

**Women Theatre Directors: Action Planning Forum Summary Document  
Company B Belvoir, May 10-11 2010**

**Compiled by Susanna Dowling**

**Contents of Document**

**Intro/Background .....1**

**Summary of Forum and Response Meeting by Anne Dunn .....2**

**Forum Attendees .....12**

**Written Contributions .....15**

In late 2009, the Australian theatre industry and print media noted and discussed the low representation of women directors within the 2010 subscription seasons of major theatre companies. This sparked a debate which highlighted a creative leadership crisis for women directors, particularly within mainstream theatre practice. In the midst of this, Company B used its 2009 Philip Parsons Memorial Lecture to hold a panel and forum session called *Where are the Women?*

The Australia Council was interested in assisting the sector further to discuss these issues and reach agreement on some strategies to address the situation. The Major Performing Arts and Theatre Boards Board believed that this process should be industry-driven, and provided some resources to Company B to host an action planning forum. The brief was to develop and facilitate an event that actively addressed the lack of consistent and sustainable pathways for women directors within the Australian theatre industry, and particularly within its major theatre companies.

Facilitated by consultant Anne Dunn, the day-long forum took place on May 10 at Belvoir St Theatre, from 10am to 6pm. This was followed the next day by a meeting of the major theatre companies to discuss the results of the forum and to formulate points of action going forward.

The day was an interactive, consultative process, consisting of both general addresses and working groups. With an historical perspective provided by Gil Appleton, editor of the seminal 1982 study 'Women in the Arts' for the Australia Council, the focus of the day was on action-planning, and solution generation for the future. The results of the day and the company meeting were then to be collated and distributed to forum participants and the MPA and Theatre Boards as a series of recommendations for practical change.

It was important to the conveners that a range of points of view from across the national industry were included. Therefore the forum comprised representatives from the MPA theatre companies, key organisations and independent theatre sector. Application to attend was through an expression of interest process. A limited amount of funds was available for air travel for regional and interstate participants, with priority given to key independent artists and representatives of smaller companies who would find such costs prohibitive to attendance.

Written submissions were welcomed, and are included in this final report, both from those who attended, and those who were unable to attend.

**Women Theatre Directors  
Outcomes from Action Planning Forum May 10 2010  
& written contributions submitted prior to the Forum  
Notes prepared by Anne Dunn, Facilitator, May 12<sup>th</sup> 2010**

**A. Introduction to participants and the Forum**

The introduction to the topic of the Forum was presented by Gil Appleton and included the following major points:

- There is a history of raising the issues for women in theatre since the 1970s and there appears to have been little progress for creative artists
- Reports are available, published by the Australia Council, and many recommendations have not been implemented
- The collection of relevant data has stopped and it is now difficult to measure the position of women, and progress towards equity
- There are established patterns of recruitment of creative artists and these have not been successful for women and culturally diverse creatives
- The domestic and child raising responsibilities of women continue to have a substantial impact on the way women want to work
- Women have slipped off the policy agenda without real progress being made
- There have been some recent high profile appointments which are worthy of celebration, but do not appear to be a sign of major change as a large number of able women directors are not being offered opportunities
- Boards of theatre companies have an important role to play in this topic
- Funding bodies must accept some responsibility for creating change
- Women directors need to work together on a national basis to push for change and capitalise on the recent publicity

**B. Format of the Day**

There were 100 participants on the day of the forum. After the above introduction by Gil Appleton, the audience split in to ten groups of ten, to discuss the topic 'What are the key issues, and what are the contributing factors that have caused them?'

Scribes for each group then reported back on what had been discussed. After lunch, Anne Dunn summarised the issues into five topics (see C below). The audience then split in to five groups, one for each topic. Participants chose their preferred topic, and discussed 'where do we go from here? And 'who needs to do what?' in relation to the topic.

The groups then reported back, and through a conclusion session mediated by Anne Dunn, the final recommendations for MPA companies, the Australia Council, and industry were formulated (see E below).

**Women Theatre Directors Action Planning Forum  
Agenda**

**Mon 10 May 2010**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	
9:45 - 10:15	Registration	
10:15 - 11:00	Introduction: Lyn Wallis, Gil Appleton, Anne Dunn	
11:00 - 11:15	Takeaway Coffee	
11:15 - 12:15	<b>Discussion Topic:</b> What are the key issues and what are the contributing factors that have caused them?	
12:15 - 1:00	Report Back	
1:00 - 2:00		
2:00 - 3:00	Summary of the morning and deciding focus areas	
3:00-3:45	<b>Discussion Topic:</b> Where do we go from here? Who needs to do what?	
3:45 - 4:45	Report Back	
4:45 - 5:00	Coffee	
5:00 - 6:00	Drawing conclusions and agreeing recommendations	

**C. What are the issues for women theatre directors, and what has contributed to creating these issues?**

Workshop groups addressed these questions and in summary agreed that significant intervention is required to ensure that women directors become part of the core staffing of major theatre companies. The issues fell into the following categories:

- Structural issues for main stage companies  
(including the structure of work, the need for child care, opportunities for presenting and proving talent, transparency in appointments, the need for feedback, positive discrimination, Board awareness and the desire to know and understand the long term artistic vision of a company)
- Structural & development issues for funding bodies  
(including assisting with finding pathways through the system, the need for research and data, understanding the historical and legislative framework, requiring commitment to change, reporting and accountability through the grants process and the professional development of women directors)

- Sector issues of networking, communication, advocacy and support (including developing a supportive network, engaging in advocacy on behalf of women directors, developing advocacy tools using data and statistics, maintaining communications and alerting women to opportunities, providing a space for profiles and promotional material, encouraging women to support each other, enlisting the support of training institutions and other peak bodies)
- Development of a new theatre paradigm (including the articulation of a female aesthetic, considering the role of writers, finding new entry points, finding incubator opportunities, working collaboratively and building the confidence of women to both work within the existing paradigm and negotiating to change the paradigm)
- Development issues for individual women directors (including the need for skill development for some women directors in confidence building, learning better pitching and promoting skills, getting agents, negotiating workable contracts, lobbying, finding appropriate professional development pathways and looking at the particular needs of population groups such as women directors of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and Indigenous women directors)

#### **D. What action is required in the future and who needs to do what?**

Following further small group discussion and consideration of written contributions, the Forum agreed the following actions are required to promote and support the increased participation of women directors in the theatre sector. The recommendations of the group considering the issues for individual women directors have been distributed among the other action areas to highlight the need for action and where the leadership for that action may come from.

Representatives of the Australia Council and the Major Performing Arts Board funded theatre companies and key organisations met following the forum and provided the italic responses to the recommendations. In addition they made the following general comments:

- The companies recognise that there is an issue with the small number of women filling creative positions, and are committed to working with women directors to redress this situation

- Their commitment is evidenced by their participation in the Forum and the responses provided below
- They are confident that there have been significant gains for women in other areas of their company business including board representation, senior management and production and would welcome some research into this topic
- The companies are concerned that even with new approaches by them to the hiring of women directors, the major problem lies with the reduction in text-based directing opportunities in mid-scale companies, and their efforts will not solve the problem of declining opportunities and talent that outstrips available positions
- There is considerable interest in continuing the discussions that have been started about both systems and practice issues

➤ **Structural recommendations for main stage companies**

1. Engage in accepted equal employment opportunity practices
  - a. Transparent appointment of key creative artists
  - b. Establish a recruitment process and advertise positions (for application or expressions of interest)
  - c. Create position descriptions for creative positions
  - d. Ensure policies and practices are consistent with all legislation

***Response***

*All recommendations are supported, in terms of permanent creative positions. 1a: will be implemented as far as possible for permanent creative positions, although some appointments are made by boards and there may be other urgent or pressing reasons that inhibit a completely open process. The issue will be raised with boards with a recommendation to apply transparency to all appointments.*

***NB:*** *In relation to freelance opportunities, Artistic Directors will ensure an open door for freelancers to come and present their work and concepts.*

2. Commit to flexible work policies and practice
  - a. Establish a family friendly policy for employees and contractors
  - b. Include this topic in contract negotiations for freelance creative artists (including child care) and ensure that all potential contractors have the right to negotiate around these matters
  - c. Provide flexible working conditions for all staff members

***Response***

*Companies are and remain committed to maintaining National Employment Standards for all staff regarding flexible working conditions and negotiations, including freelance staff.*

3. Demonstrate openness to new creative people and companies
  - a. Recognition that there are currently women ready and capable to work in main stage companies
  - b. Regularly send creative staff from the company to view work in small, community and independent companies
  - c. Provide feedback to unsuccessful “pitchers” to assist in learning and development
  - d. Seek women for creative positions and provide active support for new entrants
  - e. Invite small companies to create and present in main stage companies

***Response***

*3a: has unanimous endorsement*

*3b: often happens now, and companies are happy to commit to this recommendation. They will make an effort to have their staff make themselves known when attending. They would appreciate invitations from women directors.*

*3c: is often a resource issue. Companies will work to ensure that there is acknowledgement and basic feedback for all proposals. They feel that in-depth feedback will come as the result of good working relationships and that the actions of 3b may assist in developing these relationships*

*3d: is supported, and companies will work to ensure that there are always women considered for all creative positions*

*3e: is supported where facilities and resources are available and where such relationships fit into the artistic vision of the companies. Companies will also consider going out to work with smaller companies. Examples of where this has successfully occurred will be provided to the Australia Council as case studies for distribution*

4. Public commitment to the equitable inclusion of women in the creative work of the company
  - a. Develop and share within the creative community 1, 5 and 10 years of vision for the company
  - b. Engage in 2 way dialogue with a wide range of creative artists about their potential contribution to achieving the artistic vision of the company
  - c. Include equity for women directors as a specific focus in Strategic and Business Plans through specific targets

- d. Publish EEO outcomes (set in Strategic and Business Plans) in the annual report
- e. Promote a culture of equal opportunity within the company
- f. Review the participation of women on the board

**Response**

*4a&b: Creative visions for companies are provided in annual reports, on websites and are made real in the season brochures that companies produce. They see as more important the establishment of a 2 way dialogue so that creative artists can see directions as they emerge. In particular they will build relationships with women directors who seek them out, and will make clear the processes and entry points for people to present their work and concepts*

*4c: Based on a framework developed by the Australia Council, companies support this recommendation, and will include actions and self-determined targets in their 3 year Strategic Plans and their annual Operating Plans.*

*4d: Companies will report outcomes to the Australia Council, and the MPAB will produce and publish a report across all companies showing board members, staff and creative artists on a gender basis*

*4e: Board members are often appointed by Governments. Where an imbalance occurs this topic will be raised with the relevant Government departments.*

➤ **Recommendations for the Australia Council**

- 5. Adopt a policy of promoting the fair and equitable inclusion of women in the core creative processes of main stage theatre companies
  - a. Develop a framework (with guiding principles) for companies to progress equal opportunity for women directors
  - b. Require EO action plans for companies and accountability for progress as part of the grants acquittal process
  - c. Provide advice and assistance to companies to achieve their targets
  - d. Address non-performance issues with companies

**Response**

*These recommendations are supported by the Australia Council and MPA companies. In addition, the Australia Council will raise the topic with their State colleagues for consideration as part of their funding processes*

6. Take a leadership role in the support and development of women theatre directors
  - a. Commission a significant paper to address the gap between the last research produced on the issue of women in creative leadership, and the present.
  - b. Provide more information to companies about the current legislative framework for EO
  - c. Provide programs for skill development for women directors including workshops in pitching and promotion, confidence building, lobbying, contract negotiation and opportunities for producing work with mentoring support
  - d. Promote pathways between the different parts of the sector for talented women

**Response**

*6a&b: These recommendations are supported by the companies and the Australia Council. The Australia Council will investigate opportunities for this paper and research to be undertaken by an independent person from e.g. a university or as a Currency House Platform Paper. Companies are committed to making available their statistics to the researcher as part of this process.*

*6c: Companies and the Australia Council will consider further the most appropriate way to respond to this recommendation.*

*6d: Companies will seek opportunities to bring together a diverse range of creative artists from across the sector, through informal social occasions, promoting easier access to company shows and invitations to events*

**NB:** *Based on the size and structure of the various companies the response to this recommendation will vary. Overall, however, the companies support the creation of meaningful funding programs of support which have the potential to create long-term developmental relationships between companies and artists. The companies believe this would be beneficial to the industry and if funding were made available for programs focused on women directors they would actively participate in them.*

7. Consider the structure of the sector and its impact on the development of diverse creative leadership in theatre
  - a. Establish the result of the loss of 'middle ground' companies and opportunities (such as major regional theatre companies) and the long term effect on theatre directors identifying separately Indigenous women, culturally and linguistically diverse women and women with disabilities

**Response**

*Companies share the concerns of the women directors about this topic. They will support moves to increase the number of paid directing opportunities in the theatre sector generally. Opportunities for women directors can be addressed and monitored through the framework/guiding principles to be devised by the Australia Council.*

➤ **Sector recommendations to promote networking, communication, advocacy and support for women theatre directors**

8. Development of a theatre directors' peak body
  - a. Seek funding for a project to consult and develop a working model for a peak body to work on behalf of theatre directors generally
  - b. As a priority the peak body should promote women theatre directors throughout the sector and with the public
  - c. Communication via newsletter and websites is critical
  - d. Developing a mentoring (and/or executive coaching) program is a priority

**Response**

*The Theatre Board considers that peak body representation for the small-to-medium theatre sector as a whole would be beneficial to the sector. Addressing pathway/leadership issues for women directors could form a part of such a peak body's charter. The most appropriate Australia Council funding category for potential support, is currently the Theatre Board's Cultural Leadership Program category.*

**NOTE**

A group of women directors at the Forum volunteered to take responsibility for developing this funding application and initiating the project  
Communications and mentoring to be considered as part of the potential charter for any new peak body

9. Enlist support from allied organisations such as training institutions and other peak bodies
  - a. Ask allied organisations to promote the issues relating to the participation of women in creative leadership
  - b. Seek opportunities for women to present at conferences and workshops on the history of women in creative leadership including as playwrights
  - c. Seek the support of unions and the MEAA

- d. Seek to arrange for sessions on issues for women as part of government funded conferences and festivals
- e. Ask training institutions to include the development of artistic and social conscience in training programs, not just the development of job skills
- f. Seek support from training institutions for the development of a range of business skills for creative artists

NOTE

The investigative project above could consider these activities as part of the charter for any proposed peak body

Existing groups in the States could take up these issues with their state institutions/organisations

10. Developing peer support among women

- a. Provide opportunities for women directors (and playwrights) to meet together in their city/state
- b. Arrange annual meetings nationally
- c. Encourage women directors to develop their own 1-5-10 year artistic vision
- d. Advocate for the provision at the state and regional level of a range of opportunities for the development of skills and attributes of women directors
- e. Develop mentoring and executive coaching (general and woman-to-woman/peer mentoring) programs and seek funding where appropriate

NOTE

These activities need to be taken into account in the project to establish a peak body and its priority activities

➤ **Recommendations to encourage the development of a new theatre paradigm**

11. Presenting new models and paradigms of creative development

- a. Encourage women directors in education, community and independent theatre to articulate their insight and learning
- b. Consider the role of writers and their interaction with women directors
- c. Consider the time and space needs of different ways of working and their relevance to women directors
- d. Describe collaborative processes where respect for all contributors is the basis of the process, including the audience
- e. Investigate the contribution of culturally diverse creative artists

- f. Encourage and develop research into practice models that demonstrate different and successful ways of working

NOTE

A women's group within a (possible) peak body for theatre directors could take leadership for this development, in consultation with a diverse group of women creative artists

- 12. Proposals for a broader engagement in artistic directions beyond the one person artistic director
  - a. Consider the creation of artistic boards/committees within companies
  - b. Provide new entry points for creative artists
  - c. Provide incubator environments for women directors
  - d. Provide more collaborative experiences for creative development
  - e. Large companies to provide tiers of creative direction, all resourced as part of the core program

NOTE

These topics need to be part of ongoing discussions between women directors and companies. The development of relationships through formal and informal mechanisms will create the basis for these discussions. Further consideration of these points should be listed for further meetings.

