



**Victorian Theatre Meeting, Report
16 September 2010**

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VICTORIAN THEATRE MEETING REPORT
Lawler Studio, Melbourne Theatre Company, September 16 2010
Theatre Network Victoria

"In an ideal environment, the theatre sector in Melbourne would be a complete ecology in which artists are well supported across their career with clear pathways for development." **Pippa Bainbridge**

"In many small companies the focus should be on creating an environment for reckless artistic exploration!" **Tom Gutteridge**

"The Malthouse's photovoltaic solar panels has a digital interface screening a new morning raga from a composer in Mumbai... What could the arts sector contribution be to that vision?"
Angharad Wynne-Jones

"[Writers] now understand implicitly that despite what they have written, they must be 'open' and indeed 'eager' to change their work to suit the predilections of the company who are developing it."
Aiden Fennessy

"Scenius describes a creativity not driven by lauded individuals, but rather by an entire community. It's a shared genius." **Emily Sexton**, with reference to Brian Eno.



"A strong CALD policy is more than showing that you've got a couple of brown-skinned cleaners and a Vietnamese accountant looking over the books." **Polash Larsen**.

"Often artists are bogged down in the logistics of funding applications, producing commissions, working other jobs and more, that the essential element to 'just be, dream and create without self judgment' is not there." **Jodee Mundy**

"In the past five years, Victorian based women directors have had as much opportunity to increase their perceived 'merit' (which dictates their appointment suitability) as women seeking leadership roles in the AFL, the Armed Forces and the Catholic Church." **Lucy Freeman**

"Theatres of clarity, argument and risk... might involve further disassembling theatre, thereby fostering new relationships. To return to the spectator means to make work that is something between (to quote Kerkhoven) 'looking at something and walking into something'." **Peter Ekersall**

"We must commit as an industry to empowering Indigenous communities to control our stories within the theatre context." **John Harvey**

Victorian Theatre Meeting - Overview

On September 16th 2010, Theatre Network Victoria held the inaugural Victorian Theatre Meeting – the first such meeting of the theatre sector in Victoria, inviting 100 delegates to meet and discuss issues important to theatre today, and things we want to see happen tomorrow.

On registering, delegates were asked to propose a three-minute pitch – something they felt was important to discuss as a sector. Over sixty pitches were received, and twenty were curated for the program, based on how well they were articulated and how well they represented other issues that people pitched – so that the final twenty were a good cross section of issues, with the presenters bringing a mix of backgrounds and experience.

The pitches were presented in two sessions of ten, with voting after each session to choose the top four for discussion at tables, and then as a room. The top eight are highlighted below. The pitches that weren't voted in the top eight were often referred to in discussions around other issues, so they were greatly valuable and provided some rich context for the discussions.

Acknowledgements

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What Happens Now?

This report will be distributed widely amongst the sector, to government, and to the media, as a broad articulation of some current thoughts and aspirations of the theatre sector in Victoria.

Theatre Network Victoria will use the report to inform its program for 2011 and beyond – some of the outcomes can be undertaken by the sector itself, and some may need further development and advocacy, which TNV can provide.

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Summary of Program

(the sessions in bold were voted as the top eight for further discussion)

SESSION 1.

1. Protecting the Process. Catherine Reiser, Freelance
- 2. Diversity and Age Discrimination. Chris Kohn, Arena Theatre Company**
- 3. Light, Flexible Infrastructure. David Young, Chamber Made Opera**
4. Advocating for the teeny-tiny/emerging theatre sector. Nyunkia Tauss, Freelance
5. Creative risk in a risk-averse culture. Tom Gutteridge, Union House Theatre
6. Moving to the “next level” - spaces. Tim Stitz, Freelance & University of Melbourne
7. Is the current development climate for writers healthy? Aidan Fennessy, Melbourne Theatre Company
8. Are we colonising Indigenous Stories?. John Harvey, Ilbijerri Theatre
- 9. Regional and National Touring - supporting higher risk and diversity on the road. Jill Smith, Geelong Performing Arts Centre**
- 10. What is a Producer? Neal Harvey, Elbow Room**

SESSION 2

11. Career Pathways for emerging theatre artists. Pippa Bainbridge, La Mama
12. Support for emerging theatre makers making work for children and families. Alex Desebrock, ArtPlay & Topsy Teacup.
- 13. Women Directors in key creative positions in the professional sector. Lucy Freeman, Straightjacket Productions & Australian Women Directors Alliance**
- 14. Affiliated Artistic Directors for Regionally based Performing Arts Centres. Jude Anderson, Punctum**
15. In Praise of Dramaturgy. Peter Eckersall, NYID
16. Artist residencies - space for thinking. Jodee Mundy, Freelance
17. A Creative Ecosystem. Ian Pidd, Freelance Director and The Village Festival
18. Trust Artists: The value of open-access festivals, accessible venues and approachable programs. Emily Sexton, Melbourne Fringe
- 19. Cultural Change for Theatre. Polash Larsen, Diverse Australian Theatre Alliance**
- 20. Longer, Deeper, Slower....a ten year vision. What will we do to become environmentally sustainable in the next decade? Angharad Wynne-Jones**



Pitch Transcripts

1. Protecting the Process. Catherine Reiser, Freelance

-Ways to ensure that work gets its required development without being exposed to audiences too early. How to involve the education & community sectors in this vision.....

- Rehearsals are always too short & yet our most memorable theatre experiences are of works that have evolved over weeks, months, years of researching, work shopping & rehearsing.
- Previews are a luxury. There's one chance at Press Night. We're only as good as our last show. We're never ready and we always need more time.
- Most theatre is created in a private space. It's a delicate process with often scary & shaky beginnings until the chemistry & breakthroughs begin to happen. It's exposing for everyone & so instinctively it's not something we want to share with anyone who might betray that process and bear witness in any negative sense.

However, meaningful, well chosen & well designed relationships with the theatre education & community sectors (VCA / theatre writers' network/ RMIT journalism course, a myriad community groups etc.) can reap huge benefits for all parties, resulting in more interesting & robust work, while building new audiences. This is not an original idea & many might be doing it already.....

However, early & rigorous planning so that the form & aims of these collaborations can be devised effectively is a key. The model should attract more funding for the collaborative elements of the relationships to help extend the rehearsal period to incorporate additional access & involvement. Experience means we'll get better at knowing what to present & how best to use these sessions to reap the real benefits. I believe this model ideally needs three years or three shows & the commitment of the whole company to make it work.

The educative value to the participants is clear. For the theatre makers, it can be transformative. What's offered up can be acknowledged, absorbed or ignored. It is the beginning of a conversation.

- “work in progress” presentations are valuable for everyone involved. Those present simply need to know exactly what they are about to witness & what form the feedback needs to take. There's no point inviting comment with no time to act on it. A clear set of participants' rules, practical expectations on both sides is vital.
- But why not simply continue to ask our friends in the industry to a few select rehearsals? We still can but “Joe Public” will often give us raw, immediate responses that can help clarify many issues very quickly. If we invite the conversation with tomorrow's theatre audience, theatre makers, mailing list, season subscribers, cast & crew this will enrich the sector. Include them early on & they will remain loyal.
- In conclusion, premiere our newly created work in a more discreet way to our new initiated audience – these passionate advocates who now feel like they have a stake in the success of the piece having played a valuable part in its process & remember that they will also bring along their friends and families.
- A “welcome to the very very first public performance” introduction by the Director/Actor is an essential part in the first full presentation. It's not a apology. It binds the ties & contextualises everything that's gone before & we'll all feel the buzz as we wait for the show to begin. Post show discussions further clarify the piece after which, if funding allows, we could return to the rehearsal room for a final spit and polish.

2. Diversity and Age Discrimination. Chris Kohn, Arena Theatre Company

I am going to tell you why the big theatre companies in Australia are failing young Australians.

I am talking specifically about the Australia Council's Major Performing Arts Board theatre companies, taken as a whole - QTC, STC, the State Theatre Company of SA, MTC, Bell Shakespeare, Black Swan, Malthouse and Company B Belvoir. I am talking about young people - meaning everyone from birth to 18. That group represents a little under 25% of Australia's population.

According to the Australia Council website, The Major Performing Arts Board aims to ensure that Australia has an artistically vibrant, financially viable and broadly accessible major performing arts sector.

I am interested by the 'broadly accessible' part of this aim. I believe that any meaningful definition of 'broad access' must include a consideration of age. Given that there is no MPAB theatre company specifically for young audiences, I figure that age accessibility is a priority that needs to be shared by the sector as a whole.

