters of a dedicated venue, as well as bi-annual subscriptions and an impressive range of new international plays. Additionally, the Chapel Street venue was renovated by the Anglican Church on the proviso that the company would remain there for another ten years, creating a long-term intention on to which audiences latched. Professionalism was also found in the work of the original company of actors, who included Miller, Whiteley, Caldwell, Kate Cole, Verity Charlton, Brett Cousins, and Laura Gordon. Their work for Red Stitch attracted multiple Green Room Awards, leading to external appointments with other theatre companies, as well as ongoing film and television roles. Other actors who joined the ensemble in 2002 included Kat Stewart, Richard Cawthorne, Daniel Frederiksen, and Dion Mills (Red Stitch 2023).

An analysis of media articles and interviews given by Whiteley and Caldwell between 2004 and 2016 about Red Stitch determines that the appointment of two successive Artistic Directors from the founding membership had enabled Miller's original artist-led model for Red Stitch to be preserved. Miller's successors worked together to strengthen the company's position in the field, building upon each Artistic Director's legacy to expand the company's performance work, deepening its connection to its immediate audience as well as the wider Australian theatre and performing arts communities. It was not actually reported how Whiteley was appointed as the next Artistic Director of Red Stitch³², but as a senior ensemble member, the actor was in a good position to reinvigorate the company's vision as it progressed forward. With his appointment in 2004, Whiteley (cited in Fairfax 2004, p. 9) showed no hesitation in publicly stating his intention to move Red Stitch towards a more professional status by applying for program funding with state and federal bodies. However, he also expressed concern that the previous lack of support for the company from these funding bodies was because of its "heavy emphasis on overseas playwrights" within its performance seasons (ibid).

³² There is a suggestion in an article from this time that Miller had left Australia after performing in the June 2004 production *Under the Whaleback* and returned to live in London, and that Whiteley had stepped in (Fairfax 2004).

In that same year, the new Artistic Director of Melbourne's Playbox Theatre Company (Playbox), Michael Kantor, announced that Playbox would be changing its name to Malthouse Theatre and shifted the company's focus away from the development of new Australian work³³ towards a "broader, less text-based theatre" (Burchall 2005). The reaction within the theatre sector that followed this announcement made it clear that there was still a need for a theatre company to continue the Playbox legacy and develop new Australian writers and plays (ibid).³⁴ When Whiteley was questioned about Red Stitch's capability of fulfilling such a role, he commented that the company was "keen to develop projects that involve new writing" (cited in Burchall 2005). At that point, Red Stitch was yet to produce a full-length Australian work and did not have an official development program in place (ibid). The following year, dramaturg and director Sam Strong (cited in Litchfield 2012) approached Whiteley about "creating a writers' residency" with Red Stitch, offering to become dramaturg-in-residence and initially develop and direct the new works for no fee. This residency became known as Red Stitch Writers, which Strong co-managed with Whiteley from 2006–2008.³⁵ The program gave individual playwrights the opportunity to develop a work with Strong and members from the ensemble "in-residence over an 18–24-month period through script workshops, progressive readings and feedback sessions" (Levy-Fenner 2013), the goal being for the company to eventually stage the work. The first project developed through the program was Lachlan Philpott's *Colder* in 2006, although this play did not make it to production with Red Stitch until 2018 (Red Stitch 2023). The second project was Tom Holloway's *Red Sky Morning*, with dramaturgy and direction by Sam Strong, produced by Red Stitch as part of the 2008 season and performed by ensemble members at the Chapel Street venue (Litchfield 2012; Red Stitch 2023).

³³ Under previous Artistic Director Aubrey Mellor, Playbox did "almost nothing but Australian drama in a repertoire formula, primarily depending on world premieres mixed with co-productions or buy-ins – usually from the Sydney Theatre Company or Griffin Theatre Company" (Milne 2004, p. 272).

³⁴ Burchall's (2005) article "Exit, stage right" canvassed practitioners and companies within the Australian theatre field regarding the "abandonment" of Australian play development.

³⁵ Strong left this role to assume the position of Literary Associate with Company B at Belvoir Theatre in Sydney in 2009; the Red Stitch Writers' program continued until 2013, when it was replaced with the current INK program (Litchfield 2013; Red Stitch 2023).

Caldwell recalls that Strong developed *Red Sky Morning* with Holloway over an eighteen-month period through drafting and discussion and would then bring the latest draft to the actors “who were equally involved in the building of the work”. The play won the 2007 RE Ross Trust Playwrights’ Script Development Award and was subsequently funded by Arts Victoria and the AC for development from first draft to the stage (arTour 2019). Alison Croggon, who was on the judging panel for the award, lauded Red Stitch for choosing to develop and produce Holloway’s play, proclaiming it a “courageous bet” that “paid off” (2008). She noted that the work itself was exciting and “as good theatre writing should, attempts to rethink the possibilities of theatre. And, crucially, the commitment of the director, performers and designers to realising this play shines through the production” (ibid). After its 2008 season at the Chapel Street venue, the play and production were nominated in the Theatre Company category rather than in the Independent Theatre Company category for five Green Room Awards (Best Production, Best Direction, Best Ensemble, Best Design, and Best Lighting Design), as well as Best New Writing for the Australian Stage Award, which was won by Holloway. The production of *Red Sky Morning* was selected by the Victorian Arts Centre (later Arts Centre Melbourne) as part of the Full Tilt program³⁶ in 2009, playing at the Fairfax Studio for ten days before travelling to five states as part of Performing Lines’ national tour in 2010 and being nominated for a Helpmann Award for Best Regional Touring Production.

The level of exposure afforded to Red Stitch by the development and production of *Red Sky Morning* through Red Stitch Writers was a watershed moment for the company. This was the first full Australian play developed and produced by Red Stitch as part of its main annual season and was an artistic and financial success. *Red Sky Morning* was followed by Melissa Bubnic’s *Stop. Rewind.* with dramaturgy by Petra Kalive and direction by Anne Browning (2010); and Adam Cass’ *Roam* (2013) with dramaturgy and direction by Gary Abrahams. Both plays were developed by Red Stitch Writers, first produced by Red Stitch, and

³⁶ The Full Tilt program was funded by the VAC and ran from 2007–2011. The program was focused on developing and presenting work by independent artists and ensembles in the Fairfax Studio and The Black Box theatre.

performed by ensemble members at the Chapel Street venue (Litchfield 2012; Red Stitch 2023). Red Stitch Writers added a new dimension to the company's activities, attracting government, industry, and audience attention, which enabled it to develop further professional relationships and expand its professional practice. The process and production elevated Red Stitch from an independent Melbourne theatre company that "had made its name importing the best new international writing" (Strong, cited in Holloway 2011, p. xii) to one that was a potential successor to the Playbox legacy of developing new Australian work. The program became integrated into the company's ongoing activities, with *Stop. Rewind.* and *Roam* also achieving industry award nominations and critical success. Caldwell observes that the time was ripe for Red Stitch to expand its purview and the process of developing new work was a natural fit for the dramaturgical skills the ensemble had acquired by reading and analysing many plays through its annual selection process:

[A] lot of the company were personally quite invigorated by working with writers on local stories. As artists, we're getting a lot out of that. And I also, over the course of my time with Red Stitch, started to see it as really significant in terms of what we are offering to the community.

Red Stitch Writers was supported with grants from the Sidney Myer Fund as well as Port Phillip and funding from the 500 Club, which was Red Stitch's "small giving program". Notably, since 2008, new and classic Australian plays have been featured in the Red Stitch season alongside some of the best new international works (Red Stitch 2023). The success of Red Stitch Writers was compounded by the company securing three-year program funding in 2008 as a KO with the AC and Creative Victoria (Usher 2008). Caldwell notes that this funding and status allowed the company to expand operationally with the appointment of a full-time General Manager. In addition to Red Stitch Writers and ongoing program funding, Whiteley's legacy as Artistic Director of Red Stitch included a stronger subscriber base and the introduction of the Graduate program in 2008. Caldwell explains that the Graduate program enabled Red Stitch to unearth new acting and creative members for the company and expand its scope in terms of industry integration by inviting acting, directing,

and design graduates from affiliated tertiary programs to audition each year. Graduates are exposed to the inner machinations of the company by working on “multiple and diverse productions” as well as being involved in sourcing and developing new material and being “involved in the day-to-day and season-to-season operations of Red Stitch”.

In 2013 Whiteley stepped down as Artistic Director of Red Stitch, and Caldwell was appointed his successor. At the time, Caldwell noted that the process of selection for the next Artistic Director was similar to how the ensemble selected its annual season, and her appointment was the result of a “robust democratic” discussion about the direction of the company, which revealed that the collective was “very committed to our ensemble driven model” (cited in Simons 2013). With her appointment, Caldwell publicly stated that there were two things she wanted to do – further develop new writing and increase the wages of the ensemble – but she was also keen to develop a “stronger engagement with local writers” (ibid). This engagement involved recalibrating Red Stitch Writers into the current INK program as well as the development of PLAYList, an annual opportunity for fundraising, and connecting with the wider Melbourne community, which took its cue from Miller’s original Red Shorts initiative.

The development of the INK program and PLAYList event from Red Stitch Writers saw Caldwell “reaching out” to organisations such as Playwriting Australia and “a lot of people who I knew had experience like, sort of artists in the industry”, such as Tom Healy and Julian Meyrick, to review the company’s processes. She was “interested in learning more and engaging more with people who could help the company do the best version of a writing program” and spent a lot of time with the ensemble “nutting out what the rules around INK could be”, which resulted in an open application process to “unearth writers that we didn’t already know”. Caldwell believes that it is important for Red Stitch to connect with writers in the wider community not only to increase the size and capacity of the company, but also to encourage the professional development of the individual artists. INK’s process is “very writer-centric” and considerate of the collaborative nature of the Red Stitch ensemble

process, and the dramaturg and director are chosen by her after consultation with the writer. Caldwell acknowledges that the process is about developing a relationship with the writer, but it is also about developing relationships with plays that can be later produced by Red Stitch. Whilst INK has retained its focus of working directly with writers to develop new Australian plays, PLAYList is an inaugural fundraising event that reinforces existing relationships between Australian writers and Red Stitch, encouraging the development of a new audience through its unique site-specific and short-lived delivery and its quirky take on creativity (Red Stitch 2023). Caldwell observes that, since 2014, the event has been held at various venues such as Donkey Wheel House, National Theatre in St Kilda, and Bakehouse Studio, commissioning “ten writers to write a short play based on a theme and a song” while the audience travels through the space and attends the performances of their choosing (ibid). The initiative has unearthed potential new plays and development projects for Red Stitch, but it is also “one of the ways of, of really working with new artists, playwrights, directors, actors, musicians”.

Correspondingly, Caldwell uses both of these programs to enable Red Stitch to have a more direct relationship not only with artists but also other Australian arts and theatre companies that develop new work, such as Playwriting Australia and QTC, positioning itself as part of that development chain. She observes that “there are other writing programs that have much more money” which should be “feeding” companies like Red Stitch to develop new work and “to take the risk on emerging artists until they’ve been proven to a degree in front of an audience”. An example of this is *Lamb* by Jane Bodie and Mark Seymour, which was born from the PLAYList initiative but also became part of the INK program and was developed in 2017 and produced by Red Stitch in late 2018. Bodie was a playwright with the INK program and was already working on another project for Red Stitch when Caldwell approached her to write a “playlet” for the festival using a song by Seymour and she was inspired instead to write a full play.

This led to Red Stitch applying to the Ignition program³⁷ with Playwriting Australia and the AC for a full commission, which was received in 2017. After nearly two years of development, the play was successfully produced as part of the Red Stitch 2018 season, directed by Julian Meyrick, with Caldwell and Ian Sinclair as dramaturgs (Red Stitch 2023). Since 2014, INK has enabled the development of eight plays, which Red Stitch has taken through to full production in its main house season; nineteen playwrights – including Caleb Lewis, Tom Holloway, Suzie Miller, Morgan Rose, Michele Lee, Ross Mueller, and Mary Anne Butler – have also developed new work (ibid). Caldwell notes that there has been a “really good success rate” with producing the work being developed through INK and that the ensemble’s relationship with the writers is something she would like to deepen, suggesting that she would “love to be able to work with our playwrights over the course of five years and do three works”.

Independence

Since 2001, Red Stitch has evolved from a co-op profit-share venture into an established theatre company. Despite its success in receiving organisational and project funding from federal, state, and local government bodies and organisations such as Playwriting Australia, Red Stitch remains independent in its approach to practise. For Caldwell, being an independent theatre company means “being able to program as we have ... without any sort of ... anything being prioritised over whether we believe in this work and how much we think we should ... tell that story”. Caldwell suggests that the difference between *independent* theatre and *fringe* theatre is “exposure or quality” and also that there is a “certain degree of resilience associated with independent”. Caldwell notes that fringe and independent theatre are perceived differently by audiences, meaning that while there is not necessarily a “clear line between the two”, the difference might be found in the ongoing presence of a company within a venue. She observes that independent theatre is not “substantially subsidised by

³⁷ Ignition was “a 4-year creative script-development program” funded by the Australia Council and managed by Playwriting Australia working “in partnership with producing companies”, which aimed to “increase the investment, range, ambition, diversity and quality of Australian playwriting, leading to new landmark productions” (PWA 2019).

one source” whereas *subsidised* theatre receives “some form of government funding” as well as corporate sponsorship.

While Red Stitch embraces the idea of being an independent theatre company, Caldwell admits that the company is also subsidised, but notes that “it’s important that we’re not overly subsidised by one stream other than box office, so that we can continue to make the work that we want to make”. Making work independently and giving ownership of the creative process to the ensemble members is integral to how Red Stitch operates. Unlike other independent theatre companies, where actors and creatives might be engaged ad hoc for certain projects or on short-term contracts, members of the Red Stitch ensemble are full members of the company. In accordance with the Red Stitch Constitution (2014, p.7), they have voting rights regarding the artistic direction of the company and must “pay an annual subscription fee as prescribed by the Board from time to time”. Caldwell explains that the company does not have “someone who’s separate from the decision-making process” in terms of programming and artists are still engaged at all operational and decision-making levels so that the power remains in the hands of the artist group.

With each new Artistic Director appointment, Red Stitch has expanded upon its previous creative activities, but the artist-led approach has always remained central to its philosophy. Although it could be construed that the three Artistic Directors – Miller, Whiteley, and Caldwell – have functioned in the role of creative producer for Red Stitch over the years, Caldwell is quick to point out that the members of the ensemble are all creative producers, which they have become out of necessity, taking responsibility “for facilitating and supporting the work, not only for ourselves, but for the other artists that we employ”. As Artistic Director, Caldwell works in support of this rigour and facilitates a way of working that enables artists to offer their perspectives on the work at hand and “not only challenge ourselves, but also to offer constructive criticism”.

Caldwell acknowledges that her role as Artistic Director involves sourcing work and developing relationships with playwrights for INK, but rather than curating the performance season alone or with a small team of executives, she engages in a “consultative process” with the ensemble, encouraging them to “read a lot of plays and then we talk about them”. As the company received funding from the federal and state governments and its fundraising and box office revenue became more tangible, Red Stitch was able to appoint additional key staff such as a full-time Production Manager and Front-of-House Manager as well as a part-time Development Manager to take care of the major aspects of the company’s operations.

Operating within a semi-traditional arts administration hierarchy meant making modifications to the artist-driven focus of the company, which would allow the members to contribute to an aspect of operations to which they were attuned, but also be free to operate both inside and outside of Red Stitch as professional actors. Caldwell observes that ensemble members still “work in different departments voluntarily” but that decision making is dependent on the member’s ability to be present and active at the time, and flexibility is key to this. Unlike other independent theatre companies, Red Stitch does not rehearse part-time, but has “five-week full-time rehearsal periods” as if they “were being paid professional wages at a major company”. The ensemble makes this commitment to time as part of its personal investment in the enterprise with the understanding and agreement that there is a certain level of flexibility within the rehearsal schedule to accommodate other work as it arises.

Being known as an independent theatre company that is passionate about the plays it produces has benefited Red Stitch, but it has also created some confusion for audiences, particularly around the issue of wages. There is a misconception that the company is subsidised at the same level as the MPA companies and that all performers and creatives are paid at award minimum.³⁸ Caldwell offers that the confusion about the status of Red

³⁸ See footnotes in previous case study for Darlinghurst Theatre Company.

Stitch stemmed from “the fact that we have a subscription season, or we have a venue, meaning that we’re not independent”.

Caldwell admits that the company’s KO position with the AC also elevated the status of Red Stitch from an independent theatre company to a subsidised theatre company in the eyes of the Australian theatre field. This, along with the numerous Green Room Awards given under “Theatre Company” instead of the “Independent” section, compounded this confusion for audiences, who presumed that Red Stitch was being funded along the same lines as Melbourne’s MPA companies. Correcting these assumptions was a concern for Caldwell, who did not want to lose any of the professional status or reputation gained by Red Stitch over the years. However, she realised that in order to improve the Company’s financial status it was important that people knew the truth.

In line with Caldwell’s goal to strengthen the wage structure offered by Red Stitch, she took steps to communicate this message effectively by engaging a publicist. For the company’s fifteenth-birthday celebrations, Caldwell launched a PR campaign around the fact that Red Stitch would no longer be funded by the Federal Government as a KO and that the ensemble was effectively earning a stipend instead of a full wage when it worked creatively for the company. Towards this end, a new venture was undertaken by Caldwell in the form of the Kindred program, a philanthropic giving program built upon Whiteley’s 500 Club that was essentially designed to supplement the wages of the ensemble and fill the hole left by the lack of KO funding. Caldwell used Kindred to publicly talk about the “less than minimum wages”³⁹ earned by the Red Stitch ensemble, but also as a jumping-off point to raise more funds for the company when this government funding was not continued. At first, Caldwell found it “personally really challenging” to talk about the company’s lack of funds with patrons and subscribers and asking for money proved difficult for her as an artist. She admits she was “terrified” to take this direction, not only for herself but for the company’s reputation:

³⁹ In 2016, the rate for ensemble members was “\$2000 for 10 weeks’ work, comprising a show’s rehearsal period and its run in the theatre”. The creative team, including the director and designers, received the same fee (Westwood 2016).

[I]t's a dirty thing to admit that you're not earning professional money, right? If you're a professional artist, a lot of people don't understand that you can be a professional artist and not make a living from what you do. [Y]ou're selling your work, which I believed in very much, but it's not an area that I'm personally comfortable in ... I found those conversations challenging. But what enabled me to do them was how much I wanted to earn more money for the artists that we work with. ... How much I thought it was important that those artists' work is valued and how much I believe in the work that we're doing.

Caldwell reveals that although Red Stitch has a base of “approximately four hundred subscribers”, which provides the company with a consistent level of annual income, focusing Kindred on this cause helped raise further funds. She acknowledges that Kindred has also enabled her to “get to know people and kind of have quite frank conversations”. Caldwell notes that since becoming Artistic Director she has “increased artist wages by three hundred per cent” but admits that despite the fundraising efforts of Kindred and box-office revenue, the actors are still not paid at award rates and are still subsidising the creative practice of the company. She herself was only awarded a “proper wage” after being in the Artistic Director role for a couple of years and being paid for two days a week, which was not feasible if the company were to move towards creative and financial sustainability. Now she is paid for four days even though she is “obviously still working much more than that”.

Conclusion

Red Stitch started life as an artist-led actors' theatre initiative designed to showcase the work of the actors' ensemble whilst producing text-based international scripts. Driven by the entrepreneurial ambition of its founder and first Artistic Director, Vincent Miller, this initiative was quick to establish its connection to the local area of St Kilda East and other like-minded independent Melbourne theatre companies, secure a permanent venue, and establish a reputation for actor-driven, intimate work. Over a period of seventeen years, Red Stitch has embraced the co-op structure introduced by Miller, instilling a collaborative ethos that

encourages creative and administrative equity amongst the acting ensemble. Moving away from its original profit-share approach, Red Stitch has retained an artist-led model where the Artistic Director and ensemble function as the creative producers, whilst incorporating a professional arts administration team.

Under subsequent Artistic Directors David Whiteley and Ella Caldwell, Red Stitch has continued to deliver artist-led, intimate, actor-driven subscription seasons but, to fill the gap left by the demise of Melbourne's Playbox Theatre Company, the company's activities have been expanded, with the introduction of three new writing programs, along with a graduate program and two gift-giving programs, guided by the advice of a Board of Directors and other industry experts. These programs have encompassed the development and production of new Australian plays and enabled Red Stitch to form integral relationships with writers, musicians, and the wider Melbourne community, as well as partnerships with other theatre companies, venues, and arts organisations across Australia.

The company is working on a new strategic plan which is not public, as Red Stitch was re-applying for four-year funding with the AC at the time our interview was conducted. However, Caldwell reveals that this exercise prompted the company to think about what it wanted to be doing over the next five years and how it would consolidate its practice so far. Whatever the future holds for the company, Caldwell sees Red Stitch as being valuable to the ecological structure of the field and a platform for the development of new work, emerging artists and creative skills and "a creative sort of hub where people can continue to investigate their practice and can take risks".

CHAPTER SIX: After Creative Industries (2008–2013)

6.1. Case Study 4: Elbow Room Productions

Overview

Based in Melbourne, Elbow Room (ER) started in 2008 as an artistic collective between four creative friends from Brisbane and has since evolved into a creative partnership between Co-Artistic Directors Emily Tomlins and Marcel Dorney, and Creative Producer Samantha Butterworth around the idea of “collaboration and questioning” (ER 2023a). At the time of my interview with Tomlins and Butterworth, ER had produced thirteen works, eleven of which were original. Just over ten years into its establishment, the company has garnered critical acclaim for its productions and gained a reputation for “intellectual and artistic integrity” (ibid). Critically, ER is “recognised for their distinctive combination of intellectual curiosity and performative wit” (Chandler 2015) and the company’s work has been described by reviewers as “linguistic or sonic rather than visual”, harnessing “a powerful command of language, both verbal and written, but also toying with the grammar of theatre itself” (Bailey 2018).

ER has toured Australia, co-presenting with Melbourne Theatre Company (MTC), Brisbane Powerhouse, La Boîte Theatre Company (La Boîte), HotHouse Theatre (HotHouse), Carriageworks, Theatre Works, Brisbane Festival, Junction Arts Festival, and the Melbourne, Adelaide, and Sydney Fringe Festivals. Consequently, the company has received seven awards and sixteen nominations from Melbourne Fringe, the Green Room Awards, and the Matilda Awards, and was one of five independent theatre companies chosen by the MTC to produce and perform *We Get It* in 2015 for the third annual NEON Festival of Independent Theatre (ER 2023a).

Organisational Structure

ER formalised its structure as a not-for-profit incorporated association and registered the name Elbow Room Theatre Incorporated in 2016 with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC 2018). ER is registered for goods and services tax (GST) but is not registered as a charity, so the company does not appear on the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) register and does not produce an annual company report that is publicly accessible (ibid). At the time the second interview was conducted, ER's formal staffing structure included: Emily Tomlins (Co-Artistic Director), Marcel Dorney (Co-Artistic Director), and Samantha Butterworth (Creative Producer). According to Dorney⁴⁰, ER is guided by a Board of Directors which previously included Esther Anatolitis (former CEO of Melbourne Fringe Festival and former Executive Director of the National Association of the Visual Arts) and Gail Southwell (formerly of Polyglot Theatre), and which currently includes Erin Milne (Bureau of Works) as Chair, Ian Pidd (Back to Back Theatre, Polyglot Theatre) as Deputy Chair, along with Emily Atkins (Drama Victoria), Tahlia Azaria (Circus Oz), Dean Cartmel (performer), and Rupert Burns (solicitor). Dorney notes that the Board acts in an advisory capacity and is "fairly hands off" but that "under Erin's leadership they are becoming more managerial" due to Milne's experience as a producer.

Audience Relationship

From a marketing perspective, ER has an official website (www.elbowroomproductions.com), which provides a short overview of the company's vision, mission, and history with regard to productions, partnerships, and awards, and outlines current productions and works in development (ER 2023a). While the website details the biographies of Dorney, Tomlins, and Butterworth as the creative team behind ER, the members of the Board of Directors are not listed. The website encourages public interaction through social media (Facebook, Twitter,

⁴⁰ Unless otherwise cited, all comments attributed to Dorney in this case study are derived from the interview I conducted with him at Trotters Bistro in Carlton, Melbourne on 27 June 2018.

LinkedIn) as well as via direct email, with the Facebook page serving as a secondary website to promote individual shows, post critical reviews, and engage the public in dialogue about the work (ER 2023b). The website also has a dedicated donations page, which is linked to the company's fundraising efforts for current productions. ER also has a Vimeo page which is not connected to the website (ER 2018). This platform is used to promote the company's current shows and give audiences behind-the-scenes insight; productions featured are *We Get It*, *Niche*, and *Prehistoric*, in addition to a company showreel that features images from all shows and critics' quotes from the past ten years (ibid).

Financial Position

At the time the interviews were conducted, ER was not receiving ongoing operational funding from the Australia Council (AC), Creative Victoria, or local government. The company operates on a project-by-project basis and production activities are financed through a combination of sporadic federal and state government project funding, Australian Cultural Fund⁴¹ fundraising activities, box office income, commissions, in-kind support, and co-production arrangements with other theatre companies, arts and touring organisations, and venues. Activities undertaken by Dorney, Tomlins, and Butterworth in their respective freelance careers as director/writer, actor/performance-maker, and programmer/producer for other arts companies and organisations generate income for administration costs.

Creative Approach

ER positions itself in the Australian theatre field as a Melbourne-based "contemporary performance ensemble" that develops and creates new work (ACF 2018). ER's mission is "to ask big questions in small spaces" (ER 2023a). The company is "committed to the

⁴¹ The Australian Cultural Fund is a fundraising platform for Australian artists. It is managed by Creative Partnerships Australia and was established by the Australian Government in 2003 to encourage donations to the arts (ACF 2018).

rigorous development of the craft of writing and performance making, in order to test and strengthen the relationship between art and society, and the capacity of that relationship to create change” as well as “creating pathways for early career artists” (ibid). Tomlins confirms that ER is led by the creative team of Dorney, Tomlins, and Butterworth who work collaboratively to determine the “creative vision” of the different projects the company will undertake⁴². Dorney offers that ER acts as “a small, mobile, creative incubator” that “make(s) things, which then are enacted, are brought to an audience through partnerships”. He notes that the work the company has created has been “largely” through partnerships with various theatre companies, venues, and programs “who have some kind of bricks and mortar thing happening”.

The company generates this work one project at a time rather than across an annual season, although these projects may sometimes cross paths due to a remount or tour of an existing production. Dorney points out that the type of theatre ER does is the development and production of “new, original Australian performance works” rather than just adaptations or productions of existing work. The company’s creative approach to making these works encompasses a “collaborative, devising practice” which focuses on “conversations with artists and with members of the community about what their experiences are” as well discussion and workshopping with the performers in the cast.