These notes have been compiled by the facilitator on the basis of notes taken at the Forum, the meeting with companies and the Theatre and Major Performing Arts Boards of the Australia Council, and reading of written submissions.

**WOMEN THEATRE DIRECTORS ACTION PLANNING FORUM MAY 10  
DELEGATE LIST**

<b>First</b>	<b>Last</b>	<b>Org</b>	<b>State</b>
Olivia	Allen	Riverland Youth Theatre (incoming)	VIC
Libby	Anstis	QTC	QLD
Danielle	Antaki	Powerhouse Youth Theatre	NSW
Gil	Appleton		NSW
Sarah	Austin	St Martins Youth	VIC
Melanie	Beddie	AWDA	VIC
Nathan	Bennett	Griffin Theatre Co	NSW
Sally	Blackwood		NSW
Camilla	Blunden		ACT
Jane	Bodie	NIDA	NSW
Lynne	Bradley	Zen Zen Zo	QLD
Daisy	Brown	Vital Statistix	SA
Letitia	Caceres	Real TV/YPAA	VIC
Talya	Chalef		VIC
Kate	Champion	Force Majeure	NSW
Angela	Chaplin		QLD
Suzanne	Chaundy		VIC
Claudia	Chidiac		NSW
Libby	Christie	Australia Council	NSW
Shane	Colquhoun	Black Swan	WA
Karla	Conway	Canberra Youth Arts	ACT
Adam	Cook	STCSA	SA
Tahli	Corin	Company B	NSW
Gail	Cork	Australian Script Centre	TAS
Lindy	Davies		NSW
Sue	Donnelly	AMPAG	NSW
Susanna	Dowling	Company B	NSW
Jo	Duffy	Darwin Festival	NT
Jo	Dyer	STC	NSW
Naomi	Edwards	STC Education	NSW
Bel	Evans	Australia Council	NSW
Marcia	Ferguson	Back to Back	VIC
Joanna	Fishman	Ride On	NSW
Catherine	Fitzgerald		SA
Eamon	Flack	Company B	NSW
Pamela	Foulkes	STCSA	SA
Lucy	Freeman	AWDA	VIC

Tanya	Gerstle	OpticNerve	VIC
Veronica	Gleeson	Screen Australia	NSW
Lucinda	Gleeson	Tamarama Rock Surfers	NSW
Tony	Grybowski	Australia Council	NSW
Fiona	Hallenan-Barker		NSW
Suzanne	Hauser	Outback Theatre	NSW
Susan	Hayes	Australia Council	NSW
Brenna	Hobson	Company B	NSW
Jennifer	Irwin		NSW
Sarah	John	Company B	NSW
Erin	Kelly	Forty Forty Home	VIC
Sophie	Kelly		NSW
Annette	Madden	Company B	NSW
Nick	Marchand	Griffin Theatre Co	NSW
Paul	Mason	Australia Council	NSW
Rachael	Maza Long	Ilbjerri	VIC
Patrick	McIntyre	STC	NSW
Chris	Mead	PlayWriting Australia	NSW
Janet	Merewether		NSW
Michelle	Miall		QLD
Carin	Mistry	Australia Council	NSW
Antonietta	Morgillo	Australia Council	NSW
Janice	Muller		NSW
Ralph	Myers	Company B	NSW
Simone	O'Brien	Legs on the Wall	NSW
Danielle	O'Keefe	Sydney Theatrical Productions	NSW
Marion	Potts	Bell/Malthouse	NSW
Susan	Prince	M & J Dream Productions Pty Ltd	QLD
Chris	Puplick	Australia Council	NSW
Anne Louise	Rentell	Merrigong	NSW
Alison	Richards	Monash University	VIC
Sue	Rider		QLD
Viv	Rosman	Performing Lines	NSW
Camilla	Rountree	Parramatta Riverside	NSW
Polly	Rowe	STC	NSW
Becky	Russell	Bathurst	NSW
Anne-Louise	Sarks	Hayloft Project	VIC
Annabel	Scholes	CSU	NSW
Kylie	Shead	Bathurst	NSW
Leisa	Shelton	VCA	Vic
Mary	Sitarenos	Liminal Theatre and Performance	VIC

Vee	Spak	NicNac Theatre	NSW
Bain	Stewart	Bungabura Productions	NSW
Sam	Strong	Company B	NSW
Augusta	Supple	Brand Spanking New	NSW
Karen	Therese		VIC
Ann	Tonks	MTC	VIC
Chris	Tooher	Bell Shakespeare	NSW
Julia	Torpey		VIC
Anna	Tregloan		VIC
Jessica	Tuckwell	Bell Shakespeare	NSW
Julie	Waddington	Riverland Youth Theatre	SA
Lyn	Wallis	Australia Council	NSW
Clare	Watson	Univited Guests	QLD
Ella	Watson-Russell	Corrugated Iron	NT
Melanie	Wild	QTC	QLD
Fiona	Winning		NSW
Netta	Yaschin		NSW

**Meeting of the Australia Council, Major Theatre Companies and Key Orgs, May 11 2010  
Attendees**

Libby	Anstis	QTC	QLD
Shane	Colquohoun	Black Swan Theatre Co	WA
Adam	Cook	STCSA	SA
Pamela	Foulkes	STCSA	SA
Tony	Grybowski	Australia Council	NSW
Brenna	Hobson	Company B	NSW
Patrick	McIntyre	STC	NSW
Ralph	Myers	Company B	NSW
Bennett	Nathan	Griffin Theatre Co	NSW
Marion	Potts	Malthouse	VIC
Polly	Rowe	STC	NSW
Ann	Tonks	MTC	NSW
Chris	Tooher	Bell Shakespeare	NSW
Lyn	Wallis	Australia Council	NSW

**WOMEN THEATRE DIRECTORS ACTION PLANNING FORUM  
MAY 10 2010  
WRITTEN CONTRIBUTIONS**

**SARAH AUSTIN**

Where do all the mid-career women artists go?

Recently I wrote a response to the call for submission from Peter Garrett's Office working toward a National Cultural Policy. I spoke in this document about the issue of sustainable pathways for emerging artists and the importance of seeing the arts and culture sector as part of an ecology of 'culture-making', intrinsically and crucially linked to other important government policy areas, such as social inclusion and community, environment, immigration, planning and many others.

I argued strongly that art is an agent of change, and that fundamental understanding would bring a value ( and I mean this in the broadest possible terms) to the pursuit of artistic expression that is currently, in my opinion, not part of our national psyche.

It strikes me that these notions of pathway, value and ecology are applicable to the role of women theatre directors in our industry and that we have a responsibility to scrutinise the health of the sector in which we operate and to look for ways to strengthen development and opportunity.

I have recently returned from working in the UK where the links between the emerging artist sector and the main stage companies were more strongly defined and strategised, and the issue there was actually artists at a mid-career point lacking opportunity for development and employment and I'm aware that the theatre sector here also suffers from the same concern; if you are a mid-career theatre director ( and what even would that mean? What would a mid – career artist be?) unless you are an Artistic Director the opportunities to professional direct are indeed limited. It is at this point that the struggle often gets too much, as it competes with other priorities in our lives.

Solution generation is exciting, and requires maverick, bold-thinking, risk-taking innovation. What luck that we have such a rich community of extraordinary creative women more than capable of doing exactly that.

**MELANIE BEDDIE**

Australian Women Directors Alliance (AWDA) was formed in March 2010 in Melbourne. We are a diverse group of directors and theatre-makers and we share much of the history and some of the members of the Australian Women Directors Association which was active in Melbourne in the late 1980's and early 1990's. We hold regular meetings on topics of professional

development and we have become an important network for female directors locally and nationally. Some of our thoughts and recent actions (including an exchange of letters which has lead to the MTC adopting an Equal Opportunity Policy) are available on our blog (along with information how to join us. )

[australianwomendirectorsalliance.blogspot](http://australianwomendirectorsalliance.blogspot)

Below are Some Observations made by Melanie Beddie, Jane Woollard and Lucy Freeman regarding the need for Equal Opportunity in those Theatre Companies which are funded through the Australia Council 's Major Performing Arts Board (MPAB) .These observations were submitted to Tony Grybowski and the MPA Board meeting in December 2009.

#### OBSERVATIONS

- Women directors are neither a minority group nor should they to be considered as constantly “emerging”. We cannot solve this problem whilst we continue to marginalise and trivialise the work of women theatre artists.
- In our opinion a MPAB company which is unable to source, employ and collaborate with women in key creative roles in not functioning in a healthy and productive way. Nor are it's current employees being given the opportunity to work with a wide as possible pool of artists nor develop artistic relationships across the broadest range of practice .
- We believe women must be considered Core Business of any company and not relegated to special and occasional funding programs. This 'add-on' version of equality has been tried before and has not changed the culture of the companies into which the women were placed. Rather it has meant that as soon as the funding program ceased so did the inclusion of women.
- Only when a company begins to commit its core funding and programming to female creatives will it take the issue seriously enough to effect permanent change.
- The benefits of successful Equal Opportunity within the workplace are well documented and proven (see for instance the most recent submission from the Human Rights Commission to the Rudd Government).
- The MPAB companies' lack of accountability to EO legislation has created a 'bottleneck' in career pathways for women directors. The situation in the small to medium sector is entirely different .Subsidised by State and Federal project funding it has stringent criteria regarding EO and cultural diversity which all applicants must address in their proposals.
- Equal Opportunity policies which are thrust upon unwilling organisations have been shown to be ineffective. Instead a willingness to engage with change and an enthusiasm for the opportunities for learning and expansion which arise from a more diverse workplace are the key to success in this area.

- Equal Opportunity implementation here and overseas tells us that the proven road to success is twofold. There must firstly be consultation with all stakeholders in the area .Secondly an essential element towards creating change in an organisation is that the genuine desire for a transformation must come from the highest level of management and in this case this would refer to Boards, General Managers and Artistic Directors.
- MPAB companies have a narrow perception about what an artistic leader is, and as such the majority of work in these companies is shared amongst a small pool of directors who have experience working within a narrow band of similar venues with similar budgets. Work on large-scale productions in the CCDC sector, in fringe or unconventional venues, in touring productions or in the education sector, needs to be seen as professionally relevant to MPAB company expectations.
- The mechanism for how directors get their initial ‘break’ in the MPAB companies needs to become clearer. Once working within these companies, young directors can receive MPAB development funding to increase and strengthen their careers toward positions of greater responsibility. At present the beneficiaries of this in-house training model are overwhelmingly men between the age of 20-30. Thus it is possible to survey the Australian theatre landscape and ask the question ‘Where are the women?’ because they are invisible and not recipients of career guidance or promotion, what the Artistic Director of Malthouse Theatre has called ‘big opportunities.’

So now some Proposals:

- Due to their extensive research and personal experience female directors (and other creatives) are a vital resource when developing policies regarding the placement, development and mentoring of women within larger organisations and as such it would be to the advantage of the companies to consult these artists.
- We propose each company appoint an EO officer and that staff and the Board are given training in the area of EO and diversity
- We propose that each MPAB company needs to develop its own unique Strategic Plan which reflects the specific interests and conditions of that company.
- The Strategic Plan should set real and achievable targets for the coming year, three years and eight years etc. This provides a series of benchmarks by which that company and stakeholders can then measure its progress. We believe that any additional funding should be attached only to demonstrated and long term Strategic Plans and the success of these programmes measured and assessed.
- Companies need to be required to report to their own Boards and also to MPAB about the continuing success of their EO Policy. Increased female representation on Boards may also help.

- The Australia Council and MPAB need to take an active and ongoing role in supporting and monitoring EO in funded companies. We ask that the Australia Council create programs that assist companies to reach and then maintain their EO targets.
- Lastly yet most importantly ,in addition to developing a Strategic Plan towards the development and advancement of women within the organisation, the companies need to interrogate the existing company structure and culture and to assess whether these are working well for the encouragement of women into the organisation . It may well be necessary to instigate genuine corporate and structural change in order to lead to more equal employment of not only women but also men within these MPAB companies.

### **SALLY BLACKWOOD**

As a female director and producer/programmer working independently in Sydney, I feel it is vital to be a part of this forum. As I work on both sides of the creative fence (director/producer) I am passionate about the way in which women are portrayed, given equal chances and are also supported by other women in the industry.

Having attended the first conversation at Belvoir St last year, I am glad to see that the initial issues raised in this very brief encounter are now being given the time and support to make real changes.

I am firstly about women helping themselves, standing up and being counted is the first step, followed by intellectual rigour and creative endeavour to make their mark. After this, it is all about career progression, development and sustainability, and as a director/producer who has been in the industry for over ten years I am keen to hear and share views about the nature of sustainability. The key is to value ourselves as well as our fellow female co-directors to allow this to flow though to the rest of the industry. To have the support of the MPA Board is invaluable as a tool of recognition, value and support.

For emerging young female directors, I thoroughly support the notion of directorial mentorships and company interships, but where to afterwards? I would like to address the gaps and also talk about the fact that there are many paths to the same goal. I work primarily in theatre for young people, French interpretations and opera - so I have forged my way through a unique pathway. I would like to see not only how my career could be further supported and elevated, but how I can work to supporting others both mid-career and emerging directors.

### **KARLA CONWAY**

- developing secure pathways into professional companies for emerging directors
- ways of promoting self from assisting (observational) to making a contribution on a show, so the process of assistant directing can actually lead to something.
- how to maintain visibility / reputation with a young family. Flexibility for working mothers.
- how to expose your work to decision makers in the bigger companies
- Making the transition from ACT to the big cities: recognition and acceptance of achievement – not having to start again from scratch.

- how can the bigger companies support emerging female directors more effectively
- fighting the culture of being less respected than men in this industry.

