

**Third Angel and Company Longevity:**  
Contemporary Theatre-making and practices of Collaboration,  
Collecting and Remembering

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#190203407

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
28 April 2023

University of Sheffield  
Faculty of Arts and Humanities  
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Word count: 79,168  
(excluding front matter, bibliography and footnotes)

## Abstract

The demands placed on makers of small-scale theatre in the UK are overwhelming: contemporary theatre makers must negotiate first, the challenge of company survival in a climate marked by a reliance on government subsidy and shifting socioeconomics; second, the impermanence of their medium: haunted by its ever-imminent 'disappearance'. This research examines when and how longevity in collaborative arts practice is achievable and the challenges, risks and values attached to extended participation in, and contribution to, the sector. These challenges, especially for smaller companies, demand the application of practices of resilience.

Sheffield-based theatre company Third Angel (1995-) exemplify longevity in the sector, among a proportionately small number of 'quadranscentennial' UK companies surpassing 25 years in action. Third Angel are a small company that consistently work with external collaborators, extending their reach and impact beyond their apparent size. Their work reveals an ethos of collection and reuse that echoes their collaborative tendencies, creating networks with people, objects and stories.

Where the artistic medium is inherently ephemeral, recording practices are central to preservation of a company's legacy. Through engagement with Third Angel's archive, the study examines the conflicts between the ephemerality of performance practice and the documents that uphold a company's legacy; this research argues that the risk of 'disappearance' can be subversively appropriated as a positive resource towards longevity. The archive provides insight into watershed moments in the lifetime of the company. Together with original interviews, observation of the company in action, and close readings of performances from Third Angel's repertoire, the archive makes evident collecting and remembering as central to compositional methods, artistic oeuvre and approaches to longevity and legacy. Through examining the interplay between Third Angel's specific practices of collaboration, collecting and remembering this doctorate presents case study research towards potential strategies for longevity in small-scale UK theatre practice.

## Acknowledgements

Firstly, this thesis wouldn't have been possible without the financial and developmental support from my funder, White Rose College of Arts and Humanities.

Nor would it have been possible without the expert and unwavering tutelage, diligence and detail provided by my supervisory team, Prof. Frances Babbage and Dr Yaron Shyldkrot.

Through the Collaborative Doctoral Award format, I was also very lucky to count Dr Alexander Kelly (Third Angel and Leeds Beckett) as my external supervisor, whose artistic and academic insights are felt so keenly throughout this thesis.

This project was conducted throughout a particularly complicated period, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Both WRoCAH and my supervisory team were incredibly understanding of the challenges this posed.

Of course, a PhD about Third Angel couldn't have happened without Rachael Walton and the team, with whom I shared many cups of tea: Hilary Foster, Laura Holmes, Stacey Sampson, Sam Turner and Jon Fry.

I also want to thank my academic mentor Noha Bayoumy for her pastoral support, and to one of my departmental predecessors Dr Kirsty Surgey for her invaluable advice.

This work also reflects on some of Third Angel's contemporaries, some of whom generously lent me their time and expertise: Jon Spooner, James Yarker, Graeme Rose and Deb Chadbourn. I owe particular praise to Raquel Castro and Paula Diogo for welcoming me in Lisbon, and for their kindness and hospitality.

A massive thank-you goes out to the School of English PhD team, in particular Floor 5, for your friendship through a turbulent three years.

Last but not least, to my biggest supporter, advisor and confidante, Lora Krasteva for believing in me and inspiring me every day.

## Author's Declaration

This Doctorate was funded by the White Rose College of Arts and Humanities. This thesis is the result of a tripartite Collaborative Doctoral Award between Rob Fellman, University of Sheffield and Third Angel performance company. The project was originally proposed to the White Rose College of Arts and Humanities by University of Sheffield and Third Angel. Rob Fellman was awarded the post in autumn 2019.

I (Rob Fellman) declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Sheffield. The work is original except where indicated by reference in the text and no part of the thesis has been submitted for any other degree. Research Ethics procedures have been upheld, and all interview participants permitted their inclusion in this thesis.