Looking at the programs, websites and recent Annual Reports of most of these theatre companies, I have made some inferences some positions being put forward by the MPAB theatre companies, as a whole.

a) Children don't really belong in the theatre.

b) Sorry, children do belong in the theatre, but not in our theatres. We make serious theatre.

c) Hang on, I nearly forgot, we do make theatre for children. It's called an education program. Education. Sounds inviting, doesn't it?

d) The rest of our program is T.F.A, or Theatre for Adults. Theatre For Adults can and should entertain, inspire, make you laugh, think, cry, can amaze, astound, be sexy, funny, dark, provocative. But theatre for young people can and should educate. Just educate. It has to, because young people don't know anything.

e) If you don't believe us, then look at this - our 'Education' programs are only for children, because adults already know everything. Granted, sometimes adults are educated by T.F.A, but we don't trumpet the fact in our marketing copy as it sounds uninviting and condescending. We reserve that word for our children's shows, because the children aren't the ones buying the tickets. It's their parents, grandparents and teachers, who have been led to believe that theatre for young people is educational.

Now, here is a selection from my report card on some of the major companies - irony of metaphor intended.

Malthouse - C+

Good for the 15 plus crowd, but no dedicated programming for children. Showing promise.

Company B Belvoir - C

Does properly resource and produce a major production for families every couple of years.

MTC - D

Substitutes the adult experience - great actors doing great things for a hushed, enthralled audience, and in its place presents scenes from a show, with interrupting commentaries about what is happening and, in a cruel twist, places the thing on top of an adult set from an adult show that was properly resourced, fully realized, and proceeded from beginning to

end uninterrupted. Escapes a fail thanks to a good regional and disadvantaged access program.

STC - A plus. Top of the class.

A broad program, 6-8 productions per year which specifically consider young audiences. Including remount presentations of existing work by a broad range of companies such as Windmill, Arena, Monkey Baa, Zeal, new productions, innovative models of creation and presentation of theatre for regional families. Also a genuinely engaged Youth advisory panel.

I am about to run out of time, just before I have a chance to consider other good models from the UK and elsewhere. For now, my pitch to the majors is this - consider a commitment to accessibility that includes equal access for audiences of all ages. And be guided by the three Rs. Respect, respect, respect.

3. Light, Flexible Infrastructure. David Young, Chamber Made Opera

I recently heard about an initiative of a group of 51 Early Childhood Intervention centres which had pooled their resources to create a hub to handle their financial and human resources services. It struck me as a great example of sharing resources, and achieving economies of scale.

In my work at Next Wave, and through the Aphids Residencies & Mentoring Scheme, I have been approached by many artists, asking me if they should set up a company, and incorporate it. I have always encouraged people to never do anything like this unless they have to. But the fact is that, with the professionalisation of our sector, we are seeing more and more small and micro-arts companies being formed.

Each company is more often than not re-inventing the wheel, putting in place systems and processes for admin, insurance, governance, finance and so on. Surely there is a way that we can take out some of these pragmatic functions, and deliver them in a shared and more efficient way.

Although there are some examples of services being provided in this way, but there is still a lot of work needed to link these services up, and make them affordable across the sector. There is also a huge challenge around knowing what is out there, and how to use it best, or at all.

At the IETM Plenary in Berlin, I heard about a UK innovation called 'pop-up' organisations. Sometimes there is a big project or big idea that needs the support and infrastructure of an organisation, but then once the project has run its course, the organisation can just 'pop-down'. This shifts away from the notion that we must keep organisations going forever, and potentially offers a methodology for delivering works of scale, without clogging up the system with lots of hungry organisations.

What we need is light, flexible infrastructure that enables the best possible art, and that can bend, twist and warp with the needs of the artists and their work.

4. Advocating for the teeny-tiny/emerging theatre sector. Nyunkia Tauss, Freelance

Think of Melbourne as a UNESCO City of Literature. The Wheeler Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas. Did all this start with new-found fame and a fancy new building? No, most was already here, just not under one roof with centralised management.

Now imagine a similar focus on independent theatre and live performance...

There's a year round program of talks, workshops, and events. Indies can work with an ensemble, do a course, find a mentor, network and share ideas. Space for meetings, rehearsals and performance. Offices for hire or loan... Theatre makers can research or apply for development opportunities, and learn more about the career paths of more established theatre professionals. There are staff who match individuals or groups with the assistance they need – in-house or otherwise. These staff are a mix of emerging & established theatre professionals with contacts in the major companies. They run the offices and venues, take some of the workshops and are available for advice, mentoring and so on...

The Lawler Centre for Independent Theatre perhaps? Melbourne – City of Independent Theatre. Victoria – the Theatre State.

Almost all of this already exists. The space I've described doesn't have to be a physical space, although that would be great. This could be an online space, with a few staff, bringing together existing and new resources for independent and emerging theatre makers, an extra push here and there to help them to help themselves.

I've identified three things that could work to make this happen:

1. Investigate what infrastructure is needed to support emerging and indies to help themselves, especially once they're outside the "youth" demographic.
 - Market research, how much time, money or support do indies need? At what point is it no longer needed? How can they give back once they hit the big time?
 - Industry research, identifying and networking existing resources, building on the strengths we already have.
2. Look to successful business models from other industries, other countries and the majors. And, how is creativity, learning and development supported outside the arts?
 - Maybe it's theatre apprenticeships or paid internships combining training with on the job experience and a qualification?
 - Microfinance, "first steps" grants, sponsor-an-artist, arts minimum wage?
 - More auspicing, underwriting, corporate partnerships?
 - More business training for the industry: business plans, budgeting. Etc.

Auspicious Arts, ABAF, AMAG, TNV, Next Wave, Fringe and the like provide some of these services, is there more they could do? Could they link up more? Could state and Fed government assist more?

3. Provide space, place, physical or online, to link venues, services, resources, people and information.
 - Build on the strengths of Platform, Arena, Western Edge, St Martins, Signal, Union House Theatre, other academic spaces – create support for the next level up in the industry like Royal Court, Soho Theatre in London, Griffin in Sydney...
 - Websites like artshub, theatrealive, getintotheatre.org in the UK.
 - The building blocks & inspiration for these resources are already out there.

5. Creative risk in a risk-averse culture. Tom Gutteridge, Union House Theatre

Recently I have been struck by a number of things that emphasise the risk-averse - even fearful - nature of our society: Ads for automatic hand-soap dispensers so that you don't pick up germs getting the soap out, an article about padded helmets for toddlers so they don't hurt themselves if they fall, no one hitchhikes anymore, local sports clubs die because they can't afford public liability insurance... This does not feel like a healthy environment for making art.

Ironically Melbourne appears to be experiencing a flourishing of wild, risky, adventurous independent theatre. Over the last two years I have seen some of the best productions of my life on the Melbourne 'Fringe'. But this energy and purpose doesn't seem able to translate to or survive within a formal company environment. There appear to be a number of reasons for this - reporting loads on artistic/admin staff, the paranoid application of OHS policies, board oversight which emphasises risk-management rather than artistic excellence, and an overall financial/managerial flavour to interactions with funding bodies.

This seems to apply as much to small companies as to large ones. It may be justifiable for multimillion dollar major performing arts companies to have a strong focus on these things but not in small companies where the financial risks are minimal. I would argue that in many small companies the focus should be on creating an environment for reckless artistic exploration!

Some specific suggestions on the admin side: do we actually need boards in smaller companies? Applying pressure to government for a no-fault public liability regime for non-profit organisations along the lines of New Zealand's ACC scheme. Developing an approach to OHS obligations which promotes true risk-assessment rather than blanket risk-aversion.

On the artistic side it would be good to see the Australia Council's Artistic Vibrancy policy emphasising the value of artistic risk over financial caution, but fundamentally - it's up to us!

6. Moving to the “next level” - spaces. Tim Stitz, Freelance & University of Melbourne

I'm concerned about access opportunities for independent theatre artists, to get them and their work to that 'next level'.

Malthouse Theatre should be applauded for their remounting of indie work and residencies for indie companies, as should the Arts Centre's Full Tilt program, but how else can our emerging and even more established artists move to that illusive 'larger space'?

What avenues do we have (and need) for indie work to be showcased to a larger, more diverse audience?

And how is that 'shift' mediated, supported and stretched?