Origins

ER was established in Melbourne in 2008 as an artistic collective by Dorney and Tomlins with producer, production, and stage manager Neal Harvey and actor Angus Grant. The Brisbane creatives trained at University of Queensland (UQ) but had moved to Melbourne seeking an alternative environment to the Brisbane theatre field. Tomlins notes that the collective was formed to develop ideas and projects together, as a way to create work that

⁴² Unless otherwise cited, all comments attributed to Tomlins and Butterworth are derived from the interview I conducted with them on 1 May 2019 at the Penny Farthing Espresso café in Northcote, Melbourne.

was important to them and to maximise the opportunities that Melbourne's independent theatre scene offered at the time. Dorney is "an award-winning playwright and director" (ER 2023a) who graduated from UQ in 1999 with an Honours in Drama; he is also an actor, music director, and musician (AustLit 2018). Early in his career, he received commissions from La Boîte and Queensland Theatre Company (QT) and funding from AQ to write three works, none of which were produced because "the topics that I chose to concentrate on were ... long shots from a marketing perspective". Conversely, Tomlins had initially studied an Arts degree at UQ in Brisbane between 1993 and 1995, majoring in Drama, English Literature, and Women's Studies, where she "actually learned most of the stuff that I know about making a show and theatre" by joining the university drama society and working in various backstage capacities. After completing an Honours degree in 1998, she worked as an independent artist doing "lots of fringe theatre and independent theatre" whilst working in a retail job and as a private speech teacher (KAM 2018).

Dorney met Tomlins in 1999 when he directed her in his play *Bulldog Front* at UQ; they were friends for about eight years before becoming a couple. She went on to further study at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (Acting) degree in 2003. In her first year out, she worked with La Boîte and QT, before going on to win the 2005 Media Entertainment Arts Alliance /Matilda Award for Best Emerging Artist and becoming a member of the QT Emerging Artist Ensemble in 2006 under Artistic Director Michael Gow (KAM 2019). Tomlins notes that despite the fact that they were both doing well in their respective creative careers, Brisbane had started to feel "small", and the couple were frustrated because "there was just so many voices and stories that weren't being told on those stages". She recalls that the Melbourne field appeared to be broader than that of Brisbane and more accepting of the type of work they wanted to do. The ability to have their own voice and generate work together was another major factor in their move. She explains that it was "time to be inspired by a new place" where "there's kind of more stuff going on in the independent realm, where independent theatre might actually be spoken of as independent theatre and not as fringe theatre". The couple moved to Melbourne together in

May 2007 and for the rest of that year they talked about having a company with Grant and Harvey and then put the wheels in motion. Dorney recalls that they spent late 2007 and 2008 making sure that “one of us saw pretty much everything that we could”; they relied on Grant, who had graduated from Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) in 2001 (KAM 2019), to help them achieve this. This enabled Dorney to understand the Melbourne theatre field as a whole and to realise that the independent sector in Melbourne was not “hermetically sealed from the subsidised sector and vice versa” as he and Tomlins had been led to believe.

Tomlins recalls that she “hit the ground running”, going to meetings with Harvey, talking to people, and approaching different organisations and venues to try and make some work happen for the group and “find where our place was and who could help us right from the beginning”. The collective’s first foray into producing theatre together as ER was *Venus in Furs* at Theatre Works in early 2008, produced by Ben Eltham and presented by Strut & Fret Production House⁴³, with project funding from the Australia Council (AC) and Arts Victoria (AusStage 2020). Harvey wrote the adaptation, Dorney directed, and Grant was a performer in the project, but Tomlins was performing with Bell Shakespeare’s Actors at Work team at the time, so was not directly involved. *Venus in Furs* is not listed as a production on the ER website and Dorney is quick to clarify that this production was really just a “great dry run for me learning how to work with Angus”.

The production that ER recognises as its first creative work is *There*, which was devised and performed by Tomlins and Grant for the Melbourne Fringe in 2008, with Harvey producing and Dorney functioning as an “outside eye”. *There* won the Best Performance Award at the Melbourne Fringe, and as a result, subsequently performed a further season at the 2008 Adelaide Fringe Festival as part of The Garden of Unearthly Delights program (AusStage 2020). Following the success of *There*, Tomlins recalls that ER effectively “did the Fringe

⁴³ Formerly a Brisbane-based production company, Strut & Fret is based in Melbourne and has co-produced the centre piece for the Adelaide Fringe Festival, The Garden of Unearthly Delights, since 2002 (Strut & Fret 2019).

circuit” to showcase this production and two other shows, *A Tiny Chorus* (2009) and *After All This* (2011), building the company’s reputation.

Networking

From 2008 to 2012, ER toured the fringe circuit with these first three productions, making valuable connections with individuals, organisations, and venues. Over this time, Dorney and Tomlins worked intermittently with major performing arts (MPA) and small-to-medium (S2M) theatre companies which furthered their individual creative careers and developed a collaborative network of professional contacts that would extend ER’s creative reach beyond Melbourne. After successful seasons at the 2008 Melbourne and Adelaide Fringe Festivals, *There* was remounted for the 2009 Brisbane Festival, produced by the Brisbane Powerhouse in association with Strut & Fret (AusStage 2020) and was later invited to perform at the inaugural Junction Arts Festival in Launceston in 2011. Tomlins acknowledges that the opportunity to extend the life of *There* beyond the Melbourne Fringe Festival was enabled by the company thinking strategically about its resources, but also by using contacts like Scott Maidment from Strut & Fret, an associate from Brisbane, and “trying to be smart about all of the stuff we were doing” such as paying for their own accommodation, negotiating a free venue with The Garden of Unearthly Delights and brokering “a kind of partnership”.

ER’s second original production, *A Tiny Chorus*, developed several other key contacts. The first was performer Eryn Jean Norvill, with whom Tomlins had worked closely in the Bell Shakespeare Actors at Work team in 2008. Their creative relationship led to the co-development of this two-hander “clown show”, which they performed at the 2009 Melbourne and Adelaide Fringe Festivals, directed by Dorney (AusStage 2020). The second was Jamie Dawson, a director/producer from Brisbane and former QT Artistic Development Manager (2000–2003), who had directed Dorney’s play *Thieves Like Us* for Merrigong Theatre Company in 2008. Appointed as Executive Producer for Sydney’s Carriageworks in 2009, Dawson invited ER to perform a season of *A Tiny Chorus* at the venue, as part of the 2010

Sydney Fringe Festival, which cemented ER's popularity with audiences⁴⁴ and garnered further critical success. Concurrently, Dorney had commenced a Graduate Diploma in Directing at the VCA in 2009, under writer/director Jenny Kemp, where he learned a "beautifully, systematic approach" of working with actors that was "driven by the relationship between the director and the ensemble". This Graduate Diploma turned into a part-time Master's degree where Dorney connected with three other directors – Justine Campbell, Travis Green, and Fiona Hallenan-Barker – and together they travelled to Sydney to co-direct Howard Barker's *The Possibilities* for Sidetrack Theatre in 2010 (Binns 2010, p. 32). This ensemble-based production introduced him to a group of recent acting graduates, including Queensland actor Ray Chong Nee, with whom he would work in later ER productions. Tomlins observes that through his relationship with VCA, Dorney subsequently met and connected with "a whole bunch of really awesome actors just coming out", who became a type of "informal ensemble" for ER. In 2011, ER expanded its offerings from two-handers to larger group projects that would harness the energy of these emerging performers. Tomlins notes that this ensemble was co-operative in the most *fringe* sense of the word:

We couldn't generally pay or do anything for it. It was all about kind of collaboration, and it was always really important for us to build work from the ground up with all of the people who were going to be a part of it so that they had ownership over it. That's always kind of been a really important model to us.

At this time, Harvey left ER to become Creative Producer of the Melbourne Fringe Festival and Dawson took the reins as the company's next Producer. Tomlins recalls that Dawson supported ER's endeavours from Sydney before he moved to Melbourne at the end of 2011 to become Coordinator Arts and Cultural Development for the Greater City of Dandenong. Part of this support included offering ER a creative residency at Carriageworks in mid-2011 to develop its next show, *After All This*. Written and directed by Dorney, *After All This* featured actors Tomlins, Grant, Chong Nee, and recent VCA graduates Tom Dent and Sophie Kelly (ER 2023a). It won Best Performance for the 2011 Melbourne Fringe Festival

⁴⁴ A *Tiny Chorus* won the 2009 Melbourne Fringe Festival's People's Choice Award (ER 2023a).

and two Green Room Awards for Best Independent Ensemble and Best Independent Director before being featured in the Brisbane Festival's 2012 *Under the Radar*⁴⁵ season at the Brisbane Powerhouse. The company's close relationship with newly appointed Creative Producer Harvey enabled ER to negotiate a "special residency" with the Melbourne Fringe Festival in 2012 (ER 2023a) to produce two further works, *As We Mean To Go On* and *Rule of Three*, which were the part of the *After All This* trilogy and also produced by Dawson (Eckersley 2012).

Prior to the development and performance of *As We Mean To Go On* and *Rule of Three*, Tomlins and Dorney were both involved in the Four Larks⁴⁶ production of *The Plague Dances* at Malthouse Theatre (Malthouse) in April 2012. This production was the last of the Residencies⁴⁷ established by Malthouse Artistic Director Michael Kantor (Four Larks, 2019). Financially supported by Malthouse, Daniel and Danielle Besen, and the AC, the production gave Dorney (as the writer) and Tomlins (as a key performer), the chance to be showcased as theatre artists within a MPA sector context for the first time in Melbourne.

Between 2011 and 2012 Tomlins and Dorney continued to engage creatively with MPA and S2M theatre companies. In 2011, Tomlins had starred in *Julius Caesar* for La Boîte (directed by David Berthold) and featured in the Sydney Theatre Company (STC)/La Boîte co-production of *Edward Gant's Amazing Feats of Loneliness* (directed by Sarah Goodes) in Brisbane and Sydney (KAM 2019). Correspondingly, Dorney had maintained a creative association with Jon Halpin, then Associate Director with QT, who had directed his short play *Harriers* as part of Metro Arts' The Independents season in Brisbane in 2007 (AustLit 2018). When Dorney's play *Hypatia* was included in the Playwriting Australia Showcase in Hobart in 2009, Halpin was the director leading the workshop and staged reading of the work (PWA

⁴⁵ Under the Radar was a series of "new theatrical and contemporary performance works" performed over three weeks by "more than 100 independent, experimental and emerging artists" produced by the Brisbane Festival from 2008–2012 under the artistic direction of David Berthold (AusStage 2020).

⁴⁶ Four Larks was a Melbourne-based company focused on "the creative practice of performance-and-music-maker Mat Diafos alongside collaborative space-and-movement-maker Sebastian Peters-Lazaro" who "create original performance works that transmute big ideas into space and song" (Four Larks 2019).

⁴⁷ For the Residencies program, independent companies were commissioned by Malthouse to develop and present their work in the ninety-seat black-box Tower Theatre (Malthouse 2019).

2019). Subsequently, the play was renamed *Fractions* and won the Queensland Premier's Award in 2010–2011, and Halpin directed its inaugural production as the newly appointed Artistic Director of HotHouse in Albury–Wodonga, in a co-production between QT and his new theatre company in 2011–2012 (Scott 2011). Despite having received some commissions from QT early in his career, this was Dorney's first full-length play produced by the company (Purdon, 2010). *Fractions* won the 2011 Matilda Award for Best New Play, and Dorney also won a Matilda Award for "his accomplishment as a playwright" (Matilda Awards 2019).

The first five years of collaborating and networking across five states had laid the groundwork for ER's next phase. Between the varied personal and industry connections of ER's members, the company was able to develop and produce five successful productions for the Melbourne Fringe Festival, three of which were remounted and toured to Adelaide, Brisbane, Sydney, and Launceston. With an established reputation for producing intelligent and interesting work, and critical accolades and awards for ER productions, as well as Dorney and Tomlins individually, the next act was figuring out how to sustain the company, both creatively and financially.

Financial Sustainability

In 2012 the Melbourne field expanded with further opportunities aimed at creative and financial sustainability for independent theatre, drawing the different sectors together. In addition to existing opportunities for independent theatre offered by the Melbourne Fringe Festival, La Mama Theatre, Theatre Works, and Arts House, Malthouse's new Artistic Director Marion Potts inaugurated HELIUM,⁴⁸ a "brand new stand-alone season of works by independent theatre artists" in the Tower Theatre, which would run from June to November

⁴⁸ The HELIUM program offered five independent companies the opportunity to "present their own work in a venue provided, equipped and staffed by Malthouse Theatre" (Malthouse 2013, p. 16).

(Malthouse announces 2012 season, 2019). MTC also announced NEON⁴⁹ would commence in 2013 and invited “five of Melbourne’s top independent companies to stage their work, their way” on the Southbank Theatre stage from May to July (MTC 2019). Darebin Arts also introduced its Speakeasy annual program which aimed to present “contemporary, critical work about our society and the world that we want to live in, providing engaging artistic experiences that question the mainstream and remove barriers” (Darebin Arts 2019).

Taking advantage of these opportunities, ER produced three more works in quick succession. Owing to his other commitments, Jamie Dawson was unable to continue with ER, so actor Dean Cartmel joined the company as a performer and as its next Creative Producer. ER’s sixth new work, *Now More Than Ever*, was presented in May 2013 in association with the Speakeasy program and featured Tomlins, Dent, and Cartmel performing alongside other VCA alumni who had worked on the *After All This* trilogy: Penny Harpham, Laura Maitland, Naomi Rukavina, and Tim Wotherspoon (ER 2023a). Rather than being authored by Dorney, the production was promoted as being co-written by the ensemble with the authorship attributed to ER (ibid).

For its seventh production, ER changed tack, producing an existing work with another independent venue instead of the Melbourne Fringe. *Fewer Emergencies* by Martin Crimp was directed by Dorney, performed by Tomlins, Cartmel, and VCA graduate Edwina Samuels, and designed, scored, and produced by ER (Dorney and Tomlins) in association with *The Owl and the Pussycat* in Richmond⁵⁰ in August 2013. The company was pointed in its marketing of the production, declaring on social media that the play was “the first borrowed material ER have worked with” but “[t]his being ER, though, you can’t expect it to be theatre as usual ...” (ER 2023a). Although the production was not nominated for any

⁴⁹ As a participant in NEON, independent companies were offered curatorial control over their work, free access to MTC’s rehearsal and performance facilities, an upfront fee of \$7,500, and 100 per cent of the box office takings with all ticketing and other data derived from the season to “dramatically expand their own marketing capabilities for the future” (MTC 2019).

⁵⁰ The Owl and the Pussycat changed its name to The Owl and Cat Theatre in 2015. The venue was “dedicated to producing new work, cultivating an inclusive community and accessible career platforms for artists”. (The Owl and Cat 2019).

awards, critical responses to it reflected audience expectations in terms of ER's proven performance style⁵¹.

Finishing the year with its eighth production, ER travelled back to Brisbane to mount a three-week season of *Prehistoric* with the Metro Arts' Season of the Independents⁵² as the final production for that program (Metro Arts 2013). *Prehistoric* was a play by Dorney, originally commissioned by Backbone Youth Arts⁵³ in 2008 that had undergone an initial development with actors Dash Kruck, Carly Rees, Kevin Spink, and Melanie Zanetti. Directed by Dorney, the play was then developed "over several years" with actors Kathryn Marquet, Anthony Standish, Anna Straker, and Steve Toulmin who co-wrote the music with Dorney (ibid). Staged in the intimate space of The Basement at Metro Arts, the 2013 version of *Prehistoric* was essentially a return to Dorney's theatre-making roots but also an opportunity to solidify the ER brand and continue his professional association with Metro Arts. *Prehistoric*'s success not only opened a new door, but it also set up a chain of events that would draw further attention to the work of ER, enabling the company to move away from its position on the fringe and closer to the centre of professional practice in both Melbourne and Brisbane.

Professionalism

According to Tomlins, being an award-winning company brought welcome attention and funding to ER, as well as several major professional opportunities and key personnel, all turning points for the company in the next stage of its development. In 2014, ER remounted its production of *Prehistoric* with a new cast and presented it at The Loft (QUT Kelvin Grove) as part of the Brisbane Festival's Theatre Republic independent theatre program.⁵⁴ After that, it travelled to Melbourne for a further season as part of Darebin Arts' Speakeasy

⁵¹ Woodhead (2013) said, "ER's production of *Fewer Emergencies* is an elegant, polished and luminous little gem that fascinated me from start to finish ... [i]t's independent theatre at its most intimate and piercing. See it", Similarly, Andrew Furhmann in *Time Out* (2013) gave the production four stars (ER 2023a).

⁵² See footnote, p. 168.

⁵³ Backbone Youth Arts, an organisation based in Brisbane "facilitates learning and risk taking, as well as the creation of new and exciting works" (Backbone 2020).

⁵⁴ Theatre Republic replaced Under the Radar as the Brisbane Festival's independent theatre program in 2013 (Brisbane Festival 2019).

program, winning the Best Performance Award at the 2014 Melbourne Fringe Festival, and Best Writing (Independent Theatre) at the 2015 Green Room Awards (ER 2023a). Earlier in 2014, ER had received a commission from HotHouse in Albury–Wodonga, which was still helmed by Jon Halpin. ER was funded to develop, create, and produce *The Motion of Light in Water (Motion)*, one of two HotHouse Productions in Residence.⁵⁵ The play was described as a “queer, sci-fi love story” inspired by the life and work of 1960s American writers Samuel R. Delany and Marilyn Hacker, with in-kind and financial support from Theatre Works and Create Victoria (Theatre Works 2014). According to Tomlins, this was a “big development with a bunch of people” which “made the potential for that show to be a bit bigger”. *Motion* was the first fully funded project undertaken by ER and the first opportunity for the company to engage with a large ensemble of performers and creatives in a financially sustainable way. The cast included Tomlins, previous ensemble members Ray Chong Nee, Tom Dent, and Laura Maitland, and two newcomers to the company, VCA graduate Paul Blenheim and QUT graduate Jacinta Yelland, while the creative team included sound artist The Sweats (MTC’s resident sound designer at the time), award-winning designer Matt Adey (House of Vnholy), and lighting designer Kris Chainey (Northover 2014).

The company spent two weeks in development at the HotHouse residency farmhouse in January, undertaking a further two months of development and rehearsal in Melbourne, before premiering *Motion* in June with a one-week season at HotHouse followed by a further two-week season at Theatre Works in Melbourne in July (Theatre Works 2014). Notably, although *Motion* was written by Dorney, the work is credited on all marketing material as being “developed by ER”. In a media interview with Theatre Works about the development and rehearsal process for *Motion*, Ray Chong Nee (ibid) commented that “[p]art of the reason ER is a respected and acclaimed theatre company is that their process from idea to realisation is inherently collaborative”. The success of the Melbourne season ensured that ER was able to re-mount *Motion* for a return season at Theatre Works in 2015 before

⁵⁵ The HotHouse Production in Residence program “provides independent groups with \$10,000 for creative development plus \$15,000 for a season of the finished work”. Each group has “the opportunity to lodge in the farmhouse, use of a rehearsal room, a technician from HotHouse’s production staff and a week-long bump-in”, provided the work premieres at HotHouse before being shown in a major city season (Gallasch 2014, p. 30).

travelling to Brisbane to perform a three-week season at La Boîte, co-presented by La Boîte Indie⁵⁶ and ER, with support from Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC).

Although *Motion* was not nominated for any awards, the first Melbourne season was widely reviewed⁵⁷ and the production was acclaimed by the media and audiences, putting ER firmly in the spotlight for its larger ensemble works, ambition, and scope. Tomlins recalls that when it was announced in 2014 that MTC's NEON program would finish the following year, she and Dorney felt confident about the company's position in the independent sector and made the decision to contact NEON's producer Martina Murray directly about ER's inclusion in the final festival. Tomlins remarks that NEON offered ER the opportunity to develop a show that she and Dorney had been talking about "for a number of years" about women in the theatre industry and "the limitations on our stages in particularly in our canon for women" and "we wanted to use that opportunity to actually comment on it".

The production was called *We Get It* and was promoted by ER and NEON as turning "gender anxiety on its head in a witty and playful evening that promises to ask only one serious question: 'have there ever been women in theatre?'" (MTC 2019). *We Get It* was developed and produced by ER using the ensemble collaborative approach that had been so successful with previous works, but this time there were external creative collaborators from Brisbane (Tanya Dickson and Daniel Evans) as well as an additional writer (Rachel Perks) working alongside Dorney to bring the collective's ideas into written form. Tomlins (SRPR 2019) later commented that *We Get It* "was the largest production in scale and potential audience" that ER had been involved in. The size of the project was reflected in the twenty-strong group of cast, creatives, collaborators, and crew, which included Cartmel (Producer); Dorney and Tomlins (Co-Directors); Tamiah Bantum, Amy Ingram, Kasia Kaczmarek, Maurial Spearim, Sonya Soares, and Tomlins (Cast/Co-Creators); Matt Adey (Production Designer); Chloe Greaves and Zoe Rouse (Costume Designers); Kris Chainey (Lighting Designer); and Josh

⁵⁶ The La Boîte Indie program was established in 2010 as a platform for independent theatre-makers to use the space when the company was not, supported by financial, marketing, and technical resources in exchange for a percentage of the box office takings (McKee, 2011).

⁵⁷ *Motion* was reviewed by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Daily Review*, *Arts Review*, *Arts Hub*, and *Theatre People*.

Hodge (Sound Design and Composer) (MTC 2019). Tomlins observes that *We Get It* provided ER with the opportunity to feature alongside an elite alumni of notable independent theatre companies, including Fraught Outfit, The Hayloft Project, The Rabble, and Sisters Grimm, and to work with MTC on one of its stages in front of a much larger Melbourne audience and a demographic of “people who came who would never kind of come to a warehouse or a dodgy theatre in the north”. To take advantage of this opportunity and further promote the ER brand to this audience and the media, Tomlins hired publicist Sassy Red PR to manage the campaign, removing its “usual pressure of self-promotion” so that it could focus on creating the work (SRPR 2019). *We Get It* and ER were profiled with extensive coverage in the month leading up to opening night, leading to a sold-out season and glowing reviews from *The Age*, the *Herald Sun* and *The Daily Review* critics (ER 2023a). The performance of *We Get It* also attracted the attention of Samantha Butterworth, a creative producer/programmer working in the Arts Programming team at Darebin City Council, who knew immediately that she wanted to work with ER.

Butterworth graduated in 2008 from a three-year Contemporary Arts undergraduate degree, majoring in Drama and Film and TV Production from Deakin University. The course included an internship with Red Stitch, which led to an administrative job as Box Office Supervisor for four years between 2009 and 2013, and then Operations Manager, which included tour co-ordinating in 2014 (ER 2023a). Butterworth held this senior role for a year but then left Red Stitch to start working as a creative producer, because she felt “very hemmed in, in an administrative capacity”. She managed Showcase Victoria between 2014 and 2015 and was then Artistic Director of the Poppy Seed Festival before taking up her role with Darebin City Council, but she knew that she “wanted to be more intimately involved in, on a project-to-project basis, with art”. When Butterworth saw *We Get It*, she realised that this was the type of work she had been searching for since she had left Red Stitch and “the thing that I really wanted to invest in” and “really believe in ... theatre creating change, social change”.

At this point in the company's development, Dean Cartmel had decided that he no longer wanted the role of Creative Producer, so Butterworth was invited by Dorney and Tomlins to join ER in this capacity. Without pausing to consider how she would work with ER over the long term, Butterworth immediately started the process of developing a tour of *We Get It* to the Brisbane Powerhouse as part of the 2016 Brisbane Festival. Butterworth "didn't really think about long term necessarily what I could do" but she soon realised that "personally we get along really well and also professionally we kind of work in similar ways". *We Get It* received further accolades from the Brisbane media and following the success of the Brisbane Festival tour, Butterworth set about securing ER's legal and financial positioning and working with Dorney and Tomlins to devise a strategy for the company's financial and creative sustainability. Tomlins observes that ER was previously "ad hoc", and had only become an incorporated association in 2016 and formalised an advisory board under Butterworth's direction:

Sam immediately came in and went, okay, I think that you should incorporate, I think we should talk about eventually getting operational funding. I think we should talk about sustainability, which nobody had beforehand because we were just kind of going from project to project ... and so it was this kind of thing of like, all of a sudden having someone go, you know 'What do you want to do in two years' time? What do you want to do in three years' time?'. It really just completely made us a grown-up company.

Since joining ER as Creative Producer, Butterworth has managed the company's legal and financial aspects and has furthered its public engagement by revamping the website and taking control of the social media platforms. She says that creative producing is "a weird thing to define" mainly because it is "dependent on the project and the relationships" but acknowledges that hers is "not a purely administrative role" and that she is "across the idea from the very beginning of the process". Tomlins points out that Butterworth is treated equally as a creative within the ER company structure and the company has now grown from two members to three. She states that Butterworth, Dorney, and herself all share in "the dreaming" for ER, which includes working collaboratively and having the "bigger

conversation that holds the strategy and the partnerships and all of that other stuff”; an aspect which was not previously part of the Producer role undertaken by Harvey, Dawson, or Cartmel.

In addition to the Brisbane Festival tour of *We Get It*, Butterworth has successfully produced *Niche* (2017), ER’s tenth new work and the third for Darebin Arts’ Speakeasy program, directed by Nic Holas, and co-written by and featuring Tomlins and Eryn Jean Norvill; *The Experiments* (2018), two fifty-minute educational touring schools shows about Brecht and Beckett, commissioned by Regional Arts Victoria and written by Dorney; a further re-mount of *Prehistoric* (2018), which included a one-week Melbourne season at the Meat Market and a tour to Summerhall in Edinburgh for a three-week season as part of the city’s Fringe Festival; *Here*, the companion piece to *There*, which was showcased in a double bill at the Melbourne Fringe Festival, featuring Tomlins and Grant (2018); and *What I’m Here For* (2018), an immersive, visual, and aural onsite experience staged with Flowstate at Brisbane’s South Bank, directed by Dorney and featuring Tomlins and Brisbane actor Colin Smith (ER 2023a).

Subsequently, ER’s position in the Australian theatre industry has been solidified by plaudits in the form of placements and endowments for all three company members. In 2016, Dorney was one of ten Australian theatre artists invited by newly appointed Artistic Director Sam Strong to become a member of QT’s National Artistic Team (NAT).⁵⁸ In 2017, Tomlins and Butterworth were invited to participate in MTC’s Women in Theatre program,⁵⁹ Tomlins as a cross-discipline performer and Butterworth as a producer. Later that year, Tomlins was awarded the Sidney Myer Creative Fellowship⁶⁰ for her work as a theatre-maker. The peer-recognised award gave her an unrestricted grant of \$160,000 to be paid over two years and

⁵⁸ The purpose of QT’s NAT was “to develop strong links with artists and companies around the country” and “creating career pathways for artists” (Daily Review 2016).

⁵⁹ MTC’s Women in Theatre program “provides leadership training, practical career advice and coaching across a wide range of business and commercial aspects of the theatre industry, while also offering open access to all facets of the Company” and six-weeks’ employment through a \$5,500 bursary (MTC 2019).

⁶⁰ The two criteria used to select Fellows are: *outstanding talent* and *exceptional courage*. Specifically, this talent and courage relates to the artistic practice of the Fellows (SMFTMF 2019).

the ability to use these funds to develop further projects for ER (SMFTMF 2019). Upon the announcement of the Fellowships, Tomlins (cited in Litson 2017) was quoted in the media release as saying:

It feels more important than ever, right now, for artists to be independent. This doesn't mean 'not responsible' – it means being able to really take up the true responsibility that we have, to reflect and create something that speaks calmly and accurately; taking time and thought, so as to honour the time and thought our audiences give us.

Independence

The importance of being independent theatre artists who are able to generate their own work figured strongly in Dorney and Tomlin's reasoning for moving from Brisbane and basing ER in Melbourne. For Tomlins, the subsidised MPA and S2M stages in Brisbane lacked diversity and "were a lot whiter and straighter and everything else, than even now". They believed the move would enable them to work with other independent artists and engage with a wider creative conversation that was happening on Melbourne's stages. Tomlins equates independent theatre with creative freedom, but acknowledges that "it's really complicated" to define the difference between independent theatre and fringe theatre:

When we were in Brisbane, and at that time I would've called everything fringe, I was actually proud of being on the fringe. Like the fringe felt like the grassroots. But the weird thing about it was also that, particularly in Brisbane, was that being on the fringe was not a sustainable thing. So, the fringe was something that you did to get to the subsidised companies. I think once we were at the subsidised companies, we realised that back there in the fringe was where we had the opportunity to actually do the work that we wanted to do.