## **LINDY DAVIES**

### Become the Change

Today I would like to offer a few thoughts on where we are now with our work and where we may be going. I don't wish to imply that my view is the only view, the only analysis or the only solution, it is simply one woman's way of seeing the world, on this particular day, at this particular time. I don't wish to indulge in empty rhetoric, but may, for who knows what lies in store. All I offer are a few reminders of what we have already achieved, a glance at what we have to overcome and a glimpse at a few possibilities for the future.

This talk is dedicated to every person who has gone before us, who with their love of theatre has struggled in sitting rooms, amateur theatre companies, church halls, warehouses, and rehearsal rooms

to ensure that Australia had a living theatre. To every person whose love of this art form has transcended the surrounding indifference and ignorance that has often caused the death of many flourishing ventures. To every person whose love of this art form has meant that they have wandered in, off the street to see what's going on in any theatre around in this country. This talk is dedicated to Rex who with his bright eyes, fine intellect, revelatory insights, impeccable sense of design and immense talent created an environment that generated some of the leading artists in this country.

When Rex was alive he provided a moral imperative, he did this through the quality of the work he produced and by the working atmosphere he created.

In his absence we have struggled to keep this alive.

#### A few reminders of what he valued and what was achieved

In the January of 1982 a group of us met with Rex, in a sunlit hall in Fitzroy, to develop our work as the Actor's Development Stream of the Playbox Theatre Company. I'm glad to see some of you here Maggie Cameron, Rob Meldrum and Mark Minchinton ....

The first task we addressed was the task of writing a manifesto of our guidelines for research. The philosophical and practical framework upon which we agreed, included the following points:

- To operate within faith. in other words we wanted to demonstrate a belief in each individual's right to be present
- The second thing we committed ourselves to, was the notion that the actors, composer, designer and director were to work together as an integrated ensemble throughout the whole project. and that we were to support and to challenge each other's work and more than that to be open to being supported and challenged, as well as developing, and this was a hard one for a lot of people the ability to isolate our needs. And to state what we wanted when we perceived it.
- The other thing we agreed on was that we were going to work with a commitment and a desire to go beyond limitations.

- That we were going to take responsibility for our feelings, words, thoughts and actions.
- We had a belief in the idea of process being contained in the product.  
In other words, that anyone seeing our work would be experiencing our process.
- And that we would work with great rigour to collectively develop a language that expressed this working method. And that this working method would be continuous through rehearsal into performance.
- We aimed to overcome individual differences in order to reach a point of understanding.
- We also had a belief in theatre as a spiritual, political and social microcosm, and thought that anything we made would be imbued with those values.
- We also believed in the relevance of the work to the audience, we wanted to be the meaning not to demonstrate it.
- We wanted the audience to be able to make their own connections, so we endowed them with the powers of discernment, wit and knowledge.
- And the final thing we wanted was to build a new aesthetic from our differences.

So with this reminder of what our ensemble valued back then, with this reminder of what Rex enabled with his presence, let's move on to some of the obstacles that have prevented those dreams from manifesting. These are a few of the obstacles we have had to encounter since then, (obstacles) which have perhaps eroded our faith - perhaps not.

The first obstacle, the economic rationalism of the eighties and the inevitable disintegration of the company format meant that the opportunity to work in funded ensembles disappeared during that decade. The work became director dominated rather than focussing upon the evolution of meaning through the living consciousness of a group of people. Actors moved from job to job, being unable to develop a methodology, a consistency, a language of debate, a language of their art form.

It has only been over the past few years that ensembles have appeared again, all of them within an environment created by an individual. We have seen the remarkable achievements of Barrie Kosky, Neil Armfield and John Bell, individuals who have brought people together to work in particular ways in particular contexts.

However, the power of the actor as artist, as a given, I believe has diminished.

There are very fine actors who work with all of the directors I've mentioned and all of the directors I've mentioned value the actor, but we have not achieved what we viewed as a real possibility in the late seventies, early eighties. We have not created a Wooster Group. A group of autonomous artists who work together in an integrated way to make a theatre of substance and clarity. A theatre that offers different perspectives and expands the boundaries of the discipline.

There are very fine actors who have worked with these directors and have achieved stardom in other contexts, but we do not have a Wooster Group and we should have.

All of the directors above have contributed to the evolution of theatre in this country, but there is a gap. A gap that can only be filled by the resurgence of the force that began with Rex in the seventies, the creative force of a group of people working with integrity to investigate meaning in a non hierarchical environment.

I am not talking about us all being the same, I'm not talking about a group that doesn't allow brilliance and is threatened by the individual. I'm talking about a mindful society of artists who are committed to excellence, virtuosity and rigorous debate.

Which brings me to the next obstacle. The can't do it syndrome, a malaise which besieges us all in Australia. This is a cultural problem, for in this country when we strive to achieve excellence, rather than receiving affirmation, we encounter doubt. How many of you since you were kids have encountered this?

How many of you when you have said 'I want to...' or 'Why don't we....'  
Have had someone say to you 'No, you can't do that. You can't do that'

We seem to have a need to keep each other down, it appears that we must all be imprisoned by the chains of mediocrity. I think this is particularly so in Melbourne. Let me give you an example. The other night I saw that fine actress Cate Blanchett in the film 'Elizabeth' It was opening night, she was present. We had all witnessed an extraordinary performance, and as the audience gathered around her in the foyer, someone from the back called out 'Cate, you were bloody fantastic' and as quick as a flash, someone else called out 'Stop brown-nosing'

To me this indicates a parlous situation. We seem unable to revel in the success of others, we appear to be embarrassed by success and sickened by praise. This is our cultural albatross. It is yet another manifestation of the tall poppy syndrome.

So far we have glanced at two obstacles which have prevented us from making our best work, economics and the cultural cringe, however there is a third, and this obstacle, has the power to totally eliminate theatre as an extant art form.

The reduction of language

We all know that language is losing its power, as we become less eloquent we diminish words, and as we drift towards the meaningless without protesting we disenfranchise ourselves. And this problem exists not only in society at large but is manifested by the actions of some of our colleagues, as instanced during a particular phase in which the funding bodies chose not to support text work. It seemed that any interest in text by an artist was regarded as proof of conservative work. An interest in the classics was perceived as conservative and regressive.

Now to a glimpse of the future. How do we come to terms with the ideals we have lost through the stringency of economic rationalism ? How do we overcome the obstacles of the powerlessness of the artist and the fear of brilliance? How do we overcome what prevents from us moving forward? Essentially, I think what we have to do is to open the future, because I feel for a lot of people the future is closed. What we have to do is to create a sense of possibility for those who have lost any sense of hope. How do we do this?

Firstly, reclaim language, reclaim our eloquence, acknowledge that language has the power to shift perspective, ignite the imagination, dislocate our complacency, invigorate our minds, dissolve our lethargy and restore our hope.

Language can take us away from powerlessness into the realm of action by enabling us see things differently Howard Barker says a wonderful thing about this, he says

'The writer and actor conspire to lure the mind into the unknown, the territory of possible changed perception, a creative mind owes it to his fellow beings to stretch himself and them, to give others the right to be amazed, the right even to be taken to the limits of tolerance and to strain and to test morality at its source.'

'If language is restored to the actor he ruptures the imaginative blockade of the culture. If he speaks banality he piles up servitude.'

And as television continues to pile up servitude with increasing banality, that is reductive, patronising and diminishing, it seems that theatre is the last arena where we can keep language alive by provoking debate through action.

What else do we need to do ? If we're going to reclaim language we need to reclaim the actors. They have been forgotten. They are treated as the 'talent' and are at the bottom of the pecking order. They are constantly encountering duplicity in many environments as they are being served by others but are not being respected. There is a prevailing ambivalence, for they are regarded as necessary but are not necessarily valued.

How can we value the actor?

We must become accomplices by valuing, respecting and truly acknowledging their contribution to the work. By giving them permission to rehearse, by having faith as they stumble and lose their way, by understanding that speaking is difficult and not to assume that as writers and directors we know the best way to do it.

I will never forget working in front of Peter Brook at the Theatre des Bouffes du Nord. I was terrified. Myself and another actor went out into the space in front of him, we had two words to work on 'clair' and 'obscure' it was terrifying, but he liberated me by giving me absolute permission, by simply saying two words:  
'show me'

He is a man who has had ultimate faith in the actor, in their intelligence, their incisive instinct, a man who has consequently created the great works of the twentieth century.

If the actor is not valued and remains a servant, the future of the theatre lies in the hands of too few.

We need to invest in the future of our theatre by not only supporting the playwright's process but by acknowledging and honouring the actor's process.

We need to reclaim the actor by paving the way for our Wooster Group.

We need to provide the resources for actors to work collaboratively with directors, writers, designers and production personnel to create theatre which fundamentally changes our perception.

We need to support a group of artists to expand the boundaries of their discipline.

We can do this by applauding independence of thought, by welcoming a commitment to ideas, by relishing an understanding of form, by embracing a bravery of spirit and most of all by honouring achievement.

What else can we do in order to open the future?

To recognise and acknowledge the power of intuition.

A definition of intuition is To receive knowledge by direct perception  
another definition is Direct or immediate insight.

We often discount this most important faculty of the artist because it is invisible, cannot be proved, quantified or explained. However, it is time to acknowledge the importance of this by enabling directors, designers and actors to work with their full intuitive powers and their kinaesthetic intelligence. Often when a director or designer says that they will know what they want when they see it, they are simply claiming the importance of immediate apprehension without the intervention of any reasoning process. In other words they are claiming their intuition. So rather than regarding them as ill prepared, disorganised and indecisive, thank your lucky stars.

The fourth strategy for opening the future?

To follow in Rex's footsteps and acknowledge the female paradigm as a valid working model.

We are not talking about gender, we are talking about the Apollonian and Dionysian, the yin and yang, the female principle versus the male principle, process versus product.

For a long time now we have valued the male paradigm as a structure for working.

It seems rather strange to me, particularly when theatre was born in a religious context where there was a belief in something mysterious, something bigger than man, a belief in a spiritual life. However, for a long time now we have valued the male paradigm, Product has been valued over process. Deductive, linear, separated, logical progression has been valued above the lateral, organic and holistic.

Just look at the antiquated and segregated way in which we bring the work together, rehearsal, technical rehearsal, dress rehearsal.

One after another we doggedly pursue this old format promoting segregation and sometimes precipitating artistic failure.

By choosing to work within a female paradigm we are choosing to work in an integrated way, we are choosing to create structures which enable us to work by layering material. 'Finding out' together as we integrate all aspects of performance. If someone works organically they are often perceived to be working chaotically, formlessly. However, if we look at the definition of organic we see that form is implicit.

"Organic: characterised by connection or coordination of parts in one whole, organised, systematic"

How many of us have been belittled by comments such as 'it came together at the end' which implies a fluke rather than acknowledging a natural gestation period.

A natural evolution of meaning.

Working organically and intuitively also enables true research as the director, designer and actors can allow themselves to investigate a piece experientially in order to reveal meaning rather than deciding on a meaning conceptually and then simply demonstrating it. This is something Rex understood implicitly, for he

understood the marriage of the Apollonian and Dionysian, he understood the fusion of instinct and reason. Rex understood and practised exactitude whilst valuing the organic and instinctive.

This is what Rex gave us, a marriage of the male and female, the rational and intuitive. His receptivity infuriated people, as he appeared to be indecisive. He scarified actors by sending them out under rehearsed.

However, if he had been given the context of a Brook a Mnouchkine or a Stein he could have achieved the work he dreamed of. He did once when during a period of enlightenment the Australia Council gave life grants to selected artists to enable them to spend extended time investigating rehearsal and performance.

I want to bring this to a close by bringing Rex into the present. Italo Calvino has written a wonderful book called 'Six Memos for the Next Millennium' in which he defines Exactitude. He refers to an Egyptian hieroglyph called the Maat, which represents Exactitude.

It is symbolised by a feather that served as a weight on scales, scales that were used for the weighing of souls. On one side of the scales is a feather and on the other side... souls. It seems to me that this image of weighing souls with a feather is a perfect metaphor for exactitude, the fine quality of exactitude. I also believe this to be a perfect metaphor for theatre. The precision of quantifying the invisible is something Rex understood. The Maat also represented two other things, a unit of length: the length of a brick and the fundamental note of a flute.

Calvino's definition of exactitude involves three elements:

Firstly, a well-defined and well-calculated plan for the work in question.

And indeed, when we work most freely and organically, there are always clear and firm parameters. Rex did this through his wonderful relationship to space and meaning and through his exemplary relationships with designers such as Eamon Darcy and Jennie Tate.

Secondly, an evocation of clear incisive memorable images

Whenever I see great theatre it is made distinctive by its incisive imagery. Rex's work was distinguished by clear, incisive memorable images shaped by the set, costume, light, sound, text and the actor in space.

Thirdly, language as precise, both in the choice of words and in the expression of the subtleties of thought and imagination, as possible. Who does that? The writer and actor working together closely with the director. Rex's scholarship always illuminated meaning for us all.

I have now mentioned all of the elements needed to create fine work for the future, for with a feather to serve as a balance for the weighing of souls, a brick and the fundamental note of the flute surely we have the beginnings of theatre.

What I hope we can do is create an arena for the next Rex or Rhonda to do their work. What I think we can do is - because we're now in a position, most of us, where we do have the power to change things - what we can do is to create a sense of possibility. We can ensure that an integrated way of working, can become a necessity, not a luxury. We can return to the ideals of Rex, the ideals of operating within faith as an integrated ensemble with a desire to go beyond our limitations. We can overcome conflict by embracing our differences and allowing them to flourish, knowing that a multi voiced theatre is an exciting arena. We might choose not to damn each other's work because of philosophical differences, but to instead choose to acknowledge these differences by celebrating them. We might provoke debate through action by

answering the differences through our work. We might challenge each other with our virtuosity and inspire each other to attain the heights. We might open the future for others by claiming our vision, because if you claim your vision, you instil a sense of hope. We might challenge duplicity and collusion and give the rose. An above all, we might provoke transformation, for as the Aboriginal Elder Reg Birch said 'Transformation is essential for all of us. To change the world we have to change ourselves. You must become the change you want to see in the world'.

#### **AVRIL DUCK**

I am a women and an independent theatre director in Cairns and would very much love to attend this forum, unfortunately I can't be there due to the distance. There are very few opportunities to engage with professional peers in Cairns and even less to draw out the special themes which would come from examining the role of women in creative leadership positions, so if there is any opportunity to gather key note material from this forum, I would appreciate your forwarding such to me.

On briefly considering the subject matter, I would hope to hear discussions such as:

- The Nurturer: are women more likely to be in-tune with collaborative styles, pastoral care and community needs?
- The Regional Mother: how do women juggle Professional Development and volunteer hours building a career pathway in the regions where great energy and passion is required to keep in contact with theatre trends and opportunities? And then if opportunities are away from home, or at difficult hours, how do women integrate their passionate theatre life with family life and obligations? How are mother's in theatre, particularly in the regions viewed by peers or community? How do they maintain skills? How do they gain experience?
- The Mirror: can women theatre directors be proactive in developing opportunities for women actors to extend their careers as they age?
- The Boss: do women theatre directors need to be tougher to survive as creative leaders?
- The Girl: hormones and stress – is it okay to cry? is it a demonstration of resilience to return to the scene of a crying fit?
- The Feminist: can a woman director resist a feminist interpretation? isn't the political an intrinsic action of making theatre?