How can a work that successfully plays in 30/50/80-seat venue move to a 100/200, even 300-seat venue? And do independent artists want this trajectory?

Also, why is there a dearth of 100/200-seat, middle-ground, theatres in Melbourne?

What does it look like when it's right?

A mix of bringing existing works to bigger, profiled venues whilst also allowing the creation of the new in these larger venues.

John-Paul Fischbach from the Auspicious Arts Incubator asks “where is the transfer house for our best and brightest indie theatre”? Well arguably it's the Tower or Full Tilt. BUT, can

these two houses be the panacea? And where does this space, MTC's Lawler, fit, if at all, in this model?

And within this, how better can independent Melbourne works prepare to present regionally, interstate and internationally so that a co-op conceived gem, birthed at La Mama or the like, take flight, and provide increased opportunity and professional development for their hard working creatives.

What is needed?

In the words of Vanessa Pigrum at Full Tilt, "a 150/200-seat black box that is low tech, low risk, highly functional and adaptable"; an accessible, flexible and larger-scale La Mama, with less overheads than our larger companies and venues. And with a funding and operating model that can reward/pay artists.

How does this happen? Is there room for it? I think there might be.

What is needed to make a change:

A model where: learning, exploring, creating and being mentored/incubated throughout this progression is privileged.

Yes, we need to 'make it new' but we also need support for **remounting** (building a body of work) – there is an incredible benefit in remounting existing works (we know this) but this unfolds exponentially in different, and yes, LARGER spaces.

Lobbying funding bodies, philanthropists and big business to invest in mid-level venues, and a slightly different paradigm.

An **indie theatre 'hub'** which houses a central repository of services and resources that can support the sector – sets, costume, props, workshop, rehearsal and office spaces, links to producers, links to other artists in the sector. An industry wide umbrella.

7. Is the current development climate for writers healthy? Aidan Fennessy, Melbourne Theatre Company

My pitch revolves around the vexed adventure commonly known as 'Development'. Currently we are experiencing a proliferation of opportunities and funding around the notion of 'development' and I'd like to pick apart some of the underlying assumptions. Please note I'm not talking about emerging writers here. So...

Assumption 1: Playwrights are in desperate need of help - help to write their plays...why? Because playwrights, no matter how hard working and talented, will find the task of writing a play too difficult to achieve by themselves. So...

Assumption 2: A writer needs developmental intervention- why? ; Well... we don't trust them. Like the cascade of intervention that precedes a caesarean section, so too there seems to be this cascade of intervention prior to the birth of a new play- it's called 'harm minimization'.

How does this affect outcomes? Anecdotally what I have seen in the past few years is not heartening- I've seen good writers become bad writers through this 'intervention of development' because they now see themselves as simply 'an aspect' in the production of a new play-merely another smudge on the directors palette- they now understand implicitly that despite what they have written, they must be 'open' and indeed 'eager' to change their work to suit the predilections of the company who are developing it or more to the point, those individuals who may in fact program the work. For those of us engaged in the

development of any given script, our underlying assumption is often that it needs to be 'fixed' rather than directorially 'solved'. And because the writer now can't in fact do their job that they need a room full of people to achieve this for them-

What is the impact of all this: Writers are changing their artistic practice. Writers are either abdicating their leadership responsibility or worse, not asking themselves what their responsibility is. Writers are submitting incomplete plays knowing that intervention will happen to complete it. Often good plays are made worse by dramaturgical intervention- which may happen on many occasions by many different people all of whom are 'helping'. A play that was once alive hits the stage still born- a cardboard cut out of what it once was. Plays that begin to resemble other plays that have been through the same dramaturgical process- mash-up or composite plays- plays that resolve narrative or character when there was never any need to. In short - white board theatre.

Is this a cultural issue? Is this the way that contemporary writers have chosen to work? No. As outlets for production have shrunk, opportunities for development have risen- this is a direct result of funding changes from both state and federal bodies- 'Development funding' could be caricatured as a drip feed to a lost generational voice- this is an exaggeration but you get the picture-

So what does a writer need? Ask them... but here are some ideas. Support, money, encouragement, productions, an audience, trust, confidence and control. Why aren't they getting this? Discuss.

8. Are we at risk inadvertently colonizing our Indigenous Stories? John Harvey, Ilbijerri Theatre Company, Melbourne

I would like to commence my presentation by acknowledging the traditional owners of the Kulin Nation in which we meet today. I acknowledge their Elders past and present.

I am a Saibai Island man from Samu (Emu) and Ait Kadal (Crocodile) Clan groups and of English heritage. Something has been troubling me for sometime. Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people have oral traditions. That is our stories are not written down – but passed on using story telling, dance, song and art. It is the responsibility within our community of our Elders to pass on these stories to our children. And I am sure that it is hoped that in telling these stories – the next generation pass them on to the other next generation and so forth.

But this is not always the case. I have myself – as many Indigenous people I'm sure have experienced reading about our stories as told through the lens/perception of non-Indigenous people. As viewed by anthropologists or those who have documented us and our stories. Indeed an exhibition in Brisbane of traditional Torres Strait stories called "The Margaret Lawrie Collection of Torres Strait Islands Material". I note the title isn't reflective of the names of those Elders who told those stories – but to the Non-Indigenous writer who documented these stories. Nothing against Margaret Lawrie – but to note that it is the writer who has written/documented the stories who has been credited. The acknowledgement of these stories are inherently tied to the writer in perpetuity.

It is an unfortunate – but true that non-Indigenous people only acknowledge what is written as the truth – as the story. The Mabo Case for Native Title being a case in point – and of course the terribly history wars that rage about this land supported by the conservative right.

I think the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the context of theatre – is heard within the writing and directing of works. These 2 being the 2 creative positions –

provide the lens/perception of the story that are being told. So – within this context I take a moment to consider the implications.

I think we as an theatre industry must carefully think through the implications of having non-Indigenous people in the key creative positions of Writer and Director. I'm not saying that there isn't a place for collaborations – rather that we all must as an industry have a discussion as to what this means in terms of the lens/perception in which these stories are about. I want for my children and future generations – and I think we all want for our future generations to have our children learning Indigenous stories from the source. I believe that this is an integral aspect for developing a more mature and health society within this country. It's not an easy discussion – and there are of course many reasons why non-indigenous people write and direct theatre shows about Indigenous stories.

I think film is leading the way in this arena through the Screen Australia Indigenous Branch. They clearly define an Indigenous film as being a film which has Indigenous people in both of the key creative positions as Director and Writer. And funding can only be accessed if there are Indigenous people in these key creative positions. They've invested a substantial amount of resources in development initiatives to provide practical training to writers and directors. These initiatives are extending into the area of producing – with the knowledge of how the producer role is incredibly influential in the development of any work. The fruits of this are seen in films such as *Bran Nue Day*, *Samson & Delilah* - both films doing extremely well both nationally and internationally. *Samson & Delilah* winning at Cannes Film Festival and *Bran Nue Dae* screening at the Sundance Film Festival. *Sapphires* – a theatrical production written by Tony Briggs and Directed by Wesley Enoch – will go into screen production soon – with the screenplay adaption by Tony Briggs and a non Indigenous Writer for Screen – with Indigenous theatre/film director - Wayne Blair directing. I think we will see some amazing – authentic Indigenous work that will not only resonate with Australian audiences but also international audiences.

I think there is a language that we must develop around our work. I think a work told by a non-Indigenous person – must clearly be discussed in those terms. It is after-all only ever going to be a non-Indigenous person's perception of the Indigenous story is – as opposed to the Indigenous story itself.

Ultimately I would like to see us as an industry – honour the intent of story telling by our Indigenous Elders – to ensure that we consider carefully about how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are included in the key creative roles of writing and directing to tell our stories. We must commit as an industry to empowering Indigenous communities to control our stories within the theatre context.

Ultimately our children have the basic human right and birth right to hear and learn our stories from our people. In fact all of our children in this country have the right to hear Indigenous stories as told by Indigenous people.

9. Regional and National Touring - supporting higher risk and diversity on the road. Jill Smith, Geelong Performing Arts Centre

I apologise for any rash generalizations here but three minutes is three minutes.

If we look back over the past fifteen – twenty years there is a great deal that has been achieved in relation to national and regional touring

There is more touring than ever before

There is a greater diversity of shows available for touring

There has been an explosion of venues across the country

Co-ordination of tours has become very sophisticated across Long Paddock, Cyber Paddock and the Blue Heelers and

There is support available through Playing Australia and State regional touring funds

But in all this success I personally believe we have lost a great deal. In my opinion we have lost sight of what should lie at the heart of touring subsidy – supporting higher risk and diversity on the road.