Part of the content of Chapter 5: Collecting and Legacy also appears in a published article by the candidate: (2021) Backpages 31.3, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 31:3, 364-379, DOI: 10.1080/10486801.2021.1935026.

The appendix also includes a Context Timeline, Extract of Archive Collection Catalogue, and full Transcripts of Interviews. All are the author's own, and permissions are held by the author where applicable.

Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Sheffield, or Third Angel unless directly referenced. Some views were obtained via personal communication, and these are referenced as such. The dissertation has not been presented to any other University for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

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# Preface

I have had a personal interest in theatre since a very young age, performing in my first show at age 6 at the local village hall (I played a baby). This experience was the first of many that has led to an enduring relationship with the arts, as a performer, writer, director, and as a venue management professional. Following my undergraduate degree in Drama, I set up a small theatre company with a group of fellow graduates (2011). We ultimately fed into the statistics and failed to survive beyond our debut performance (2012), despite having set out a three-year plan. In truth, the sector was not all that unkind; we had support from a venue in the form of rehearsal space, and mentorship from its Artistic Director; however, even with this assistance, funding became our early barrier. In addition, though hard to admit in hindsight, our naivety as to the financial and logistical hardships we would face posed another stumbling block, not to mention the strains this placed on our collaborative relationship. My interest and investment in this PhD comes out of that experience, alongside a desire to appreciate and document the longevity of Third Angel, a company who, despite facing many of the same odds (albeit at a different time), have built a 28-year portfolio. I am driven to write the thesis I would have loved to read as a twenty-something emerging practitioner, one that would map the context of the sector and its relationship to funding, whilst simultaneously showing that the core artistic practices of a company need not be separated from its organisational workings.

# Introduction: 'At the start of a journey'

We didn't think we were setting up a company, we just had this idea for a show that we thought had legs.<sup>1</sup>

Third Angel are a Sheffield-based (UK) theatre company (1995-) founded by its two co-artistic directors, Rachael Walton and Alex Kelly. In order to trace the longevity of the company, it is pertinent to acknowledge their methodological beginnings:

In 1995 we were doing an MA in Film and TV in Sheffield (Alex) and a PGCE in drama in Manchester (Rachael). We had both been talking to different people about making work together but were both still thinking that there were other collaborations to explore at the same time.<sup>2</sup>

The two had met at Lancaster University, on the BA Drama programme. Beyond their performance education, their postgraduate experiences in pedagogy and film editing respectively influenced their early work. I recognise the correlations between filmic and performance composition, in particular, that has its earliest origins in their debut project, when the impact of film on Walton and Kelly's creative psyche was arguably at its most prominent:

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<sup>1</sup> Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: Twenty Years Ago Today...'.  
<<https://thirdangeluk.blogspot.com/2015/10/twenty-years-ago-today.html>> [accessed 20 January 2023].

<sup>2</sup> Third Angel, 'Testcard | Third Angel' <<https://thirdangel.co.uk/shows-projects/testcard>> [accessed 20 January 2023].

Seemingly off the top of her head Rachael said, 'Well, I've got this idea for a performance that lasts 72 hours, where two people live in separate rooms in a gallery or a public building, and the audience have to choose who they watch'.<sup>3</sup>

Walton proposed that the performers would watch TVs, showing the news, pre-recorded footage, live video of one another, and of the audience. By the company's own account, she suggested that the audience could watch them live during the day, and at night via monitors and through the gallery windows:

'The woman probably takes polaroids of the audience. It's kind of about voyeurism and the male gaze.'

'And perhaps about CCTV and surveillance?' Alex suggested, as he was reading Living Marxism a lot at the time.<sup>4</sup>

Walton and Kelly reached out to Deborah Chadbourn, then General Manager of fellow Sheffield-based company, Forced Entertainment, for advice on how to approach writing a project proposal.