Dorney defines subsidised theatre as companies that call themselves "main stage or mainstream" that are relying on "a cultural cache left over from the sixties from a point where

art as a public good was a really important cultural aim". Tomlins suggests that, in a traditional sense, subsidised theatre has too many strings attached while independent theatre is more focused on creating the work rather than "pleasing people" or "fighting with boards about getting bums on seats". Dorney agrees, noting that the difference between the independent and the subsidised sectors is mainly an aesthetic one due to "economic and social positioning". He points out that the most interesting work produced by the independent sector "operates in relation to the mainstream" which "the subsidised sector has made a grab for" through programs such as MTC's NEON and Malthouse's HELIUM festival. When asked about the difference between independent and fringe theatre, Butterworth offers that "the independent world is so complicated and it's such a huge ecology that I kind of don't think about it as fringe at all" and instead positions independent theatre at the heart of the overall theatre industry. She suggests that the characteristics of independent theatre are centred on "ambition and taking risks" as well as social and artistic values around "creating new work and putting it on", which reflects ER's practice.

As noted, Dorney and Tomlins have continued to work both as individuals and together as ER with subsidised theatre companies and venues in Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne. Their ability to partner ER with the subsidised sector, to collaborate with independent artists, and tell stories in their own productions has compounded the company's success and also enabled Dorney and Tomlins to sustain their individual creative careers. Dorney observes that the independent sector "crosses over" with the S2M subsidised sector "frequently and more productively than the sort of higher-end subsidised sector". For him, this enables independent artists to not only make a living but to "attract artistic credibility for the crucial part about survival in independent practice, which is project-specific funding rather than on-going funding". While creative sustainability has taken precedence, financial sustainability is still something to which ER aspires. Tomlins notes that although ER has received some project funding from the AC and Creative Victoria, she and Dorney have not been as proactive as they could have been with operational funding as they "were always pretty bad at asking for that kind of stuff":

[W]hen it comes to selling yourself or going, you know, I deserve this money, or you should give me this position, that's always been much harder for us ... it's about the personal and you pour all of this stuff into your work and then you have to stand up and prove why it should be supported. And that's ... hard and it feels brutal sometimes, you know.

With Butterworth as Creative Producer, *Niche* was co-presented with Darebin Arts Speakeasy and attracted \$15,000 in funding from Creative Victoria and undisclosed amounts of funding from the AC, The Myer Foundation, the Sidney Myer Fund, and the Besen Family Foundation (Darebin Arts 2019; ER 2023a). In addition to receiving funding and in-kind support from government and other arts organisations and venues, ER has successfully used the Australian Cultural Fund to raise just under \$24,000 by public donation for three of its productions, *We Get It*, *Niche*, and *Prehistoric* (ACF 2019). Butterworth notes that funding is also raised through box office income, which usually accounts for 10 per cent of the budget. Any difference is made up by Dorney, Tomlins, and Butterworth from the proceeds of their individual work on other projects in the subsidised and independent sectors. Although they also pay themselves as individuals to work on projects through the funding they raise, the administration costs of running ER as a company are not covered and are therefore donated by the collective in terms of time and money. Butterworth explains that they “set a budget together” and decide which items will be funded and which will be unfunded or “what income sources are available for us”. She notes that “we haven't in the last three years put artists in a position where their fees have not been confirmed”:

So, we take the risk rather than the artists that we're engaging. If the show falls into a deficit scenario, which we haven't had yet, but if that happens, then that goes into our reserves. Elbow Room is an incorporated association with reserves, so that would eat into our reserves before eating into any personal financials.

Dorney confirms that “priority number one” is that ER pays a stipend to actors “in so far as we can”. He believes it is important to “be upfront” with performers about not being able to pay award minimum but also to “enter into a discussion about what kind of value we hope to add to the situation to make it worthwhile”. Dorney recognises that he and Tomlins have been influenced by their individual experiences and relationships with subsidised theatre companies and organisations, in terms of their approach to creative practice and their “respect for people’s time, for their autonomy ... we treat people as collaborators because they are”. Although ongoing funding has been elusive, the level of financial and in-kind support offered to ER through its partnerships with companies such as La Boîte, MTC, and HotHouse has enabled the company to expand its vision into creating works for larger ensembles and to attract a wider audience demographic; they have also given ER a framework from which to develop and produce work with other artists.

In 2019, ER’s major projects were put on hold as Tomlins and Dorney worked with other companies: Tomlins as a performer and Dorney as a resident director with The Good Room’s touring production of *I Want To Know What Love Is* (TGR 2019), while ER was engaged as a project partner for Polyglot’s development of *Copy Cat* (Polyglot 2019). Butterworth points out that this temporary hiatus was also due to the fact that ER is applying for so much funding and building relationships around that, which has amounted to “a funding application every week”. She explains that ER is at a point now where it is “craving some stability” and, as such, recently applied for four-year funding with the AC. This has meant engaging in strategic planning and discussion about what the company will look like in the next five to ten years and developing a plan that would move some of the productions into a higher gear, whilst others would remain at a “shoe-string” level. Butterworth observes that ER also seeks the ability to work together more frequently on a creative level rather than one or two days per week. Four-year funding would enable ER to go from part-time to full-time operations and devote more time to developing the company and the work. Butterworth notes that becoming financially sustainable over the next five years will enable the collective to be able

to plan and work together more often, consolidating their creative relationship without being interrupted by other jobs.

Conclusion

ER started as a theatre co-operative (co-op) under the artistic direction of Dorney and Tomlins and quickly infiltrated the Melbourne scene by finding a gap with text-based theatre that tapped into the zeitgeist and questioned the role and purpose of theatre and its relationship to audience. Collaborating with like-minded performers as storytellers and devisors, the company circumnavigated the echelons of Australia's fringe festival nexus to establish itself as an award-winning independent theatre company. Having gained professional recognition in Brisbane before relocating to Melbourne, Dorney and Tomlins continued to maintain their previous relationships with companies and venues in that location.

For the past ten years, ER has focused on the development of new work, strengthening key relationships with theatre companies in the subsidised sector and collaborating with other independent artists, expanding its creative offerings from two-handers to larger ensemble works. Individually and as ER, Dorney and Tomlins have cultivated a strong level of cultural capital and networked across many companies, organisations, festivals, and venues, leveraging these relationships to produce more than a dozen acclaimed works, establishing a reputation and a professional status with industry and audience members. This reputation has been further elevated by Butterworth as ER's Creative Producer, who has given the company a more strategic foundation by solidifying the business aspects of the company, securing government and public funding and further establishing collaborations and partnerships. With the addition of Butterworth as the third creative company partner, the instigation of an advisory board with Producer Erin Milne as Chair, and the change from a co-op to an incorporated association, the focus of ER has shifted towards a business model that will enable the company to have a permanent venue and for its operations to encompass

the development of other writers and theatre-makers. To achieve this, ER submitted a tender to be company in residence at the Brunswick Mechanics Institute but missed out to the Next Wave Festival. Although ER was unsuccessful, Tomlins reflects that it did make the company “really kind of sit down and think” and “write this whole kind of massive document” which clarified its vision for how it might operate such a space. Tomlins offers that “one of the big things” in the company’s latest four-year plan is “supporting other people to create their work as well” which is something it has been doing “unofficially for a very long time” and collaborate with “this beautiful kind of rich independent community that we have here in Melbourne”.

The rest of ER’s vision and strategy sits with the idea of developing further partnerships as well as “continuing on with this kind of collaboration with local artists on new work that we want to develop as well”. Butterworth points out that ER’s collaborators are “very different” to the company’s partners in that collaboration involves “a conversation about stories and ideas”, while partnerships are selected through “opportunity, what kinds of presents itself and also what we want to do as a company” as well as whether they are aligned with ER’s vision, mission statement, and aims and objectives as a company. ER is focused on the development of creative product rather than financial profit and its sustainability is about developing its own creative niche and being able to produce the work that is important to the company, with this focus now shifting towards securing a permanent venue, training other independent artists, and acting in the capacity of dramaturg and incubator for other independent companies. Dorney proposes that rather than a producing house, ER would provide dramaturgical support, which would enable the company to focus on the development of new work as well as collaborations:

You know, a place where people can actually bump into each other and actually encounter. Trying to sort of open that up to something which is more accessible, than those places usually are. I mean, to combine that with the possibility for rigorous engagement with others ... asking, being around people who can actually sort of, in a supportive framework, ask hard questions.

6.2. Case Study 5: Sport for Jove Theatre Company

Overview

Established in 2009 by actor/director Damien Ryan, Sport for Jove (SFJ) is an independent, NSW-based “repertory theatre company”, which produces a “major touring summer festival of outdoor Shakespeare in Australia, along with theatrical and education-based seasons of classical and new works in Sydney theatre venues” (SFJ 2023a). SFJ is the theatre company behind the long-running Sydney Hills Shakespeare in the Park at Bella Vista Farm Park and the Leura Shakespeare Festival at Everglades House and Gardens (ibid). Additionally, SFJ is a Resident Theatre Company at the Seymour Centre (Seymour) in Sydney and works with this venue as well as Riverside Theatres Parramatta (Riverside) to provide “an interactive Education program to NSW schools” (ibid). The company produced eleven “outdoor” festival seasons and twenty-five “indoor” main stage productions between 2009 and 2019, including nineteen Shakespeare plays, twelve classic plays, and three new Australian works (SFJ 2023a).

Organisational Structure

In 2010, SFJ formalised its organisational status as an Australian Public Company Limited by Guarantee, registering the name Sport for Jove Theatre Company Limited with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC, 2019). The company is registered for GST and appeared on the ACNC register in 2017 as a charity with deductible gift recipient (DGR) status operating in NSW, Queensland, and the ACT (ACNC 2023). At the time of my interview with Ryan, SFJ’s formal staffing structure included the following key personnel: Damien Ryan (Managing Artistic Director and Board Director); Terry Karabelas (Co-Artistic Director and Board Director); Steven Tait (Marketing and Business Development Manager); Bernadette Ryan (Administration and Board Director); Gordon Stalley (Chairperson); Alexandra Grace (Secretary and Board Director); and Susan Strouthos

(Board Director) (ACNC 2023). According to the SFJ Theatre Company Limited Constitution (SFJ, 2010, p. 1) the three main objectives of the company are “to produce and perform theatre in Australia and overseas as opportunities arise; to develop the work of young Australian performing artists; and to contribute to theatre’s place in education in Australia”. SFJ’s Artistic Mission outlines nine key goals for the company, the first of which is its determination “to establish an original, compelling and energetic new theatrical voice in Australia” by testing the boundaries in the production of classical theatre which includes a repertoire of Greek, Shakespeare, and modern classic plays as well as the development and production of new Australian work in Sydney and regional NSW (SFJ 2023a).

Audience Relationship

From a marketing perspective, SFJ has an official website (www.sportforjove.com.au), which outlines the company’s current annual season of works and provides a detailed history of its activities in terms of production history and awards, artistic mission, and philosophy (SFJ 2023a). The site provides details of SFJ’s latest production season, as well as short profiles of the aforementioned key creative staff and board members. Additionally, the website details the company’s educational aims, listing the key activities of live productions, in-school workshops, youth acting workshops, and Shakespeare carnivals; and provides a downloadable education brochure, links to a teacher mailing list, and tickets to the Seymour and Riverside performances. There is also a dedicated donations page which is linked to the company’s fundraising efforts. Notably, an annual subscription package or loyalty program is not on offer to the general public. The website encourages public interaction through links to social media platforms Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube as well as direct email, and an event mailing list and teacher list sign up. The Facebook page promotes individual shows, posts critical reviews, and engages the public with SFJ’s work (SFJ 2023b), while the Instagram (SFJ 2018a) and Twitter (SFJ 2018b) platforms offer competitions, behind-the-scenes insights, and commentary from SFJ and its audience about productions. The YouTube platform showcases production trailers and behind-the-scenes interviews and

rehearsal videos (SFJ 2018c). SFJ also has a Vimeo page (not linked to its website), which houses behind-the-scenes documentaries, promotional videos, and production showreels from 2013 to 2019 (SFJ 2018d). The company's annual activities are promoted to the media via a season launch and directly marketed via email to its public and school databases in August the previous calendar year; this activity is supported by social media campaigns and further email communication to promote individual performance season dates as they approach (SFJ 2023a).

Financial Position

At the time this research was conducted, SFJ was yet to produce an annual financial report that was publicly accessible (ACNC 2023). However, in my interview with him, Ryan noted that the company's education program delivers "an enormous, over \$600,000 a year education program" which is "purely box office driven"⁶¹ and effectively pays the wages of the actors and creative teams involved in delivering it. The budget for the shows is generated through the pre-sale of the program and by November, Ryan has "a fairly clear portrait of what the revenue will be". At the same time, Ryan confirmed that SFJ was not receiving ongoing operational funding or project funding from the AC but had received some project funding from Arts NSW (now Create NSW) and local government. Since 2010, the company's activities have been financed through a combination of this project funding, ongoing financial support from its principal sponsor, Premier Services Group⁶², festival and main stage production box office and education program income, in-kind support, and co-production arrangements with venue partners. According to Ryan, in 2009 the Hills Shire Council provided an initial funding amount of \$5,000 for the establishment of the Sydney Hills Shakespeare in the Park Festival, which was increased to \$70,000 the following year. There is no record of direct funding from this source after 2010, but archival evidence confirms that SFJ is supported by the Council through the provision of Bella Vista Farm for

⁶¹ Unless otherwise cited, all comments made by Artistic Director Damien Ryan in this case study are derived from the interview I conducted with him at the SFJ office and rehearsal space in Surry Hills, Sydney on 13 July 2018.

⁶² Premier Fire under the auspices of Premier Services Group has been a principal sponsor of SFJ since 2011. The amount and frequency of its financial contribution has not been disclosed.

these outdoor performances (THSC 2015). Similarly, the company works in partnership with the National Trust of Australia to perform in the heritage-listed Everglades House and Garden site during the Leura Shakespeare Festival (SFJ 2023a).

Public reports from Arts NSW reflect that, in 2012, SFJ was awarded funding of \$30,000 for the further development of the Leura Shakespeare Festival, Shakespeare in the Botanic Gardens, and The Sydney Hills Shakespeare in the Park programs (Create NSW 2019). This was followed by annual program funding of \$30,000 for the ongoing 2013 program costs of The Leura Shakespeare Festival, The Sydney Hills Shakespeare in the Park, productions at New Theatre and the Seymour, and the in-schools education program (ibid). In 2016, SFJ received \$60,000 of Arts and Cultural Project Funding from Arts NSW for its indoor theatrical season of plays “exploring traditional classical theatre” which included *No End of Blame*, *Hamlet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Macbeth*, *Away*, *Three Sisters*, and *Antigone* (ibid). In 2015, HotHouse in Albury–Wodonga received a grant of \$43,290 from Regional Arts NSW to partner with SFJ to develop and produce a major new Australian musical work by Caleb Lewis titled *The River at the End of the Road*, which was performed in 2018 (Regional Arts NSW 2019). In 2018, SFJ was also successful in receiving a \$10,000 grant from the Seaborn, Broughton and Walford Foundation towards production costs for its 2019 season (SBWF 2019).

Creative Approach

The second goal of SFJ’s Artistic Mission is to be “a repertory theatre company, committed to offering audiences access to the lost tradition of ‘playing in rep’ – an exciting perspective on storytelling and the versatility of the actor’s and designer’s art” (SFJ 2023a). SFJ continues to pursue this goal by producing two seasons of work on an annual basis: the outdoor Summer Season, and the indoor Education Season, both performed by an ensemble of actors who feature across different productions within the same season. The Summer Season offers public seasons of at least two plays in repertoire and runs as The

Sydney Hills Shakespeare in the Park festival at Bella Vista Farm in December and as the Leura Shakespeare Festival at Everglades House and Garden in January each year, supported by the Hills Shire Council and National Trust of Australia respectively. Through its Education Season program, SFJ partners with students and teachers across NSW and the ACT, providing a “live experience” (SFJ 2023a). The program includes three to four full live productions of Shakespeare’s plays, as well as in-school workshops, HSC symposiums, and an annual primary and secondary Shakespeare Carnival.

Origins

SFJ was founded by Ryan out of a passion to develop new spaces to perform Shakespeare and to build new audiences to appreciate Shakespeare’s language. In the SFJ Philosophy and Practice statement, Ryan outlines that SFJ’s dream is “of a theatre experience that is richly physical, painstakingly rigorous in its control and understanding of text and ensemble-based in its storytelling notes” (SFJ 2023a). At the time of our interview, Ryan had been a theatre practitioner for twenty-four years, and in addition to his work with SFJ, had worked professionally as an actor and director with MPA companies such as Bell Shakespeare, STC, and Belvoir, as well as a director, writer, and teacher in the education sector at secondary and tertiary levels (ibid). Brought up in a family of writers, Ryan trained and worked as a journalist during the early 1990s. With a mother who was a Shakespeare scholar, Ryan was familiar with Shakespeare’s plays “in an academic sense” but had “never thought of them as in the theatre”. Growing up in “a tough school in Mt Druitt”, he had never attended a play or a Shakespeare performance before he “literally fell” into becoming an actor at the age of twenty-two, when he was cast as Lysander in an amateur production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

In 1995, Ryan gave up journalism to become a member of Nomad Repertory Theatre (Nomad), a NSW-based touring company modelled on the English repertory theatre tradition which “travelled absolutely everywhere”, performing twelve different plays per year based

on the secondary education curriculum. Over the two-and-a-half years he was employed with Nomad, Ryan learned about acting on the job, performing in “everything from classical works through to contemporary Australian adaptations of novels for schools”; a process that he compares to the “old school drama training” of an apprenticeship and an experience that gave him his love for the ensemble approach. Ryan also notes that Nomad gave him an understanding of “how to communicate with schools and the kind of product that they might be after”. With his love of storytelling and writing, Ryan was initially drawn to “Shakespeare as a writer” which quickly “bloomed into a love of Shakespeare as a theatrical idea”. Ryan did not train formally as a director and admits that he learned the process “from watching other directors, obviously close up in the room”, but was also inspired by the words of British theatre director Tyrone Guthrie, who was the first Artistic Director of the Stratford Festival in Ontario, Canada, to start directing his own productions:

I almost remember this quote to this day ... he just said ‘If you want to be a director, there’s no other way. Get a group of people stupid enough to be directed by you, into a room and put a play on’. I remember reading that and going ‘yes, that’s what I’m going to do’. I took Love’s Labour’s Lost and hired a theatre, and we built a production and just kept going.

Ryan furthered his Shakespeare education during his fifteen-year working relationship with Bell Shakespeare (AusStage 2020). As an actor, Ryan performed and toured with Bell Shakespeare in productions of *Antony and Cleopatra* (2001), *Richard III* (2002), *The Comedy of Errors* (2002 and 2006), *Hamlet* (2003), and *As You Like It* (2003 and 2006). From 2006 onwards, he directed adaptations of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* for Bell Shakespeare’s Actors at Work program and later, mainstage productions of *Romeo and Juliet* (2011), *Henry V* (2013), *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2* (2014, with John Bell), and *Hamlet* (2015) (AusStage 2020; Bell Shakespeare 2020; SFJ 2023a). Ryan recognises that “Shakespeare that has driven everything I’ve done. Even though there is a lot of other things that I have done. Shakespeare always seems to be at the centre of it”. Fittingly, his original ambition was to devise a genuine Shakespeare festival that would bring

the community together (SFJ 2023a). He was inspired by his acting and directing experience, but was also following a worldwide tradition of outdoor Shakespeare festivals:

I remember thinking 'Well, that's not what I want. It's not A Midsummer Night's Dream in the park that interests me'. It's a genuine Shakespeare festival ... the desire to build something. Of course, I had no infrastructure and no kind of contacts ... there was just this incredible park across the road from my house with a very dramatic, natural stage and ten thousand roses.

The Roxborough Park Rose Garden in Sydney's Baulkham Hills was the perfect setting to develop an outdoor Shakespeare festival "with a genuinely local character" (SFJ 2023a). He approached the Hills Shire Council for funding and after three years of negotiation, they gave Ryan \$5,000 and permission to stage the festival there. Initially promoted as Shakespeare in The Rose Garden, the inaugural festival premiered on 7 December 2009, and included a repertory season of *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Ryan, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, directed by Ryan and Co-Artistic Director Terry Karabelas (SFJ 2023a).

The productions featured more than twenty-five actors, who were mostly Ryan's tertiary acting students, as well as musicians and crew. Ryan recalls that the approach was *co-operative theatre*, and the box office was run on a donation-only basis, with the festival selling out every show in the season and the audience "overflowing in the streets, trying to get in". This proved to him "that, even though it is a very small-scale thing, there's a great desire for something like this". Simultaneously, Ryan negotiated with The National Trust of Australia (NSW) to support a Shakespeare Festival in Leura; an opportunity to present the same season of plays at the Everglades House and Gardens in January 2010.

The inaugural Leura Shakespeare Festival was equally successful with the seven performances also close to selling out (SFJ 2023a). The success of both festivals persuaded Ryan to form a theatre company to strengthen audience interest and keep up the momentum. Inspired by the name "Cheek by Jowl" and its "energy and strangeness" as well as the fact

that it came from a Shakespeare play, Ryan discovered the phrase “sport for jove”, a quote from Shakespeare’s *Othello* and found that it served his purpose:

We liked the thought that theatre is sort of the sport of the gods in a sense and I’m very interested in very physical theatre, a lot of movement, a lot of energy, big ensembles. I almost think of it as an athletic pursuit to be in the theatre, so I liked (the word) sport.

The following year, the Hills Shire Council awarded Ryan \$70,000 to move to the larger Bella Vista Farm and the festival was renamed the Sydney Hills Shakespeare in the Park, presenting a remounted *Romeo and Juliet* in repertoire with a “promenade production of *As You Like It* to more sold-out audiences” (SFJ 2023a). The Leura Shakespeare Festival returned to Everglades House and Garden in January 2011 and included additional performances at the Norman Lindsay Gallery in Faulconbridge (ibid). The continued success of these outdoor Shakespeare festivals and Ryan’s work as a director “caught the critical and public eye” (Blake 2014) and attracted a major partner in Premier Fire and Gordon Stalley, a philanthropist “who was looking to become involved in the arts”. Stalley was not a theatregoer but, according to Ryan, the story and the play “had a very profound effect on him”. A successful businessman and Managing Director of Premier Fire, Stalley arranged to meet with Ryan and discuss SFJ in order to understand the theatre company’s structure and financial arrangements. Ryan recalls that Stalley was horrified to learn that these productions were built on a co-operative (co-op) basis and offered to “find a way for it to become sustainable”.

When Ryan formalised SFJ as a theatre company, he had written the Artistic Mission goals and Philosophy and Practice statement that are on the company’s website because he “wanted to make sure I did have a purpose behind what I was doing”. The third goal is the company’s commitment “to nurturing and challenging young artists – actors, directors, playwrights, designers and technicians – through practical connection with the best industry professionals” (SFJ 2023a). When Premier Fire agreed to sponsor the company, Ryan felt

duty-bound to put together an annual season of five or six plays to “try and create an environment in which actors, artists, creatives can demonstrate their work and get their work seen and hone their craft”. With this in mind, he moved the focus of SFJ’s work from the outskirts of Greater Sydney to its centre, with two significant seasons of work that would put the theatre company on the map in a wider public sense.

In March 2011, the company staged its popular productions of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *As You Like It* in Sydney’s Royal Botanic Garden, presenting a three-week outdoor repertoire season as a major part of the *Sydney Morning Herald*’s short-lived Autumn of the Arts Festival to “critical acclaim and large audiences” (SFJ 2023a). This successful inner-city outdoor season was closely followed by SFJ’s first major indoor production with another up-and-coming independent theatre company. Departing from Shakespeare to produce Stephen Jeffrey’s *The Libertine*, SFJ partnered with DTC in a three-week season at Reginald Murphy Hall in Potts Point (SFJ 2023a). Co-directed by Ryan and Karabelas, this production featured prominent Bell Shakespeare actors Matthew Edgerton, Sean O’Shea, and Susan Prior alongside SFJ regulars Naomi Livingston and James Lugton and newcomers Anthony Gooley, Sam Haft, Felix Jozeps, and Danielle King (AusStage 2020). Nominated for five Sydney Theatre Awards, three *Timeout* Awards, and a *Sydney Morning Herald* Metro Award, the production won three Sydney Theatre Awards, including Best Independent Production, Best Actor (Anthony Gooley), and Best Actress (Danielle King), and *Timeout*’s People’s Choice Award for Best Production (SFJ 2023a).

Fresh from the critical accolades of its inner-city seasons, SFJ went on to produce its third series of summer festivals at Bella Vista Farm and Leura in December 2011 and January 2012 respectively with two new productions, *Macbeth* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. The latter was nominated for five Sydney Theatre Awards, including Best Director for Independent Production (Ryan) and Best Independent Production, and won Best Actor (James Lugton). This was a major turning point for the company in terms of its public profile and operation and provided the chance to accomplish the seventh goal in SFJ’s artistic

mission, that is, to “provide a bold, vigorous and inventive program of syllabus-based works for NSW students and teachers” (SFJ 2023a). In June 2012, SFJ began a partnership with the Seymour Centre (Seymour) in Sydney, as a Company in Residence (SFJ 2023a). According to Ryan, the company was approached by Seymour’s Artistic Director and CEO Timothy Jones to operate in this capacity and contribute its work to the development of the Education program. What followed was the launch of “an active education program” by SFJ in conjunction with the Seymour for high school students across NSW (SC 2012). As a resident company, the Seymour offered SFJ a permanent home for its indoor season allowing for its “growth as a company” as well as fulfilling this part of its artistic mission (ibid). SFJ developed a similar relationship with Riverside Theatres (Riverside) in Parramatta to deliver the same education program from 2013 onwards (SFJ 2023a). By 2013, SFJ had established its Summer and Education Seasons in four venues. Although the company was receiving in-kind support and some government funding, it became increasingly reliant on box office sales and funding received from its major sponsor Premier Fires, as well as the ensemble of performers, creatives, and educators to produce successful delivery of the work.

Ensemble

As a theatre company, SFJ focuses on the “lost tradition” of performing plays in repertoire but is also committed to the third goal of its artistic mission, being “an actor’s company”, determined to treat actors respectfully and establish “a place where actors can feel they create and possess the work” (SFJ 2023a). Ryan’s definition of repertory theatre is “a group of artists coming together to produce more than one work” and he believes that it is the sense of ensemble in the rehearsal room that makes this creative approach fulfilling for the actors. As he discovered working for Nomad, an actor’s company is a core aspect of repertory theatre, which is why he loves the ensemble approach. Big ensembles are an integral part of SFJ and strongly connected with what the company does creatively: “if there is a brand within our company that I try never to let go of, it’s a form of ensemble theatre that is characterised by language”.