In chasing the efficiency dividend - getting to as many venues as possible, across as many states and territories, for the lowest possible cost – we have in fact created a rod for our backs and denied audiences and artists many opportunities.

The efficiency dividend works against

Works of scale – both cast and production values

Split tours which are more manageable for many artists and can offer more alternative dates for presenters

It works against

Risk-taking and freshness in programming (selecting now for a program up to two years away)

Audience development in the context of program diversity, and with the rare exception,

Major company involvement

The one size fits all is not necessarily the best model for a country so vast, with venues of varying scale, and audiences with different levels of experience, interest and proximity to capital cities.

Victoria has recognised the differing capacities of its venues in the context of both technical facilities and audience, grading venues accordingly and tailoring tours to better match these capacities.

But what of the future? Increasingly Governments are encouraging citizens to move to regional centres. Lifestyle is an important consideration in that decision. In turn, access to cultural activities in their home town is an important contributor to perceptions of lifestyle.

So how can we broaden programming options to capture these new audiences?

I can immediately think of five possible areas for review.

First, for some venues works of scale will simply never be accommodated. In others, there will be a need for additional funding to allow for such things as additional touring costs; bump in/out costs associated with larger more complex design; accommodating one week buys even with the same number of performances.

Second, as media strategies and communication outlets change, the cost of finding the elusive new audience will reduce and new opportunities will arise to match new audiences with more varied product.

Third, split tours or shorter tours would allow for a greater mix of touring circuits across venue size and geography and we should review the issues around including CBD arts centres in funded tours to help launch state-wide tours.

Fourth, small to mediums and independent artists need producing partners to secure funding. Think about partnering with regional centres to launch development projects and tours.

Finally, undertake the economic impact studies to help centre managers convince their local governments that a bigger investment in their arts centre will in fact provide greater returns to their communities.

10. What is a Producer? Neal Harvey, Elbow Room

I want the sector, as much as the funding bodies and training institutions to define what qualities, skills and experience we want our producers to possess.

The Australian live arts sector is still coming to terms with a new model of work creation that underscores the role of 'the producer.' The days where a group of artists could secure funding or presentation agreements and administer it themselves are gone. Artists have to work with producers to secure money and presentation agreements and producers have to work with other producers in festival and umbrella event contexts.

This situation has been forced upon the sector – it didn't really arise naturally, from the mainstream or the fringe or festival circuit. That isn't to say that it isn't a good or necessary development for the sector, but it's true that now everyone has to have a producer. Ten years ago, that word didn't meaning anything for most us.

Now that the word and role exists, it'd be good to get a sector-wide discussion going about what skill sets, qualities and perhaps training might be associated with that role. I don't want to introduce any more barriers to individuals or groups entering the sector and producing work, but the range, variety and experience of those of us out there calling ourselves producers is, potentially, doing the sector more harm than good. We could all be better at what we do and freeing up the knowledge and experience that is tied up in a relatively small number of us can only benefit everyone.

There isn't one solution to this: that's not what I'm proposing. But acknowledging that we're asking a lot of our young and emerging producers is the first step in addressing that. Oz Co are making some good steps towards vocational training through the JUMP program and the Emerging Producer scholarships that were handed out last year, but the outcomes of these schemes – while good – were tied to individuals – perhaps the focus could be broadened to strengthen the sector, as well as individuals. The MAPS scheme, for example, was great – but the artists I spoke to in Victoria and QLD didn't emerge from that scheme with any producing skills – the scheme funded someone – who already knows how to produce to produce for them. Give 'em a fish or teach them to fish?

It's odd that you can study every aspect of live art production, technical or otherwise except Producing, but that's the one role that a company or collective can't do without. VCA, for all the difficulty it has experienced in merging with Uni Melb might actually now be well placed to offer such an education. They can offer students undergraduate training in a meaningful context followed by a postgraduate diploma teaching the range of skills needed to start producing live art.

Large organisations like festivals and arts centres have an opportunity to contribute to the education and training of producers because they can reveal to emerging producers all of the different facets of their job. Producing is publicity, marketing, proofing, production management, lighting and technical support, directing and stage managing. It's all of these things, or it could be and having experience in all of these aspects of live art creation is going

to create better producers which in turn will make for a stronger sector, with more jobs and more success stories.

Organisations like Auspicious Arts are really helping the sector too. Perhaps there's a way to start talking about everything that these groups, organisations and funding bodies are doing and begin to articulate exactly what it is that a producer does and help train up the next generation of them in a way that will be beneficial for everyone.

11. Career Pathways for emerging theatre artists. Pippa Bainbridge, La Mama

There exists in Victoria a need for clearly articulated, well-funded pathways for artists and small companies.

For many artists and companies, the creation of independent or fringe theatre is the pinnacle of ambition, and they create new work that is deliberately of an appropriate scale for small venues and an intimate audience. For others however, there is a desire to develop their work and their practice further and to create work that will be seen by larger audiences, on a scale that is suitable for larger spaces, and can be toured both nationally and internationally.

But how do artists and small companies bridge the gap between producing work in small venues and being recognized as 'emerging', to producing work of a larger scale? Where are the opportunities for artist development and the development of new work? Are we so focused on audience development that we are neglecting to develop our product?

There is no lack of small companies here in Victoria, and artists and new works are well supported at their emergence however it is the pathways beyond the independent sector that are missing.

In an ideal environment, the theatre sector in Melbourne would be a complete ecology in which artists are well supported across their career with clear pathways for development. In order to achieve this I propose a number of suggestions for 'filling the gaps'.

1. Continue to build an infrastructure and support for a model in which the major performing arts companies take responsibility for programs that cultivate emerging artists. This would include increasing mentorship and co-presentation opportunities as well as providing support for new work in the development phase.
2. Further engage regional Victoria to create touring opportunities in order to extend the life of new work and support the maturation of artists and small companies.
3. Ensure opportunities that do exist are clearly articulated and broadly communicated, and are valued by the companies that run them.

To conclude I will quote John Baylis in his Mapping Queensland Theatre Report (which I think is equally relevant in Victoria and more broadly across Australia),

A vibrant theatre culture needs diverse activity, and lots of it. Such activity of course needs audiences, but before that, it needs artists. Without the artists to make it happen, solid foundations for audience development will not exist. There need to be artists from across the full range of experience and practice. Young artists can make work in sparse circumstances and present it in bare spaces – for a while. However, for them to persist, they need pathways – they need to see a future for themselves and their work.

12. Support for emerging theatre makers making work for children and families. Alex Desebrock, ArtPlay & Topsy Teacup.

I'm talking today for the little little ones of theatre. The ones in the independent and emerging categories that make work for children and families. (I'm not touching on theatre for youth, as that is a whole other issue, and I am no expert – but has some similar issues).

Just to paint you a picture:

There is a string of venues presenting work for children & families – these include ArtPlay, the Arts Centre, La Mama for Kids, Gasworks & Northcote Kids & of course, RAV. This is great, as it means that there is a market.

The bad news is, the companies that create this work are paid ONLY when they present. Which is risky for venues, as the quality can be a bit hit and miss. So companies like:

- Pocketfool
- Asking for Trouble
- Drop Bear Theatre
- Curious Legends

Make shows basically that come out of a suitcase.

But what if they want a set? What if they want to do a creative development? What if they want to pay a composer to create some music?

Arts Victoria has never funded these companies. They have never been able to get anyone from the panels to their shows. But, obviously this is common at all emerging/independent levels.

Then there are some reputable companies (Dislocate, My Darling Patricia) that have received Arts Vic support to create work for adults, but when they want to try and make theatre for children, they fail, despite presentation confirmations and cash support from ArtPlay or the Arts Centre.

So at the moment we have a situation where venues are looking for quality, interesting work but the Vic artists out there, are struggling to find the resources to do this. This means, independents from interstate are flying a lot higher than they are in Victoria – and subsequently getting the touring support.

If we look at adult theatre, there are platforms such as Next Wave and Melbourne Fringe. Melbourne Fringe do have a kids section, however this hasn't been great as the fees are too much for them, when you have \$7 tickets, a \$3 booking fee is a lot.

Victoria has Arena & Polyglot, but like many of the larger organisations within the industry, there is little opportunity for support. Very few umbrella opportunities, or strategies to engage with the emerging and independent.

So what could help?