... and many more ideas spring to mind ..it's very interesting topic indeed.

Congratulations on opening up this forum, I hope it is a successful event.

#### **WESLEY ENOCH**

I just think that this is an all of Industry issue and not the sole responsibility of the women members of it. It goes beyond representation and says something about the heart of our aesthetics and processes of working.

[..] If you asked these questions 10 – 15 years ago you would have got a very different

response...there were more women running companies and involved in Associate roles etc. But it seems to be cyclical. The real questions are why are they cyclical? Though it is tempting to use hard and fast measures like quotas I know that Artistic Directors hate being told what to do. Though if there was a voluntary code that the Major companies could sign up to.....or even the gathering of data – hard numbers sometimes shame people into action. If each Theatre Company had a dashboard that measured hard numbers of women employed in key roles that they reported on annually.....anyway I think they would feel it keenly. No one wants to actively exclude women....I think it's done through not seeing the wood for the trees.

## LUCY FREEMAN

In my association with the AWDA and in researching my paper titled 'The influence of gender on Victorian theatre directors' I am surrounded by a sea of voices... here is a random selection:

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*"Women will not find empowerment by forging their way into the male-centred mainstream. Empowerment will come out of claiming the profound value of women's history just as it has been and the equally profound value of women's identity just as it is"* Elisabeth Lloyd Mayer, 1999

In 1929, Joan Riviere's produced the first psychoanalytic paper to address the issue of gender influence on professionally successful women.

*"Men are more likely to be offered positions of creative authority because men are more likely to ask for them"* MPAB senior employee, 2009

The Australian Affirmative Action Policy was established in Australian Law in 1986

*"I look at who the actors are and the playwrights, but not the producers/directors- and I don't even know the difference actually..."* An MPAB company subscriber, 2009

In 1991 the United States government introduced The Glass Ceiling Act to punish corporations that (even unintentionally) discriminate against women in the upper tiers.

*"I had a baby ... when I finally went back to make my pitches - I had become a persona non grata"* Anon, 2009

The rise of women directors in the USA may well be causing shifts in the way artistic leadership is defined, approached and received' *Rebecca Daniels, 1996*

*"The glass ceiling -which does not reward female aggression or ambition in the workplace - has the potential to cripple the intrinsic drive of many women"* Psychoanalyst Dorothy E. Holmes, 1999

In 1993 The Australian Women Directors Association issued a letter to the MTC calling for more support for female theatre directors. This was reiterated by Melanie Beddie in 2004 and again, by the AWDA in 2009.

*'Industry diversity is not only about equal access to employment opportunity, it is also about opening space for the telling of stories that might not otherwise be told'* Marian Evans WIFT NZ, 2007

*"We employ seasoned creatives who have been working long enough for their artistic strengths to be clearly identifiable ... directors have to have the skill to create a work that will sell 15,000 to 30,000 tickets"* Derek Young, MTC, 2009

*In 1996 Rebecca Daniels study of 35 American women directors concludes that both external and internal resistance to women in leadership roles diminishes exponentially as they establish a reputation and become more accustomed to their own positions of power.*

Honours student Donna Benjamin titled the last chapter of her thesis on Australian Women Directors 'A Breeze is Blowing', 1994

*"The appointment of women directors decreases as the production budget, audience capacity and director's salary increases"* Lucy Freeman, statistical data finding, Victoria 2007-2008

*"What we have is genius- just not of the 'boy genius' variety"* Anon, 2009

*"If you believe theatre communicates vital things about our society, then the fact that there is equal representation among the practitioners who are responsible can only affect in a positive way"* Marion Potts SMH, 1996

*"There's reluctance amongst those of us who have mainstage aspirations- it's dangerous to be aligned with a campaign – to speak out"* Anon, 2009

*"I'm intrigued. There's talent, there's money, there's class and power, there's gender, there's race. Deeper and deeper we go into the dark heart of our tolerant, classless, fair go society".*  
Anon, 2009

*'Rule-less, process free models for appointing executive staff affect women's mobility in their professional lives'* British psychoanalyst Nancy J. Chodorow

*'Stereotypes that exist about women being good communicators, teachers, trainers and nurturers sees women sometimes reach the top in those areas, but in terms of taking the next step, women traditionally encounter not only a "glass ceiling" but also a "sticky floor".*  
Chodorow, 1999

*'Gender difference has less impact in the building of the art and more in the building of a career'. Director- Melia Bensussen, 1996*

*"Bloody hell. As if we weren't all busy enough trying to manage our careers and families without having to be the ones to also fight for common sense and basic rights in the workplace"* Anon, 2009

In 1996 psychologist Carol Gilligan observes that 'women tend to work within a structure of non-hierarchical interconnections'. Director Sharon Ott views her leadership as 'the center of a wheel as opposed to the top of a column'.

*"My complaint is not with the men who did get the gigs this year. Actually, they worked hard for it too and unlike us, it paid off for them".* Anon, 2010

On whether lack of strength in women is an issue ... *"women who go into directing are probably very strong willed. It's a trait you have to have"* Director- Penny Metropulos, 1996

In response to being asked to list Australian women who are ready for the mainstage ... *"It's directing a play for God's sake, not brain surgery. There are so many, many women who are READY".* Anon, 2009

*"In the future, to experience the fullness of power and creativity, we will look to women and the margins where women have traditionally been placed (or placed themselves)"* Lloyd Mayer, 1999

*"The most affirming element in all this is the coming together, the sharing of wisdom, insight and experience and through this uniting we are finding our voice and our power"* Anon AWDA member, 2009

*"We need to look beyond ourselves and consider a question like "what is the legacy we are seeking to build for the future?"* Anon, 2010

Compiled by Lucy Freeman, May 2010

## **SAMARA HERSCH**

To whom it may concern,

I wish to express my recent experience graduating from the VCA with a Masters in theatre direction. It seems very apparent at these early stages of forming a career in theatre directing that being a female there exists a strong sense of disenfranchisement when it comes to assuming leading roles as creatives within professional theatre companies.

It seems strange that throughout high school and university there was never any distinction evident between the capabilities - (intellectual or creative)- that men and women possessed. And yet - as I enter the 'real world' there appears an unspoken understanding that women simply cant handle the responsibilities and demands that a large scale theatre production requires.

I know this is untrue and wish you all the best for this very necessary forum.

### **ROSLYN OADES**

Dear Forum Conveners,

I am writing to express both my interest in and apologies for not being able to attend the upcoming forum on Women Directors. On the day of the forum I will have literally just arrived home from working in Brisbane and feel it would be too difficult for my 3 year old son, if I immediately left him again to jump on a plane to Sydney the next day. Which made me think, 'Mmm, interesting insight into one challenge faced by female directors'.

Best wishes for a fruitful day!

### **DANIELLE O'KEEFFE**

"When it comes to mainstage opportunities, is there a question of a gender difference in approach by male and female directors? Are women less inclined to put themselves in contention for opportunities because of a lack of confidence, assertiveness etc? If so, can these gender differences be addressed?"

This is area I have had many discussions about, with theatre and music practitioners over a number of years. Knowing myself and other females in the industry I do not think women are less inclined to put themselves forward due to confidence, I think there is a fundamental difference in our approach to working. I think of myself as privileged to be able to support myself financially in work that feeds me emotionally. When I am emotionally engaged I am soft and open. This is where I think our gender differences lie. If I am working honestly I am rely heavily on my feminine side, and there is very little aggression present. To work in this feminine way often I have to resort to being harder as assertiveness delivered gently is often seen as wishywashy. Ofcourse this could be explained away as a personality debate, not a battle of the sexes, but I think there is something here worthy of discussion.

### **ALISON RICHARDS**

**Where are the women? Gender representation and Australian theatre practice**

The noticeable lack of women directors and women playwrights in the 2010 seasons announced by MTC and Company B late last year has focused public attention on the persistent issue of gender inequity in the Australian theatre industry.

The underrepresentation of women employed in key creative roles by major theatre companies is not exactly a new phenomenon. According to data published by Rachel Fensham and Denise Varney in 2005, the average number of women employed as directors nationally across 'flagship' and 'second house' Australian theatre companies, and the number of plays by women produced, rose from a very low base to a 'peak' in the early 1990s of between 20-25% of totals in both cases. These figures were more or less constant for a decade. However from 2002, a simultaneous and steady decline in both indices has begun to look alarmingly like a trend.

It has been argued that women are well represented in managerial, administrative and technical positions; they may dominate some job roles in the Australian theatre industry. On the broader question of career pathways, we simply don't have enough reliable information about how many women are employed, where they are employed, how long they are employed for and what their job roles are, to draw conclusions with any confidence. There are also no comprehensive records of the production histories of Australian plays by and/or directed by women. The figures above, however, speak for themselves. It's important to note that similar inequities, in the theatre and in e.g. the boards of major business organisations, have also been the subject of complaint and action recently in the USA, UK and Europe.

We know that women generally outnumber men in industry-related education and training programs, including those for directors and writers at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Women directors and other theatre-makers are also prominent in triennially-funded and independent theatre companies, in other artistically, socially and culturally valuable areas of theatre work and in film, television and new media. According to the Australian Script Centre in Hobart, 49% of the playwrights they currently represent, and 38% of those in the catalogues of other Australian theatrical publishers, are women. Why then do so few make it into our mainstage companies and/or onto the mental horizon of that small but influential group of their Artistic Directors, literary advisors and other programming decision-makers?

Does it actually matter that so few women directors and playwrights get a gig in the major companies? Should we be satisfied, for example, to see women freelancing or employed in smaller companies, as production and stage managers, General Managers and in other admin and marketing/PR roles? I think not –if women are excluded from the key roles of director, Artistic Director and playwright they are also excluded from the prestige attached to these positions, their real and symbolic power and the intellectual and cultural influence exerted by their occupants. In Australia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is simply unacceptable to expect women to confine themselves to the role of helpmeet and support to male genius.

It's a complex undertaking to work out the causes of any discrepancy between the gender balance at the 'starting gate' and the absence of women at senior career levels in what ought, on the face of it, to be a heavily feminised industry. The big question is whether the current situation results from sexism pure and simple, or from other factors. I would argue that a range of other structural dynamics also deserve attention.

These include:

- Discrepancies in genre, traditions of practice and repertoire formation, between MOB companies and other industry sectors.
- Terms of employment demand high mobility, difficult with family responsibilities
- Successful works not transferred from other industry sectors.
- Limited career movement across industry sectors.
- Lack of repertoire development: 'new' Australian works seldom revived.
- Unchallenged assumptions re major companies' mission and cultural values.
- Budgetary pressures and
- Limited patronage and recruitment networks lead to
- Risk-averse programming and
- Tendency to replicate existing imbalances, selecting for 'same' rather than 'different' personnel and program choices
- ADs chosen from within MOB 'circle', no clear career pathways or selection criteria
- Search for the wunderkind: 'hot' young male directors are more likely than experienced women, to be offered showcase opportunities
- Women directors, by choice or necessity are often directed into 'other' (culturally valuable but less traditionally prestigious) forms of practice e.g. interdisciplinary, community, political or women's theatre, disability arts, theatre for young people etc.
- Tendency for women directors to be hired *only* for women writers' plays and vice versa
- Limited use of, and limited access to, new sources of information, performance styles
- Lack of readily available information about the past and current work of women directors, writers and other theatre-makers

This last point is of particular concern. Many of the career hurdles encountered by women are also experienced by other physically, socially or geographically disadvantaged groups. Other working women also face gender-based imbalances in expectations with regard to career, family and other domestic responsibilities, difficulties with childcare, travel and so on. And the patchy subsequent production history of new work is a problem for all Australian writers and theatre-makers. However, the combination of uncertain employment, the dominance of often tacit cultural assumptions and taste preferences in established companies and unequal access to opportunity and information across industry sectors, presents special challenges for women. Women are more likely to experience career interruptions or to be 'pigeonholed' in terms of the prestige accorded their work. They are less likely to be given 'breaks' less likely to be able to sustain the profile that supports ongoing career advancement – women's work in general is likely to be less visible to those making employment or programming choices.

Feminists from the 1960s onwards devoted enormous energy to rescuing women's work and women's 'herstory' from cultural oblivion: I would strongly suggest that we take the current signs of gender imbalance seriously and take action now. Affirmative action is only one part of the picture. There is an equally pressing need for more and better information and for ongoing research – through practice as well as documentation – to counter those industry practices and processes of repertoire formation that act as barriers to women's full participation. The cultural currency of any tradition of practice or work of art depends on the renewal of collective memory, through the frequency of its appearances in the public sphere. We could do with a theatre industry equivalent to the Women's Art Register – and oh, how we miss Playworks! but above all, I'd suggest, this might be a good time to review our obsession with 'new work' in favour of a critical examination of the life cycle of original Australian works for theatre, including

and especially those by women. Let's celebrate women's work and its place in a sustainable national repertoire, lest we forget ... again ...

## **SUE RIDER**

### WOMEN DIRECTORS' FORUM Submission

Preamble: one woman's journey

I am an independent Brisbane-based senior theatre artist with more than thirty years' experience and in 2010 I am in something of a quandary.

I learnt directing on the job. Through founding and running an educational theatre company, through freelance work which has taken me all over the country, from community theatre to state theatre company to creating work with galleries, I have gained courage in artistic risk-taking and have won awards for my work. From 1992 to 2000, I had the immense privilege of leading La Boite Theatre, where, encouraged by the spirit of the time, we implemented a program of Australian contemporary theatre, initiatives for the development of local writing and theatre professionals, policies for cross-cultural casting, gender equity and inclusiveness. We ensured that each year the total number of women creatives (including actors) equalled or exceeded the number of men. We sought out plays that reflected the diverse viewpoints of our society. La Boite achieved full professional status, artistic and box office success, won awards for the development of new work and secured state and federal triennial funding. It was a time of hope, energy and optimism.

Since leaving La Boite, however, my past ten years as an independent director have been disappointingly, frustratingly uneven. Of twenty-eight productions, only three have been "mainstage" with Australian subsidised companies; five have been unfunded or only partially funded; ten have been educational. My most innovative achievements have happened in NZ where, after reconnecting with a former collaborator, I have created original works and been invited to direct some of the world's best plays in "mainstage" theatres. But my real commitment is to Australia and as far as my Australian colleagues were concerned, I had disappeared. I resolved to create a major work in Brisbane and was fortunate to gain an Arts Queensland Creative Fellowship in 2007. The outcome was *The Pink Twins*, which I developed with composer John Rodgers and eventually directed and produced last year with presenting partners QPAC and The Queensland Music Festival. This was a work full of artistic risks, aiming for the highest production values, as well as engaging with a marginalised section of the community. It was immensely rewarding and I received more unsolicited acclaim from peers and general public than I think I ever have before, but the scale of the task, which had taken four years, was utterly exhausting! There is the hope of course that the show will go further, but that will require a whole lot more producing work, which is not my area of expertise.