Ryan acknowledges that audiences recognise SFJ as being a “Shakespeare company” even though it has also successfully produced award-winning classical and contemporary work including *Cyrano de Bergerac* (2013), *A Doll’s House* (2014), *Of Mice and Men* (2015), *The Crucible* (2015), *Antigone* (2016), *Away* (2016), *No End of Blame* (2017), and *Moby Dick* (2018). He admits that he tends to avoid naturalistic plays with small casts because “there is plenty of focus on those sorts of plays out there in the independent sector already ... I don’t just want to do three-handed American plays for the sake of it”. Although SFJ is focused on Shakespeare and classic plays, the company has started to realise its sixth artistic goal, “being dedicated to developing, workshopping and producing new Australian plays in Sydney and NSW regional venues” (SFJ 2023a). The first of these plays, *Fallen*, by Seanna van Helten, was a co-production developed with Melbourne independent theatre company She Said⁶³ in 2017, and played for a two-week season at the Seymour in Sydney before being re-mounted in Melbourne for a further two-week season at the fortyfivedownstairs theatre in 2018 (AusStage 2020). The second was *The River at the End of the Road*, “a new Australian work entirely produced in a regional area, with a semi-Indigenous cast” by Caleb Lewis in conjunction with HotHouse, which premiered in a two-week season at the Butter Factory Theatre in Wodonga in March 2018 (SFJ 2023a). The third was the world premiere of *Ear to the Edge of Time* by Alana Valentine, which played a two-week season at the Seymour in Sydney in October 2018 (ibid).

From an operational perspective, a large ensemble of ten to twelve actors allows a range of plays to be performed with the same group, enabling a smooth transition during the repertory season. For Ryan, the actor’s company approach creates instant recognition and develops a strong relationship with audiences who “get to see the different qualities of an actor” as they play multiple roles. When casting each season, Ryan does not play favourites; the acting and teaching work is distributed evenly across the ensemble and the cast is

⁶³ She Said Theatre is a Melbourne-based independent company founded in 2006 by Co-Artistic Directors Penny Harpham and Seanna van Helten to create “leadership opportunities for women in theatre”. (She Said 2018).

utilised across the Summer and Education Seasons in different capacities. Historical records of SFJ's productions indicate that earlier shows featured an ensemble of actors who were equally engaged in the design, stage management, and production management roles, essentially tapping into the co-op model of theatre-making found in fringe theatre (SFJ 2023a). As SFJ secured project funding and sponsorship from Premier Fire and the Seymour, the company was able to appoint a dedicated design and production team to enable the performers to focus solely on working together as an acting ensemble (ibid). Whilst Ryan has a core ensemble of performers and often returns to artists who have previously worked with the company, he also tries to include new and emerging actors in the ensemble, in an attempt to develop a wider artistic community and a larger audience for SFJ.

Developing a strong artistic community for SFJ is important to Ryan, and the core ensemble is made up of more experienced "associate artists" such as Matthew Edgerton, James Lugton, Yalin Ozucelik, Francesca Savige, Lizzie Schebesta, Christopher Tomkinson, and Timothy Walter, who have worked in main stage productions with companies such as Bell Shakespeare, Belvoir, and STC (SFJ 2023a). Ryan observes that this collective of associate artists is useful as an artistic advisory group to read and suggest plays, and to assist him "to thrash around ideas" and make curatorial decisions about upcoming seasons. Working with a core ensemble of experienced performers creates consistency, keeps productions in repertoire, and makes re-mounting them more sustainable. This type of ensemble also creates a sense of tradition, with skills and experience being handed down between older and younger actors, which is related to the idea of apprenticeship that Ryan believes SFJ offers to emerging theatre artists working at "a semi-professional level".

Financial Sustainability

While the ensemble model has creatively sustained and helped to expand the work of SFJ by offering a vigorous training ground for younger members, Ryan admits that this approach

has not been financially sustainable. The company's administration and production are financed by government project funding, private and in-kind sponsorship, as well as box office returns from the Education and Summer Seasons, but is insufficient to pay the ensemble, and creative and production teams at minimum award rates for all activities across the year. When SFJ started, the ensemble worked on "a completely co-operative basis" and actors were paid a stipend of "a couple of thousand dollars for a three-month season". When I spoke to Ryan, SFJ was producing a total of seven plays per year: four paid actors at award minimum (the Education Season) and three paid actors with an agreed stipend on a profit-share basis (the Summer Season). Ryan admits that one of SFJ's "failings" in terms of income and sustainability is that the company has never developed a subscription season for the general theatre-going public from its annual seasons. He blames "exhaustion, laziness, tiredness. We've just never got our ducks in a row" but agrees that audience loyalty and "building a relationship with the artists" is an important part of SFJ's ensemble approach.

Having a permanent home at the Seymour as a Company in Residence and a similar season at Riverside has encouraged loyalty from schools and brought more financial stability to the company's activities, meaning that its education product has become a strong focus. The Seymour supports the work of SFJ through in-kind access to rehearsal space and heavily discounted performance space, and the company is featured and promoted in the Seymour's annual educational marketing campaign,⁶⁴ which has given it a stronger relationship with schools. Education was always part of SFJ's mission but evolved once its residency started, due to the energy of Carolyn White, Seymour's Education Manager at the time, and the addition of complementary events such as the HSC symposiums and workshops being added to the company's school offerings. The Education Season takes place in the Seymour's York Theatre, which has a capacity of 781 seats as well as the downstairs Reginald Theatre, which has a capacity of 148 seats (Seymour Centre 2019).

⁶⁴ The Seymour has a dedicated Education Program page on its website which features SFJ as Company in Residence. It also produces a downloadable and printed brochure that is mailed out to schools. In addition, it promotes the education program via a dedicated email to its school database and to the Seymour Teachers Advisory Network (STAN) whose members "share their opinions and experiences through surveys and focus groups" (Seymour Centre 2019).

Ryan observes that the larger theatre is often difficult to fill for a general public show but is ideal for a school audience, with “fifteen hundred kids a day ... coming through the building”. In 2018, SFJ performed to over 25,000 students at both the Seymour and Riverside (SFJ 2023a).

In addition to the school matinee performances, SFJ offered a series of one-off evening performances called One Night Stands, which were also open to the general public. Ryan confirms that these performances generated further income and kept the SFJ brand alive for the company’s adult audiences in between the Summer Seasons. Accordingly, ticket sales for both school and public bookings for the four plays in the Education Season as well as the HSC symposiums and workshops funded “three-and-a-half months at full Equity pay with eleven artists and three crew and a production manager”. In almost complete contrast, the Summer Season is produced on a co-operative basis. Ryan defines co-operative in the sense that the “artists are donating part of their wages towards the production” rather than sharing all the financial risk and perceives them as major sponsors in the work.

The Summer Season also relies on project funding, in-kind sponsorship, and some major sponsorship funds so that SFJ is able to “guarantee those (stipend) payments from the beginning” for the large cast rather than “paid at the end if we have something” from the box office returns. Ryan admits that it makes more sense for SFJ to produce only one or two plays a year with smaller casts so that everyone is paid at minimum award rates, but it is something that the associate artists have previously opposed. He frequently gathers these ensemble members together for a “mini summit” to consult about the forthcoming season and each time the group has voted to be paid a stipend for the Summer Season so that the company can “bring more actors through the work on an annual basis”. As Artistic Director, Ryan is paid a wage from the funding SFJ receives from Premier Fire and from the work that he does for the Education Season, but he still needs to supplement this with directing or performance work outside of the company with Bell Shakespeare, Belvoir, or STC “so that it is not intruding on the budget for an outdoor season or the budget for an indie show”.

Ryan acknowledges that the company “can’t rest on our laurels and think it’s okay to go on forever and ever and not pay people properly” and insists that SFJ’s ultimate aim is for everyone to be fully paid “one hundred per cent” of the time. In addition to its education program, SFJ has ambitions to improve its reach and “find corporate partners just like STC or Bell or Belvoir have” as well as further philanthropic support. Ryan has recently taken steps towards restructuring SFJ’s activities so this goal can be accomplished, stating that “[o]ur role every year is to be industrious enough to go, how can we do this? To become self-sustainable and to remunerate artists across board for what they are doing, and we have to”.

Professionalism

SFJ presents itself publicly as a S2M professional theatre company, producing an annual season of critically acclaimed indoor and outdoor productions in major Sydney venues. The company’s inclusion in key marketing campaigns with venue partners and SFJ’s own marketing of its annual season increases SFJ’s profile and strongly connects it to schools and general public audiences. Operationally, the company works from a dedicated office and warehouse space in Surry Hills, Sydney that is owned by Premier Fire, which functions as a rehearsal space and storage facility for sets, props, and costumes, to keep production assets viable for future repertory seasons. Used by SFJ since 2017, the space gives the company a central Sydney location to rehearse and conduct the business of producing its dual annual seasons.

Ryan’s professional profile as a director and actor with major theatre companies Bell Shakespeare, STC, and Belvoir and his use of recognisable actors in the SFJ ensemble has greatly increased the professional profile of SFJ, as have the numerous awards that the company has won. However, despite SFJ’s success with these different aspects, ongoing support from government funding bodies has been elusive, with Ryan conceding that the

company has tried unsuccessfully over the past nine years to secure multi-year grants at both federal and state government levels. Whilst the company has been awarded project grants from Arts NSW (now Create NSW), this assistance has been infrequent with inconsistent amounts, making it hard for SFJ to forward plan. Ryan admits that after five years of successful operations, he expected that either the federal or state government funding bodies would offer SFJ ongoing financial assistance, particularly because the company had been funded by local government (Hills Shire Council), was working predominantly in Western Sydney, and had received “a range of awards”. Instead, he received a letter from the AC acknowledging that while SFJ’s “work is excellent” and the company was “doing very well to sustain the work” there was not enough funding to support its ongoing endeavours due to the fact that Sydney already had “three major theatre companies”.

Ryan’s frustration over a lack of government recognition for SFJ is compounded by the fact that the company is publicly perceived as a smaller, independent version of Bell Shakespeare – often referred to as “mini Bell”. In hindsight, he acknowledges that SFJ has “never developed the kind of relationship with government that we probably should have. You know that kind of close-tied learning about what they do want. We’ve always seen them as a little bit of ‘them’”. Ryan understands that the federal and state funding pools are limited and that in order to secure funding “you’ve also got to be niche”, which he admits SFJ does not appear to be on the surface, even though it performs one of its annual seasons outdoors and has recently developed three new Australian works. However, he is unperturbed about the lack of financial support from government funding bodies, acknowledging that he and the company “don’t spend our days worrying about that, thinking about that. We believe there is a way to not have the begging bowl for government (to) decide whether we can continue as a company. We are trying to find ways of being self-sustainable without that”.

With regard to this idea of self-sustenance, Ryan offers that, in addition to financially supporting SFJ through Premier Fire, Chair Gordon Stalley has “been great as a business

mentor”, sharing a similar vision to Ryan in terms of where the company should be heading. Working with Stalley over this time has taught Ryan that a “key part of our independent sector is actually to talk to other sectors. The heroes of our industry are not always just artists trying to do the work. There are philanthropic people out there who care about the culture of the country”. However, Stalley is set to retire in the next few years and Ryan notes that the support of Premier Fire as a major sponsor for SFJ will be withdrawn.

The knowledge that SFJ will be losing its major sponsor prompted Ryan to hire CI consultant Caroline Sharpen to assess SFJ and “kind of pull it apart and help us understand how we might think and our mindset as we move towards losing this philanthropic backing that we had”. Starting with the current mission statement, Ryan discovered that the company had “hit every box that we’d dreamed of hitting, apart from stepping beyond being an emerging company”. Sharpen’s analysis determined that SFJ needed to restructure and strategise how it could overcome the funding gap left by Premier Fire, in a “move to make education an even bigger part of what we do”. With this in mind, Ryan revealed that SFJ is about to disappear from the public view and stop producing multiple productions in the way that it has previously. By concentrating on its education program, SFJ plans to carve out a different niche for itself, building its business upon large-scale performances for schools, forums, and symposiums that are focused on exciting and educating young people about Shakespeare. While there will still be one or two performances open to the public within these seasons, there will be less emphasis on producing five or six indoor shows for general public consumption and a stronger focus on building audiences for the Summer Season. SFJ aims to develop an Education Season that will run from February to September, giving the company “a full-time focus into education” with one show “in the midst of that” created solely for a general public audience and designed to keep “the brand going as a theatre company” so that SFJ doesn’t “disappear from the marketplace”. Ryan’s vision is that this production will be “with an external director”, run for “four or five weeks” and be “a play done purely for its artistic merit and its commercial viability”.

Ryan is wistful about losing the company's artistic reputation and being seen as "dying away" but acknowledges that this restructuring is necessary to "focus on the financial viability of the company" to ensure its survival and "start to build the kind of back-end the company needs in order to support a more complete season". SFJ is also taking advantage of the fact that from 2019 onwards there will be a national English curriculum which will help develop its symposiums and deepen its relationship with English and drama teachers across Australia. Together, Sharpen and Ryan have devised a way to think "more nationally with that work", developing a team that "might take that work into different states", or by "filming the work and creating an online portal infrastructure to get it to regional schools" nationally and providing a subscription or purchase system, "rather than just whacking on a couple of plays and a few workshops each year". To offset the absence of Premier Fire as its major sponsor, SFJ will look for other corporate sponsors and have enlisted the assistance of business development manager Camilla Rountree to help with this process. Ryan acknowledges that sponsorship has always been core to SFJ and without philanthropic and in-kind support, the company would not be where it is. Instead of relying on government funding, he is determined "to find a way to keep that going without them", giving himself the next couple of years to move SFJ towards the vision of self-sustenance that he and Stalley first imagined for the company.

Independence

When discussing commercial, subsidised, and independent theatre, Ryan suggests that it is the different levels of financial support rather than the quality of the creative output that separates these sectors. He acknowledges that while each receives subsidy from government or corporate sponsorship, it is the levels of funding that differentiate one from the other in terms of production and public perception. Ryan defines commercial theatre as having "a box office approach to production" which is "designed through private financial help and backing of the project to make its money back and provide a profit". Correspondingly, he views subsidised theatre as the "big, flagship, mainstream companies",

who have a wage gap that is “covered by the government and or some very large corporate partners” which “allows them to function in a professional space”. Ryan suggests that independent theatre operates predominantly in an “unsubsidised space”, which means being able to pay everyone from box office returns without “any form of subsidy from anyone else”. However, he argues that a theatre company like SFJ who occasionally receives a small grant for a production should still be considered independent, as the costs of expenditure such as rehearsal space and wages are never fully covered by the amount granted, which means that “your back end is not covering itself” and “the wages of the employees who are developing the company, year on year (are) not being covered by subsidy in government”. He observes that what keeps a theatre company “in that independent zone” is the fact that “you are not obliged to any particular funding body for the work you are doing”. While this means that an independent theatre company such as SFJ has the creative freedom to schedule an annual season of work, this approach has also proven to be precarious financially. Ryan admits he is surprised by “how hard it is to break through that ceiling” of ongoing government funding, particularly “when you have a demonstrated commitment to a series of ideals as a company”:

[Y]ou're not a one-year flash in the pan or trying to (do) a couple of jobs and trying to get funding or simply trying to tick the right boxes on a grant to get a bit of niche funding or something. We're trying to develop a new space in which actors and artists can trade their wares at a professional level. At a level of work that critics and audiences are responding to. I guess I had it in my head that if we did that consistently over a period of time, we'd start to be taken seriously by funding bodies. But it hasn't quite worked that way.

To Ryan, the funding discrepancy that exists between subsidised MPA theatre companies like STC and independent theatre companies like SFJ, does not reflect the excellence or creative and box office success that is achieved by either. He is frustrated by the lack of “meritocracy” within the Australian funding system and the fact that government policy “just keeps morphing” and continues to elude the company. Ryan laments the “protected-species level” and “the ceiling between our sector and fully subsidised, continuous, year-round

working, triennial funding seems almost unbreachable, regardless of the consistency that is produced” and refers to independent theatre as the “grassroots of the industry”, which should be further integrated into the overall theatre ecology from a development point of view. One of the key purposes of SFJ is nurturing the next generation of repertory ensemble and classical actors and strengthening the ecology of the theatre field. Ryan perceives that there is a begrudging respect from Bell and the other MPA theatre companies for what SFJ does in these areas. SFJ is “a company that allows people to develop their work as directors, actors, designers, musicians, all the different strands of the creative area we are in, to practise their craft, get their craft in front of audiences”. Ryan suggests that SFJ fills a gap in skills training and experience that the MPA and other S2M companies, due to their size and funding limitations, are not able to, with actors “continuously stepping from our company to the major companies and back again”:

(M)any actors have said to me that they’ll get a professional gig in a six-month tour of a Shakespeare play or something and they would not have been ‘match fit’ or trained to do it, without the work they did with us ... Imagine if all actors were simply trying to get the occasional audition for those elite companies. Where would the skill level be? ... How would they ever find the quality of the work they need to sustain their seasons if people weren’t applying their craft in independent theatre?

Within this idea, Ryan sees the potential for a stronger relationship between the MPA and independent companies and a symbiosis that could supersede the current lack of meritocracy in the funding system. In his opinion, independent theatre forms part of the theatre industry value chain and should therefore work together with the other sectors and have equal access to government funding, with the onus on the MPAs to seed and nurture the independent sector’s work. As a quid pro quo, the independent sector will develop the productions, train the performers and creatives, provide “a platform for emerging artists to create their work”, and gather an audience for the work. Ryan offers that independent theatre breaks ground on the development of productions and believes that MPA companies should be showcasing “the five or six extraordinary works that come out of the independent sector

every year”, adding these successful productions to their annual seasons. His experience of directing productions for both independent and MPA companies also leads him to believe that this crossover would be a “sure-fire ticket for a major company” and strengthen audiences for independent companies such as SFJ, getting their shows to the “thousands and thousands of Australians that should see that work”:

You (the major company) develop a relationship with the independent company that allows both companies to both take the financial risk but to gain some financial reward for their structures and for that work and that you are building the grassroots of the industry, just as you might think in the sports sector, for example. Where if a young player or a team is rising from the grassroots, they will be selected for the next level and continue their journey.

Conclusion

SFJ started with a public outdoor Shakespeare festival in Sydney’s Hills District and an artistic mission to promote the repertory theatre model, showcase emerging talent, and introduce Shakespeare to audiences, young and old. Over the past decade, this Shakespeare festival has evolved into an annual season of theatrical events spread across several venues in Greater Sydney, enabled by the in-kind and financial support of local councils, venues, and major sponsor Premier Fires. The creative approach taken by founder and Artistic Director Damien Ryan and the inclusion of Ryan and several other professional high-profile theatre performers as core ensemble members have combined to elicit a strong level of cultural capital for the company; this has been further amplified by the public reception and critical acclaim of SFJ’s work, which saw the company receive multiple theatre awards.

SFJ’s reputation within the theatre field has enabled the company to form partnerships with Sydney’s Seymour Centre and Parramatta’s Riverside Theatres and expand to an indoor education season. Although not wholly intentional, SFJ’s creative entrepreneurship over this

time has been responsive to the creative and business opportunities that have engaged with its artistic mission, which has rapidly grown its endeavours. However, the lack of ongoing government and private funding has been debilitating for SFJ, revealing a shortfall in its income, leading to an inability for the company to function in a self-sustaining manner. This has meant consolidating and focusing SFJ's strategic approach on the products that Ryan knows will generate income for SFJ in order to rebuild the business to a level of self-sustenance and allow the company to expand into the development of new work and national and international touring. From an artistic and operational perspective, Ryan aspires for SFJ to be like London-based international touring theatre companies Cheek by Jowl and Complicité who "devote a lot of time to a very special show". As part of the SFJ ten-year strategic plan, he indicates that he would like the company "to develop some of our own works that are just covered by our own sort of signature or style" and tour in a similar way to these two companies around Australia and "overseas through Asia".

Moving forward in SFJ's strategic plan, Ryan has recognised that the company's wages gap will not be covered by government funding and the company's model must change in order to achieve this vision of self-sustenance. The desire to showcase the work of the ensemble is what has driven SFJ to present six or seven shows per year, but that level of production will cease over the next few years as the education program takes over to financially sustain the company. The funding derived from this expanded Educational Season and ancillary activities will underwrite the company's one major indoor production per year and support the outdoor festivals, which will remain in the Hills and Leura venues and hopefully expand into a new territory in Sydney's CBD. As Ryan explains, although SFJ had one successful festival season at the Sydney Botanic Gardens in 2011, staging ongoing festival performances in this venue proved to be logistically impractical due to a lack of isolation from other events in the precinct. He hopes to find another large outdoor Sydney venue and has commenced talks with Barangaroo about the Stargazer Lawn at the end of Hickson Road, which might prove to be the venue that will enable the Summer Season to reach a much bigger audience within Greater Sydney. The other exciting initiative is the gift of the

theatre that Gordon Stalley will be building at 8 Marlborough Street, Surry Hills – the warehouse in which the company currently has offices and rehearses. The legacy of SFJ's major sponsor is the creation of a ninety-seat theatre and rehearsal space, where the company will be resident, and which will also be made available to other independent theatre companies. However, Ryan is realistic about the trajectory of SFJ and is not willing to wait forever to see if this new business strategy is viable, giving himself two years to ascertain the company's progression and decide whether or not to continue.

With this in mind, Ryan will let go of the entire creative responsibility of managing SFJ which at the time of this interview, he shared with Tait. Instead, he has “demarcated” the company's workforce “to get more minds in the job”. Ryan notes that when Tait leaves towards the end of 2018 he will be replaced by three part-time roles in the areas of clerical/administration, business management, and business development in order to grow and source funding. Additionally, SFJ has hired a marketing firm on a monthly basis to assist in focusing the company's marketing strategies. Ryan is mindful of the coming changes for SFJ and is focused on becoming “a national company in our approach to education” which he knows will be “a huge, pretty consuming focus for the next five years, at least”:

We do hope and dream that we can again, wave a bit more of a flag of producing more independent, full-scale but professionally paid work for GP audiences. I think that's the thing I am going to miss, is that ... consistent, producing of shows for general public and bringing an audience in. We don't know how we will be perceived in the next couple of years if we are only turning up once in the middle of the year and once at summer.

6.3. Case Study 6: Belloo Creative

Overview

Belloo is “an all-female, award-winning independent theatre company that produces original contemporary cross-cultural works” for both stage and film (BC 2023a). Founded in 2013 by four women “with decades of experience”, Belloo is a creative partnership between Caroline Dunphy (Co-Artistic Director, Director, Performer), Dr Katherine Lyall-Watson (Co-Artistic Director and Writer), Dr Kathryn Kelly (Dramaturg), and Danielle Shankey (Creative Producer) and is focused on exploring “new ways of firing the imagination and connecting stories with the human body” (ibid). At the time the second interview (with Kelly) was conducted, Belloo had produced three original theatre works, *Motherland* (2013 and 2016), *Hanako* (2016), and *Rovers* (2018) and had also accomplished creative developments for two others, *The Gloaming* (2014) and *The House in the Dunes (House)* (2018–2019) (BC 2023a).

For over six years, Belloo has enjoyed critical success for its collaborative, physical, and visceral approach to text-based performance. Critically, the company has been acknowledged for providing “[a]n electrically charged, cross-cultural, multi-disciplined journey” (Clarke 2016), as well as “[c]ombining intriguing details and vivid characters” to create “a number of crossovers, in time and context, in a sophisticated storytelling style continually being honed by writer, Katherine Lyall-Watson (*Sand*, *Hanako*, *Motherland*)” (XS Entertainment, 2018). The 2013 production of *Motherland* received a Matilda Award for Best Independent Production, and was nominated for Best New Australian Work, and also received a Groundling Award⁶⁵ for Best Overall Production; *Hanako* was nominated for four Matilda Awards, including Best Independent Production and Best Emerging Artist (BC 2023a).

⁶⁵ The Groundling Awards are the Brisbane-based “people’s choice awards of the Queensland theatre industry”, promoted by Greenroom, the online blog written by actor/director Kate Foy (Clarke 2012).

Organisational Structure

Belloo formalised its organisational status in 2016 as an Other Incorporated Association, registering the name Belloo Creative with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC 2018). The company is not registered for GST and does not appear on the ACNC register as a charity with DGR status, so does not produce a public annual company report. At the time this research was undertaken, the company's formal staffing structure included the following key personnel: Katherine Lyall-Watson (Co-Artistic Director, Writer); Caroline Dunphy (Co-Artistic Director, Director, Performer); Danielle Shankey (Creative Producer); and Kathryn Kelly (Dramaturg). There was no evidence found of a board of directors or artistic advisory committee in any archival documents nor was there any mention of such a group in either of the personal interviews. As an independent theatre company, Belloo's philosophy is "to bring people and stories out of the shadows"; its creative vision encompasses four key aims: (1) to produce diverse, original, contemporary theatre; (2) to develop performance-based works across artforms; (3) to create intercultural projects; and (4) to strengthen artistic ties between Australia and Asia (BC 2023a).

Audience Relationship

From a marketing perspective, Belloo has an online presence in the form of its official website (www.belloocreative.com), which provides short profiles of its key creative staff, information about the company's artistic philosophy and practice, production history, and awards, news and reviews, and collaborations and partnerships (BC 2023a). The website features links to most social media platforms including Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Vimeo, and Instagram as well as a dedicated page to "start a conversation" with any of the individual members or the company about collaboration or donations via direct email. The Facebook (BC 2023b) and Instagram (BC 2023c) pages are used to promote individual shows and offer behind-the-scenes footage and commentary along with critical reviews, while the YouTube

(BC 2023d) and Vimeo (BC 2023e) platforms offer a stronger visual account of the company's work and include production trailers, behind-the-scenes interviews, and rehearsal videos.

Financial Position

Because Belloo does not produce an annual financial report that is publicly accessible, the company's average annual income is not directly evident. At the time of this research, all company members confirmed that Belloo was not receiving ongoing operational government funding but had received project funding from the Australia Council (AC), Arts Queensland (AQ), Brisbane City Council (BCC), Creative Partnerships Australia, Catalyst, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) (BC 2023a).

Since 2013, the company's activities have been financed through a combination of government project funding, personal investment from collective members, box office income, in-kind support, and co-production financial arrangements with venue partners such as Brisbane Festival, Brisbane Powerhouse, Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Arts (Judith Wright), Metro Arts, NORPA, Queensland Theatre Company (QT), and touring organisation Critical Stages (ibid). For example, Belloo's inaugural production *Motherland* was financially seeded and supported by Judith Wright's Fresh Ground Residency Program⁶⁶ with funding from the Creative Sparks program, a joint initiative of BCC and the Queensland Government through AQ (Metro Arts 2013). Further development and production of the project was supported by QT with in-kind rehearsal space, and Metro Arts included the production in its Season of the Independents program, which was financially supported by the AC, AQ, and the BCC (Metro Arts 2013b).

⁶⁶ The Fresh Ground program (supported by AQ) allowed artists "to develop and present new work at all stages of development, from providing a space for initial creative development through to presenting a production in one of the Judith Wright Centre's performance venues and assisting in developing and delivering strategies for touring works nationally and internationally". Artists receive \$10,000 in cash and in-kind support worth \$20,000, which includes space, equipment, and labour as well as development of business and strategic plans and producing skills (Dionysus 2013).