- small amounts of funding for resources – the materials. There is quite a bit of support from the venues, so space isn't the biggest hurdle.
- a commitment from Arts Victoria to support independent and emerging artists making work for children and families
- strategy building with Polyglot, Arena, the venues & Melbourne Fringe to support these artists, and provide them with pathways

The result, as with all emerging/independent artists – less burn out and dare I say the word exploitation? The ability to take risks, and create something special, engaged audiences, - because as we all know -

a magical experience of theatre as a child opens up a world for life.

Do it wrong, and it turns them off for life.

13. Women Directors in key creative positions in the professional sector. Lucy Freeman, Straightjacket Productions, La Trobe University & Australian Women Directors Alliance

While many industries have been adopting strategies toward a 'critical mass' of one third representation of women in leadership roles, the past 15 years in Australian theatre has seen the number of women in key creative appointments decrease. The statistics are particularly bad for women directors in the Victorian professional sector. Of the last 58 productions at the MTC, 7 shows were directed by a woman. 3 by Kate Cherry and 4 by other women who do not reside in Victoria. The news is no better out of The Malthouse. In the past five years, Victorian based women directors have had as much opportunity to increase their perceived 'merit' (which dictates their appointment suitability) as women seeking leadership roles in the AFL, the Armed Forces and the Catholic Church.

My pitch is for subsidised companies to outline their Equal Opportunity strategies and have their effectiveness assessed by a regulatory body. Non-compliance should carry consequences and results or reports be made public.

In the face of limited opportunities throughout history, a few Victorian women directors have shattered glass ceilings, some prefer the artistic freedom found working in the margins, and many have found strength in the community, youth, independent and education sectors. But many have walked away, fatigued at forever being dubbed 'emerging creatives' and 'alternative' to an imposed norm. Many are frustrated by the banging on seemingly locked doors, the unanswered invites to see their work and the longitudinal development opportunities offered young male directors – whose artistic sensibilities align with those of the monolithic decision makers. The popular catch-cry that women directors are responsible for their plight because they do not network and pitch "like men" – derives from a gendered assumption that men pitch the "right" way.

Under the leadership of Melanie Beddie, Jane Woollard and myself, the AWDA (Australian Women Directors Alliance) has recently reminded the theatre industry that workplace equity is not a choice, but a legal, ethical and moral requirement. Similar to the atmosphere in 1994, it is currently felt that 'a breeze is blowing'. The current theatre industry's legacy will be how well the issue is addressed THIS time. For lasting change, political and industry leaders must take the baton from the un-resourced AWDA and strategically advocate for an increase in interpretive female voices in the nation's theatre.

The theatre industry is not exempt from equal opportunity because individual male or female artistic director's aesthetic taste or personal and professional relationships necessitate it. MPAB and other state and federally subsidized companies are supported by the society for whom theatre is made. It is therefore reasonable to demand at least one third of all theatre company board and key creative appointments are female.

Women are not a sub-set of men. And, despite being listed as a 'special category' in arts funding, women are neither a homogenous nor a minority group. Men and women must together re-imagine an ethos and structure that welcomes the creative authority, artistry and potential of women, in all their diversity. Enough is enough. History has shown that a breeze is never enough to affect change. It is time for a wind machine, even if hiring one means re-jigging the budget and turning it on forces things to shift in unquantifiable ways.

14. Affiliated Artistic Directors for Regionally based Performing Arts Centres. Jude Anderson, Punctum

My idea comes from my good experience in our regional area where some of our programs are partnered by Bendigo's performing arts centre.

So the idea is:

That the 20 regional performing arts centres in Victoria, each have an associated artistic director.

These performing arts centres spread statewide have competent and engaged full time managers and associated technical and operational staff. A good number of them are state of the arts facilities. They have programmed seasons, strong local networks, and are venues for hire. They are often business units of Local Councils. They present works but rarely produce them. They are 'net importers'; they 'buy in product'.

Currently not one of them has a full time associated artistic director or full time programme of associated artistic directors.

Artistic directors would lead innovation in place based practice, drive a fresh approach to the interpretation of the region's culture, creatively engage with the region's communities in new and exciting ways, construct works that acknowledge and celebrate performing arts in all its diversity on a day-in day-out year long basis.

The profession of artistic director is more than a metro calling. With a supported statewide initiative for these regional performing arts centres to engage associated artistic directors, within a year there could be;

- over 20 new positions for high level professionals and hundreds more employment opportunities through generated activity and leveraged funds,
- an engine for driving statewide opportunity, innovation and growth
- regional renewal through enriched cultural competency and regionally based career opportunities,
- a dynamic sector celebrated by professionals and audiences for its **diversity** of professional engagement and production
- leadership in stimulating equity of access, and excellence of regionally based professional practice and production.

What change needs to occur to make this happen?

1. that the Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres adds 3 words to its mission statement: **professional artistic development** so that their statement reads: "development of the arts industry's best practice in **professional artistic development**, programming, presentation, venue management and community cultural development."

2. that each regional performing arts centre in Victoria is funded \$100,000.00 per year over the next 4 years to employ an associated artistic director and that Arts Victoria evaluate the impact of the programme.

Just recently I attended the Regional Arts Australia Conference and the Australian Women Directors Alliance Forum. *Professional development opportunities and clearly defined career pathways* were raised as THE issues the sector needs to address in order to avoid atrophy. Right now there exists an incredible opportunity to show great cultural leadership.

20 regional performing arts centres, each with an associated artistic director.
It could be real.

15. In Praise of Dramaturgy. Peter Eckersall, NYID

My pitch begins with a quote from Jacques Ranciere:

“We no longer live in the days when playwrights wanted to explain to their audience the truth of social relations and ways of struggling against capitalist domination. But one does not necessarily lose one’s presuppositions with one’s illusions ... On the contrary, it might be that the loss of their illusions leads artists to increase pressure on spectators, perhaps the later will know what is to be done, as long as the performance draws them out of their passive attitude and transforms them into active participants in a shared world. [1]... Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting”. [2]

Dramaturgy is learning to handle complexity. It posits and indeed insists on a conversation between ideas and forms and between the creative event and the conditions and contexts of its receptions. I believe that these interactions should be visible, manifestly shaping the performance, and should enliven the experience of viewing. This is to explore what dramaturg Marian Van Kerkhoven calls a ‘dramaturgy of spectatorship.’ [3]

To increase pressure on spectators asks for theatres of clarity, argument and risk.

So what might this look like and what can we do?

- It might involve newer directions in training that include dramaturgy and dramaturgical perspectives on theatre.
- It might involve further taking our creative processes into collaborative arrangements, developing our understanding of new media and hybrid media dramaturgy.
- It might involve arguments about politics and what needs to be said in theatre; so much current alternative politics is unable or unwilling to address Ranciere’s terms of capitalist domination.
- It might involve further disassembling theatre, thereby fostering new relationships. To return to the spectator means to make work that is something between (again to quote Kerkhoven) ‘looking at something and walking into something’.

[1] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London & New York: Verso, 2009) 11.

[2] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London & New York: Verso, 2009) 13.

[3] Van Kerkhoven *Performance Research* (2010), 8.

16. Artist residencies - space for thinking. Jodee Mundy, Freelance Director and Performer

My pitch is about a request for more Performing arts residencies in Melbourne and Victoria.

I have done a few residencies including the Polyglot Theatre Tap residency (funding for this has been cut). This offered the artist a space for 2 weeks and 3000 dollars. I have done ‘a month in the country’ at the HotHouse Theatre and was a leading artist for an Extended Artist in a school.

Sometimes we get so bogged down in the logistics of the industry/boards, policies, tax stuff etc... that we forget about the simple things like space for an artist to go and reflect and discover their own practice, and realize ideas.

Currently I am doing the Victoria University Solo Residency. This is an excellent working model.

There are approximately 45 performing artists in their mid career stage. We all have access to shared diary to 3 spaces, one mentor, given group provocations and various readings. Amazing gift. And we are given money to go overseas to ‘immerse’ ourselves somewhere for inspiration. By the end of the year, the aim is that you have dedicated at least 3000 hours to

your own practice.

Often artists are bogged down in the logistics of funding applications, producing commissions, working other jobs and more, that the essential element to 'just be, dream and create without self judgment' is not there. If an artist survives like this, there is a high chance they will give up their practice. It is not viable.

Giving artists space to work supports them to continue being sustainable. It allows them to dig deeper and create work that actually has depth. If there is a mentor and/or fellow artists, part of these schemes- this enables them to support one another.