So what happens now? Over the past ten years I have seen the gradual erosion of what I thought was a position of certainty, where equality was taken for granted, respect for experience had a place and our stages reflected the community out of which they arose. There are many days I feel despair.

I have enjoyed some marked successes in my career, I have often been well-supported, I have generated my own projects and opportunities. I have learnt on the job; but I also need to keep developing on the job.

Today I have energy, expertise and a continuing passion for the development of our dynamic, astonishing artform. I long to direct, to collaborate, to harness the creative energies of extraordinary people into a world which startles and inspires.

But, as a woman in my sixties, I do not have the desire to start every project from scratch. This is my quandary.

Nurturing directors; one way forward

I have followed the debate about women directors with interest but have refrained from joining in. Why? is it that I'd rather not acknowledge the problem? Is it that I feel we've been here before? is it that I don't want to be a whinger? Is it fear that if I add my voice it will marginalise me even more?

The decision to involve myself – or not – came to a head in February this year when the Judith Wright Centre (JWC) in Brisbane invited me to facilitate a Talking Shop session (a monthly gathering of artists) and hinted that I might like to choose the topic of women directors. This was certainly relevant in Brisbane. Women directors are strong in the independent sector but almost non-existent in the two major subsidised companies.

But I hesitated. There was an opportunity being presented here: local theatre artists gathered together to talk shop. Was this the topic I wanted to lead? Would it simply be divisive? How could I approach it in a way that would bring women and men together in a common concern and take us all forward?

I realised that my fundamental interest was the development of theatre directors – whatever our gender. Develop our directors and our theatre will develop. We are an isolated group. We work with creatives, but rarely with each other. How can we find ways to develop? How do we give and receive feedback? How can we engage with each other's work? What mentoring models exist? I'd found my topic. I would facilitate a conversation about theatre direction.

Word of the session went out at short notice. More than thirty people showed up. To my surprise and delight twenty-five of these were women. All had directed or wished to. Their experience ranged from senior artists to students. The session was passionate, honest, enthusiastic. We had to finish after an hour and a half but all wanted it to go further. It was clear that we had tapped into a real interest in developing our theatre directors at all stages of experience. As a result, with support from JWC and UQ, I am facilitating a workshop on May 29 where directors can spend a full day sharing ideas and methodologies in a hands-on situation working with three professional actors.

My hope is that the participants will be a balance of women and men and that we are able to interact with each other in the spirit of practical investigation, engaging with different approaches and aesthetics to discover solutions to the challenge of making meaning through theatre. Hopefully this will be the first of a number of similar sessions.

The issue of women directors is complex. I cheered aloud when Kate Cherry and Marion Potts received their appointments. But I wonder where the others are, those who were around when I was at La Boite. Have they dropped off the radar by choice? We're not very good at celebrating our senior artists. Let's seek them out, tap into their expertise, find out what is happening and

how we can reach across the generations to improve the situation for our younger sisters and for theatre as a whole. Whether we're emerging, mid-career or with many years of experience, whether we direct in independent, educational or subsidised theatre, we need pathways to open up opportunities and to enable us to keep on developing. I see the Women Directors' Forum as an invaluable step towards establishing such pathways and I hope we are able to seize this opportunity to generate genuine action.

## **ELIZABETH ROUTLEDGE**

### 1. Introduction

The leadership crisis witnessed in mainstream theatre practice is also evident in regional professional theatre (if there is such a thing?). Amateur theatre, community projects and school performance is on the other hand well represented by women, invariably acting on a voluntary basis, as parents, retirees, teachers or hobbyists.

I have lived and worked in the Clarence area (Coffs harbour, Bellingen, Sawtell etc.) for ten years, working in the secondary school system and self financing productions or seeking community sponsorship for theatre work. I am in this area as an educated, career orientated woman seeking an alternative lifestyle, I have children and I am divorced. For these reasons I have limited my opportunities and access to resources that I (might) have if I were back in the city. I am part of that auxiliary workforce who is cheap, willing to work two or more jobs, under and often unpaid!

I recently applied for a production grant from the Australia Council for a play I had written "Adam's Rib and the Longest war". It was my first application and I put a lot of work into it but was rejected, not because of my gender or the fact that it had a feminist theme, but because it probably did not score as well as other applications in meeting certain criteria. I still believe it is a play worth getting up and obviously in the light of this forum particularly timely and apt.

I certainly can't whinge about the boys club because everyone I dealt with was a woman. But, as soon as the possibility of grant dollars was off the table, a couple of male contributors were no longer interested in the project; it just wasn't viable for them to invest the time and energy without financial reciprocation! The female director and talent were keen to explore other options because they *felt* passionate about the content!

What I do question is the system and methodology of selecting works for grants which I found limiting and linear (therefore patriarchal and Newtonian? See following section on New Physics). It appears to me that funding institutions are restricted by an '80's mentality' criteria and a parochial obsession with Australian identity and a Nationalism that verges on fundamentalism and only serves to perpetuate more propaganda. It's the C21st surely we are global citizens now?

Possibly in the near future I will engage a professional grant writer (male or female, do I care? No I just want someone confident to show me the money) to tick the right boxes and say the right things!

“So the more I play the game the better it is for me,” said an anonymous young lawyer in the recent article *“The Only way is up”*, by Fenella Souter in The GW section of the Sydney Morning Herald (May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010). So obviously the lack of representation and big, fat pay cheques for women is “... the same in politics, the arts, the media, academia, comedy ... anywhere and everywhere.” Ms Souter declares! “Feminism remains relevant!” reiterate virtually all her intelligent, interesting female interviewees (hardly a balanced article; though her one male quote {Robert Care, chairman of Arup Australasia, an engineering firm}, did support “urgent action to advance women’s participation...”).

Lets face it we’re going to have to raise the ‘ism words, because according to the article in SMH, the stats don’t point to fairness or equal opportunity for women in the top ranks of *any* profession.

“The argument we never engage with “, says Juliet Bourke, in the same article “is the structure of work itself, who is advantaged by it and how they make their decisions.” Our definitions of success, work standards and practice are still predicated by masculine agendas which creates stressed, “monocentric” workaholics scrambling up the hierarchical pyramid of job promotion and financial remuneration; and hanging on to their positions for dear life.

I have a deep frustration with the majority of the systems that operate in this country and invariably in the West, from political to schools to councils; bogged down by anachronistic, bureaucratic, constraining, bombastic paperwork and proformas that are supposed to increase efficiency and level the level playing field. Rigid protocols and systems may be necessary in high risk environments like surgery or the armed forces... but in the arts?

So I have included in this submission some information on a possible approach to affirmative action, applying the principles and metaphors of the New Sciences (Dissipative structures, quantum physics etc). See “Sex Discrimination and New Science”, and “New Physics” (a separate attachment).

On a political level women might have to relook at some of the old feminist approaches and be more assertive and challenging ( Oh! hang on a minute, those are male adjectives, women are aggressive self promoters, femo-nazis ... etc) in demanding that Governments enforce quotas for women in certain positions, as they are doing in a number of countries in Europe. For when the playing field isn’t level, “sometimes we do need differential treatment to get equal outcomes” , (Elizabeth Broderick, Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner).

Maybe it is time to stop being pleasant, patient and polite (there goes all my conditioning!) or apologize for being “too emotional” or “too female”, or try to be hard-nosed or “one of the boys” to fit in or meet the criteria of corporate success; and redefine a number of different approaches to create critical mass for women in the Arts and the workforce in general, and eventually a tipping point, from the bottom up.

Or, as Elizabeth Farrelly announced in her column (April 29, 2010) “WICKED WOMEN MAKE THE EARTH MOVE”. As long as I don’t have to deploy the use of my face, body, attire or sexuality to gain power... ah but it’s too late for that , I’ve reached the age where my seductive, decorative powers are diminished and I am approaching invisibility, I’ll have to rely on my brain, character and skills – is it enough?

The following pages will give a brief overview of using new science language / models to approach social issues. I developed these for a conference on Poverty (another issue that affects women more than men) a few years ago, but they can actually be applied to any system.

It really is a matter of consciousness (which is paradoxical statement in itself) and as Einstein said, (he got it from his wife, I heard), is that the solution is never found at the same level as the problem.

Now I know you are probably thinking ... she comes from the North coast where they all play djembes and meditate etc and it is true you will find more shamanistic, canio-sacral, homeopathic, reiki, life coaching, natropathic , yoga practitioners per capita than you can poke a stick at, in one street alone even and, I've probably surrounded myself with like minded lefties so that I think the worlds is actually changing... at the same time as its getting worse it is getting better! But bear with me and read the following :-

### Sex discrimination and the New Sciences

In the early 1920's and continuing to this very day scientists are presenting theories that urge us to view the world differently. In a time of paradigm shifts we need to let go of the old world view and its habitual approach to solutions because they are now inappropriate. What could happen if we applied these scientific discoveries to models of human democracy? If we tackle the social and political problems we face.

We live in a world organized and designed along Newtonian images and thinking, where the universe is managed by separating things into parts and hierarchies – still under the influence of the Greek thinkers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle who established the descriptive system of argument, logic, analysis and classification and ignored *the possibility system*.

Scientific developments in systems theories suggest that humanity operates through self-organization, chaos, interdependence, relationships, complexity and networks.

With the new sciences we need to apply new images and metaphors to create new perceptions and actions.

New science indicates that there is no objective reality waiting to reveal its secrets and truth but that *we to a certain extent create reality through engagement with others and events or evoke reality through choosing a reality of possibilities* – everything is subjective, always new, different and unique to each of us. *There is no expert interpretation or one sure-fire application.*

New sciences move towards a holistic understanding of systems and give primary value to relationships that exist between *seemingly discrete parts*, a new landscape of connections and phenomena that can't be reduced to simple cause and effect but are seen as *a constant flux of dynamic processes*.

Relationship is a key determiner of what is observed [for the observer changes what is observed in the act of observing] and how things manifest, therefore the unseen connections between what were previously thought to be separate entities are the fundamental elements of creation,

and, *empowerment, ethics and respect are no longer fuzzy religious concepts but key elements in sustainable action.*

Chaos Theory – order and chaos contain each other

Gaia Hypothesis – the earth is a living organism / system engaged in creating conditions that support life.

Motivation Theory – refocuses on the deep longings we have for community, meaning, dignity and love in our organised lives; the strong emotions of being human.

Field Concept – invisible forces structure space and behaviour and suggest the importance of vision, values and culture. Organisms are fluid, organic, boundary-less, self-renewing and conscious entities.

Dissipative Structures – Ilya Prigogine asked if entropy is the rule why does life flourish?

Entropy = inefficiency of the process, energy lost, waste

= measure of disorder or chaos in a system.

=measure of randomness in a system

= the inverse measure of the ability to change

When you look at an engine you see that it expends some fraction of its heat input as exhaust, heat radiation, friction etc. The 2<sup>nd</sup> law of thermodynamics states that all things, over time break down and become less ordered, random and degenerate [ unless energy is added in some way]. This applies to all energy systems including cosmic entities, to a system on one planet – weather system, electromechanical, chemical, biological and *SOCIAL SYSTEMS*.

The net amount of entropy in the universe is always increasing, yet plainly, Prigogine observed, many things in the universe tend towards increasing order.

In old physics the focus was on ideal / closed systems i.e. they don't interact with their surrounding environment so that the variables they had to contend with were manageable.

Prigogine realized that it was necessary to think in terms of whole living systems and their relationships, not just their parts; that systems exhibit high degrees of order and increasing complexity and that they do this by *DISPERSING ENTROPY TO THEIR ENVIRONMENT*.

He witnessed the occurrence of *AUTOPOIESIS* – The characteristic of living systems to renew themselves and to evolve / progress to new levels of complexity. Prigogine suggests that disorder/ entropy plays a critical role in giving birth to new, higher forms of order; that chaos and order function together.

Prigogine proved his hypothesis that order emerges not in spite of but because of chaos, that *evolution and growth are the inevitable product of open systems slipping into temporary chaos and then reorganizing at higher levels of complexity and functioning*. Such systems take in energy and matter from the environment and dissipate the resulting entropy from the system into the environment. Other scientists have confirmed that these discoveries apply to every open system in the universe whether chemical, a germinating seed, a highway system, a corporation or an individual human being.

As living systems purposeful human systems are also self-organizing that dissipate entropy to their environment and as dissipative structures, in order to maintain their existence, must interact with the environment by *continually maintaining flow into and out of the system*, [furthermore rather than being the structure through which energy and matter flow, dissipative structures are the flow itself]. This supports quantum theory that the universe is not one of independent separate entities but one of process: changing, evolving and intimately connected system of interactions.

### What does this mean in regards to sex discrimination?

We are seeing sex discrimination, women and femininity (masculinity being associated with leadership, assertiveness, objectivity and action) as a form of entropy; as they progress they also experience “an accumulation of disadvantage”, by many indicators “it’s actually going backwards” (Fenella Souter, GW, SMH, May 1, 2010).

We see women in leadership in terms of the old paradigm as a separate issue, *a problem*, the myth that “we needed to build up women’s capabilities. ‘if only we could fix women’ ... that was about sending them to confidence-building courses, giving them mentoring opportunities, networks. Lots of women went through those in the ‘80s, so you’d expect they’d now be in senior positions – but they’re not. So women are the best they can be, but there’s still something going on.” (Juliet Bourke, Aequus Partners).

The entity “female” in a system or ‘gender schema’ or corporate culture “that continues to operate like a cross between an old boys club, a footy locker room and capitalism on speed.” (Fenella Souter) that favours maleness; and we are still applying old ways of thinking to find solutions.

Our thinking does not deal with perception. We argue and set up unnecessary adversarial positions. The ‘boxes’ we derive from the Greek thinking are not adequate in dealing with a changing world. Analysis is insufficient to solve ‘wicked problems, we need to design solutions. Criticism is not enough; we need to attend to generating, productive and creative aspects of thinking and take action.

Each system has an upper limit of how much entropy it can dissipate into the environment, it has a threshold and reaches a “bifurcation point” a moment of truth when it either ceases to exist or reorganizes itself in entirely new way. It has literally an infinite number of potential outcomes. Because of the number of variables only the probability of an outcome can be determined, not the certainty.

### SOLUTIONS

According to systems thinker Professor Horst Rittel all our major sociological problems are classified as ‘wicked’ i.e. they arise from a complex non-linear system. Issues such as sex discrimination and all the ‘isms’ are ‘wicked problems’ and soft system concepts and methodologies are essential to deal with them.

A soft system approach requires Participation – the active involvement of those involved in a constant cycle [maybe a helix would be a better metaphor] of thinking, learning and acting because :

1/ Sex discrimination is part of a web of evolving interlocking issues and constraints. There is no definitive statement or description of the problem.