At the time I conducted the second interview with Kelly, Belloo had received \$30,000 from the Federal Government’s Catalyst fund (Office for the Arts 2019) and \$5,000 from Creative Partnerships Australia’s MATCH Lab program⁶⁷ for the development of *Hanako* (CPA 2019); \$21,824 from AQ to develop *The Gloaming* (AQ 2019); and \$10,995 and \$11,000 from BCC to develop *Rovers* and *Boy, Lost* respectively (BCC 2019). As a result of the international collaborations between Idiot Savant and Good Company Arts, the *House* and *Akiruno* developments were funded with \$26,553 from the DFAT, with the company also receiving a further \$6,000 in grants to travel to the TPAM – Performing Arts Meeting in Yokohama (DFAT 2019).⁶⁸

Creative Approach

Belloo is a collective partnership between Dunphy, Lyall-Watson, Kelly, and Shankey, each of whom individually lead the different aspects of performance-making required to produce a creative work but share equal responsibility for the company’s creative direction and business decisions. Each member holds a tertiary qualification as a theatre practitioner, which informs their specific role within the company, as well as the company’s creative approach: Dunphy holds a Bachelor of Arts (Drama) in Acting from QUT; Shankey holds a Bachelor of Education (English/Drama) from Griffith University and a Graduate Diploma of Creative Industries (Arts and Cultural Management) from QUT; and Lyall-Watson and Kelly each have PhDs in Creative Writing and Dramaturgy from UQ. Additionally, they are all teachers, mentors, and arts advocates with extensive experience “across theatre, performance, community cultural development and the visual arts” (BC 2016).

⁶⁷ The MATCH Lab program “provides funding to independent artists to create new work, attract new donors, build relationships and boost their fundraising skills, by matching donations raised through fundraising campaigns” (CPA 2019).

⁶⁸ TPAM – Performing Arts Meeting in Yokohama is “a space where professionals from various places in the world who explore the possibility of contemporary performing arts exchange through performance and meeting programs to gain information, inspiration and network for the creation, dissemination and vitalization of performing arts” (TPAM 2019).

Founded on the values of “research and exploration, steadfast commitment, artistic integrity and heart”, Belloo is committed to “developing partnerships to present works nationally and internationally” and “growing them into powerful relationships”, as well as collaborating with “artists, communities and organisations to build capacity, create opportunities and drive social change” (BC 2023a). The company’s work is “long-term, strategic and multidisciplinary” with an emphasis on “cross-cultural collaboration, risk-taking and rigorous process” and seeks to “influence the cultural landscape” (BC 2023a).

Origins

The 2013 production of Lyall-Watson’s *Motherland* brought the four members of Belloo together, although officially, the creative partnership was not formed until a year later. Notably, Lyall-Watson, Kelly, and Shankey shared a previous professional and personal connection through the various roles they had undertaken in their respective solo careers⁶⁹. The outsider in the group was Dunphy, who knew of the individuals within the collective from a professional perspective but did not have a personal relationship with any of them.

From 1987 onwards, Lyall-Watson worked as an actor, director, and theatre reviewer whilst fulfilling “day jobs” as a communications editor and strategic projects co-ordinator for the BCC, before completing her Master of Arts degree in Creative Writing in 2008 and officially transitioning to the creative role of playwright (BC 2023a). At that point, Lyall-Watson was approached by another independent company with an idea for a play about socialite, traveller, and journalist Nelle Tritton: a Brisbane woman who married former Russian Prime Minister Alexander Kerensky, a story that became the main narrative for *Motherland* (Lyall-Watson, cited in O’Donohue 2016). She wrote the play over four years as part of her doctoral research and, when completed, *Motherland* was shortlisted as one of three for the 2013 Patrick White Award. Offered the opportunity for creative development towards a full

⁶⁹ Unless otherwise cited, all comments made by Dunphy, Lyall-Watson, and Creative Producer Danielle Shankey are derived from the interview I conducted with them at Shankey’s home in Kedron, Brisbane on 14 September 2018.

production with Metro Arts, Lyall-Watson initially tried producing the play herself, which she found “incredibly difficult” and set about trying to find a team to share the workload and responsibilities (Lyall-Watson, cited in Watts 2014).

Kelly had worked with Lyall-Watson at Playlab⁷⁰ on the development of her first play, *Tinder*,⁷¹ and was also the dramaturg for the written development of *Motherland*, so was engaged in this role when the play moved towards its creative development stage. Kelly had completed an Honours degree in Australia in 1997 before travelling to Canada, working at the Factory Theatre under dramaturg Brian Quirt and playwright Iris Turcott, and with Cahoots Theatre Projects in Toronto. She returned to Australia in the early 2000s to specialise as a dramaturg in “text-based theatre, contemporary performance and socially engaged practice” (QUT 2019). Working with various theatre companies and festivals in Melbourne and across Queensland, Kelly also worked in arts policy for AQ and held the roles of Resident Artist of World Interplay (2003) and CEO of Playlab (2004–2008), before becoming a drama lecturer at QUT in the CI Faculty, School of Creative Practice in 2018 (BC 2023a). Kelly recalls that Lyall-Watson “had gone through all these processes with these different creative teams” with *Motherland* but was determined to remain as a co-producer and did not just hand the play over to “a director for hire”⁷². Kelly’s advice to Lyall-Watson was “to find her tribe;” seek out a creative team and director she could trust.

Part of the tribe already surrounding Lyall-Watson included Shankey, an arts marketer and producer who had worked with Lyall-Watson at the BCC and with Kelly at World Interplay. Kelly recalls Shankey was brought in by the pair, who were keen “to embroil her” in the project, to undertake the marketing for *Motherland*. Shankey started her career as a drama teacher in Queensland before travelling to Scotland and Northern Ireland in 2002 to work in community cultural development. She returned to Australia in 2004 to work as a producer

⁷⁰ Playlab is a Brisbane-based organisation that develops, publishes, and produces new Australian theatre “with the playwright at the centre of the creative process” (PLT 2019).

⁷¹ *Tinder* was one of three plays nominated for the 2008–2009 Queensland Premier’s Drama Award (QT 2019).

⁷² Unless otherwise cited, all comments made by dramaturg Kathryn Kelly are derived from the interview I conducted with her in her office at the Kelvin Grove, QUT campus in Brisbane on 28 February 2019.

and marketer for World Interplay and then QPAC as an online marketing specialist before she “jumped into the corporate sector”, working for Virgin Australia as the campaign manager for *Velocity*, and then working for the BCC from 2008 in various roles, including digital producer, community development team leader, and community relations manager (BC 2023a).

By this stage, Lyall-Watson had cast the play but was still looking for “an exceptional director” to collaborate with, who would lead the creative development process “in a particular way”. She approached playwright and director Daniel Evans,⁷³ who recommended Dunphy. Primarily an actor working in theatre, film, and television for the first eight years after her graduation from QUT, Dunphy moved into devising and teaching through her training and performance work with Frank Theatre (OzFrank), where she specialised in the Suzuki Actor Training Method. She trains regularly in Japan with Tadashi Suzuki and has worked on projects as a deviser and performer with Darlinghurst Theatre Company, La Boîte, The Danger Ensemble, and The Good Room (BC 2023a; KAM 2019). After “a number of conversations” followed by the creative development process, Lyall-Watson knew that “this is the person that I want to work with and (who) I want to create theatre with”. Lyall-Watson (cited in Watts 2014) notes that the pair had “this lovely synergy” and shared “the same goals and the same ideas and values about what we felt was important and what we wanted to do; we just realised that together we were greater than on our own”. Lyall-Watson and Dunphy made a “natural decision” to form a company together, which they called Ellen Belloo (ibid). They both wanted a name for the company that reflected their origins and the strong women in each of their families: “Ellen” was the name of Dunphy’s grandmother and “Belloo” was the nickname of Lyall-Watson’s grandmother Beryl (QT 2019).

Following the success of *Motherland* in 2013, Ellen Belloo’s artistic mission became focused on finding “new ways of exploring text and space via the medium of the human body and to create vibrant new theatre works” which led the company to its second project, *The*

⁷³ Daniel Evans is the co-founder of Brisbane performance collective The Good Room (TGR 2019).

Gloaming (AQ 2019). *The Gloaming* was an “existing gothic play” written by Lyall-Watson, and the three-week creative development in 2014 for the work was designed as an editing process to enable the company to collaborate with “professional arts makers” including Yaron Lifschitz (Artistic Director of Circa), Christine Johnston (Queensland performing artist/vocalist/writer/musician) and performers Barbara Lowing and Tim Dashwood (AQ 2019). With a view to a potential co-production between Ellen Belloo, Christine Johnston, and theatre company Dead Puppet Society,⁷⁴ the arts maker group functioned as “mentors and provocateurs” during the creative development to explore “the possibilities for movement, soundscapes and puppetry in its conception and execution” (ibid).

For this creative development, Ellen Belloo was once again supported through Judith Wright’s Fresh Ground Residency Program and received additional financial support through AQ’s Projects and Program Funding. The creative development culminated with “a script reading performance to industry peers and potential producers”, such as Brisbane Festival, La Boîte, QPAC, and QT, to enable Ellen Belloo “to discover demand for the work”. As part of the reported project outcomes for AQ, the company noted that the process had realised potential partnerships, clarified how the work could be placed, and “built key collaborations and brought together a high calibre core creative team” which included Kelly and Shankey (ibid). According to Kelly, it was this creative development process that encouraged Dunphy and Lyall-Watson to expand Ellen Belloo to include them in an official capacity and “formalise this” working relationship to make them equal partners in the company.

Collaborative

At the time of Ellen Belloo’s expansion, Lyall-Watson (cited in Watts 2014) highlighted the importance of an independent theatre company having a “shared vision for what sort of theatre and what sort of art you want to create” but also having the capacity to share the

⁷⁴ The Dead Puppet Society is a Brisbane-based production house and design company that creates puppet-based visual theatre (DPS 2020).

burden of developing and delivering the work. Dunphy offers that the collective of four women “clicked” from the beginning and that “it initially just felt very right” to her, which is why she could see the group getting on, forming “a tight collective, making theatre” and working well together without needing to “force it too much”. The connection between the collective was deepened by the fact that all were mothers and shared a similar level of experience and background in theatre-making. Also, each member had “very specialised and distinct skill sets” which were complementary rather than competitive (Lyll-Watson, cited in Watts 2014). According to Kelly, the development of Ellen Belloo into an all-female foursome in 2014 was not a “conscious modelling” on a particular approach or existing theatre company but was a “genuine meeting of us” and the group has “worked it out as we’ve gone along”.

Dunphy observes that the name Ellen Belloo remained following the addition of the two new members, but the company’s artistic mission expanded to that which it holds today: an emphasis on cross-cultural work, rigorous process, developing relationships, and “bringing stories out of the shadows”. Shankey led the development of the artistic mission and notes there was an emphasis on optimising Belloo’s capacity. She recalls that the collective “built the company from the base up and went from there into mission and vision and then strategic goals” engaging in a rigorous five-year strategic plan process which “really unpacked the values of everyone individually in the group, and then collectively what those values were”, naming key milestones to be achieved by the beginning of 2020. She notes that this process was “vital” and that the collective committed a lot of time to doing it, which enabled them to develop a rapid way of creatively working together. The creative process is different depending on the project, but the members of the group agree that the cornerstone of their work together is their tight-knit collaboration. Kelly reflects that the company now, compared to what the group thought it would be five years ago, is better because the group has worked together “in lockstep” to “make all the decisions together”.

In its creative approach, the collective builds a concept together or consults with Lyall-Watson about what she is interested in writing about. The group will brainstorm and once the “broad picture” has been developed, Lyall-Watson will begin to write, “feeding bits of writing to the group as I go and we’ll be exploring, talking more, building it” towards further rewrites. Dunphy notes that Lyall-Watson is not always involved in initiating every concept as the writer and believes that it is her role as the director to not necessarily wait “for the script to edit” but to develop a concept through devising or building “a visual world with Katherine as we (are) going along”. She adds that community engagement is also a strong consideration for Belloo in terms of how the work is chosen and developed, citing that the company “always wanted to create theatre that had an experience, which is not just limited to being in the black box or in the theatre space” and “to find ways to reach different audiences as well”. According to Lyall-Watson, community engagement for Belloo is “about taking whatever we’re doing, in this case theatre, away from the traditional audience who would come to a theatre and actually reaching a wider community”. Shankey notes that Belloo will “always underpin the creative process with community outreach” which includes activities such as teachers’ notes, Q&A sessions, workshops, art exhibitions, and foyer installations. She adds that another way the company works with community is to “purposefully and intentionally” engage interns and mentor young artists “through (to) creating career and economic pathways for artists at all different stages of their life” in order to “try and grown the capacity of the sector”.

Reflecting upon why it is important for Belloo to generate its own work rather than produce existing plays, Kelly offers that it is “where all of our practices started and that’s what we believe in”. Lyall-Watson concedes that the collective is not averse to producing an existing work, and “if the (existing) work fits our ethos and (is) what we want to say and need to say, I don’t want the company to be limited by how long it takes me to write a play”. According to Lyall-Watson, the members of the group “balance each other” in terms of the different tasks that must be accomplished in the development of the work: Dunphy will “sit in the middle”, working creatively to develop the script with Lyall-Watson and Kelly whilst

“communicating with Dan (Shankey) about so many concepts and ideas” to do with “branding and design and marketing”.

Although the creative development of *The Gloaming* did not result in a full production, the project remained on the Ellen Belloo production list until 2016, when it went into hiatus so that the collective could concentrate on two other projects. The first was a further season of *Motherland*, which was remounted in partnership with QT as part of the state theatre company’s annual season and toured the production to Queensland and NSW, in conjunction with Metro Arts, Arts Queensland (AQ), and Critical Stages (AusStage 2020). The second was *Hanako*, which was presented as part of the Brisbane Festival and staged at the Brisbane Powerhouse (BC 2023a). At the same time, the name Belloo Creative replaced Ellen Belloo to signal that in addition to theatre, the company would be developing different types of projects, including film and installation as well as community engagement events. *Hanako* was the third show developed by Belloo and the first production to include a collaboration with international theatre artists. The production was the result of opportunity, relationship-building, and intercultural partnerships – key aspects of Belloo’s mission and creative approach.

According to Dunphy, intercultural partnerships are a “massive” focus for Belloo and also “inevitable ... In a globalised world, there's no other way”. Reflecting Belloo’s intended creative and cultural hybridity, *Hanako* “reimagin[ed] a classic Japanese Noh tale [as a] bilingual (Japanese–Australian) work that fuses traditional Japanese performance styles and martial arts with contemporary fashion, karaoke, anime and pop music” (Lyll-Watson et al. 2016). The work was developed over two years, receiving initial support from the Brisbane Powerhouse’s SWEET! program⁷⁵ in 2015 and “involved international collaborations with Japanese artists and three creative developments, at the Judith Wright Centre through their Fresh Ground Residency Program and at Brisbane Powerhouse” (ibid). The production

⁷⁵ SWEET! was an “artist-led program focused on assisting local performance makers to create and manage their own work, supported heavily by the infrastructure and resources of a major multi-arts venue” (The Weekend Edition, 2015).

received funding from AQ, BCC, Catalyst, Creative Partnerships Australia, and Brisbane Powerhouse and secured the support of Critical Stages, which offered a national festival tour for the work in 2018 (BC 2023a). On the strength of this cross-cultural collaboration, Belloo was also invited by the AC to be a delegate at the 2017 Tokyo Performance Arts Market (TPAM).

Kelly states that partnerships are an essential part of the company's success and reflects that "every project we've done has had ten or twelve partnerships attached to it". She notes that Belloo has "a suite of works at various stages and we've spent a lot of time developing ideas for things that we want to do". Sometimes it will be "what sticks on the wall" or "who picks it up and who wants it" and the partnership opportunities that will bring the show to the fore, and then Belloo will prioritise and build it. At the time of our interview, Belloo had approximately twenty-five projects in various stages of either being written or developed. Kelly explains that this is because of the "multiple markets" in which the company operates and "the level of thinking that you have to do", noting that Belloo must acknowledge that these markets are constantly evolving and that "the person who programmed you last year might go, or the institution might change". Kelly notes that being "a good citizen of the sector" enables people to "know what they get when they work with you" and "will want to work with you again or be comfortable in programming you again" even if they move to a different organisation.

Financial Sustainability

The strong relationships Belloo has developed with organisations, companies, and venues, as well as local and state government funding agencies, has enabled the company to rapidly expand its activities and projects, developing its reputation as an independent theatre company, and enabling it to sustain its creative endeavours. To solidify its reputation, Belloo is strategic in selecting and planning its projects and cognisant of funding and resources, making sure that it has both in place before commencing with production. Dunphy notes that

Belloo has never undertaken a project with a view to a co-operative or profit-share model with performers and the company has always “come with the money first at a minimal fee”. Kelly confirms that Belloo does not do a project unless it can ensure that performers are paid at award minimum, and creatives are offered a similarly reasonable fee. She explains that Belloo will “pay someone by the hour if we can’t pay them (weekly award rates) or pay them an appropriate rate by the hour and try and manage hours rather than fees”. Dunphy adds that once this funding has been secured, artists are offered an increase on the original fee.

Lyall-Watson observes that Belloo spends a lot of time writing grant applications and funding a production is usually a slow building of resources which is based on the success of “getting that first investment in the new work and then from that we can springboard and start getting more and more”. For Shankey, “everything in funding is relationship-based, even though there’s very rigorous assessment and protocols and programming” and she reasons that because the competition is fierce for “such a small pool of money”, it is “your reputation and your track record and your relationships (that) are so vitally important”. Lyall-Watson and Dunphy acknowledge that the company’s reputation has been used to leverage a “consistent” relationship with BCC and AQ as well to develop inroads into other government funding bodies. However, Lyall-Watson admits that sometimes the money Belloo is offering these artists is their own and “the sad reality is that the last people who’ll get paid are us”. As partners in Belloo, the four members make up any financial shortfall in projects by investing their own money from work undertaken outside of the company. Lyall-Watson explains that while they will usually be able to pay themselves a fee as creative members of the project, any money received from funding does not cover the costs of administration. She notes that this is something the company members donate “because it’s our company and our project, we bear the cost”.

Government funding and in-kind sponsorship play an important role in the development and production of Belloo’s work, but the company is mindful that it will need to generate more

funding to enable Belloo to move into operational mode, rather than working from project to project. Kelly observes that this focus is also about sustaining Belloo's practice so that the company can pay people what they are worth, rather than make a profit. While the company keeps "a minimum amount" in the bank from box office takings for this purpose, Lyall-Watson notes that Belloo would like to generate a more regular income stream in order to appoint an office administrator so that the rest of the collective can "do the creative work". She suggests that the only way the company will raise more funding "on a regular basis" is to have several Belloo works touring in repertory. Shankey offers that "the need to sustain operational capability" and "getting a body of work" together like this will form "the big question" for Belloo over the next five years of its strategic plan. In a step towards this strategy, Belloo devised its fourth project and third production *Rovers* "as an economic and creative vehicle" for experienced Brisbane actors Barbara Lowing and Roxanne McDonald.

Rovers was a "new intercultural performance work" that celebrated the lives and careers of Lowing and McDonald, using as the basis for the work the story of how the pair worked together in their early careers and became friends during a touring production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Lyall-Watson states that Belloo "made *Rovers* on an artistic and a commercial (level)" and was "very mindful when we created it that we wanted to create a work with particular artistic elements, but that we wanted it to be something that could tour, that would be popular in regions". She acknowledges that the intention of the work was to "not only employ and give a good wage to two amazing senior actors for a long time but would also bring something back in to the company ... that could be part of how we sustain ourselves". *Rovers* is "part verbatim, part fictive memory and deliberately draws on feminist tropes of the road movie and the notion of the 'wild woman' to celebrate the power" of Lowing and McDonald whilst exploring "Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal experiences of colonisation, reconciliation, memory and aging" (Kelly 2018). Significantly, the project included the implementation of a First Nations Community Engagement Program, which was "designed in consultation with Brisbane Festival and Nadine McDonald Dowd, (and) delivered by Emily Coleman – a proud Bundjalung Githabul woman" (Critical Stages 2019). The program was

focused on diversifying the work's audience base and growing "contemporary performance literacy in Indigenous communities", as well as ensuring that audiences from Aboriginal communities were invited and felt "welcomed and connected to the theatre venue and presenting institution" (Kelly 2018).

Rovers was developed in early 2017 with assistance from NORPA (2019), which programmed the production as part of its 2018 season. The work was given a reading at QT in March 2018 as part of International Women's Day and a further showing in April 2018 as part of the Commonwealth Games Indigenous Arts Festival in Brisbane (Kelly and Coleman 2019 in McGowan et al. 2019). On the strength of this showing, the Brisbane Festival programmed *Rovers* as part of its 2018 season. In line with the project's focus on community engagement, Shankey negotiated in advance with the Brisbane Festival that "a substantial tranche of free tickets be set aside for Aboriginal community members" (ibid). For the project, Belloo received financial support from AQ and BCC, and in-kind sponsorship from NORPA, QT, the YWCA, QUT, and the Brisbane Festival. The production premiered at NORPA with two performances (17–18 August 2018), before one performance at the Maleny Arts Festival (26 August 2018) and five performances at Brisbane Festival's Theatre Republic (11–15 September 2018). According to Kelly's research notes, this unseen and untested work was programmed by all three organisations on the basis of Belloo's reputation as well as "the calibre of the two performers and the strength of the performance script" (QUT 2018). *Rovers* was also invited to showcase at the Australian Performing Arts Exchange and arTour in 2018, attracting interest from Critical Stages to tour the work nationally in 2019–2020 (BC 2023a).

Professionalism

The focus on collaboration and relationship-building that underpins Belloo's creative work has provided strong professional partnership opportunities for the company during its short existence. However, each member of Belloo is a mid-career theatre artist in their own right,

bringing to the company individual cultural capital and strong relationships with MPA and S2M theatre companies and arts organisations within Queensland and interstate. Lyall-Watson was Chair of Playlab from 2013 to 2019 and an associate artist with QT in 2015; Dunphy was on the Board of QT from 2003 to 2006 and was Assistant Director to Sam Strong on the 2017 QT production of *Noises Off*, before being appointed as an Artistic Associate at NORPA in the same year; Shankey was a board member with regional theatre company JUTE and has been an assessor for the Regional Arts Development Fund; and Kelly held the reigns as Interplay's Director, before being appointed as Artistic Director of Playlab and working for multiple script development agencies (BC 2023a).

Owing to this level of professional experience, Belloo projects the image of a S2M theatre company on its website and media releases, defining its approach to creative practice and highlighting its accomplishments as a company and the accomplishments of the individuals who make it up. Belloo's professionalism has been strengthened by its association with organisations and companies such as the Brisbane Powerhouse, QT, and the Brisbane Festival over a short period of time and the level of support that has been afforded to the company. Kelly notes that the fact that the company has mobilised so quickly and "the trajectory has been very fast" is not lost on the group. She notes that "there is a hundred years' worth of experience there, so maybe it would be a bit embarrassing if it wasn't fast!". Lyall-Watson measures Belloo's professionalism by the funding and partnership opportunities it has received, but notes that the company's success is also measured by audiences attending the performances, reviews, ticket sales and "how people respond to it":

Kelly believes that it is this collaborative relationship-building with key industry partners and audiences that has enabled Belloo to be rewarded with the chance to develop and perform untested new works such as *Hanako* and *Rovers* as part of the Brisbane Festival. The relationship with these companies has provided Belloo with stronger ticket sales and a broader audience database, but most of all, "it makes it much more reputable" particularly when "international producers look at our website, having those institutions endorse you".

Shankey notes that “tools like websites and collateral” are helpful but “only gets you a certain way down the path”. She notes that “brand recognition” and reputation are “measured in different pools” and “all of it is relationship-based”:

[H]aving strong relationships with presenting partners and venues to actually measure audience impact is really critical. Having data, having analytics, being able to tell an artistic and creative story as well as an evidence-based story is how we demonstrate success. And then that kind of beautiful and organic, authentic relationship-based connections and conversations is maybe the third path of where our success comes from and how we try to maintain it.

Dunphy agrees that Belloo’s success is maintained by the connections with the artistic directors of the theatre companies and festivals with which they collaborate. She offers that these conversations are barometers of the company’s value, which gauge “whether you’ve actually done what you’ve pitched or whether you’ve actually taken that further” or “whether you’ve excelled in that kind of initial pitch or not”. As a testament to this, it was announced at the end of the 2018 Brisbane Festival that Belloo would become QT’s Resident Company (2019–2020), working alongside Artistic Director Sam Strong as part of the state theatre company’s artistic advisory team, learning about the programming process and participating in key activities, whilst being commissioned to write, develop, and create a new work for QT’s 2020 season (QT 2019). Six months after this announcement, Kelly observed that Belloo’s residency with QT had furthered the company’s “legitimacy” but has also provided resources such as a dedicated space, and an understanding about “how that company works from the inside”.

Independence

Belloo identifies as both professional and independent, despite the company’s success in securing project funding from the different levels of government and QT’s offer for it to be resident for two years. Shankey defines *professional* in the sense that the company pays

artists and *independent* in terms of being “unfunded” or not receiving any long-term government and corporate funding that will sustain the activities of the company. She offers that whilst being independent is a challenge due to this lack of ongoing subsidy, there are “higher amounts of agility and the ability to pivot and change and diversify as opportunities pop up” with creative projects. Lyall-Watson agrees that Belloo is independent because the company is “not beholden to anybody” and “don’t have to fit anybody else’s criteria ... we can create everything from a completely artistic value sense”. However, she observes that being a subsidised theatre company would mean “that we’re getting some money for running the company ... there’s payment for administration”. Kelly defines a *subsidised* theatre company as one that has made “an ongoing funding arrangement” with a government entity rather than receiving “project funding, which is once or twice”. Based on her experience of working with AQ, she perceives that the arrangement is a “lock-in contract of some generation, with often an expectation continuing on being capitalised”. Dunphy notes that if Belloo were subsidised by the government to this level it may not have as much creative control as it currently does: “I don’t think in our industry we have to worry too much”.

Kelly suggests that independent theatre is “professional practice that’s not sustainably resourced” and perceives that only commercial theatre, which is made from “the flow of money” from “the private sector rather the government for all of those huge start-up costs”, is profitable and self-sustaining. She notes that independent theatre can be self-sustaining, but only in cities where “there’s enough scale of audience and an ecology that’s sufficient enough that non-funded companies can often make a living”, or they can sustain themselves through “parallel entrepreneurial teaching activities” or tour “highly commercial work”. For Lyall-Watson, the term *commercial* means “thinking about what’s going to sell”. She admits that Belloo can be that way inclined, particularly with the development of *Rovers* where the company had “a very clear commercial view” which included keeping costs to a minimum and designing a set that could tour easily while still creating “something of great artistic merit”. However, while *Rovers* was not commercial in the sense of being profitable, Shankey

says that it was a way of “meeting an audience need ... rather than making art for art’s sake with no intended audience to consume it or a react to it”:

Commercial means understanding a need, whether it's a venue's need, a presenter's need, a community's need, an audience's need, and trying to meet in the middle so that there is a product or a worth that hopefully finds that beautiful moment of connection.

Conclusion

Belloo formed organically around a project and the need for writer Lyall-Watson to find her tribe, mobilising swiftly to become a creative partnership between four experienced theatre practitioners. Practicing as solo artists for over twenty years, Lyall-Watson and Dunphy found a creative synergy that encouraged them to continue creating together but realised that they were stronger as a collective with Kelly and Shankey. The decades of experience the group shares and the wide set of creative and business skills they possess enabled the company to capitalise on its established government and industry relationships and move quickly to produce three major projects over six years and receive funding to develop three others in quick succession. Over a six-year period, the company developed five new works and delivered three successful productions in quick succession, establishing a way of working together that optimises the individual skills within the company and strengthens its creative approach.