If we can at least have more spaces available, then at least one area for artists is continuing to be nourished. If there were more spaces/artists in arts organisations, residencies in public and corporate environments this brings the art to the community. ie: it could be in more hospitals (ie: Victoria Hospital), charities (asylum seeker resource centre) banks, museums, science research centres, schools and so on. This allows for an opportunity of exchange with the community and the artist.

In my own practice, having access to residencies is what has allowed me to be sustainable in my practice. When you enter that space and begin to make work, you feel home, valued and supported by a community. This support inspires artists to give back to their community. Like a dialogue the two can continue to give to each other. There are opportunities for community involvement, new networks and potential projects on the horizon. This adds to the cultural fabric of our country. It is the times when I haven't had access where I feel at a loss and disconnected. I am sure many other artists feel this way.

17. A Creative Ecosystem. Ian Pidd, Freelance Director and The Village Festival.

One of the effects of the shift of resources out of the rehearsal room and into the office of arts companies is an increasing managerialism taking hold in the arts. In my opinion the most damaging results of this trend is the wide acceptance that the arts can be "solved." That if all artists and arts companies and funding bodies and policy makers could all be prevailed upon to sign up to a particular business plan/marketing model/dramaturgical process/commissioning formula/presenting path/producing ideal then everything in the arts would be hunky dory and things will just be easy and simple and we'll see lots of wonderful work and happy artists and managers, and the right things will get funded and everyone will see sense. And, of course, it's bunk.

It's primarily based on the Management Consultancy business model that (similarly absurdly) proposes that if you can get all the people who work in an enterprise into one room for a few days and inspire them to agree to a mission statement and a few very simplistic strategic goals then the organisation will suddenly become a nirvana of fulfilled workers and unlimited profits.

As each new strategy for the arts fails to produce this "solved" arts sector, managers (I guess in this case I mean the major arts funding bodies- council, state and federal) send the artists to their rooms, while they retire to a strategic planning session run by a management consultant, emerging with a new plan that we must all sign up to. Which will not work in the controlling way that it is intended to, and on and on we go.

I say what we need is to assert our desire to see the widest possible range of ways of doing everything in the arts. What we need is to celebrate the widest possible diversity of models for doing everything in the arts. A diversity in the way we make our work, in how we train our actors, in company models, where things are seen, who our audiences are, how we tour, what constitutes a risk, what constitutes forward planning, etc.

The arts are not a machine that can be set up to operate in an efficient way and then left to run. The arts are an ecosystem that must be allowed to flourish and grow in as diverse a way as can be (not) managed.

(Just to be clear. I am not saying that the situation is entirely toxic. Australian arts scene is quite diverse and relatively well supported. BUT we all spend such a huge amount of our time responding to these big plans (and employing more managers to write these responses) and less and less time actually making work.)

18. Trust Artists: The value of open-access festivals, accessible venues and approachable programs. Emily Sexton, Melbourne Fringe

I believe our Melbourne arts community is driven by a kind of scenius, to use Brian Eno's term. Scenius describes a creativity not driven by lauded individuals, but rather by an entire community. It's a shared genius. It's typified by a mutual appreciation of risk, the rapid exchange of new ideas and techniques, whole networks empowered by the success of any member, and a healthy tolerance of innovative mavericks.

In this city, we've experienced such a scene for decades. This strength makes it easy to assume our independent arts culture is impervious. It's not true. It's actually quite easy to kill it, through lack of trust, recklessness or simply by seeking too hard to control it.

Across Australia there is an overwhelming trend towards festivals, programs and venues being curated. It's an interesting circumstance that has brought this about. I think it's been driven partly by the dissolution of barriers between mainstream and fringe, as people recognise that it's often in the independent arts that the most important artistic discoveries are made.

Please don't get me wrong: curated Festivals, exhibitions, programs - they are fascinating and often propel brilliant independent artists into the national spotlight. But with the increase in curation, we can also end up with a handful of individuals who determine what's vital for contemporary culture.

That's not right. Artists should determine what's vital for contemporary culture.

I would argue that entrusting artists to choose what issues, ideas, trends, stories, beliefs and reflections are vital in 2010 produces the most fresh, most crucial of results. I would say that it is only through open-access models that scenius can be created at all. Open-access Festivals, and a healthy independent arts sector, go hand in hand.

The 2010 Melbourne Fringe Festival program – opening next week - showcases an immediate representation of current cultural trends by those who are making them, not just those who have spotted them. That's what makes it so rich, so exciting.

To protect its delicate nature, and to make it even better, what 3 things could change?

- 1) Venue for hire is not a dirty word! Being accessible and approachable is a good thing.
- 2) Artists shouldn't always be waiting. For venue, for funding, for selection, for validation. It isn't healthy and it doesn't produce better work. To understand art you have to put it in front of an audience. We will make our theatre practice relevant by doing, not by waiting.
- 3) Curatorial practice must be grounded in strong sector knowledge. This means listening, and it means attendance. It also means that leading arts organisations must be approachable and the principles by which they make decisions must be transparent.

19. Cultural Change for Theatre. Polash Larsen, Diverse Australian Theatre Alliance

Statement of Passion #1:

We want cultural change. We are passionate about theatre. We want the Australian Stage to reflect the diversity of our country. We want artists and arts workers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to be encouraged, nurtured and supported. We want cultural change. Great talent, extraordinary storytelling and powerful voices come in many different shapes, sizes, colours and ethnicities. We want the Australian Theatre industry to step into the twenty-first century and shake off the racism of the past. We want to see the beauty, power, poetry, destruction and humanity of our stories performed on the stage. We yearn to see diverse faces. We want cultural change.

- Candy Bowers.

So you can see from this that we recognize and embrace Australia as a country where people of “mixed-parentage” are in the majority. But our industry doesn’t reflect this diversity.

So we want:

- To ensure substantive access for culturally diverse Australians to employment within the theatre industry.
- To support the theatre industry to make, present and promote work that engages a culturally diverse audience.
- To assist the theatre industry to maintain, build and develop culturally diverse audiences.

Our mainstage theatres were once key factories for shaping and reflecting the nation’s cultural narrative but they’re becoming decreasingly relevant. Changing the stories we tell to attract different audiences necessitates changing some of the people creating and presenting the art itself. A strong CALD policy is more than showing that you’ve got a couple of brown-skinned cleaners and a Vietnamese accountant looking over the books.

The “Do You Really Expect to Get Paid” report paints a fairly rosy picture of NESB artists who don’t view their ethnic background as an obstruction to their employment – however NESB artists are strongly represented as visual artists, craft practitioners and dancers – all fields where their appearance is arguably not an obstruction. NESB artists make up 14% of artists surveyed in those fields. In our industry - the percentage drops to 5%. That’s for actors. They didn’t supply stats on Artistic Directors or Board Members.

Dealing with Diversity is about acknowledging and disadvantage and addressing it - and about acknowledging privilege and addressing it.

If every other industry can embrace equal opportunity legislation – then why not ours?

20. Longer, Deeper, Slower....a ten year vision. What will we do to become environmentally sustainable in the next decade? Angharad Wynne-Jones, Collaborator

The environmental and sustainability sectors across Australia have gathered together to commit to a 10 year social and structural transition – the transition decade - that enables the restoration of a safe climate and decarbonised economy for Australia by 2020.

What could the arts sector contribution be to that vision?

Here’s a snapshot, a guided fantasy of a zero carbon future I could imagine for artists ten years from now. It’s a big leap from where we are, but who better to make that leap than

artists who have never been ransomed to a bottom line. Close you eyes if you like....

The Malthouse's photovoltaic solar panels has a digital interface screening a new morning raga from a composer in Mumbai. The sun is glinting off the rainwater tanks suspended on the outside of the building. They provide ballast for the self propelling lift enabling disabled access to the roof market garden that provides produce for the café.

10 years ago it used to be a theatre, now it's an international futures research centre, with artists, designers, scientists, carbonists, adaptors, resistors, local residents and children imagining, designing and rehearsing futures and remembering old knowledges.

Today I am joining the centre's artist associates in my role as resident failure catcher. They are hosting a planning meeting for the Immersive International Quadrennial (previously known as Melbourne International Festivals of Arts). The collaborators on one of the projects share the outcomes of the 2 year immersive online process between themselves and a team of artists in Europe. In a week the artists and their families will begin their journey to Australia overland, stopping off at other research pods along the way to upload content into the virtual studio. A video update arrives from a team of students from across the state who set off two weeks ago on an overland bike hike to Darwin to meet them.