2/ You only begin to understand sex discrimination when you design and act out interim solutions.

3/ There are many people and groups who have a stake in the issue and how it is resolved, therefore problem solving is a social process.

4/ There is no one objective answer, stakeholders need to design, accept and put into action promising or potentially effective solutions.

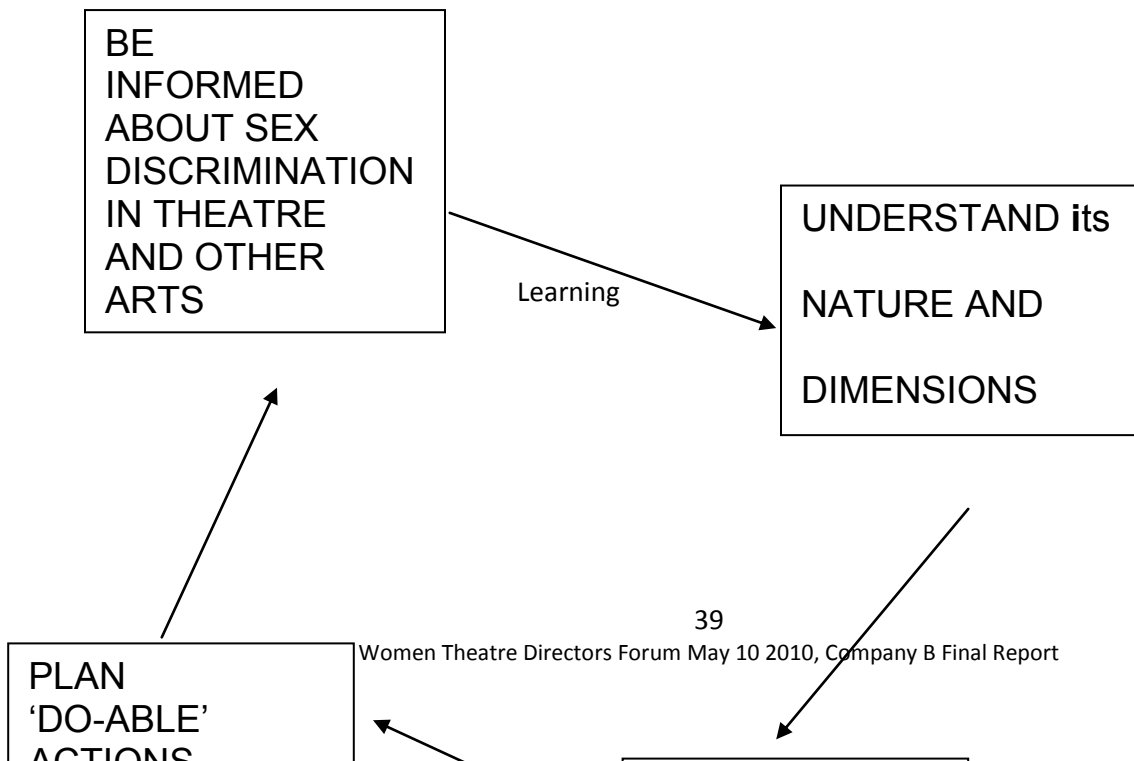
5/ Constraints on finding solutions for sex discrimination change over time because we live in a changing world. The stakeholders generate the constraints and the changes – by changing their perception, communicating or not communicating, involving or abdicating responsibility or changing or creating new rules.

6/ Since there is no objective version of the problem, there is no definitive solution.

7/ The problem solving process is ongoing or degenerates from a lack of energy [ input of money or other resources]

8/ There is no perfect solution. The error is in applying linear processes to solve wicked problems

“Wicked” problems [such as sex discrimination] arising in complex human systems requires people to be actively involved in a constant cycle of thinking, acting and learning together.



Interim solutions

EVALUATE AND  
REFLECT

Thinking as a social process

Devolve decision  
making power

Some practical ideas to put on the butchers paper mind map!

- Theatre's and groups developing "sister" theatres with a regional area.
- Finding new NGO sources of revenue.
- Seeking out the support of female philanthropists ... E.G. "Women Mobilising Millions", "Australian Women Donors" ...
- Setting up a task force of female producers to source money and projects.
- Alliances with all kinds of special interest groups.
- Women self generating funding and own material to avoid compromise on content.
- Female Internet networks and collaborative groups.
- Creating a Global / Local mentality rather than Nationalistic / parochial agenda.
- Including men, it is important for men to contribute to the debate.

## MARY SITARENOS

### Areas of Interest

My areas of interest are specific from my perspective as an independent theatre maker and actor trainer. I do not delineate my practice from my process to performance. I am co artistic director of a small company named Liminal Theatre and Performance. We are a group of dedicated artists and practice together when we are not in performance. I work from a studio which is also our performance space. I am in my fifty's. I am a mother. I have been in both the main and independent theatre sector for 32 years. I have won awards, received invitations to work overseas and been appreciated, I am broke and passionate, not normal, not completely white, not commercially beautiful, not black, not a refugee, not young, yes different (but not different enough) or the same and still without a sustaining presence here in Australia. I live on a bridge, between the real and the abstract, in flux.

How does one have a sustaining presence? We all know it has nothing to do with whether you can *direct* or not. Great women have come and slipped away. So what paths must she take to stay? How can she survive without being too alternative or too conservative, unadventurous or all over the place, having to toe the line or too eclectic?

Is the only pathway to having a presence being in the establishment? Is there any other way one can have a presence from another path or entry point? What do you do when you have little

resources when you are not nested in a larger frame? What do you do when the particular lens you work in is outside the "Industry"? Can you talk the talk as well as keeping the personal development developing? Is my only avenue to put in a very good submission and hope? And if successful will this finally legitimise myself as being a director that can potentially get a foot in to the MPA? And then, how will *that* shape my work, what sustaining path ways will that present? So, what kind of presence are we talking about? Are we talking about the masculine as the standard of value? Must we go over this ground one more time? If this is just a political question about men and women it is a question about power. To fight a power battle then you are potentially still within a male domain. I am not saying this is not an important issue, for it is. But we also know that artistic directors in MPA hold onto what they have because there are no pathways beyond for them either. But there is another very important issue that needs to come forward that is inherent to this question in working within an existing system, it is also about allowing new models to emerge and be supported. I feel this will give more women work.

I have been negotiating my rights and responsibilities from within patriarchal familial contexts for years. I have been born into multi-diverse constructs and traditions and have developed contemporary processes. I have been born within an allocated and confined space. My social presence as a woman has developed as a result through ingenuity of being in a limited space for my survival. My cry for diversity is now the voice of a small person indeed in a little studio! I have worked for MPA the and enjoyed my time there, I have worked in the Popular and felt at the frontier of being part of something special, the Educational as a vital contribution and platform, the Alternative being part of the avant guard and multi-lingual and multicultural theatre to give voice and commitment to difference, to living cultures and new forms. But, they have all been in a particular paradigm: a male paradigm deeply embedded and entrenched in relying on systems that are hierarchical and not sustaining. All forms have been within one paradigm not my own. Yes, they have all been important and shaped me in some way but in the end, I have to create the space for what is necessary to me in how and with whom I choose to work. A space in which people want to work with me, to engage with meaning making and creating new models and pathways. A space that is generative for the company to bring together delineated disciplines and roles and provide the continuity for them and myself as a leader and independent artist. A platform to voice my research, my practice, my difference and the space and time to reflect what it means to be a independent women artist. The current predominate model can not sustain my practice, my presence. The current predominate model itself is trying to find new connections and pathways.

As most independent artists know, it is hard work and certainly the consistency of having a wage is compromised. And, indeed burn out is possible and usually inevitable. But I have become a master in simplicity and stripping back so that the little resources I have are essential and reusable. I direct, produce, stage-manage, administer, do front of house, stock up and cook and design. I share these roles when possible with the company. I also acknowledge that not all women work this way. But I choose to work this way as a way into my future. I am not sure if this work can have a big presence and be a legitimate lens amongst the "Many" but, with great struggle and passion I faithfully tread this path to understand and reach for difference within sameness. I *am* different and similar to many.

So my small studio now is my way to do what I feel is necessary without disappearing and falling off the stage. Have a look at the Greek plays. They all so clearly end with women in small spaces. Some so small they are restricted and have no choice but to place the noose around their neck as a form of breaking through into some *other* realm... or, they are sacrificed. I already know it too well being the child of the Diaspora, and a Greek one at that! The company and practice is

my support and we have endured with limited inconsistent external funds in the last 7 years. But I also know that a small space is not the only place within which a woman must reside. I can only give you my perspective and for me it is a question of process, which falls outside the predominately male paradigm. So, where I am placed if in the turn around with positive discrimination to create equality is the outcome? I will still be marginalised because my process falls outside current organisational structures that we set in place. The implication of the way I choose to work is a slow beginning with an ensemble and a quick end into production, it doesn't fit. The change must be flexible to allow different ways of working. I am marginalised not just by gender but also by artists' process. Currently to become or be seen to be successful is not by artists' merit but by being a marketable commodity with an inflexible artists process. Perhaps it is not a matter of toppling that order so as to replace it- that amounts to the same end, but in disrupting it and modifying it starting from the outside as we are and see that this position is exempt. Clear paths into a flexible change to give more women work in ways they like to create that reflect their diverse contribution. Allow the many women to shape their future that doesn't take them off their path. Perhaps it is a bigger question than Gender. Perhaps the question for all artists regardless of their sex is to give the best not the most powerful artist the opportunity to work? We have space to share. Lots of it! We need incubators, women's hubs for doing and making for the diversity of directors' writers, designers, educators, and musicians for all women artists.

If there is one future door that will reveal an open space to enter it will perhaps more likely come from a woman who can see and has the generosity, vision and faith in other women to do what they must in their way. In new models that are clear, viable and exciting. This space I call for needs to consist of many spaces: all in dialogue, porous at their boundaries, acknowledging their differences, understanding their similarities. All contributing to the total.

## **JANE WOOLLARD**

### Sustainable Time

How time is managed is a key factor in the implementation of structural change. The term 'sustainability' need not only refer to energy consumption. It may also refer to professional work practice.

The MPAB companies and other peak bodies in the performing arts sector have been slow to question or even wonder about the shape of a career in Australian theatre - how this fluctuates over a week, a month or years. Meanwhile, the rest of the community is engaged with ideas about leading a balanced life, leaving time for family, community volunteering and other activities that lie outside the work sphere.

The chasm between the small-medium sector and the MPAB will never be breached as long as there are two modes of time/work management in place. Artists in the small-medium sector are accustomed to holding down part time jobs in the education sector for example, as it is impossible to sustain oneself financially through project work. Yet when we are given the opportunity to work within the MPAB sector, we are expected to be available for long working hours, to the exclusion of other commitments and activities, for the sake of an eight- week contract. The full-time leadership roles of associate director or artistic director are predicated on this model of 'giving over' to work, a 19thc belief in the intrinsic value of hard work. If one questions the value of working an 80-100 hour week, one risks being considered (oh horror!) a

'hobbyist'.

The management of the resource of time has consequences for women directors who are also parents. When one is a parent, one has responsibility not only for one's own timetable, but also the timetable of a child, which may not intersect with a 9-6pm-and-beyond working day. Of course women are not always the primary carers of their children, but they often are, and the reasons for this are cultural, emotional, structural and need to be addressed by MPAB companies if they intend to redress the gender imbalance in key creative roles. If we choose to have children, attend their school working bees, or volunteer in local environment groups, surely that makes us more resilient, connected practitioners, in touch with the world and her dreams? What kind of artists do we become when we grind away our time in rarefied 19thc arts sweatshops?

The time is ripe to make room in the MPAB world for the skills and varied experienced of many different kinds of practitioners, not only for the mono-focused, 'unencumbered,' driven white male.

A solution the same size as the problem: some thoughts about authentic systemic change.

In any change, the solution is the same size as the problem. For example, as we become more aware of global warming and diminishing oil reserves, we may be told that changing light bulbs, recycling and driving smaller cars is enough to solve the problem. This causes a state called 'cognitive dissonance', where we are in a trance, believing we have been given the answer, whilst at the same time knowing it is not really solving the problem we have been given.

The rush to solve the problem of inequality of opportunity for women directors in the Australian theatre workplace has lead to a flurry of events and initiatives in the past five months: the 'Where are the Women' forum held at Belvoir Street in late 2009 might be seen as one of these knee-jerk solutions. Despite the fact that this event was hosted by Belvoir Street, there has been no real desire for systemic change within this company. A transparent process for the selection of the new Associate Director at Belvoir Street is one way that this example of 'cognitive dissonance' could have been addressed. However, Belvoir Street has chosen a new Associate Director without an open process that could have provided the opportunity for female directors to apply for this position. Like changing the light bulbs, or driving an electric car, hosting forums and announcing initiatives for women directors within a particular age bracket does not address the underlying systemic problem.

If the MPAB companies truly wish to find a solution that is the same size as the problem, then the federal Equal Opportunity legislation may be a good place to start. Accountability, transparency and a willingness to engage with change and to consider new structures are the ways in which the MPAB companies might build a bridge between their own practice and the small to medium sector. If there is courage and energy for change, then we could create an industry where inclusion, resilience and social relevance are the pillars that support an excellent national theatre.

**KATE MACNEILL AND ANN TONKS**

**Co-leadership and gender in the performing arts**

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***Abstract***

Co-leadership has been a dominant form of management within sections of the arts industry for many years. Consisting of the artistic director and the general manager the leadership partnerships within arts organisations, at first glance, might appear classically gendered: an heroic artistic leader and a facilitating general manager. In this research we identify the existence of these demarcations. However, we also find that the incumbents make no such association of gender specificity. We attribute this outcome to the characteristics of the performing arts industry more broadly and the people that are attracted to working in such an environment.

***Biography***

Kate MacNeill is a lecturer in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne and Ann Tonks is general manager of the Melbourne Theatre Company and, in that capacity, was also a participant in this research. Both Kate and Ann lecture in the graduate programs in arts management at the University of Melbourne.

***Introduction***

Leadership models within the major performing arts companies in Australia vary significantly. These companies include orchestras, dance companies, theatre and opera companies and circus. While the major performing arts companies were the subject of a major government inquiry in the late 1990s, including questions of board governance, there was little attention given to the internal management structures and dynamics of leadership (Major Performing Arts Inquiry 1999). Nonetheless a number of these companies share a particular leadership model: that of an artistic director and a general manager. Through a series of interviews with general managers and artistic directors our research explores the dynamics of this relationship as well as interrogating leadership structures and techniques in a creative context more broadly. We are particularly interested in the question of whether artistic leadership and managerial leadership require different styles and how these are employed in the day-to-day practice of co-leadership within a performing arts context.