Over the next five years, Belloo’s mission and philosophy will remain as the collective continues to evolve and work with a “new set of challenges”, including being resident artists with QT, writing and developing a new production for the state theatre company’s main stage season, and igniting the twenty-five projects that Belloo has waiting in the wings. One of these, *The House in the Dunes (House)*, completed its fourth creative development stage at the end of 2018. A cross-cultural collaborative project between Belloo, Japanese theatre company Idiot Savant and New Zealand theatre company Good Company Arts (BC 2023a),

House investigates “inter-cultural performance practice that respectfully navigates cultural and artistic encounter between four cultures (Aboriginal Australia, white Australia, Japan, and Pakeha NZ)” to “explore cultural understandings of the body and landscape” (Kelly and Gattenhof 2018). Supported by a residency with NORPA and funding from the AC and DFAT, *House* is a hybrid of live performance and “digital and multi-form content creation” (ibid). It will “produce content for an installation project” and features the work of “Aboriginal choreographer Kirk Page; New Zealand Arts Laureate and installation artist Daniel Belton; cultural evaluation specialist and co-dramaturg, Sandra Gattenhof; film production company Cutting Edge and QUT” (ibid).

The strength of the company lies in its strategic planning and artistic mission which has been clearly delineated from the collective’s beginning. By developing a multitude of projects and continuously working on these at various stages the company was able to mobilise quickly to meet opportunities as they arose and develop a pattern of sustainable practice. Taking equal responsibility for the creative and business decisions means that the members of the group play to their strengths and support one another but also take turns to lead where necessary. They are not afraid to produce the work themselves but seek out strong partnerships to enable the work to be professionally profiled and supported in order to pay artists adequately.

The previous two chapters have presented the case studies of six independent theatre formed prior to, during and after the introduction of the CIC. Each case study discussed how these companies are positioned within the Australian theatre field, the sustainability of their creative practice, and how they relate to the *field of power*. The subsequent analysis and interpretation in the next chapter will evaluate the extent to which the logics of CIC and CE were taken up by the companies and those involved.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Discussion and Analysis

7.1. Introduction

When I began this research, I wanted to know if the promotion of *creative entrepreneurship* (CE) through the *creative industries concept* (CIC) had influenced theatre practice in Australia at a grassroots level. As detailed in Chapter Two, the framework for this research engaged with the field analysis theory of Bourdieu (1983): three levels which suggest a methodology to be used to examine the logics of practice and the forces of economic and political power within the *field of cultural production*. Correspondent to Bourdieu's approach, I presented an historical analysis of the Australian cultural field in Chapters Three and Four which determined the position of the theatre field in relation to and, as I argued, against the *field of power* (the fields of government and economic combined), clarified its approaches, structures and organisations, and cited influences and drivers of change prior to and after the introduction of the CIC. I hypothesised, on the basis of this analysis that players within each of these fields would respond strategically (in the Bourdieusian sense) to the shifting of the logics of the field overall by adopting a habitus of entrepreneurship, consistent with those logics. Arguably, this is the very point of such policies.

Since the end of World War Two, policy focus has shifted from the Keynesian model of funding, with a view towards nurturing art and artists and an expansion of the cultural field, to a neoliberal model which is focused on supporting art that is commercial in its output, competitive in its nature, increasingly business focused and exposed to the free market. The Australian neoliberal model includes the introduction of economic rationalisation to arts funding resulting in the demarcation of the Australian theatre field into four subfields: the Australian Major Performing Arts Group (AMPAG), the Key Organisations (KO), the small to medium sector, and the independent sector. The government's cultural policy decisions, particularly over the past two decades, have also impacted and influenced funding decisions and frameworks for all Australian states and territories (Hunt, 2015).

I argued that, in historical terms, the co-operative (co-op) and collective theatre models exemplified by Nimrod and the APG in the 1970s and 1980s were taken up as what we might provisionally understand as the habitus of fringe theatre during the 1990s. By the early 2000s, this had generated “at least six broadly different kinds of groups ... some with sub-species and hybrids within them” (Milne 2004, p. 302). These models included companies that were *writer-centric* or focused on a particular writer or group of writers or set out to do particular written works; *actor-centric* or focused on plays of an “intimate nature” that “provide opportunities for the actors, and hopefully an audience for their work”, with scaled back production values; *director-centric* or focused on “a director with a particular vision of the theatre or a taste for particular kinds of theatre”; *complete production companies*, with resident writers, directors, actors and designers; and companies “defined by common gender, sexuality or ethnicity, and style-oriented companies” (ibid, pp. 302-311). This entrepreneurial approach to theatre making provided freelance artists with the opportunity to define their own position in the field, prompting the formation of independent partnerships, collectives and companies which developed their own theatre practice, rather than waiting to be noticed by the field’s centre.

The introduction of the CIC to Australia in 2001 and the push for CE within the arts, was part of a wider movement toward neoliberalist policies and practices across all industries made by federal governments, which was subsequently promoted at a state and local level. The institution of the performing arts as an industry under the CI umbrella and the implementation of the CIC through the implementation federal and state government cultural policy and funding criteria saw a widespread, albeit unwilling, acceptance of the logic of economic rationalism as the fundamental logic underpinning the field of artistic practice. Since the early 2000s, Australian independent theatre artists have been required to engage with business practices via various government and education mechanisms. These included the introduction of the Australian Business Number (ABN) enabling them to operate as a sole trader, tax reform focused on the work and income of artists (TR 2005/1) which clarified the

nature of art activity and stipulated how artists could be defined in economic and management terms in order to be considered as professionals rather than as hobbyists for tax purposes, and a concerted focus on entrepreneurship training within university arts programs (graduate outcomes and attributes). Government entities such as the Australian Business Arts Foundation and Artsupport (2000), and initiatives such as the Australian Cultural Fund (2006) were established to promote private sector support for the arts, and to enable artists to source alternative forms of income outside of government agencies. As these mechanisms were designed to be consistent with the policies aligned with the CE concept, independent theatre artists and companies began to operate as business entities: fundraising and entering business partnerships with other artists to collaborate and create work together, and initiating projects and developing relationships with S2M, FYFO, MPA companies and major festivals, rather than waiting to be employed by these organisations or to be funded by the government.

In the decade succeeding the introduction of the CIC, two other factors emerged from this changing creative business environment: the nature of the artistic labour market itself, and the rise of the portfolio career. In 2004, Milne recognised the employment rate in professional theatre was less than ten per cent, noting that “there simply isn’t the work available in the established companies to employ the thousands of artists already in the profession, or the scores of hopefuls who swell its ranks every year on graduation from training school” (2004, p. 301). Citing this as a reason for fringe theatre’s rapid expansion, Milne simultaneously observed the emergence of “productions mounted by groups of mostly professionally trained artists, with little or no direct support from government funding agencies, in the hope of making some money from a share of the box-office after expenses”, which he attributed to “the large and vibrant ‘professional co-operative’ sector of the industry” (ibid, p. 299). Any long-term employment previously offered in the arts was replaced with a project-based system reliant on short-term hiring referred to as a “portfolio career”, creating a work environment in which “artists learn to manage risk and to stay alive through multiple job-holding, occupational versatility, diversification of job portfolios and occasional income

transfers from social security or other sources” (Menger 2006 as cited in Throsby and Zednik 2011, p.10). As Throsby and Zednik acknowledge, “the portfolio career pattern comprises a continually evolving patchwork of grant-based (i.e., publicly subsidised) and/or commercial projects, jobs and educational experiences. A portfolio of arts work may be supplemented by additional concurrent work activities – the ubiquitous ‘day job’ – in order to meet the artist’s financial obligations” (2010) check dates. In 2013, Bridgstock and Carr argued that an artist engaged in a portfolio career pattern “should possess well developed arts entrepreneurship skills (those associated with the application or sharing of creative work), as well as highly developed skills associated with arts practice, that is, creation, making or performing of artistic work” (2013, p.14).

Towards the end of this first decade after the CIC was introduced to Australia, Gallasch observed that the *Make it New?* consultation undertaken by the Australia Council’s Theatre Board and the subsequent changes made to the theatre funding program “addressed the challenges of building networks and freeing artists of various burdens by creating producer and management models that support innovation, thus initiating an ecological approach to sustainability for the small to medium performing arts sector” (2008, p.12). Notably, the *Make it New?* proposal identified the creative producer as “a creative partner in the conception of the work” who takes “some or all of the financial responsibility for a project” and defined this role as “people who work closely with artists in bringing a project together, who access the necessary resources to take it forward, and who keep one eye on future possibilities for the resulting work” (Baylis & Joshi 2006, p. 5).

At the beginning of the second decade after the CIC was introduced, further changes of federal government and shifts in cultural policy and priority served to strengthen the position of the AMPAG and KO theatre companies in the cultural field and erode that of the S2M sector, to the detriment of independent theatre artists. The AMPAG “have been characterised as occupying a privileged position in the Australian cultural funding landscape” whilst “the hundreds of smaller organisations and thousands of individual artists who are not

part of the major companies are competing for the minority share of the Australia Council's funding" (Eltham and Verhoeven, 2020, p.82). The relationships between the AMPAG, FYFO, S2M and independent artists became "fractured ... between the haves and the have nots—all fearful of losing the crumbs that fall from the table" (Hunt 2015, p.3). When Senator George Brandis tore at the fabric of the government's support of the performing arts sector in 2015, he relegated 21 previously funded S2M theatre companies to the level of "have nots", decimating the development of emerging artists and employment opportunities for independent artists, and exposing the precarious nature of the cultural field and the fragility of Australian theatre's ecosystem.

As noted in Chapter Two, CEs work to build, sustain and grow a demand for their creative business, attracting personnel and other needed resources and working strategically and collaboratively with "many agents, some large and capital-intensive, some small and skill-expert, in its productive processes", and specialising "in order to adapt to the changing environment" (Rae 2007, pp. 56-59). For the first set of case studies, I focused on three companies (Darlinghurst Theatre Company (DTC), Matrix Theatre (Matrix) and Red Stitch Actors' Theatre (Red Stitch)) established in the Australian theatre field prior to and during the introduction of the CIC, and for the second set of case studies I focused on three companies (Elbow Room (ER), Sport for Jove (SFJ) and Belloo Creative (Belloo)) which were established in the years following this. Responses to the open-ended questions I asked in personal interviews with participants enabled me to determine how these six independent theatre companies were organised, how they operated within the wider industrial hierarchy and in relationship to government and audiences in terms of development and growth, and whether this practice was influenced by the idea of *creative entrepreneurship*. I will now review the key findings from the two comparative multiple-case studies, discussing the systems of dispositions within which they all practice and analysing their position in the theatre field.

7.2. Origins and Development

As demonstrated in Chapters Five and Six, two central approaches to creative practice emerged from the multiple-case studies data: one was the desire to challenge the status quo of the MPA companies, in both ideas and form, in a manner similar to the ways in which previous alternative Australian theatre companies had sought to secure status in the field by offering novel content and practices. The second involved a desire to work within the artistic parameters set by each independent company to develop strong products that would create distinction and sustain or improve their position in the theatre field. Each company had an explicitly stated creative vision and organisational purpose, which is reflected in their artistic products, and which also informs and shapes a creative business approach.

The artist-driven approach taken by DTC formed the core of its activities and encouraged the company, as part of its vision and mission, to “seek out work and provocations that explore, discuss, and engage with contemporary Australia and topical issues”, promoting a “democracy of ideas” which placed the vision of theatre artists at the centre of their work (DTC 2018). Red Stitch was also artist-driven and committed to performing “contemporary Australian plays and award-winning new writing from around the world” whilst playing “a vital role in the development and presentation of new Australian works” offering “opportunities for theatre-makers at all stages of their careers to hone and develop their craft” (Red Stitch, 2019). While also an actors’ company, SFJ was foremost a repertory theatre company focused on the work of “Greeks to Shakespeare to modern classics” which was “seeking to inspire excellence” and “determined to establish an original, compelling and energetic new theatrical voice in Australia” (SFJ 2023a).

The development of new work was central to the final three case studies, with Matrix describing their purpose as “presenting high-quality, vibrantly innovative new works which have been inspired by true-life stories, and the best of world literature” (MT, 2023a), while ER remained “committed to the rigorous development of the craft of writing and

performance making, in order to test and strengthen the relationship between art and society, and the capacity of that relationship to create change” (ER, 2020a). Comparatively, Belloo’s artistic practice was centred around “a collaborative framework that traverses text and physical form across multiple art forms to produce original contemporary Australian theatre experiences”, which enabled the company’s performances to have “the flexibility to move between traditional playwriting, contemporary performance making, devised theatre and other art forms” (BC 2023a). While each company’s creative practice crosses over and also emulate the work of the MPA and KO companies, the impetus to practice was identifying and filling a gap in the creative field.

When creating artistic products, the six companies engaged with the logics of *excellence*, *nationalism*, and *professionalism* in diverse ways. All participants used the logic of *excellence* in the competition to gain cultural capital which, in this context, meant gaining audience attention and funding from government, sponsors and philanthropists. For example, DTC had the explicit artistic aim of attracting and producing the work of the best artists, while Red Stitch focussed on selecting and presenting the best writing from around the world. Although the logic of *excellence* aspired to by the artists and expected by government coalesced, there was also a strong desire for independence from the government’s expectations of *excellence* when it came to curating and producing their artistic work.

For Matrix, ER and Belloo, *nationalism* was an explicit part of how they defined themselves through their commitment to new Australian work, written and developed by in-house writers in conjunction with the collaborative work of other artists in the company. In contrast, *nationalism* was less evident in the work of DTC, Red Stitch, and SFJ, who focused on producing a mixture of existing classic and contemporary plays (which might include new Australian work) sourced from partnerships with external writers. Unlike the AMPAG, this engagement with *nationalism* was not used by these independent companies for the purposes of showcasing their work internationally but was focused on challenging the national identity at a grass roots level with stories about forgotten or unseen historical figures

(Matrix, SFJ and Belloo), or tapping into the zeitgeist of contemporary Australia with issue-based and social contemporary drama, comedy and satire (DTC, Red Stitch and ER).

The logic of *professionalism* was evident in the creative work and operating structures of all six case studies. Reflecting the collaborative nature of theatrical practice, each company established and maintained an organised production relationship amongst a core group of artists over a series of continuous projects. By mirroring the organisational and operational practices of the MPA and S2M theatre companies, these independent theatre companies promoted partnership and collaborative opportunities with other companies and venues and attracted government funding. In doing so, they had established their own position in the space between the co-op fringe sector and the MPA sectors within the theatre field to sustain their practice.

7.3. Creation and production

All six case studies formed, in the first instance, to create theatre work, and were shaped by various ideas of artistic, cultural, and social sustainability rather than concerns with operational and financial sustainability. Each company began with a co-op profit-share model as their initial organisational practice. With the exception of Matrix, the co-op model was refocused over the ensuing years towards a professional independent approach in an effort to becoming self-sustaining entities. DTC, Red Stitch and SFJ are now structured as full-time creative organisations with artistic directors, producing annual seasons of work that are delivered in dedicated performance venues. Comparatively, ER, Belloo, and Matrix are now structured as project-based partnerships which act as creative umbrellas for the artists involved. These artists all worked as individual entities within the MPA and S2M sectors but convened to develop new work on a project basis and function as creators and producers under the banners of their companies within the independent sector. All companies used a combination of key personnel and ancillary activities, existing relationships within the *field of power*, as well as structures and platforms contained within the theatre field as a way of

gathering resources, initiating projects, and developing their artistic products. Correspondingly, these six organisations can be grouped into three modes of operation, which I describe here as *Initiator*, *Incubator* and *Collective*.

The *Initiator* operational model generates creative ideas and gathers other creatives to work collaboratively to expand these ideas towards production. These organisations are small creative partnerships who write, construct, and develop original work, seeking out like-minded creative partners to see the work through to production. Examples of *Initiators* are Matrix, ER and Belloo, all of whom are creative partnerships that were itinerant and developed theatre projects as the opportunity arose, rather than being obligated to an annual season of performance works at one particular venue. These companies initiated, authored, and creatively developed their work, collaborating and co-producing with other individuals and companies, festivals, and venues in its various stages to bring it to production.

The *Incubator* is a venue-based organisation that provides personnel and financial investment to support the delivery of creative development towards theatre production. These independent companies are “creative hubs” with a larger production infrastructure than *Initiators* and the financial means to develop a new or existing work from a creative development stage through to production. As producing houses, Red Stitch and DTC both curated an annual season of plays focused on the creative energy and artistic drive of independent artists. Red Stitch co-opted the energy of external theatre artists to work in collaboration with the ideas of their resident acting and creative ensemble, while DTC harnessed creative ideas put forward by individual independent artists to create a collaborative partnership, with both providing a platform for the production outcomes of the work.

Independent companies using the *Collective* model relied on various aspects of the production by spreading these tasks amongst a large ensemble. These independent companies were ensemble-based and closely aligned with the earlier fringe co-operative or

collaborative models in terms of creative input / output but resembled traditional hierarchically organised theatre companies in their management structures. SFJ and Red Stitch collaborated regularly with large communities of theatre artists to accomplish annual performance seasons and other activities, such as the creative development of a new work or the delivery of an extensive education program.

These three modes of independent theatre organisation reflect a similar hybridity to Milne's creative typology (writer-centric, actor-centric, director-centric), with companies tending to occupy more than one position at a time. Significantly, each mode has functioned as part of a value chain ecology for independent theatre development and practice, enabling a stronger recognition of this sector's work within the overall theatre field.

All of the case studies engaged with technology to promote and position themselves operationally as professional independent theatre companies. Each had a public website and used a variety of social media channels and media platforms to present their professional profile and publicly convey the company's creative history, achievements, and personnel, as well as to promote artistic products and upcoming creative activities to build interest and encourage a direct relationship with audiences. Towards the notion of audience development, DTC and Red Stitch had each produced between 6-8 plays annually and offered half-yearly and yearly subscriptions. Comparatively, SFJ had produced the same number of plays but did not offer a subscription. However, the company had divided its annual season into two (public and schools) and performed in outdoors and indoors venues provided through a series of venue partnerships, encouraging a wider demographic.

DTC, Red Stitch and SFJ had an advantage over the other three case studies because they were able to continuously deliver artistic product in a dedicated performance space in which the company was resident. This enables them to nurture individual brand loyalty, and strengthened their professional relationship with audiences, sponsors and government, enabling them to build cultural capital. Multiple ventures and diversified offerings such as in-

house festivals, touring shows and education programs had increased their audience and capacity, helped build their creative businesses, moving the companies closer to an artistically and financially sustainable position. However, Caldwell (Red Stitch) noted that an independent theatre company with a subscription season and a venue conveyed a sense of prosperity and subsidy that does not necessarily exist, creating confusion for audiences and the overall industry as to the company's position within the theatre field:

I think it's funny, because sometimes people talked about the fact that we have a subscription season, or we have a venue, meaning that we're not independent...I've had that conversation with people in the industry, (they) have said that to me. We don't qualify as independent because we have subscribers as we do. That's one of the conversations that has come up a couple of times in terms of independent theatre and whether we qualify as independent theatre.

Working from project to project, Matrix, ER and Belloo have taken advantage of project and performance opportunities as they have arisen. The itinerant nature of their individual creative practices enabled these companies to develop, perform and readily tour their work, building key relationships and partnering with other theatre companies and venues, accruing cultural capital and legitimacy through these relationships. Unlike their venue-based counterparts, these independent theatre companies were mercurial and flexible enough to accommodate creative partnerships with the MPA, FYFO, other S2M organisations and venues, as well as major and fringe festivals.

7.4. Collaboration

All six independent theatre companies achieved a level of cultural sustainability through creative partnerships and/or *festivalisation*. According to Negrier (2015, p.1) *festivalisation* is “the process by which cultural activity, previously presented in a regular, ongoing pattern or season, is reconfigured to form a ‘new’ event” but is also “the process by which cultural

institutions, such as a cinema, theatre, arts centre, or gallery orient part of their programme (sic) around one or more themes or events, concentrated in space and time” (2008, p.12). The festivalisation of Australian culture over the past thirty years has increased opportunities for independent theatre companies to gravitate from the fringe to the centre of cultural activities.

Milne noted that the role of Australian fringe theatre “subtly changed in the 1990s from a peripheral or marginalised activity to in some cases acting as a supplier of product and personnel to subsidised companies and festivals” (2004, p. 316). Independent theatre companies have strengthened their cultural capital and gained professional legitimacy by using fringe festivals and dedicated independent theatre platforms created by MPA and S2M producing houses and major festivals. This is exemplified in Matrix’s production *A Beautiful Life* which was featured in the 1998 Brisbane Festival in partnership with La Boîte Theatre, and subsequently toured nationally to critical acclaim. Glow & Caust (2010) identify fringe festivals as an integral step in the ecological progress of independent theatre, providing a platform for the outcome of an artistic development, and exposing companies to a wider audience. Correspondingly, ER initially presented their work in the Melbourne, Adelaide, and Sydney fringe festivals to build their identity, practice their craft, experiment with form and style, and generate further opportunities for their company (ibid).

The programming of MPA and S2M producing houses and production companies in the decades following the CIC also reflected creative partnership opportunities for independent theatre companies. Although the AC’s *Make it New?* (2007) recommendations and changes to the Key Organisation (KO) funding were only in place for a few years, the effects were far-reaching. Milne observed that due to this consultation, creative partnerships were taken “a step further”, with KOs being promoted as “producers, co-producers and presenters in their own right as before, but also able to provide mentorship, creative development partnerships and other support, such as auspicing, to independent artists and groups and to develop projects with them” (2013, p.35). These creative partnerships emerged as curatorial

platforms offered to independent artists in Brisbane through Metro Arts' *Season of the Independents* (Independents), the Judith Wright Centre's *Fresh Ground* residency and Brisbane Powerhouse's *SWEET!* Programs; in Sydney through Belvoir's *B Sharp* and the Seymour Centre's *BITE* programs; in Melbourne by the Victorian Arts Centre's *Full Tilt*, Malthouse's *HELIUM*, Darebin Arts' *Speakeasy* and MTC's *NEON Festival for Independent Theatre* (NEON) programs; and regionally through NORPA's *In Development* and Hothouse's *A Month in the Country* programs, to name a few.

As illustrated in the ER, Belloo and Matrix case studies, participation in these development programs and curated seasons enabled these independent theatre companies to build cultural capital by providing them with a platform for creative autonomy and entrepreneurial endeavour whilst conferring on them a level of professional legitimacy. ER was invited to feature two works, *After All This* and *Prehistoric* in the Brisbane Festival's independent theatre *Under the Radar* program and was subsequently commissioned by Hothouse to develop *The Motion of Light in Water* which was produced and presented by HotHouse and La Boîte, and to develop and present *We Get It* for MTC's NEON. Belloo was invited to remount their Metro Arts production of *Motherland* under the auspices of QT and tour the work nationally; after which they were consequently engaged to present the premiere productions of *Hanako* and *Rovers* as part of the Brisbane Festival's successful independent theatre platform Theatre Republic, which led to a regional tour of *Rovers* and a resident company position with QT. Similarly, Matrix was supported by Metro Arts' Independents program to produce the award-winning season of *The Kursk*, undertaking a 34-venue Australian tour in partnership with Metro Arts and Critical Stages, supported by Playing Australia. Having practised through the government funding and touring structures of the 1990's, Futcher (Matrix) was conscious of changes within the theatre field in terms of touring independent work that had been brought about by these creative partnerships, but also by the development of independent touring organisations such as Critical Stages (CS).

It (The Kursk) had no plan beyond just being a show at Metro (Arts). Fortunately for things, Robert Kronk (former Director of Programming and Operation) and Liz Burcham (former CEO), who were at Metro at the time, talked to Critical Stages about it. And Critical Stages came up (from Sydney) and took the show on. And so that was an amazing thing because a little mini-independent show started to connect with Australia.

7.5. Sustainability

Whilst all six case studies have engaged with the logic of *professionalism*, it is the companies with an in-house creative producer that have made the strongest progress towards professional legitimacy within the Australian theatre field, alongside artistic, cultural and financial sustainability.

As an independent production house, DTC neatly meets the definition of a venue-based creative producer. When DTC shifted from a co-op to a creative producer model in 2001, the company grew its creative business exponentially. The company had presented and showcased the work of independent artists in an annual season, developed the work of the artistic teams they have engaged with and sought further opportunities beyond this initial season, such as return seasons, transfers, and touring. Although ER had worked with various producers on earlier productions, it was only when Butterworth joined the company as the creative producer in 2015 and became part of the core artistic team, adding to the artistic vision and developing ER's business structures, that the company started to work strategically towards long term goals of artistic and financial sustainability. In comparison, Belloo had engaged a creative producer since the company's inception. Rather than being positioned as an artist, Shankey saw her role as creative producer and her purpose within the company "as one to support, nurture and facilitate opportunities for artists". Shankey had functioned as a member of the creative team to enable the development of projects but had also worked to secure creative and financial relationships with partners and taken responsibility for the company and its work from a business perspective, rapidly positioning it within the S2M and MPA sectors of the theatre field.

Comparatively, the three ADs who have led Red Stitch—Miller, Whiteley and Caldwell—have functioned in the role of executive creative producer, particularly in the areas of fundraising and sponsorship but also through the management of the artists and diversification of product. Although not appointed as a creative producer, SFJ’s Business and Marketing Manager Steven Tait had supported the legal and financial considerations of the company’s creative business and developed opportunities for it. It was only when the withdrawal of SFJ’s major sponsor was imminent, that Ryan recognised the SFJ structure needed to change and brought in an external creative producer to optimise opportunities for sustainability by reimagining the company structure. Significantly, Matrix had struggled to develop beyond its initial company structure and has not surpassed the co-producer model it developed with its production of *A Beautiful Life*. Fatcher admitted that he and Howard were “more creative entities” and acknowledged they would need to engage a creative producer to develop Matrix further as a company.

We want to be able to create works that get put on, you know, we don't want to just perform it in a night club somewhere. It's hard to actually achieve your artistic goals like that. You know, if you can't pay actors to be there every day, you know, day in, day out, then it's very hard... I'm not saying it's impossible and we've proved many times that we can put shows on like that, but it's not ideal, you know. To be able to afford the best lighting designers and sound designers and designers and all those sorts of people, you know, to collaborate with those sorts of people. If we were able to, you know, if a producer was able to come along and assist us to be able to get the funds to make our shows happen, then that would be brilliant.

In addition to the development of artistic product and organisational structures, all of the interview participants were aware of their company’s ability to sustain creative activities in the long term from artistic, financial, operational, cultural and social perspectives. I noted that while each participant acknowledged government funding as a possible source of income, there was also an awareness of the small pool of money available to them through all tiers of government and was not something that any relied upon. Each company had

received project funding from either federal, state or local government but not enough to sustain operations in the long term.

However, DTC and Red Stitch had successfully secured consistent operational funding, were the most commercially productive of the six case studies and had the strongest links to the *field of power*. DTC had received government subsidies for accommodation from the City of Sydney and operational funding from the City of Sydney and Create NSW, while Red Stitch was previously a KO with the AC between 2009–2017 and had received organisational funding from Creative Victoria and cultural development funding from the City of Port Phillip. Both DTC and Red Stitch were venue-based, box-office driven and geographically central to their respective communities, so had connected with a wider audience through sponsorship and fundraising activities and had achieved a higher level of financial buoyancy than the other four case studies. However, while box office and subscriptions had increased their individual financial capacity, it had also created a more precarious financial position for each, due to the robust operating structure and higher staffing levels needed for these companies to function.

To financially sustain their creative businesses, all participants identified that they needed to diversify their artistic products to fortify their box office earnings and develop strong community and theatre sector relationships through fundraising and sponsorship opportunities. I observed that DTC was the most financially resilient and innovative of all the companies in this study, having always focused on becoming a self-sustaining entity, even when it operated in a profit-share co-op model. As outlined in the case study, DTC developed its core creative business through the multiple enterprises of Darlo Drama, Milk Crate Theatre and Critical Stages as well as concerted efforts to become a vital part of their resident community, by securing donations and in-kind support from a multitude of donors and through relationships with local and state government. Conversely, the multiple income streams generated by these enterprises helped to support and fund each individual entity

until it was strong enough to function alone, giving DTC a larger cultural capacity and footprint as an organisation.