They will bring them back to Melbourne via the Centre's Ernabella community partners in the Pitjantjatjara lands for a knowledge exchange ceremony. There's discussion about how to document the unexpected learning outcomes from their 6 month residency at the VCA. And plans for the party the Melbournians are throwing to welcome them, when they perform their work on the first night of the International Quadrennial.

I walk home down a pathway between trees laden with fruit. I can hear the whirring of bicycle wheels, as Melbournians go about their business. And the song of birds nesting in the living walls of surrounding buildings. The sun is hot on the back of my neck but not too hot.

What kind of zero carbon future do you want? for your self, your company, your organisation, your neighbourhood?

What's the next step you'd like to take to make that a reality?

Discussion Notes – Top 8 Issues

The following notes are from the report-backs from table discussions about the eight pitches that were voted in to be discussed in more detail. They are interpretations and distillations only. They are in order of the pitches as they were given, not in order of priority.

1. Diversity and Age Discrimination - Discussion

Diversity is the current buzzword, Age diversity should be included in this conversation.

Theatre should have 'all ages' as the baseline classification for all shows, with variations noted (current classification system is based on an assumption that the audience knows that shows are suitable for adult audiences, if the show is suitable for 'all ages' then this is the notable classification).

If major theatre companies want to engage young people, then young people should have a role in the program development.

Companies have a curatorial prerogative.

Mission statements declaring a commitment to inclusivity should outline what actions will be put in place to achieve this goal. (a score card ? name & shame?)

Key roles should be a reflection of audience diversity (eg Arena). And other audience diversity too, as per John's pitch.

Major companies should develop relationships with young people, rather than current focus on targeting school involvement.

We should be finding platforms for young people to develop works for children. Leadership is required – good examples have been set by Sprout, Art Play, Polyglot, The Sydney Theatre Company. Young people are both audience and creators of theatre. Need more leadership from MPAB companies.

Use YPAA as a lobbying platform.

Centenary of Canberra have two planning groups made up of children & teenagers for the 2013 Celebrations, - neither of these groups have spoken of theatre at all.

Scotland has an entire festival driven and by young people. The LIFT (UK) has a youth council.

This issue shouldn't be just focussing on young people, but on the family unit, shows should be enjoyable for whole family because this will result in repeat custom – eg 'Pixar' movies.

This marginalisation of young people is a cultural one, it comes from children being treated as separate from general society. A better approach is one which incorporates children as (intelligent/engaged) general audience.

It is important that the pricing structure of these shows be real , don't charge \$45 /ticket and don't treat kids like idiots the show doesn't need to be 45 minutes too long (stretched out to dumb it down, especially if the concept is very-very simple)

How do artists conceive works in order to make them accessible? Ask questions at the *start* of the creative process.

IMAGINE IF...How (good?/interesting?) would it be if all of the major companies programmed the entire 2011 for young people?

There should be an ethical code of practice on this issue of age diversity including quality of programs.

As part of company Business Planning , the emphasis should be on diversity including age, theatre for children (on the whole) is dumbed down and not risky (as Tom said in his pitch re taking more risk).

Melbourne Uni has been conducting consultative research into youth engagement with theatre (Theatre Space, Tim Stitz) and the findings will be published soon.

2. Light Flexible Infrastructure - Discussion

This is a practical tangible issue to tackle, but there are challenges to sharing infrastructure such as:

- Competition (companies wanting to be in better rather than equal position)

- Not wanting/ or able to share databases (Privacy & competition)

- Decision making process – who and how would this happen, choosing an opportunity for one company over another (favouritism/ conflict of interest)

There would be good aspects to sharing as well especially with areas like payroll and insurance.

Festivals like Big West do act as Pop Up project based flexible infrastructure organisation (by providing these shared services) within the festival.

Gasworks provides some of these services, like a skills bank, incubator, mentorships program.

Independent artists have less need for boards and management.

To be impermanent and responsive to change are the important features of this idea, it would need to be able to shift its method of operating (to match with current needs)

Auspicious Arts provides many of these shared service needs.

The difficulty is in identifying what services are not currently available, such as

- Transfer houses – Flexible venues (such as Tim's 'spaces' pitch)

- finding funding for independent artists

- Artists developing a longer life for their arts by getting remounts and touring

The question is how to do it - Identify what is out there already, What are the common needs, How much would it cost, What area would it cover (local / national) There is a need to map the need, and find the resources needed – a research project.

Independent artists don't know what is out there, maybe Fringe Festival could run a forum / provide a list of opportunities such as cyber paddock. Fringe - we are running such a forum in Fringe this year!

A hot zone – like hot desks. Where could that happen?

Flexible can't mean not getting paid or skimping on quality.

(tax deductible status discussion)

'Light' infrastructure does not mean 'for free'. The work (involved in staging any arts event) is in the process not just the product.

Repeat showing of work to an ever expanding audience, venue profile – is the essence of need to be filled by this Pop Up company.

The need is in marketing assistance, budget and financial management, this pop up needs to

be flexible, able to link needs with resources at the time “find it when you want it”. Two way to get this idea up are 1. invest in current support services 2. Facilitate sharing.

3. Regional and national touring - Discussion

Regional Touring is key to national culture - not just capital city touring.

Need a variety of approaches.

Regional has to be part of the touring matrix. There is a need for identifying the products produced in each region. Eg Bendigo is well known for its Hub of arts.

Post tertiary incubator model eg North Melbourne Town Hall.

There is a need for a better description of the resources and capabilities or regional PAC's.

The issue does relate directly to critical mass: The reality of (great new theatre) attracting an audience size of 200 from Melbourne 4 mil population translates to an audience of 2 in a population of 40 000.

So there needs to be an identification of a regional touring circuit which could get the audience for new interesting works.

Investing in local regional artist & their works rather than large expensive touring acts.

Regional venues could be more flexible.

Knowing what the 20-50 year vision is in the regions would help Melbourne artists support that vision. What are the audiences in the regions?

There needs to be a variety of approaches:

1. Pause in the regions, develop relationships and an audience in the region. Have a strong visibility – become involved with the community through an extended stay and with extra activities.
2. Developing more regionally based productions, offer of artistic mentorships.
3. Touring regional to Melbourne Venues (create cultural exchange)

There is a good political environment for this right now – the arts minister has just taken the regional development portfolio.

4. What is a producer? - Discussion

More on-the-job training and supervision appears necessary to ensure that the industry retains a healthy number of capable young producers. Elbow Room Neal Harvey

The imposition of the role of the producer as a gate keeper is dangerous.

There is a difference between ‘producers’ working in venues and those working in companies.

MAPS program is not flexible enough.

Who are the really creative, effective producers?

Why aren't the VCA Arts Management graduates filtering down to fill these roles?

This can be an organic model, artists do want to do this (producer) role themselves.

The producer frees the artists: They manage the budget, they protect the story, they deal

with the marketing.

Training producers would involve both tertiary and, importantly, hands on internships with companies.

The tertiary institutions are responding to this need, SA Uni and UTS are a couple of examples of good training provision for this role.

5.& 6. Redressing Inequities – Women Directors in key creative positions in the professional sector. AND Cultural Change for Theatre. - Discussion. (Discussion of these topics overlapped and have been amalgamated.)

Change is the key theme needed across everything.

Who is in Charge, what are the structures, Where does it start?

Funding bodies need to set the benchmarks. All levels of Government should enforce (equal opportunity).

Yes we need E.O. but we also need a range of strategies to address the fundamental notion of vision.

“Why does the Arts not reflect the census?”

Employers need not ‘employ minorities’, rather to embrace change.

Incentives, rather than a box-ticking exercise.

There needs to be more representation of cultural diversity in popular culture (TV).

There needs to be consideration for preserving integrity of stories “the right stories told by the right people” Process is inclusive of all stories.

Cultural and Gender Diversity should be represented on Company Boards.

Have the encounter with “other” so that you have the tools to make the change. The discourse is different if there are just white men in the room.

Boards need to be more representative of the society “ we are more than middle class eastern suburbs women”.

There need to be more gender and culture equity on the main stage.

There is diversity on/in the fringe – (so much so that) Gender and cultural diversity has become ghettoised.

Diversity (Gender / culture) needs to be policy driven.

How relevant is theatre to CALD communities??

Sector is so small, maybe we can’t change without policy?