In this paper we also examine the dynamics of co-leadership with reference to questions of gender that arise within these partnerships. The literature on co-leadership more generally tends to ignore this question – perhaps because the “partnerships” are often of the same sex. However, within the performing arts there has been a tendency for the artistic director to be male and the general manager to be female. This suggests another productive line of research on co-leadership. We have restricted the analysis in this paper to those organisations that exhibited clear co-leadership structures, language and processes.

***The literature on management in an arts context***

The literature on leadership in the arts emphasises the role of creativity and the demands of leading in a creative environment (e.g. Bilton 2007; Hartley 2005). In Australia, the necessity for creativity and entrepreneurship on the part of the arts leader has been thoroughly documented (Rentschler 2002). Often these studies emphasise the individualistic nature of creative

leadership and locate this within the artistic aspects of an arts organisation's operations. In other words leadership in relation to the management of an arts organisation tends to focus on the artistic product. Lapiere (2001, p. 4) refers to leadership being "rooted in the artistic product while management is subordinate to it" and that when art becomes a business enterprise it produces "an inevitable conflict" within the organisation between art and commerce (p. 5).

These discussions are based on certain assumptions about the nature of management and of leadership. Implicit in much of the management literature is the idea of a dichotomy between creative leadership of an organisation and conventional management imperatives. The evolution of arts management as a distinct discipline has resulted from the view that there is something unique about the arts. It also implies that there is a potential tension between the pursuit of artistic practice and that of managing an organisation (Royseng 2008). Separate structures frequently exist to serve the creative aspects of a company's activities and its administrative responsibilities and external accountabilities (Chong 2002). Chong implies that bifurcated management structures arise from the increasing complexity and diversity of skills required by arts organisations. This inevitably produces the separation of the roles of artistic director and general manager. However, as our research demonstrates, the relationship between the artistic goals of the organisation and what might be thought of as "management" responsibilities is much more organic – and the prevalence of the co-leadership model may, in fact, be a consequence of this flexibility.

Complementary leadership models are not the sole preserve of the arts industry, and there is an increasing awareness of the way in which complementary leadership models are practiced in corporate settings: a common division is along the lines of responsibility for the external and internal environments (Miles & Watkins 2007). Co-leadership has also been attributed with ensuring that "the whole is much greater than the sum of the parts" (Miles & Watkins 2007, p. 92). Critical factors in determining the success of co-leadership are considered to be communication and shared vision. Miles and Watkins argue that organisations need the four pillars of alignment in successful complementary teams: a common vision, common incentives, communication and trust. Ensley, Hmieleski and Pearce (2006) suggest that shared leadership is a particularly efficacious predictor of success in new venture performance, a finding which they considered to be consistent with prior research on shared leadership. They conclude that "shared leadership appears to be particularly important in the development and growth of new ventures... high profile cases of prodigal entrepreneurs, whose individual creativity and charisma have led them to fame and fortune, are more myth than reality" (p. 228).

It is interesting that shared leadership should emerge as a focus of management literature at a time when the very concept of what makes for good management is being re-assessed – together with its gender specificity. One particular theme recasts management in a way that emphasises "feminine leadership", and argues that women in fact bring particular skills and attributes to their roles as managers which in turn produces "more humane, relations-oriented, flexible, participatory and caring institutions" (Billing & Alvesson 2000). As Billing and Alvesson note, there is a tendency in this literature to essentialise women, suggesting that women adopt different forms of communication, are more corporative, have a view of power that is more relational than individual and are better able to mobilise human resources (pp. 147– 149). They go on to observe that some of these "feminine" values have been described as "the prioritizing of feelings ... the importance of the imaginative and creative" (Hines 1992, p. 314). At the same time, imagination and creativity, together with charismatic leadership might equally be

applicable to notions of artistic leadership, reinforced by the growing literature on creativity and innovation (Florida 2003; 2005 and others).

Lapierre (2001) suggests that artistic and theatre directors behave very differently when meeting with artists than when they deal with the administrative team, which implies that management behaviours, be they creative or otherwise, are not inflexible. However, while noting these very different approaches to leadership, he neglects to examine how the key leaders of their respective areas of the organisation (artistic leadership and organisational management) negotiate this dynamic. Certainly there is a perception that a tension exists because of the inherent characteristics of an arts company, conveyed through references such as “organisational schizophrenia (between the artistic and administrative sides of the company)” (Fitzgibbon 2001, p. 70). Perhaps because of this, the need for mutual respect between the executive director and the artistic director is emphasised. The interdependence of their fortunes is reflected in Mehta’s observation that “the executive director must respect the music director’s point of view, since it is on his [sic] shoulders that the ultimate responsibility for a season’s success rests” (Mehta 2003, p. 5). Likening the dynamics between the executive director and the music director to that of a marriage, he notes the complicating factor that while they are forced to live together they do not necessarily do so by their own choosing (Mehta 2003, p. 5). Attributing individual characteristics to success in management runs the risk of reinforcing gender stereotyping, a matter that we directly address in our research. There has been little research specifically on women in management in the arts industry, and Foley (2005) noted that this may in part be because “most studies seem to have concentrated on women in more clearly defined management roles in, for example, manufacturing companies, and do not seem strictly applicable to a creative industry with a less hierarchical career structure” (p. 242). Certainly there has been significant attention given to the gendered nature of certain industries, and arts administration or management is widely regarded as a female dominated occupation.

Nonetheless, as Foley notes, sex segmentation does arise within the arts industry, frequently revolving around the artistic director/managing director partnerships and this is borne out in our study of the major performing arts groups. The capacity to impute gender specific requirements to the respective roles of artistic director and managing director is all the greater because of the frequent references that are made to arts organisations as “families” and the role of the two leaders as being the mother and father of the company. However, as our analysis demonstrates, these are far from traditional families and it is therefore not surprising that we find that any preconceived ideas of sex/gender stereotypes were not supported in the research.

### ***Methodology***

While the literature acknowledges the need for both creative and managerial leadership, the way in which these components are incorporated into leadership models and position descriptions varies considerably across company forms and size. Indeed there has been little attempt to reconcile the literature on creative leadership with actual management structures and, in particular, to examine the effectiveness of complementary or dual leadership models within the context of gender relations and the division of labour.

Our research involves in-depth interviews with the artistic and managerial leaders of Australia’s major performing arts companies. The analysis of this data draws on Katz’s

(1983) analytic induction method: an initial hypothesis is formulated based on the existing literature. This is tested against the content of the interviews. The hypothesis is then revised and its fit against the data re-assessed. This iterative process is repeated until an explanatory framework is found that can accommodate the accounts contained within the interviews.

The principal research question that we are investigating in our wider research project is whether the model of leadership and its implementation within arts organisations is consistent with those models described in the management literature more broadly. We hypothesised that the context within which leadership roles are exercised will influence the particular models adopted and the style of leadership that is practiced. In this paper we also focus on one specific aspect of this research, namely the role of sex and gender in the dynamics of the creative and managerial leadership partnership. Based on the literature, we hypothesised that these factors would play a role where the partnerships consisted of one male and one female. In our interviews with members of these partnerships we asked whether their partner's status as a member of the opposite sex was relevant to the leadership dynamic and in what ways.

### **Findings**

At this stage we have completed sixteen interviews with each of the artistic and managerial leaders of eight performing arts companies. The co-leadership partnerships in seven of the eight organisations consisted of a male and female partnership: two leadership teams consisted of a male general manager and female artistic leader, and five leadership teams consisted of a female general manager and male artistic leader.

Acker's (1992) framework of "gendered processes" in organisations has proved a useful way of thinking about our own processes and the way in which we are seeking to engage with the interactions between women and men in our small sample and seek to come to some understanding of how these dynamics are both formed by, and play a part in forming, the organisational culture.

### **Managing creativity**

Managing in a creative environment is widely understood to be a uniquely challenging role. Once confined to the arts, the notion of the creative workplace has now spread more widely and is indeed becoming a dominant framing of "best practice" management. Goffee and Jones (2007, p. 79) say that to manage clever people:

*You need to be a benevolent guardian rather than a traditional boss. You need to create a safe environment for your clever employees; encourage them to experiment and play and even fail; and quietly demonstrate your expertise and authority all the while.*

The management style required to enable creative people to work effectively is frequently described in similar terms, as an "almost entirely supportive or facilitative function" (Davis & Scase 2000 p. 20). In fact the co-leadership model in the performing arts very much complies with the concept of the servant/leader model, a model in which leadership is subservient to the greater cause – in this case the art (Spears 1995). But in the arts organisation the greater cause is personified by the artistic director with the general manager being the quintessential

“servant/leader”. The status of the artistic director, embodying the essence of the organisation’s entire rationale, can take on heroic connotations.

### ***The art comes first***

Certainly our interviewees saw the roles of artistic director and general manager as distinctly different – although absolutely interdependent. The most emphatic expression of their respective status was the widespread view that the artistic director must, of necessity, be the CEO of the company. Reasons for this lay with the absolute belief that the organisation’s primary role and distinct character derives from its status as an arts organisation:

*Who’s the person who’s most important to the organisation? The artistic director and therefore they should be, within broad frameworks and limits and budgets, bigger than the general manager. ... Because the organisation only exists because it’s an arts organisation. ... If you’re destroying the output of the artistic director, therefore you’re undermining your very existence. [GM 4]*

Furthermore it was considered necessary to reinforce this aspect in the public’s perception and with external stakeholders:

*But I think even on a symbolic level the important thing about the CEO position sitting with the artistic director is that it’s symbolic. It says that at the topmost level of governance, whether it’s speaking outside company or within the Board, it’s saying: this is what the company’s here for. This is the primary impulse. [GM 2]*

The primacy of the art and hence the artistic direction is reinforced by the acknowledgement by many of the participants that the artistic director should have their choice of general manager:

*It’s absolutely crucial that the Board ensures that each new artistic director has their own general manager. ... I would recommend to any Board of any organisation that the most important thing that a theatre company does is to employ an artistic director. So it’s absolutely crucial that they have in mind that the artistic director will pair themselves with a person that they want to work with. [AD 2]*

### ***Equal and different***

It is clear that while we write of a model of co-leadership, the bottom line is that a hierarchy does exist, even if it is never referred to or utilised other than at the moment of the arrival of the artistic director and again at the time of their departure:

*But I had my resignation on the table to the Board so that they could feel free to pick whoever they wanted to pick, who could then say and I want to bring x with me. So of the shortlist of candidates eventually I knew there was at least one person who had someone they would want to work with as general manager. [GM 4]*

The concept of leadership from behind was mentioned by one interviewee – indicating the ability to create space and to be:

*willing to let somebody else get the obvious rewards of doing things in terms of both the art and the company, [while you are] doing all the sort of hard edged, analytical, financial, right brain stuff. [GM 4]*

In other words the role of general manager is viewed as facilitative, one that enables the company or the creatives to get on with their primary role of creating – serving the art:

*Really the fundamental job of the general manager is to enable the art to be made. [AD 2]*

*...the primary job of management is actually to facilitate artistic vision. [GM 2]*

The necessity of the general manager role, and the dependence on that person by the artistic director, was reinforced when an artistic director's described themselves as lacking in certain skills:

*the company wouldn't run with just me as the CEO – it would be – fall apart into a chaotic shemozzle fairly quickly. ... [AD 6]*

Similarly general managers were very clear about their specific skill set and contribution:

*[The artistic director is] just not interested in budgets and dealing with sponsors and strategy and policy development and all those sorts of areas. ...I get excited about trends and looking back at the information and churning figures through to see where we might be heading. [GM 7]*

At the same time there was a notion that the artistic director role was an intuitive role, one of necessity unmediated: *it's just arts coming out of my head whereas the general manager's role is much more complex. [AD 6]*

*He's the left and I'm the right side so it just balances each other out [sic – sides reversed from the "theory" but point stands]. So in terms of the artistic vision and what the company can create, that very much comes from [the AD] and his knowledge of all things theatrical. Mine is about the pragmatic, how do we actually get there, what do we have to do to get there? [GM 8]*

These descriptions of the respective roles of artistic director and general manager suggest that different skills are required for carrying out the functions attached to each position. This has led to the tendency in the literature to presume that, by implication, these positions might be gendered. At first reading, the artistic director role is emphatically that of a leader – one that might be characterised within, the now somewhat outdated, notions of leadership as the "single, heroic leader" whose influence is "uni-directional", that is, starting from the appointment of the general manager, the artistic director is firmly in charge and influences the entire operations of the organisation (Yukl 2002, p. 431)

In contrast, the general manager is there to serve – to serve the art and to serve the artistic leader. Their role is to keep the machinery of the organisation functioning so as to enable the artist to maintain a single vision, without being distracted by the day-to-day matters of "housekeeping". The general manager carries out activities that are often associated as being "feminine", namely "listening, collaborating, nurturing and behind-the-scenes peacemaking" (Meyerson & Ely 2003, p. 134) as well as organising and book-keeping. In other words, it is

possible to conceive of this job demarcation between artistic director and general manager as being gendered: the artistic director's role requiring skills and behaviors that we might deem "masculine" and the general manager of performing functions and roles that we might consider "feminine". We should emphasize that we use the terms of "masculine" and "feminine" not to attribute these to a particular sex but with reference to the literature which demonstrates the way in which characteristics, behaviors and job functions are frequently described in terms of gender (see Billing and Alvesson 2000, pp. 152–54).

The popular framing of co-leadership as a type of marriage further encourages one to regard the respective roles and competencies of each partner as being complementary= and hence different – an assumption that we address in the following section.

### ***Co-partnership as marriage***

Miles and Watkins' attributes of successful complementary teams, namely common vision, common incentives, communication and trust are apparent in the way in which our interviewees describe the nature of their relationship with their co-leader and with the organisation. The common vision is implicit in the way in which the general manager interviewees prioritise the needs of the artistic director, and in the ways in which the artistic directors speak of their commitment to the art as their driving motivation.

While Billing and Alverson (2000, p. 144) and others, have referred to the way in which leadership is frequently constructed in masculine terms, a framework which renders more intimate and familial interactions to the margins of management behaviors, the language of our interviewees was dominated by the emotions of "passion" and "love". This is consistent with the observation made by Fitzgibbon (2001, p. 32) that work relationships within the arts management literature "[call] on the concept of family or friendship or even love, dimensions on which the bulk of management literature is silent".

### ***A labour of love***

The notion that working in the arts is a labour of love is not unproblematic – but is nonetheless pervasive. Royseng's case study of the financial rescue of a Norwegian theatre company, emphasised the need to balance the purely business approach to solving the company's problems with ensuring the primacy of its artistic activities, the new manager stating that she believed that it was important for her to "love theatre" as well as be an effective business economist and to do otherwise would have "damaged the whole theatre" (Royseng 2008, p.44). Far from being at the boundaries of management practice, in these particular co-leadership relationships and within the arts workplace more generally, what might be considered to be more "feminine" values are at the center of workplace dynamics.

*You're working for love basically, so you actually have to enjoy what you doing.*  
[GM7]

*I think the motivating force is a general love of [name of organisation].* [GM6]

*The passion that one has for the form spills over into the dynamics between the employees: I can't work with anyone I don't love in this business. If I'm not in love with my artistic director I can't do it. And so there is automatically a relationship that is deeply personal and deeply respectful.* [GM 5]

Beyond this common vision interviewees would, without prompting, emphasise their absolute trust in the other.