As well as using box office proceeds to fund further creative productions, each case study leveraged the reputation and profile of key creatives or performers to maintain a professional position in the field and build an audience for the company's work. However, DTC, Red Stitch and Belloo were also focused on relationship building with local, state and federal government, sponsors, venues and other key sector organisations, such as artistic hubs and touring organisations, and had strongly advocated for both private and public funding. Comparatively, the companies who avoided public advocacy and relationships with government and sponsors (Matrix, ER and SFJ) or expected to be recognised and financially rewarded for their creative excellence (SFJ), had been overlooked from an operational funding perspective. Ryan (SFJ) noted that independent theatre companies "will occasionally get a small government grant toward a play that doesn't somehow remove your status as an independent company, because you are not receiving program funding, but you might be receiving project funding". Dorney (ER) offers that project funding is not only "how a lot of independent artists make their living" but also "attract artistic credibility for the crucial part about survival in independent practice, which is project-specific funding rather than on-going funding".

However, as Ryan (SFJ) observes, artistic credibility is no longer enough to secure ongoing funding. As exemplified in the case study, SFJ had tried to establish itself as a company in traditional patronage terms, expecting that their critical success would be noticed by the field of power and the company would be eligible for ongoing operational funding. Ryan recalls the frustration he felt about SFJ's lack of recognition when he received feedback from the Australia Council about a triennial funding grant that he was sure would be successful due to his company's reputation and box office success:

We received a letter (in response) to one of our funding grants that we put a lot of work into. It was a lovely thing in a sense for them to be honest with us, but they wrote back and said 'Look, the work is excellent. Clearly, you guys are doing very well to sustain the work you are doing, but we have three majors...what did they say...elite companies or performing arts companies or something...theatre companies in Sydney, and the city cannot sustain another one'. It was very much saying, "I'm sorry, we are not going to help you now and we are not going to help you in future. We have our major companies". Yeah ... "We have our major companies and you're a tier below, so good work but none shall pass". You know? I thought, wow. So, there is no meritocracy. It doesn't matter if the quality of the upper-level slips at any time and the quality of the lower level, not just my company but a whole range of others, is doing well. Never the twain shall meet. That amazed me.

Through this experience, Ryan had realised that the government's relationship with the Australian theatre field no longer functioned to elevate new companies that demonstrated artistic excellence, and that SFJ would need to achieve financial resilience through the activities of its education arm in the short term, diversify their product to include the development and presentation of new Australian work, focus on developing a better relationship with government funding bodies and secure more private sponsors. Terry (DTC) agreed that it was a struggle and not a given for independent theatre companies to be supported by government funding, observing the length of time that was faced by DTC in the process of securing ongoing funding at a state level, and noting that "there would need to be a revolution of some sort in the funding world" because there are too many new companies being developed and "the pot hasn't gotten bigger".

All of the case study participants were economically driven and intent on raising funds for production purposes, and all wanted artists and production personnel to be paid, but finding the money for wages was a continuing battle. While DTC had recently installed an Equity minimum policy that paid all staff at the given industry rates, the remaining five case studies still used an upfront stipend / profit-share model or paid artists at non-industry rates, unless they had raised enough funds through box office revenue or received a direct sponsorship or government grant for the project. While the attitude of putting "the work before the wages"

(Brisbane 2003, p. 8) remained with Matrix, Red Stitch and SFJ, there was also a strong sense of value in the time and focus of the artists and production personnel and a responsibility for trying to achieve close to industry minimum or at least a stipend that was acceptable to the staff. Comparatively, I found that ER and Belloo paid the artists and production personnel before themselves and willingly self-funded projects from their other external creative work in order to pay for these costs, rather than expecting artists and production personnel to share the financial risk and rely on a share of the profits for wages.

7.6. Independent or Entrepreneur?

Crucially, all participants who were interviewed identified as independent artists rather than entrepreneurs, even though most realised during our discussions that their approach to performance making was aligned with some of the attributes of the creative entrepreneur (CE) model. All of the case studies had ABNs, with DTC, Red Stitch and SFJ registered as companies limited by guarantee with ASIC and registered as charities with the ACNC, while ER and Belloo were registered as other incorporated entities. Matrix is an unincorporated partnership with an ABN only. Although the hallmarks of creative entrepreneurship were present within the creative practice of each case study, I found that the development of these independent companies were more aligned with the logics of entrepreneurship found within the neoliberal cultural policies inherent in the Australian cultural field, rather than a conscious emulation or even recognition of the CE model. In other words, rather than stemming from an ideological commitment to being a creative entrepreneur, the development of these independent companies can be understood as a series of responses to policy changes and the resulting shifts in various bureaucratic mechanisms.

The participants varied in their individual responses to questions about the CIC and CE concept. Futcher (Matrix) perceived the CIC as “trying to have a dollar each way” in that one can be both an artist and an entrepreneur and try to “marry those two things together”.

Comparatively, Caldwell (Red Stitch) understood the CIC to be “quite a broad term” that “encompasses a lot of practices” such as theatre, writing, and visual art, but which “interacts with other industries that you wouldn’t qualify as creative industries”. Dunphy (Belloo) suggested that it was “a merging of performing arts” with “a business mind” and “seemed product focused”, while Ryan (SFJ) offered that CI is an “umbrella term for all of the different cultural approaches”. Graduating from QUT in the early 1990s, Dunphy was not trained in CI philosophy but admits that she has heard the term used within the context of her individual professional practice. To her, it means “a merging of performing arts into a more holistic, creative place” with a more “product-focused business mind”. Lyall-Watson (Belloo) admits that when she first heard the term CI, she “thought it was another buzz word” or “a way of amalgamating all the performing arts together and valuing it and saying, this has got a commercial value too”, enabling governments to have a relationship with the arts under the banner of “industry”, in order to justify expenditure and investment.

Terry (DTC), Dorney (ER), and Kelly and Shankey (Belloo) demonstrated the strongest knowledge of the CIC’s rhetoric, recognising both the value and challenges it presents in terms of the economic framework it provides for the arts. Whilst Terry was aware of the CIC and construes its meaning as “pretty broad”, he also recognised that “the capital, the value and quantifying” of creativity is important. However, rather than the CIC, it is the notion of creativity that figures more prominently in his artistic philosophy because it is something that artists must do “to seed their projects, more and more”. Dorney was an undergraduate in Brisbane when the CIC was introduced, and he did talk about “cultural, social economic formations” through subjects in cultural studies at UQ but was first exposed to the CIC by working with QUT graduates and engaging with what they were talking about. Dorney believes that the CIC “exist(s) in order to have the practice of art engaged with the wider economy” and is “incredibly valuable”, but also dangerous if you are not critical of it and “could lead to a sort of wholesale absorption of the industrial model as it is”. Shankey was exposed to the term CI during her Master’s degree at QUT and refers to it as “the growth of the creative economy”. She acknowledges that CI offered “for the first time, the intersection between the cultural arts and traditional arts sector and the more commercial creative fields

like design, architecture, and technology-based work”. In her view, CI defines the economic value of the different arts companies and “marks the professionalisation of the (theatre) sector” where “you can measure an economic output” and “you value the artist at the heart of that, because you are paying them to produce what it is they're creating”.

Kelly was working at QUT in the CI faculty when this research was conducted and agrees that CI has “legitimised government investment in the arts” and “allowed public subsidy of the arts to continue in a more palatable frame than art for art’s sake”. She noted that it has also encouraged “the globalisation of arts into a commercial framework” which is also “industrial (and) neoliberal”, suggesting that CI is “a public discourse” that explains “what art is and resourcing it and engaging people in it and bringing them along”, and points out that it has advantages and disadvantages:

I think it's protected us. So, globalisation has come, and it's had big impacts on music, and it's had big impacts on literature ... but the public subsidy of concrete buildings in the theatre sector has helped us and creative industries has been a part of that. But it's also commodifying art, which every artist feels the dissonance between those two positions. So, as a public discourse it's been advantageous ... and everyone has basically run a dual line. So, there's the art we make and then there's the, the framework we put around in order to get funding for our art.

All of those I spoke to were cognisant of this dual “framework” and how it relates to the concept of creative entrepreneurship, although opinions were once again divided as to how the model of CE practice that I outlined in an earlier chapter directly corresponds with their creative approach as independent theatre companies. When asked to define a CE, Ryan (SFJ) offered that this is a person who is a “self-starter” or “someone who is self-creating their place in the industry” and not waiting for an opportunity to be given to them; an individual who says “Well, no, I'll create one then. I'll create my own context in which to work. Let others come to me if they want to come to me, but in the meantime, I'll busy myself with this”. Fatcher (Matrix) equated creative entrepreneurship with being able to “create your

own opportunities to get your work up” by talking and selling “your product to the people who can help you put it on”, which is something that he has always done and is “constantly trying to do”, with Matrix. Dorney (ER) was happy to recognise ER’s work as a type of creative entrepreneurship but was quick to differentiate this from any business or commercial concerns, noting that the creative entrepreneurship within ER’s practice over the past decade had been focused on creating a unique identity more than building a creative business.

Dunphy (Belloo) defined a CE as an individual who starts a creative business with an idea, which can come from either a creative or business perspective. Lyall-Watson (Belloo) admitted that creative entrepreneurship was not something that she had ever really thought about and the term also felt “like a buzzword” to her. However, she conceded that “if an entrepreneur is somebody who is creating something new and starting something innovative and building their business, then doing it creatively, then I go, yeah, I suppose Belloo are CEs”. Shankey (Belloo) thought that creative entrepreneurship meant “taking a business mind, applying it to an arts setting, but not losing the integrity and high-quality rigour that the arts and the cultural centre brings”, proposing that all artists must be CEs and find a way of living both roles:

[Y]ou’ve got to be able to move in that continuum, because the CE for me is more about sustainability and in a time where creative problem-solving is the huge value, that’s the new perspective, the new way of doing things, the agility to change with new models, new economies, new technologies. That’s the value of collaboration, connection, all the values that underpin Belloo and what we feel connected and passionate about allow us to hopefully sustain a practice. And whether it’s an artistic practice or a commercial practice, hopefully it sustains the company.

The venue-based case study companies, DTC and Red Stitch, were the closest to the CE model in terms of the Leadbeater & Oakley (1999) and Rae (2007) definitions discussed in

Chapter One and were the most structured in their approach to building and sustaining a demand for their creative businesses. These companies worked purposefully and collaboratively with many agents to shore up their resources and adapt to a changing environment. Although venue based, SFJ was more aligned with Matrix, ER and Belloo against the CE model. These companies also developed their project work but used the collaborative and networking capacity of this work to enable the strategic development of relationships with other artists, with audience, and with other producers, such as festivals, theatre companies and venues.

Caldwell (Red Stitch) acknowledged that this idea of creative entrepreneurship is something that “the artists of Red Stitch have done for a number of years and effectively everyone who works with us continues to do that”. However, Caldwell observed that the company’s work is not focused on CI or creative entrepreneurship in a formal sense, although it has taken creative risks from the beginning of its existence and its creative trajectory has always been steered towards self-sustenance and independent professionalism. For Terry (DTC), the double-edged sword of taking an entrepreneurial approach means that artists need to be careful of the “I’ll do this for nothing” sentiment where there is a “wonderful, whole kind of cultural thing that’s going on but beneath it is a real poverty and reliant on the artists doing this for nix or for very little or funding it themselves”, which is not sustainable.

Sustainability was an important factor within creative entrepreneurship for Terry (DTC), who observed that “if the whole kind of creative industries thing has enormous value” it needs to be about finding “pathways to sustainability” so that artists are enabled by initial funding, encouraged to grow their creative businesses, and “supported towards being self-sustaining”. However, he warned that the idea of artists funding their activities without some federal, state, and local government contribution sets a dangerous precedent; the danger is that government will withdraw from arts funding entirely. Kelly (Belloo) agrees, perceiving a “problem” within the CI and creative entrepreneurship “rhetoric”, which is that the expectation from government that arts organisations “will tip into self-sustaining”, causing a

further reduction in the amount of financial assistance. Assessing the independent theatre sector in Australia, Kelly observed that “the number of companies that have sustained themselves beyond ten years is very small” and the reason why Belloo has survived for six years is because the collective “would never put pressure on the company to make money” in the sense of profit-making. For Shankey (Belloo) it is the “value driven passion and drive, and it is transformation” that sustains the work of independent companies and “when the spectrum of the artist comes into play because no one does this (for the money)”. Kelly acknowledges that there are “pathways to sustainability” for independent theatre companies but these require the energy to run “a parallel business” and do “whatever it is you have to do to survive if you’re not”.

Throughout the interviews, it became clear that it was the shift in Australian cultural policy from a Keynesian philosophy to a neoliberal approach and the demarcation of the field between the AMPAG and S2M sectors that had encouraged these participants to develop independent theatre companies within the theatre field. Rather than building a business to make a profit, all of the companies wanted to make work that was artistically and culturally sustainable and financially able to pay for itself. Creative entrepreneurship was about building artistic work that was developed by them as well as building reputation, networks and a sustainable artistic and cultural practice. From these platforms, the six companies had seeded substantial creative projects which consolidated the cultural capital and legitimacy of individual company members, enabling them to work under the auspices of their company and simultaneously maintain a portfolio career and work across the different sectors of the field as freelance artists. While there was debate over the relevance of the CIC and alignment with the CE model, I found that each case study recognised their creative practice as being independent to the rest of the theatre field, albeit in different ways.

For DTC and Red Stitch, the term independent reflected an approach to their overall creative practice with the ability to program any work that was important to them without external interference. In comparison, for Matrix, ER and Belloo independence meant creative

freedom and the flexibility and ability to develop relationships and engage in a wider creative conversation with other artists and companies, while SFJ and Belloo defined the term independent as operating without any ongoing subsidy from government and corporate sponsorship. Significantly, Terry (DTC) also noted that the term independent had now become synonymous with what fringe theatre used to be in terms of organisation and operation. For him, the word *independent* bestowed creative legitimacy, but not financial legitimacy due to its growing association with the profit-share co-op theatre model still used by some independent companies.

These independent companies were not mirroring their MPA and S2M counterparts from a position on the fringe, but rather defining how they could work differently to partner and collaborate with MPA and S2M companies and venues; making the approach rather than waiting to be approached. Instead of trying to be recognised by the centre or assimilating to one of the existing positions in the theatre field, these companies occupied the spaces between the MPA, major festivals and S2M companies and venues. The structure of these independent companies was flexible rather than rigid, and their creative practice reflected the levels of excellence and professionalism that was acceptable to the festivals or companies that they wished to partner with. Rather than trying to compete directly with the MPA or S2M companies or to infiltrate or challenge existing structures, the purpose of creating an independent theatre company for each of the case studies was about developing a professional platform to work from.

CHAPTER EIGHT: Conclusion

8.1. A New Possibility in the Space of Positions

It goes without saying that, in both cases, change in the space of literary or artistic possibles is the result of change in the power relation which constitutes the space of positions. When a new literary or artistic group makes its presence felt in the field of literary or artistic production, the whole problem is transformed, since its coming into being, i.e., into difference, modifies and displaces the universe of possible options; the previously dominant productions may, for example, be pushed into the status of outmoded (*déclassé*) or classic works (Bourdieu, 1983, pp.312-313)

When I commenced this research, I wanted to understand if the creative industries concept (CIC) and its focus on creative entrepreneurship (CE) had directly influenced the development of fringe theatre to become the independent theatre sector. My curiosity had grown out of my own experience as a freelance theatre artist, whose early career had progressed through the pre-CIC and CIC eras. When I was introduced to the CIC in 2001, I was working as a part-time lecturer at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in Brisbane. At that time, I questioned the meaning and value of *creative industries*, effectively dismissing its rationale: as a freelance theatre director who was already producing and developing my own work, I understood myself, fundamentally, as an artist who was invested in distinguishing myself in the field, not engaging in the commercial aspects of my practice. I did not identify with being a *creative entrepreneur* and the term *creative industries* was alien to my artistic vernacular.

I recall heated debates with colleagues during the 1990s about the use of the word *industry* and how it worked against the very idea of what it meant to be an artist. The thought that we might be creating art under commercial terms, developing product as a commodity to be bought and sold, rather than art that was to be experienced as just art, seemed anathema to

most of us. This was, of course, an effect of the field of cultural production in which we had found ourselves: lacking economic capital, we competed, instead, for cultural capital.

In 2002 I moved to Sydney. Over the course of the next decade, I observed changes within my own practice, in response to shifting government funding structures. These shifts were enabling a new type of freelance professional practice: that of the *independent* rather than the *fringe* artist. This indicated to me that a new type of theatre artist had emerged from the Australian cultural field or, as Bourdieu suggests, there had been a change in the space of “artistic possibles”, resulting in a “change in power relation which constitutes the space of positions” (1983, p. 312). In my own professional practice, I observed freelance theatre artists identifying as *independent* to increase their cultural capital and to claim a professional distinction not previously available to them as (merely) fringe artists, positioned on the periphery of the field of theatre.

These observations led me to question whether the demarcation of the Australian theatre field and the focus on a more neoliberal approach to the arts by government, had driven a change in direction from a *fringe* theatre model to an *independent* theatre model. I wondered whether the introduction of the CIC with its focus on creative entrepreneurship had encouraged a new type of independence in the field. Had the logics of CE offered this group of artists an alternative way to sustain their artistic practice and legitimise a more professional position within the cultural field? To what extent had these logics shifted the self-conception of the *artist*, and were artists able to balance the logics of these policies and structures and still retain their beliefs and self-understandings of what was important about being an *artist*?

In Chapters Three and Four, I unpacked the development of the Australian cultural field, noting four distinct phases, the second and third—between the mid-1950s and the late 1970s—involving a rapid expansion of the professional theatre field due to the establishment of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (AETT), Gorton’s Australian Council for the Arts and Whitlam’s Australia Council (AC). The fourth phase, from the early 1980s to the present,

brought forth a flurry of reports into arts expenditure that questioned the Keynesian model of arts patronage used by the federal government, and which saw, as part of broader process of economic reform, the introduction of economic rationalist and neoliberal approaches to arts funding, prompting a flurry of policies and priorities for the arts.

That chapter, crucially, demonstrated that the logic of entrepreneurship was not new to Australian theatre artists. The concept of artists becoming creative entrepreneurs in order to enhance their opportunity to work had been promulgated by the Australian government widely prior the introduction of the CIC; the logic of entrepreneurship via fringe or alternative theatre already existed as a means for artists to develop a position for themselves within the theatre field.

Indeed, entrepreneurship had already been the major feature of the development of the field itself as show business, with the early monopoly of commercial theatre by J.C. Williamson and other theatre managers. The shift to this orthodoxy came with the Keynesian Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (AETT), which fostered the development of the field of theatre rewarding, repertory and Little Theatre artist groups by underwriting their productions, and eventually enabling them to become established as Australia's flagship theatre companies. This development of the field—arguably a distortion of the existing logics of the marketplace—was further expanded by the Gorton and Whitlam governments, which dedicated more government funds than had previously been spent on the arts sectors, encouraging new theatre companies and rewarding those who had demonstrated entrepreneurial endeavour. However, this system of expansion and reward also established a competitive relationship between theatre companies promoting practices organised around the ideas of *excellence* and *professionalism*, which were then used to differentiate between more established companies and newcomers who wanted to enter the field, in terms of which should receive the greatest funding support. I argued that the Nugent Report and the subsequent quarantine of funding for the AMPAG from the rest of the Australian theatre field during the early 2000s created a seemingly sacrosanct centre, which

designated the cultural leadership of the field to the AMPAG and KOs, effectively forcing the remaining S2M companies and independent artists to develop new tactics in order to survive, if not flourish.

Based on this historical research and the six case studies I conducted to understand the more contemporary state of the field, I argue that the space of positions for agents within the Australian cultural field has altered dramatically since the introduction of the CIC in the 1990s, but this has not necessarily been because of the CIC.

In the years preceding this introduction, there had already been a noticeable shift in the relationship between the *field of power* and the theatre field, and a marked change in what it means to have a professional career in the theatre industry. While the CIC was an intrinsic driver, assisting to move support for the theatre field away from the Keynesian model, the logics of CE were part of the logic of economic rationalism and the overall neoliberal approach later adopted by the three tiers of government, their agencies and cultural policies from the early 1990s to the late 2000s. It was mechanisms such as the introduction of the Australian Business Number (ABN) and taxation reform for artists (TR 2005/1) as well as the development of private fundraising platforms such as the Australian Business Arts Foundation (ABAF) that encouraged theatre artists to engage with the idea of developing a creative business. However, as noted, there has been very little focus or support given to independent artists to strengthen creative entrepreneurship within the theatre field.

The MPA structure, and demarcation of these companies from the S2M sector, created as an outcome of the Nugent report, effectively prevented any further development of the Australian theatre field. The sink or swim policy of the federal government's neoliberal approach to the S2M sector meant virtually no support was available for any new independent theatre companies that needed investment or underwriting. The neoliberal framework and drive towards self-sufficiency for the theatre field had allowed the

government to relinquish responsibility for employment and forced freelance artists into a portfolio career which included independent practice, which is reflected in the six case studies.

Fuelled by changing cultural policies, government infrastructure, globalisation, digitisation and Web 2.0, theatre artists moved towards a creative practice that encompassed canny online arts marketing and social media strategies as well as advanced communication techniques. As noted by Throsby and Petetskaya, these technological advances and trends have played a role “in supporting and extending professional art practice” (2017, p.11), encouraging individual theatre artists to devise ways to administer, research, self-train and promote their own creative practice despite the lack of available positions in the field. Relatedly, I found that the focus on CE within the Australian government’s neoliberal approach had deliberately encouraged freelance theatre artists to practice within the realms of independent theatre in order to gain professional status in artistic, cultural and economic terms as independent professionals, and as a way of legitimising their creative practice within the theatre field.

As the trend of creative enterprise attempted to address the widening employment gap and enabled a level of artistic sustainability, freelance theatre makers filled the void between the S2M and fringe sectors to create a new position in the space of possibles, that of the independent. Additionally, I found that because the position of independent theatre was formally acknowledged by the field of power through government structures and mechanisms such as funding, taxation changes and industry reports, these independent theatre companies were also able to seek creative opportunities and develop work in the spaces *between* the different sectors of the field, effectively strengthening the ecological relationship between the sectors. The CIC, in conjunction with other neoliberal mechanisms introduced by government, encouraged artists to think in business terms, activating their own companies and engaging with government, companies from other sectors within the theatre field, venue partners, touring organisations and private sponsors in an

entrepreneurial way. Within these parameters, independent artists were able to legitimately claim their professional place by developing their own creative business, attracting an audience and developing their own relationships and networks to ensure sustainability.

The case studies suggest that independent theatre operates across the whole theatre field, practising both within and outside the existing structures and developing strong relationships with other agents. These findings reveal different ways independent artists have strategically responded to the exigencies of the twenty-first-century creative economy and the neoliberal push for creative entrepreneurship.

8.2. Future Directions

Although this research was focused on the impact of economic rationalism on Australian fringe theatre practice, its findings have also highlighted the lack of infrastructure and direct federal funding given to the development of independent theatre artists and companies in Australia. Towards this, independent theatre needs to be acknowledged by the field of power as a sub-sector of the S2M sector and its definition and practice separated from that of the fringe sector. The entrepreneurial practice of independent artists has worked to expand the field and to a certain extent, has been successful in developing different models that function without large amounts of government subsidy. The different approaches as demonstrated by the six case studies in my research have strengthened the sub-sector's position within the theatre field and these must be given further opportunity and support. Towards this, further research focused on an industry-wide understanding of how independent companies are organised and operate and the phases of independent practice from emerging to established is needed.

Despite the breadth of cultural and industrial research that has taken place over the past twenty years towards the development of the Australian cultural field, the policies developed

and implemented by one government have been torn down or diluted by the next. The extensive industry consultation which resulted in the *Make It New?* (2008) report and the subsequent *Emerging Key Organisations*, *Artistic Hub*, *Artistic Explorer* and *National Service Organisation* models established to support and develop independent theatre artists and companies, were abandoned by the Australia Council (AC) in the years following due to a change in organisational priorities and government leadership. Since then, platforms devised by the MPA, FYFO and S2M companies and major festivals have functioned to present the work of independent theatre companies, but there is no longer an obligation on the part of these entities to develop or support that work in their government-funded capacities. Reports such as *Make it New?* were not fully realised and need to be re-read, revised and implemented. The AC must be able to retain, maintain and implement innovative ideas found by research that will strengthen and grow the theatre field without interference from individual politicians or changing policies, otherwise it is nothing more than a cultural toothless tiger.

The creative industry value chain promoted by the CIC as part of the field of cultural production is not plausible under the current structures and space of positions in the Australian theatre field. There is minimal professional engagement between the AMPAG, S2M and independent sectors due to the protectionist funding put in place by the federal and state governments, which has subsequently affected ongoing opportunities for the growth and ecology of the overall theatre field. There needs to be a funding distribution balance between the AMPAG, S2M and independent sectors, that promotes stronger partnerships and collaboration between all. As O'Connor suggests, having an understanding of "the arts ecology allows us to develop a whole variety of new arrangements, tools and protocols based not on cost-cutting and off-loading subsidy onto corporate sponsorship but on securing innovation, diversity and sustainable incomes as part of a healthy cultural economy" (2016, p. 54). Further government investment in the arts in terms of subsidy is needed to encourage the growth and development of the independent sector, with more shape being put around the notion of an ecology. Australian theatre needs a cohesive sector

that is strengthened by its ecology rather than separated by funding labels, where public money is invested rather than gifted and artists are given the opportunity to develop the field rather than be restricted by government cultural policy.

CHAPTER NINE: Epilogue

Four years have passed since the primary data for this thesis was collected, so I feel that it is appropriate to conclude this research with a summary of each case study, highlighting any changes and key events that have occurred during this time.

9.1. Darlinghurst Theatre Company

At the end of 2023, Darlinghurst Theatre Company (DTC) continued to operate as a public company limited by guarantee with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC 2023) under the name Darlinghurst Theatre Limited and remained listed as a charity by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC 2023).

After becoming Co-Artistic Director alongside Glenn Terry in March 2020, Amylia Harris was appointed sole Artistic Director in September 2021, with Terry taking on the newly created role of Executive Director whilst simultaneously announcing his retirement in early 2022 (DTC 2021). Viv Rosman was appointed to replace Terry as the new Executive Director in January 2022, but was herself replaced in early 2023 by former DTC Board member Suzanne Pereira, whose “cross-industry professional experience includes roles in marketing, investment and governance” (DTC 2023).

In 2020 and 2021, the Eternity Playhouse closed due to ongoing government restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and DTC cancelled the majority of their productions. Harris and Terry worked together to respond to restrictions by “reactivating the entire theatre, giving rise to an alfresco dining space on the Eternity Playhouse’s street frontage, as well as the transformation of the downstairs foyer into a New York-style piano bar and the birth of Sydney’s newest jazz club” (Wild 2021). This programming enabled DTC to be “one of the first theatres anywhere in the world to reopen after the first COVID-19 lockdown”, but also allowed the company to remain a live presence for their audience and continue to employ theatre artists during the second series of lockdowns (DTC 2023).