Raise awareness with artists also – Cultural ratio is key at all levels.

Employers need to look beyond themselves – choose difference.

Artistic Vibrancy = diversity.

Both Gender and CALD leaders need to be in visible positions (on the stage, rather than behind the scenes) and discussions about inequity within scripted roles.

This needs to be in a Cultural Policy (as opposed to Arts Policy)

‘Excellence’ & ‘Quality’ as terms need to be examined especially if they are fundamentally

racist concepts.

Carrot or the Stick? – The action will bring its own rich rewards on all bottom line indicators. Carrot = bigger audiences, artistic vibrancy, etc. Stick = policy requirements.

Creative practice could lead this change, underpinned by policy.

There are international benchmarks for Government funding bodies excluding companies who do not have good gender/ cultural equity practices. (there was a request that Art Vic impose these sanctions).

Employers needs to lead by example such as in the position design & in the recruitment advertising “this role has been designated for / or when designing this role we did so with Women and CALD candidates in mind”

Encourage and empower Culturally Diverse persons to study the arts.

Dramaturgy has a role – reflect the changes that need to happen.

Gender equity has been on the cards for 20+ years – its time that we had 10 bold options for achieving this goal.

Quotas are awkward – what about “designated roles”.

7. Affiliated Artistic Directors for Regionally based Performing Arts Centres. - Discussion

Jude – Reiterate plan – budget is 20 x \$100,000 = \$2 million.

If Regional PAC’s were empowered by Artistic Directors they would:

Have Artistic Stimulus, Build their resources, Artists would have greater creative freedom, There would be more partnerships between Creative Product Producers and Producers of Creative Product.

20 regional Artistic Directors would allow for more (programming)

They could be Women and Culturally Diverse AD’s, they would be place based.

There would be multi year Key artistic Development

\$100,000 to be Managed by (each of) the Venues

Would bring about Cultural Change.

Commissioned Local performing arts would be based on the community from which they were developed e.g. Needle and the Damage Done.

A Regional Residency could be the Artistic Directors for the PAC’s, There could be guest Artistic Directors.

Art Centre becoming producers, artists do want to work directly with PAC’s as producers of their own work.

This program should be in policy, and funded by .01% of the mining tax, because mining is a regional activity. (The Mining tax funding might be a little while off, but) Playing Australia could fund this, if the (performing arts) industry adopted the practice of “doing time” in the regions.

8. Longer, Deeper, Slower....a ten year vision. What will we do to become environmentally sustainable in the next decade? - Discussion

THE most important topic.

Eco conscious & theatre practice can co-exist. Theatre is a specialised field, the skill and the excitement is a vital aspect. The environment needs to be championed by others – supported by theatre.

There is an opportunity for theatre to expand on the discussion – We interact with society, we reflect & interpret society, in many ways we creatively engineer society through creative practice. We live in this environment this is our concern too.

Some venues are exemplar of environmental sustainability.

We in the arts have a responsibility and we have a leadership role – with our skills we can take this topic to the fore. This is our fight and we have to be in it.

Appendix 1. Meeting Attendees

Jaclyn Booton	Arena Theatre Company
Chris Kohn	Arena Theatre Company
Erin Milne	Arena Theatre Company
Alex Desebrock	ArtPlay & Topsy Teacup
Fiona Cook	Arts Access Victoria
Dr Vincent O'Donnell	Arts Alive
Jacqueline Grenfell	Arts Industry Council Victoria
Andy Miller	Arts Victoria
Rohini Sharma	Arts Victoria
David Everist	Arts Victoria
christy flaws	asking for trouble
luke o'connor	asking for trouble
ailsa wild	asking for trouble
Josh Wright	Ausdance Victoria
John Paxinos	Auspicious Arts Projects Inc
Lyn Wallis	Australia Council for the Arts, Theatre Board
Gail Kelly	Australian Circus and Physical Theatre Association
Alice Nash	Back to Back Theatre
Pauline Cady	Back to Back Theatre
Penelope Bartlau	Barking Spider Visual Theatre
Kate Shearer	Big West Festival
Nancy Black	Black Hole Theatre Inc.
Sue Lindsay	BOObook theatre
Alison Richards	Call the Doctor
Catherine Reiser	Catherine Reiser - freelance
Robyn Archer	Centenary of Canberra
David Young	Chamber Made Opera
Vicky Guglielmo	City of Melbourne
Sue Gore	commonplace
Bill Garner	commonplace
Ben Laden	Courthouse Arts
Malcolm Sanders	Courthouse Arts
Polash Larsen	Diverse Australian Theatre Alliance
Dominic Golding	Diverse Australian Theatre Alliance
Neal Harvey	Elbow Room
Markus Michalowski	Flying Fruit Fly Circus
Merryn Tinkler	Frankston Arts Centre
adena jacobs	freelance
Jodee Mundy	Freelance
Nyunkia Tauss	Freelance
wendy joseph	freelance
Brad Spolding	Freelance
Sue Broadway	Freelance
Minerva Draeger	Freelance
Tim Stitz	Freelance & Uni of Melb
Steve Helper	Freelance Director
Suzanne Chaundy	Freelance Director, Board Member PYT & theatreworks
Mari Lourey	Freelancer
Tamara Jungwirth	Gasworks Arts Park
Jill Smith	Geelong Performing Arts Centre
John Harvey	Ilbijerri Theatre

Rik Brown	Impro Melbourne
Angharad Wynne-Jones	Independent
Anniene Stockton	Independent producer
Simone Collins	KAGE Physical Theatre Ass Inc
Pippa Bainbridge	La Mama
Liz Jones	La Mama
Matt Kelly	List Operators
Ben Packer	little death productions
Suzanne Daley	Live Performance Australia
Aaron Joyner	Magnormos
Laura Koomen	Magnormos
Brad Martin	Malthouse Theatre
Annette Vieuxseux	Malthouse Theatre
Anna Cordingly	Malthouse Theatre
Esther Anatolitis	Melbourne Fringe
Emily Sexton	Melbourne Fringe
virginia lovelt	Melbourne International Comedy Festivals
Linda Sproul	Melbourne Museum Public Programs (and Meeting Facilitator)
Ann Tonks	Melbourne Theatre Company
Suzie Thomas	Melbourne Theatre Company
Aidan Fennessy	Melbourne Theatre Company
Christine Croyden	Melbourne Writers' Theatre
Kirsty Ellem	Monash Performing Arts
Yvonne Virsik	Monash Uni Student Theatre, also freelance director
Nic Barclay	National Institute of Circus Arts
Lydia Teychenne	not yet its difficult
Peter Eckersall	not yet its difficult
Melinda Hetzel	Peepshow Inc
Juanita Pope	Peepshow Inc
Rose Godde	Platform Youth Theatre
Simon Abrahams	Polyglot Theatre & TNV Chair
Jude Anderson	Punctum
Sonya Soares	Red Stitch Actors Theatre
Emily Atkins	Regional Arts Victoria
Simeon Moran	Snuff Puppets
Sarah Austin	St Martins
	Straightjacket Productions Artistic Director and Chair Australian
Lucy Freeman	Women Directors Alliance
Robin Penty	The Arts Centre, Melbourne
David Lloyd	The Capital Theatre-Bendigo's Performing Arts Centre
Marcus Schutenko	The Dog Theatre
Jeremy Gaden	The Substation
Ariane Ramsay	The Village Festival
Suzanne Kalk	The Village Festival
Ian Pidd	The Village Festival/Dreammasons/Freelance
Margaret Harvey	Theatre Director
Nicole Beyer	Theatre Network Victoria
Angela Pamic	Theatre Works
Petra Kalive	Two Blue Cherries
Tom Gutteridge	Union House Theatre
Lucy Shorrocks	Victorian Opera
Lena Cirillo	Westside Circus

Theatre Network Victoria aims to strengthen the small to medium performing arts sector in Victoria and beyond, enabling it to produce more work, build new audiences and increase sustainability.

Committee of Management:

Simon Abrahams (Chair) – Polyglot Theatre
Erin Milne (Treasurer) – Arena Theatre Company
Alice Nash (Deputy Chair) – Back To Back Theatre
Görkem Acaroğlu – Melbourne Workers Theatre
Sarah Austin – St Martins Youth Arts Centre
Rose Godde – Platform Youth Theatre
John Harvey – Ilbjerri Theatre
Emily Sexton – Next Wave Festival
Chris Thompson – Random Acts
Ann Tonks – Melbourne Theatre Company

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