### **Communication**

Equally strong is the way in which communication between the co-leaders is described as being almost intuitive. In this way, we might see successful co-leadership as avoiding the problem that Bennis (1997) suggests is inherent in structures that rely on two or three part leadership or “distributed leadership”, namely that it leads to increasingly bureaucratic processes. In fact, in the relationships that we explore, there appears to be a minimum degree of bureaucracy in the dynamic between the current leaders, a situation that arises from an implicit understanding of each other. Arts organisations are unlikely to develop rigid bureaucratic structures. This is principally because of the way in which the organisation will inevitably change as the artistic leadership changes hands and, along with it, the general manager. The notion that the arts industry consists of flexible modes of organisation is borne out by the dynamics described between partners in each of the co-leadership examples studied. The negotiation of relationships is a fundamental element of the arts industry:

*each one of the productions is an organism and there is a new set of interesting personalities that arise within an organism and so the relationship of the senior executives to each of the groups of playwrights is different every time. [GM 1]*

There appears to be a heightened awareness of the importance of communication and interpersonal dynamics so much so that, in a number of circumstances, the co-leaders offered information as to what personality type they are (for example, using a Myer Briggs framework), and appear to have a sophisticated analysis of the way in which their communication operates.

This flexibility and informality is also evident in the type of communication that happens between the two leaders and there was a very strong emphasis on informal communication. This would, in some cases, contrast to the way in which they communicated with other workers within the organisation:

*It's informal simply because a structure wouldn't ever work. [GM 4]*

*Most of that communication just takes place without making meetings. He might say what you doing for lunch, let's have a coffee and we'll talk about a few things. [AD 3, p. 6]*

*We have a lot of coffees – which sounds big wanky but it's actually good to get out of an office environment and discuss particular issues. [GM 8, p. 8]*

*He rings me every lunchtime. ... and then maybe once a week we'll see each other in the evening. Or half a day on the weekend. ... Because we discuss everything. [GM 5, p. 9]*

While it is tempting to pursue the metaphor of marriage, to do so would bring on a debate about traditional roles and traditional values. For while the image of marriage came up time and time again, it was to a thoroughly reconstructed model of marriage that the interviewees referred:

*I don't think that gender really plays a part in it – it might provide a convenient psychological paradigm for the rest of the company who might like to refer to “mum and dad”, but in the theatre of course one could have same-sex parents and it wouldn't be that surprising. [GM 2]*

*We know each other. We know each other's nuances. We also know which buttons to ... it's a very respectful relationship because we know how to take each other and what buttons not to push. And that's not about being all sweetness and light but it's about understanding each other and the commonality of goals. [GM 8]*

### **A very modern marriage**

References to marriage were in terms of identifying the qualities of a successful relationship, rather than to a gendered hetero-normative model of partnering:

*We respected each other and I think you have a responsibility to be quite careful with each other but that's just being grown up – like being married. [AD 3]*

*So clearly I think the analogy is more in terms of the successful negotiation between two human beings, marriage is a reflection of the sort of intensity of the kind of relationship that arises in these jobs... [GM 2]*

Although the mum/dad metaphor might help explain the co-partnership model, it's a very modern marriage with a rupturing of “feminine” and “masculine” roles and functions from the biological sex of the person in the specific position. Nevertheless, the artistic director is often away from the office on a regular basis (in rehearsals) and not around for the day-to-day discussions and problem-solving while the general manager stays at home.

*...you end up being Mum and Dad in an organisation and I'm possibly the more nurturing, encouraging, more access to, ... and AD's much less effusive with his praise but when it comes, it's more important and meaningful. [GM 7]*

Our discussion has highlighted the distinctive characteristics of the respective roles of general manager and artistic director. It has not been our intention to test the validity of sex stereotypes in our research, and we have certainly not set out to reinforce them. In fact, while the metaphor of family, mother and father is pervasive within the language of the interviewees there is often a very self-aware approach to the fact that the terms are not intended in any essentialising manner. Indeed many of our interviewees actively sought to disassociate themselves from any sex-based stereotypes.

### **Girly girls and blokey blokes: blokey/girly people**

The performing arts industry itself has a relatively healthy balance of male and female employees. In 2006 women made up 43% of the total number of employees in the categories of “music and theatre productions” and “performing arts venues”, and 46% of the total employed in all cultural occupations were women (ABS 2006, p. 9). This is in contrast to the many areas of industry which are predominantly female, for example health care, education and retail, or predominantly male for example manufacturing, construction and transport (ABS 2008, para 59 u.p.). It is possible that the presence of strong female role models and non-stereotyped male

role models in one's career may also discourage a sense of gender specific skills and attributes. Two of the men that we interviewed offered examples of having had significant experience of working with women as peers, an experience that may be enriched and reinforced by the very flat structures of arts organisations:

*I was also infinitely fortunate to have [a woman] as my first artistic director. She had basically been given the job of putting the company back on its feet. [GM 5, p.1]*

*In contemporary [art form], particularly in Australia there's this whole range of really strong women who had set the thing up and there was this really strong struggle for gender balance. And we still have gender balance in the show. [AD 6, p. 7]*

As Pringle (2008) has suggested, much of the literature on gender and the work place is actually heterogendered – it imposes a model of gender drawn from a heteronormative framework. We may have set out with a similarly heteronormative framework, encouraged by the descriptions of theatre companies as “families” and sought to find a distinct division of tasks along a male and female divide, often associated with the transference of domestic divisions into the workplace.

As evidenced by the quote above referring to same sex parenting, which reminded us that families are not restricted to the male and female mum and dad, many of our interviewees rejected gender stereotypes. While the terms “mum and dad” or “parents” were used, women did not necessarily consider themselves to be the “mother”, or even the “mothering” type – in contradiction with a gendered approach to the role of general manager as being the organising, administrating, facilitating and relationship builder. *I don't think that [...] is a really blokey bloke or that I'm a really girly girl. [GM 7]*

The intelligent, well-educated women under discussion may choose to work in arts organisations because of the nature of the people they are likely to work with, as well as having a passion for the output. Men who choose to work in arts organisations aren't necessarily people who are chasing power or money, and the men that women get to work with are more likely to be collegial rather than competitive:

*I guess you'd say that they're fairly ideologically sound men or politically reconstructed men or feminist men or what have you. [GM 6]*

Many of the men whom we've interviewed to date either describe themselves, or are described, in words that imply that they are pro-feminist. For example:

*I consider myself to be a fairly reconstructed man. [GM 1]*

*He's calm and collaborative and he likes everyone to be happy. [AD 2]*

Marshall has used the following terms to describe male leadership values: selfassertion, separation, independence, control, competition, focused perception, rationality, analysis (Marshall, 1993). While some of these could be considered values of performing artists (self-assertion, focused perception); and others the necessary requirements of management (rationality, analysis), it also appeared that a number of the values aren't so important or don't

carry as much weight within a performing arts organisation. Male artistic directors would consistently acknowledge the analytical skill set of female general managers but did not classify these skills as masculine. In fact, they are more likely to see the range of skills required by a general manager to be generalist and therefore perhaps “feminine” compared to the single-mindedness of the artist. But even the artist’s single-mindedness must be tempered by the reality of functioning in a sector which is financially stretched. While artistic directors were happy for the general manager to carry the burden of this, they were nonetheless resigned to the fact that they were not pursuing unconstrained creativity.

### **Conclusion**

The key issues that we have addressed in this paper are whether co-leadership in the arts industries appears to replicate that which is described in the management literature, whether the roles of artistic director and general manager are gendered, and the ways in which sex and gender, love and marriage are manifested in the leadership structures of the organisations studied.

The initial descriptions of the activities and functions identified by the artistic directors and general managers suggest that these roles are very different. However, these differences do not appear to have produced the “organisational schizophrenia” (between the artistic and administrative sides of the company) alluded to by Fitzgibbon (2001, p. 70) at the level of the organisation’s leadership. Our interviews have only focused on relationships at the peak of the organisation, so it is not possible to state that this holds for all levels within the organisation; however the lack of overly hierarchical structures within arts organisations could lessen the likelihood of such divisions arising.

The interviews also suggest that the binaries of masculine and feminine qualities are absent in the way the interviewees discussed their co-leadership arrangements. This is not to say that the interviewees were not aware of the manner in which attributes are assigned to each gender, but rather revealed a level of self-awareness and knowingness around questions of gender. Billing and Alverson (2000, p. 148) note that there is a wealth of literature that supports the view that at heart there is little difference in management style between men and women, with both sharing similar aspirations, values, personality traits and behaviours. However this literature also notes that in leadership positions the attributes, skills and behaviour that both men and women exhibit remain “masculine” and a number of our interviewees described their management strengths with words that fit within a more masculine management set.

Equally there are characteristics of the way in which artistic activity takes place that militate against the singular heroic vision. Based on our analysis so far it would appear to be the case that the environment within which these co-leadership roles are exercised has influenced the particular models adopted and the dynamics between the co-leaders. The environment may also be the explanation as to why the participants failed to identify specific gender dynamics in their experience of co-leadership. Some respondents referred to influential role models of either sex in their career development and in future research it would be useful to examine in more detail the degree of sex segmentation in the arts labour force at a variety of levels and across the different art forms.

The companies that we examined are performing arts companies in which teamwork is more important than separation or competition. Control in the sense of financial constraints is

balanced by the requirement to be free for creativity to flourish. Even when competing for government grants or corporate sponsorship or donors or audiences, performing arts organisations are more likely to cooperate and share information and resources. Perhaps the nature of the non-profit performing arts industry requires a less gendered set of underlying leadership values if these mutually advantageous relationships are to be maintained.

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## **NETTA YASCHIN**

1. are women supporting other women in the industry?

2. what is the current model of the successful Australian woman and should that image remain the same?
3. what effect gay (male and female) leadership has on the employment of women?
4. do women possess the "male strategic mobility"? as the system currently is built on male dominated skills.
5. how does the Australia Council going to monitor the damaged image that assessment panels have over Australian female leadership in the arts?
6. should Male leaders in the Arts apologize to women for Sexism and chauvinism?
6. should artistic directors report to the Council on the artists that approached them with a pitch into a season? should they report to the Australia Council what their considerations were in choosing a specific Director for a Job? should the Council cut off their budget if they refuse to demonstrate transparency?

### **YWCA Adelaide**

5 May 2010

To the Major Performing Arts and Theatre Boards Board

Australia Council

Company B Belvoir

YWCA of Adelaide submission in response to Women Theatre Directors: Action Planning Forum

YWCA of Adelaide is the leading voice for young women in South Australia, a non profit organisation

delivering advocacy, support, empowerment and leadership opportunities for young women under 30 through services, programs and campaigns.

Vitalstatistix Theatre Company has informed YWCA of Adelaide about the Women Theatre Directors

Forum and we extend our congratulations to all parties involved that time, energy, funding and momentum is being directed to addressing the lack of leadership of women in the theatre sector.

We know from our consultations, campaigns, program work and service delivery that women's leadership – across all sectors - is a key concern for young women. At our 2010 International Women's Day stall in the city Mall, when we asked people what their vision for women is in 2020, equal pay and paid parental leave featured highly, as did comments such as these:

- That we have not just equal opportunities, but equal outcomes; and that women who demand equality are not mocked or belittled but supported by a more progressive society
- All women have equal access and all social barriers removed
- Equality for women in the workforce

YWCA of Adelaide's three policy priorities, as determined by young women, are violence against women and girls, self image, and gender role stereotypes. Gender stereotypes begin before birth if the sex of a baby is known, and gender roles are learned and reinforced by families, friends, schools, media, literature, art, laws, institutions and workplaces.

We know that when women are in decision-making roles in creative pursuits that this influences the representation of women in the final performance or product. Martha Lauzen, a Professor at San Diego State University who annually reports on the representation of women working on and behind the scenes in Hollywood has said: "When women have more powerful roles in the making of a movie or TV show, we know that we also get more powerful female characters on-screen, women who are more real and more multi-dimensional."

At the Cannes Film Festival in France in 2007, New Zealand Director Jane Campion was honoured on stage alongside 30 other major directors. She was the only woman on stage. "I think it's just the way the world is," says Campion. "That men control the money, and they decide who they're going to give it to." Then Chief Executive of Women in Film and Television UK, Jane Cussons, said: "I don't think it's because women are discriminated against deliberately, but it's always been assumed that when you get out there on the set, the director's the boss. And people still find it a little difficult to accept women as being the boss."

While the above examples relate to cinema, when we consider the incredibly transformative power of theatre, and the director as boss, the above comments could reasonably be interpreted to also apply to the stage.

Achieving and increasing women's leadership requires several strategies and could include:

- Challenging gender role stereotypes
- Setting quotas
- Establishing a mentoring program

Challenging gender role stereotypes

The starting point of challenging gender role stereotypes is often a shift in attitude. It also requires a change in language that people use (how often do you hear a group of women being addressed "hi guys".) It demands a level of critical media literacy, and making personal choices. It is about the clothes that people buy for their children and the media they choose to consume. In the case of the theatre, it can be the script that is chosen for development, or the play that is chosen to be performed, the colours used in marketing material, and the gender of those chosen to play roles behind and on stage.

Setting quotas

The South Australian Government's State Strategic Plan, launched in 2004, set a target of 50% of women on government Boards and Committees. They hoped to achieve this by 2008, and while the percentage of women on government Boards and Committees in April 2009 was 44.78%, this is a significant increase from the January 2004 figure of 33.62%. Progress has been made

through initiatives such as awarenessraising; promotion; collaboration with government and non government agencies; and creating the Premier's Women's Directory which is an online resource of skilled women available for board and committee appointments.

#### Mentoring program

One example of our work is the Two Degrees of Separation (2DS) mentoring program. This was developed following a Forum with young Adelaide woman who identified three things they felt were essential to becoming better leaders: confidence, experience, and mentoring. The 2DS program consists of regular Café Sessions where successful women share their experiences with young women; and one to one mentor matches where mentors and mentees meet weekly for a year.

Feedback from 2DS participants include:

"I have developed networks that I will definitely connect with in the future. My self-confidence has

increased through being a part of the cafe sessions. I have learnt new skills and been inspired by many of the women I have met."

"During the first session, I realised that other women were facing the same problems I am - having

formal education but not knowing exactly what is expected of me in the workforce, not knowing how to prepare a career progression plan, a lack of female role models and difficulty discerning how assertive to be in the workplace."

"Through 2DS, I have vastly expanded my professional network and met a group of motivated, talented women who face the same difficulties in their careers that I do. Through my mentoring relationship, I have learned to better handle difficult situations in the workplace and my confidence in what I can achieve has improved."

YWCA of Adelaide wishes everyone involved in this Forum the very best. We hope that productive and practical outcomes are discovered and implemented.

Anne Bunning  
Chief Executive