On 24 June 2020, responding to the Black Lives Matter movement and the social issue of systematic racism, the Board and Executives at Darlinghurst Theatre Company made a public commitment to “having at least 50% of all artists in our employ, every year, belonging to an Indigenous and/or Black and/or People of Colour and/or Culturally and Linguistically Diverse community, and to having diversity of representation across our season and programming” from the 1 January 2022 (DTC 2021). Following the 2020 statement, the company worked with Stage A Change⁷⁶ to create an *Equity, Access and Inclusion Statement*, which was released on 20 December 2021 and addressed the principles, commitment, actions and accountability that DTC would follow (DTC 2021, p.4).

In 2021, DTC was successful in securing \$605,562 of the RISE⁷⁷ funding grants in December 2020 for a 21-week Australian tour of *Once the Musical*, their 2019 smash hit production (OfA 2023). Unfortunately, the tour was postponed until 2022, due to the second series of lockdowns across New South Wales and Victoria in August 2021 and the production carried forward into the 2022 season (DTC 2023).

The 2022 DTC season, the first solely curated by Harris, was “its most ambitious season yet, with work presented on six stages in four states across the nation” (DTC 2021). Guided by DTC’s *Equity, Access and Inclusion Statement* the season featured “productions of varying scale from plays and musicals to genre-defying happenings that combine the best of cabaret, burlesque and fully-fledged festivals, as well as transformative talks and workshops” (DTC 2023). These productions included the postponed season of *A Chorus Line*, which was performed at Riverside Theatres Parramatta and the Sydney Opera House as part of the 2022 Sydney Festival, and the rescheduled Australian tour of *Once the Musical*, along with

⁷⁶ Stage A Change is a Melbourne-based organisation that collaborates nationally with “community, industry and artists” in order to “increase, amplify and sustain professional opportunities for artists of colour in Australia (Stage A Change website, 2023).

⁷⁷ The Restart Investment to Sustain and Expand (RISE) Fund was a \$200 million program announced as part of the Creative Economy Support Package, which opened on 31 August 2020 and closed. RISE was designed as an “open competitive grant opportunity” intended to “provide finance to assist in the presentation of cultural and creative projects, activities and events, and to rebuild confidence amongst investors, producers and consumers” and supported 541 national projects (Office for the Arts 2021).

other productions that had been rescheduled due to the pandemic shutdowns of the previous two years (ibid.).

In 2023, Harris announcing that DTC would divide the yearly season into three, making key production announcements throughout the year to embed “flexibility into our seasonal launch schedule and given ourselves space to react to waves of change as the year unfolds” (DTC 2023). The 2023 season promoted a stronger level of audience growth and engagement, with DTC partnering with Sydney Festival and Sydney WorldPride by using Eternity Playhouse as a festival hub, remounting and touring *Once the Musical* to the Gold Coast and Melbourne and premiering a new musical *Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812*, as well as the creative development of three new works through DTC’s *Next In Line* program.

The financial position of DTC was challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns. The company’s 2020 financial report reflects a decrease of box office by 45% (\$1,143,357 > \$512,824), venue hire income by 95% (\$483,322 > \$22,186) and bar sales by 68% (\$376,929 > \$120,355) when compared with 2019 (ACNC 2023). However, the company saw an increase of 39% in donations and fundraising over this period (\$112,280 < \$ 184,158) and received several grants from local and state governments, and payments federal government schemes to offset these losses (ibid.).

DTC was eligible for JobKeeper⁷⁸ and the company received \$246,450 in payments under this scheme to support employees (ACNC 2023). The company also received project grants worth \$491,000 from the City of Sydney, Create NSW, and the Australia Council⁷⁹, which left them with a deficit of \$10,750 for the year (ibid.).

⁷⁸ The JobKeeper Payment scheme, was a \$101.3 billion wage subsidy scheme and part of the federal government’s series of measures to support the income and employment of all Australians and preserve “the connections between employers and their employees during the crisis, and to support business and job survival” by “giving employers a wage subsidy for eligible employees in order to help them retain those employees and reduce the associated wage costs” (Bishop & Day 2020, p.1).

⁷⁹ In August 2023, the Australia Council was renamed Creative Australia.

While the proceeds from the 2021 box office remained similar to 2020 (\$512,824 < \$516,457), there was a 50% increase in venue hire (\$22,186 < \$50,768) and a 25% increase in bar sales (\$120,355 < \$161,205) due to the company's reactivation of the theatre as a cabaret and festival space (ACNC, 2023). In addition to \$83,328 in further JobKeeper payments, DTC received \$331,510 in JobSaver⁸⁰ payments and a \$1.3 million grant from Create NSW, creating a total income of \$3.4 million and a surplus of \$194,815 for 2021 (ibid.).

The 2022 and 2023 DTC financial reports are yet to be published. However, in accordance with the 2021 report, the company is solvent with a total equity position of \$302,194.

9.2. Matrix Theatre

At the end of 2023, the organisational structure of Matrix Theatre (Matrix) continued to be a creative partnership between joint Artistic Directors and husband/wife team, Michael Futcher and Helen Howard. Matrix engaged in minimal production activity between 2020 and 2023, with key events focused on the development of one new work and the production of an existing work.

Futcher and Howard continued to engage with professional activities outside of their own company, to increase both their financial and cultural capital. In late 2019, prior to the pandemic outbreak, Futcher directed a new adaptation of *Jane Eyre* for shake & stir theatre company (shake & stir) at the Cremorne Theatre, Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC) in Brisbane, where he cast Howard as the character of Mrs Fairfax (MT 2023b). Simultaneously, Futcher collaborated with writer/dramaturg Janis Balodis on the creative development phase of *Haneef*, the Matrix project previously funded by Arts Queensland (AQ) in 2018 (see Chapter 5.3, p.159). During this phase, Futcher executed three rehearsed

⁸⁰ The JobSaver Program was "a joint initiative of the NSW and Federal Governments to support businesses and not-for-profit organisations (NFPs) impacted by extended lockdowns due to COVID-19 from July 2021 until 30 November 2021" (PWC, 2021).

readings of the work: one with TheatreiNQ in Townsville in November 2019, one at the Merivale Studio in Brisbane supported by QPAC in December 2019, with the third reading performed during the first lockdown via Zoom during April 2020 (MT 2023a).

In early 2020, Howard was engaged in a one-year contract to perform in the roles of Professor Umbridge, Aunt Petunia and Madame Hooch in *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* at the Princess Theatre, Melbourne. The production was suspended in late March due to the national shutdown of theatre venues. Howard returned to Brisbane to wait out the hiatus, before resuming the roles in February 2021 when the production recommenced in Melbourne. In mid-2021, Howard was engaged as dialogue coach on the film project *The Portable Door*, which saw her return to Brisbane (MT 2023b).

By the end of 2021, Futchler was engaged as a director by shake & stir to remount his successful production of *A Christmas Carol* at the Lyric Theatre, QPAC and was then in planning and rehearsal mode for a co-production between Matrix and the Brisbane Powerhouse of David Holman's adaptation of Nikolai Gogol's *Diary of a Madman*, which had received \$29,876 from the *Queensland Arts Showcase Program* (Arts Queensland) in August 2021 to contribute to its Queensland premiere season (AQ 2023). *Diary of a Madman* was the first new production under the Matrix banner since *Piano Lessons* in 2017 and opened on February 24, 2022, in the Brisbane Powerhouse Underground Theatre. The production was scheduled to run until March 5, but the season was cut short due to excessive localised flooding in the New Farm area and surrounds which occurred in between March 3-5 (MT 2023b). A remount of the production and season has been scheduled to run at PIP Theatre in Brisbane from the 16 May to 4 July 2024 (ibid).

Matrix is not listed as a charity by the Australian Charities and Not-for Profits Commission (ACNC) and does not produce an annual report, making it difficult to assess the company's financial position over the past four years. The RISE funding reports indicate that Matrix did not receive any project or activities funding from this scheme, but it is unclear whether

Futcher and Howard were able to register for JobKeeper during the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns.

9.3. Red Stitch Actors Theatre

At the end of 2023 Red Stitch Actors Theatre (Red Stitch) had retained its status as a not-for-profit Australian Public Company limited by guarantee under the name Red Stitch Actors' Theatre Limited and was still listed as a charity with DGR status (ACNC 2023). Ella Caldwell was engaged as the Artistic Director of Red Stitch during this time, while General Manager Fiona Symonds had left the company in May 2023, and Cecelia Scarthy had joined the company as Operations Manager (Red Stitch 2023).

Celebrating its 22nd birthday on 27 October 2023, Red Stitch had stayed committed to being a theatre company run by and for artists which produces “contemporary Australian plays and award-winning new writing from around the world”, while developing and showcasing new Australian work through its INK program and providing a stepping stone for graduate artists through its Graduate program (Red Stitch 2023).

Melbourne's lengthy pandemic lockdowns between March 2020 and November 2021, forced Red Stitch to close its doors for the remainder of 2020 and accordingly, the company was only able to offer limited capacity performances for the first half and last month of 2021. The 2020 Red Stitch program featured only one instead of the scheduled seven productions, while the 2021 program featured only five productions and two short events, the annual PLAYLIST and a reading/dining experience featuring two new plays from the INK program (Red Stitch 2023).

While the theatre was closed in 2020 and between July and November in 2021, Red Stitch stayed connected with both audience and artists through social media platforms such as

Facebook and Instagram, offering behind the scenes interviews and Zoom discussions about the development of new work and ongoing rehearsal processes (Red Stitch 2023). When Red Stitch finally emerged from the COVID-19 restrictions with a production at the end of 2021, it did so with the premiere of a new INK program work, *Prayer Machine*, which had been rehearsed through a combination of online and face-to-face rehearsals, and which ran from 17-28 November.

In December 2021, instead of the expected announcement about their 2022 season, the company launched the \$80 *Red Stitch Annual Membership*, designed to give patrons “access to pre-sale tickets, discount pricing and special events” while creating “a badge of honour for the dedicated followers who commit to each season and ensure the company’s survival every year” (Red Stitch 2023). At this time, it was also noted that the company would announce its 2022 program “play-by-play, bringing audiences on an adventure of discovery as we progress through the year, and return to something approaching theatre ‘normal’” (ibid.)

The 2023 program was announced in two halves, demonstrating a similar level of caution as the company recovered its creative practice and audience. Although the productions within the 2022 and 2023 programs were all delivered as scheduled, the annual number of productions was reduced from the usual eight to only seven plays (Red Stitch 2023).

Similar to DTC, the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown challenged the financial position of Red Stitch. The company’s 2020 financial report reflects a decrease of their box office sales by 85% (\$440,017 > \$69,461) and bar sales by 80% (\$53,103 > \$10,530) when compared with 2019 (ACNC 2023). However, the company saw an increase of 20% in donations and fundraising (\$390,422 < \$483,668) over this period and received several grants from local and state governments, and payments from federal government schemes to offset these losses (ibid).

In 2020, the company received project grants from the City of Port Phillip (\$30,000), Creative Victoria's Organisational Investment Program (\$110,000) and Strategic Investment Fund (\$60,878), and the Australia Council (\$9,000) (ibid). In 2021, the Organisational Investment Program payment to Red Stitch increased to \$289,945, while the company received \$60,000 from the City of Port Phillip and \$20,000 from the City of Stonnington, while the box office increased by 74% (\$37, 204 < \$168,485) and bar sales increased by 40% (\$10,530 < \$18,460) (ibid).

Red Stitch was eligible for JobKeeper, receiving a total of \$252,904 over 2020 and 2021 to support full-time and part-time employees (ACNC 2023). In January 2022, the company was included as one of 25 companies to be supported by Creative Victoria under the new Creative Enterprises program⁸¹ from 2022 to 2025, receiving an annual boost of \$100,000 to their funding pool (ibid). The company was also successful in securing a \$605,000 grant of RISE funding in March 2022 for "supporting 518 arts workers to deliver 14 plays, 1 festival, 2 play hospitality-partnered readings and creative developments with metropolitan, online and regional outcomes" (OfA 2023). The 2023 Red Stitch financial report is yet to be published. However, in accordance with the 2022 report, the company is solvent, with a total equity position of \$109,288 (ibid).

9.4. Elbow Room

At the end of 2023, Elbow Room (ER) remained as an Other Incorporated Association, under the name Elbow Room Theatre Incorporated with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC 2023). The company was not registered as a charity with DGR status, so did not produce a public annual company report. The company continued to be a creative

⁸¹ The Creative Enterprises program is a four-year Creative Victoria funding program that "provides investment in the leadership, organisational infrastructure and capacity of non-government creative industry organisations to deliver on Creative State 2025 priorities", Recipients receive a minimum of \$100,000 per annum for 4 years (Creative Victoria, 2023)

partnership between joint Artistic Directors, Marcel Dorney and Emily Tomlins and Creative Producer Adelaide Fisher, who had replaced Samantha Butterworth in 2022 (ER 2023a). ER had engaged in minimal production activity between 2020 and 2023, with key events focused on the development of new writing and the presentation of three new works, one written by Dorney and two by other Australian writers (ibid.).

In June 2020, during the first COVID-19 shutdown, ER announced their *Development Series* program, which offered Australian writers the opportunity to participate in paid development (\$160 for a 3-hour session) and enabled professional actors and theatre makers to engage with their work via an online platform. The program was “designed to assist writers to better articulate the central questions of their work, and assess its potential relationship with their audience”, with ten plays to be selected for development over the remainder of 2020 (ER 2023b).

In February 2021, ER announced that their next production would be *Enlightenment*, a collaboration between the company and Singapore-born, Perth-based artist Joe Paradise Lui that “re-imagines the legendary figures of the Buddha and the Monkey King as young women in contemporary Australia” (ER 2023b). Directed by Dorney with a cast of five including Tomlins, *Enlightenment* was presented between 10-20 March as part of the Darebin Arts Speakeasy season at Northcote Town Hall, receiving 5-star reviews and winning the Independent Theatre Best Ensemble Awards at the Green Room Awards the following year (ibid). Although the production did not attract direct funding from local or state government agencies, ER used the Australian Cultural Fund crowd-funding platform to raise \$14,441 towards production costs for the Melbourne season and the planned tour to Perth’s State Theatre from 14-17 July 2021. However, due to the second Melbourne lockdown and closing of the West Australian borders, the tour of *Enlightenment* was postponed until 14-17 December 2022 (ibid).

Prior to the 2022 tour of *Enlightenment*, ER presented two new works with a view to further creative development. The first was a rehearsed reading of *Crocodiles* by Vidya Rajan, a play “set in an aged-care facility the story revolves around an incident culminating in the death of a resident, and the official inquiry that follows” (ER 2023a). *Crocodiles* one of the new works unearthed by ER’s *Development Series* in 2020, which was initially performed at 45 Downstairs in Melbourne on the 4 September 2022 as part of its *Play Reading* series, directed by Marcel Dorney (ER 2023b).

In 2023, the premiere season of *Crocodiles* was produced by ER and presented by the Darebin Arts Speakeasy from 24 May – 4 June 2023, directed by Dorney with a cast of five including Tomlins. ER and Rajan received \$20,000 from Creative Victoria’s Creative Projects Fund towards this production (Creative Victoria 2023). The second work was *Technique*, a one-person play written and directed by Dorney, created and performed by Tomlins, and produced by Butterworth and Fisher, which ran from 27 Sept - 1 Oct 2022 at the Meat Market Stables in Melbourne (ER 2023a). The premise for *Technique* was initially conceived in 2013 as part of *Now More Than Ever* and was “the third part in Elbow Room’s trilogy exploring the role of the religious impulse in the contemporary world” (ER, 2023b). A further performance of *Technique* occurred at Monash University’s Progress Festival at the Ian Potter Centre for Performing Arts on 1 September 2023 (ibid).

ER is still not listed as a charity by the Australian Charities and Not-for Profits Commission (ACNC) and does not produce an annual report, making it difficult to assess the company’s financial position over the past four years. The RISE funding reports indicate that ER did not receive any project or activities funding from this scheme, and it is unclear whether Dorney, Tomlins, Butterworth and Fisher were able to register for JobKeeper during the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns.

9.5. Sport for Jove

At the end of 2023, Sport for Jove (SFJ) continued to operate as an Australian Public Company Limited by Guarantee, under the name Sport for Jove Theatre Company Limited (ASIC 2023) and as a charity with deductible gift recipient (DGR) status (ACNC 2023). Damien Ryan remained in the role of Managing Director/Artistic Director between 2020 and 2023, but the leadership team was restructured in 2021 to include Producer/Company Manager Rob Jago, Communications Manager/Associate Producer Fiona Boidi, and Shakespeare Carnival Director Christopher Tomkinson (SFJ 2023a).

SFJ faced a difficult year in 2020 with the effects of COVID-19. The company was able to deliver their December 2019/January 2020 Summer Season of *Romeo & Juliet* and *Twelfth Night* at Bella Vista Farm and Leura, but their proposed March to November 2020 Education Program with the Seymour Centre, which featured five full-scale Shakespeare in-repertoire productions and the HSC Symposium series of nine different works, was cancelled (SFJ 2023b). Despite this set back, SFJ used the lockdown period to pivot towards a stronger online presence (SFJ 2023a). Over 2020 and 2021, the company undertook the task of delivering online symposiums and workshops, and digitising their Education Season archives “to ensure that students and teachers across NSW were still able to gain valuable educational content” in the absence of face-to-face performances (SFJ 2023b). SFJ expanded its online content to include production videos of recent and HSC-relevant productions, cast Q+As, and the development and creation of all new Digital Symposiums, all of which are still available on the SFJ website under the banner of *SFJ Digital* (ibid).

With restrictions on gathering still in place between December 2020 and January 2021, SFJ decided to forego their usual *Summer Season* and create a film instead. Ryan had written a new play during the first lockdown period called *Venus & Adonis*, which was loosely based on Shakespeare’s poem, but revolved around the relationship between William Shakespeare and Emilia Lanier, the first professional female poet ever published in the English language

(SFJ 2023a). The company partnered with local filmmakers SOAP Productions to make *Venus & Adonis* onsite at their Surry Hills offices over an 8-day period in December 2020, and the film was released in late January 2022 at selected Sydney cinemas (Shand 2021). Although SFJ was able to present the majority of their HSC Symposium series within the 2021 Education Seasons of the Seymour Centre and Riverside Theatres Parramatta, the June to November lockdown caused by the second COVID-19 wave, meant that the three productions to be included in these seasons were postponed until 2022 (SFJ 2023b).

Unlike the 2018 season, which featured eight productions, the 2021/2022 SFJ annual season was reduced to five productions, with the focus of the company shifting to the two *Summer Season* plays and three repertoire performances of plays for schools only at the Seymour Centre and Riverside Theatres Parramatta (SFJ 2023a). In 2022/2023, the company's annual season had a similar structure but featured a sixth theatre production for the general public, a live version of Ryan's *Venus & Adonis* which premiered at the Reginald Theatre, Seymour Centre on 29 September 2023, running for four weeks to great critical acclaim (Shand, 2021).

SFJ's 2020/21 financial report reflects a decrease in ticket sales of their mainstage products (Summer Season, Seymour Centre, Riverside Theatres Parramatta) by 42% (\$315,383.48 > \$132,692.60) and an increase education product ticket sales (Symposiums, Shakespeare Carnival, Lectures/Seminars, and the Second Age Project) of 52% (\$105,828.20 < \$203,473.39) when compared with 2019/20 (ACNC 2023). During this reporting period, the company received grants and payments from sponsorship, donations and state and federal government schemes to offset any losses. SFJ was eligible for JobKeeper, receiving a total of \$150,850 to support full-time and part-time employees (ibid). The company also received sponsorship and donations (\$100,370), project grants from Create NSW (\$654,685) and RISE funding (\$434,420.80) being for "2021 Sport for Jove Education Season including live performances and streamed performances for regional and remote schools, involving professional development mentorship and youth education program" (OfA 2023).

The SFJ 2021/22 financial report demonstrates the restoration of mainstage product income (Summer Season - \$70,549.97) and a further increase of 29% (\$203,473.39 < \$693,288.31) in education product ticket sales, enhanced by state government grants (\$170,440.87) (ACNC 2023). Comparatively, the 2022/23 financial report reflects a 25% increase in mainstage product income (\$70, 549.97 < \$93,194.58) and a 23% decrease in education product ticket sales (\$693,288.31 > \$466,158.75) offset by donations (\$31,800) and state government grants (\$237,366.09) (ibid). In accordance with the 2022/23 final report, the company is solvent, with a total equity position of \$298,074.37 (ibid).

9.6. Belloo Creative

At the end of 2023, Belloo Creative (Belloo) remained as an Other Incorporated Association, under the name Belloo Incorporated with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC 2023). Belloo's formal staffing structure retained Katherine Lyall-Watson as Co-Artistic Director/Writer and Caroline Dunphy as Co-Artistic Director/Director/Performer but replaced Danielle Shankey as Creative Producer with Emily Coleman as Associate Producer and Jessica Veurman as Administrator (BC 2023a). Shankey had left the company in 2020 to pursue a political career, while Kelly remained as the resident Dramaturg, but had also become Chair of the new Belloo Management Committee in 2022 (ibid.).

Belloo engaged in a high level of creative activity between 2020 and 2023, with key events focused on the tour of an existing work, the ongoing development of three new works and the development and presentation of five new works (BC 2023a). In February 2020, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Japanese version of *House in the Dunes*, the long-term collaboration between Belloo, Idiot Savant Theatre Company (Japan) and Good Company Arts (New Zealand), premiered in the 400-year-old Teishoin Temple at the Tokyo Performing Arts Meeting (BC 2023a). At the same time, the company's 2018 smash hit *Rovers* was set

to tour nationally with Critical Stages Touring (CST) and Belloo was in the final stages of the creative development phase of *Phaedra*, the “unashamedly Queensland, satirical interpretation of a Greek tragedy” written by Lyall-Watson and directed by Dunphy as the culmination of their company in residency position with Queensland Theatre (QT), which was due to premiere in September 2020 (BC 2023b). However, when the national COVID-19 restrictions on gathering and travel were announced in late March 2020, the CST tour of *Rovers* was cancelled and postponed until June 2021. As it became clear that the pandemic restrictions would continue into the rest of 2020, QT and Belloo made the difficult decision in May to cancel the scheduled season of *Phaedra*. The company used the 2020 lockdown period to continue to develop and create three works, noting on social media that they were “grateful to be in a position to offer some employment and are mentoring, contracting and commissioning other artists while we can” (BC 2023b).

With financial support from CST and Arts Queensland (AQ), the company created the *Rovers Web Series* based on the stage production of *Rovers*, with four webisodes filmed between July 2020 and May 2021 (BC 2023b). The series featured as part of the CST Digital Screening Room from October 2020 through to May 2021, which kept the project alive until the national tour could commence. During 2020, the company continued their creative relationship with Idiot Savant Theatre Company and Good Company Arts by contributing to the development and performance of *Akiruno*, a “a joyful, transcultural collaboration based on traditional Japanese folk tales from the Akiruno region of Japan”, which was performed as part of the Tokyo Tokyo Festival in 2021 and supported by the Australian Government through the Australia-Japan Foundation of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (BC 2023a). Unable to join face-to-face rehearsals to co-direct and perform in *Akiruno* due to COVID-19 restrictions, Dunphy instead worked with writer Lyall-Watson to develop five short scripts towards the production by rehearsing and filming with artists from different states and countries online and created a digital work to be projected alongside the live performance (ibid). Additionally, Belloo collaborated with Good Company Arts and Brisbane’s Phluxus2 Dance Collective to write, develop and film *The Woman Remembers*, a

physical theatre/dance work “of scale and beauty addressing our relationship to landscape and our experience of climate emergency” (BC 2023a). Supported by AQ, the work was choreographed by Phluxus2 Dance Collective’s Artistic Director Nerida Matthaei, directed by Dunphy and written by Lyall-Watson, and was projected nightly on the façade of the Judith Wright Centre from 1 November 2021 to 2 January 2022 (BC 2023b).

In early 2022, Belloo commenced the physical creative development of *Boy, Lost*, a world premiere mainstage co-production with QT to replace the cancelled production of *Phaedra*, adapted by Lyall-Watson from Kristina Olsson’s award-winning memoir and directed by Dunphy. The work had been “incubated” over a seven-year period since it was first commissioned by QT and former Artistic Director Wesley Enoch (BC 2023a). The creative development phase was supported by an \$11,000 grant from Brisbane City Council’s Creative Sparks fund (BCC 2023) and the production was supported by \$96,309.40 of RISE funding (OfA 2023). *Boy, Lost* played over a three-week season in QT’s Diane Cilento Studio from 29 October to 19 November 2022 to critical acclaim, winning the 2022 Matilda Award for Best New Australian Work and being nominated for Best Ensemble and Best Independent Production (Belloo 2023a).

Between early 2022 and late 2023, Belloo also worked on the development of “three new Australian stories”: *Sand*, *A Night at the Pink Poodle* and *Haven: Home to Bilo*. *Sand* is a collaboration between Belloo Creative, Taikoz, Good Company Arts and First Nations artists, “that centres on First Nations storytelling from Minjerribah (Stradbroke Island)” and fuses “ongoing cultural connections to land, music, story and physicality” (BC 2023a). The creative development of the project was supported by Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC) and \$133,739.10 of RISE funding (OfA 2023), with the premiere scheduled for June 2024 at the Redlands Performing Arts Centre in Brisbane.

A Night At the Pink Poodle is a “pop chamber opera adaptation of Matthew Condon’s classic Queensland novel” written by Shaun Charles and composed by Peter Farnan, with additional

music by Richard Pleasance (BC 2023a). Charles, who has been developing the work since 2020 with Farnan, engaged Dunphy to direct the production, with Lyall-Watson as Creative Producer and Kelly as Dramaturg on the project (BC 2023b). Belloo successfully secured \$30,000 in funding from AQ to complete the score for the work and to deliver a creative development phase and a showing in May 2023, which was supported by Home of the Arts (HOTA) on the Gold Coast, where it is envisaged by Belloo that the work will premiere before touring nationally (ibid).

Haven: Home to Bilo (Haven) is a verbatim play written by Lyall-Watson and constructed from interviews about the imprisonment and detention of the Nadesalingam family and the “grassroots community effort to bring them home to the regional Queensland town of Biloela” (BC 2023a). The concept for the play was originated by director Matt Scholten and his company If Theatre before being developed in collaboration with Belloo (ibid). *Haven* had a creative development phase in Brisbane in 2022 supported by a \$10,000 grant from the Brisbane City Council’s Creative Sparks (BCC 2023), and a regional development phase in Biloela and Gladstone in 2023, supported by a \$40,000 grant from the Flourish Festival (BC 2023a). The second phase included a rehearsed reading of the play’s first draft at the Biloela ANZAC Memorial Club on 20 July 2023 in front of an invited audience of Home to Bilo campaigners and the Nadesalingam family, followed by an excerpt of the play shared at the Flourish Festival in Gladstone on 22 July 2023 (ibid). Both development phases were co-directed by Scholten and Dunphy, with dramaturgy by Kelly (ibid).

At the end of 2023, Belloo was not registered as a charity with DGR status, and the company does not produce a public annual report, making it difficult to assess their current financial position. Although the company received RISE funding for two projects, it is also unclear whether Belloo was able to register for JobKeeper to support its employees during the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns. However, in late 2021 it was announced that Belloo was “one of fourteen new entrants” to receive Four-Year Organisational Funding, securing \$240,000 per year between 2022-2025 (AQ, 2023). Additionally, the company received a

\$70,000 grant from the Queensland government's Arts Showcase Program (QASP) on 25 October 2023 towards the further development and presentation of *Haven* and the re-development of *Rovers* for schools touring (BC 2023a). This welcome injection of annual state funding on after several years of development, presentation and project funding, suggests that Belloo's position of financial and creative sustainability has strengthened considerably since 2019.

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