The project, then-titled *Sleeping Partners*, did not get commissioned by the Arts Council.<sup>5</sup> As Walton and Kelly remember, they mounted their own campaign, for favours and backing, eventually winning a small grant from Sheffield City Council, equipment and technical support from Northern Media School, and 'trust and respect' from Sheffield venue, The Workstation.<sup>6</sup> Thus, despite the initial Arts Council funding setback, Walton and Kelly summoned their own 'self-belief' and forged ahead with their project:

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<sup>3</sup> Third Angel, 'Testcard | Third Angel' <<https://thirdangel.co.uk/shows-projects/testcard>> [accessed 20 January 2023].

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

[W]e liked the idea, and decided to make the work anyway. We adopted the company name Third Angel and we called the piece *Testcard*.<sup>7</sup>

From making the work with less funding and equipment than budgeted for, Third Angel's *Testcard*, as they recall, went on to catch the 'zeitgeist', appearing on page 5 of *The Guardian* newspaper as part of a local news piece about the nature of art. The company had speculatively sent a press release to the newspaper, and a photographer from their Manchester office attended the performance. Happening at a similar time to a performance art project in London involving Tilda Swinton inside a large glass vitrine, *Testcard's* design and artistic proposition had unwittingly tapped into a current hot topic of the objectification of the human condition. This serendipitous moment earned the company national recognition and kudos for their first project.<sup>8</sup> The company not only surmounted their initial setbacks but, according to their self-reflective narrative, saw a path towards their evolution:

Once it was over we knew we would make something else. We knew we wanted to make exciting work that would reach people nationally as well as locally. We knew we were at the start of [a] journey, but we didn't have a clue where we were going, or how long it was going to take to get there.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Third Angel, 'Testcard | Third Angel' <<https://thirdangel.co.uk/shows-projects/testcard>> [accessed 20 January 2023].

<sup>8</sup> Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: Monthly Film: TESTCARD POLAROIDS'. <<https://thirdangeluk.blogspot.com/2014/06/monthly-film-testcard-polaroids.html>> [accessed 20 January 2023]; Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: Twenty Years Ago Today...'. <<https://thirdangeluk.blogspot.com/2015/10/twenty-years-ago-today.html>> [accessed 20 January 2023].

<sup>9</sup> Third Angel, 'Testcard | Third Angel'.

The average age of a UK company at the end of March 2022 was 8.6 years old.<sup>10</sup> Despite fluctuations in recent years, that average has dropped noticeably from 10.7 years in March 2000. This statistic indicates issues with long-term strategy, a more challenging environment, or a combination of both.<sup>11</sup> These statistics apply to the business realm more generally, and do not even begin to consider the breakdown of those small businesses by sector. The survival rate of UK arts companies may indeed be much lower than the national average. The demands placed on makers of small-scale theatre in the UK are overwhelming: contemporary theatre makers must negotiate first, the challenge of company survival in a climate marked by a reliance on government subsidy and shifting socioeconomics; second, the impermanence of their medium, haunted by its imminent 'disappearance'. This thesis examines when and how longevity in collaborative arts practice is achievable, and the challenges, risks and values attached to such extended participation in, and contribution to, the sector.

This thesis argues that theatre companies strive to be resilient, adaptable and resourceful in both their working practices and resulting artistic outputs, against a backdrop of highly competitive sector funding that also reveals a London-centric bias. Theatre companies further removed from the central influence of the capital's arts scene must operate on the periphery of the national consciousness. The peripheral is often overlooked, an inequity this thesis seeks to help redress.<sup>12</sup> These challenges, especially

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<sup>10</sup> '81 UK Small Business Statistics (Updated 2023)' <<https://www.business4beginners.co.uk/uk-small-business-statistics/>> [accessed 5 March 2023].

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.; 'How Many UK Businesses Fail in 1st Year? Startup Statistics 2022'. <<https://www.resolvefinancial.co.uk/startup-failure-statistics/>> [accessed 5 March 2023].

<sup>12</sup> Ricky Lawton et al, 'Arts Council England: Regional Galleries and Theatres Benefit Transfer Report'. 2021, p.6; Paul Woolf, 'Update from Our CEO: 26 JUN - Kings Theatre Portsmouth', 2021.

for smaller companies, demand the application of practices of resilience required by, and to an extent relative to, their geographical distance from the capital. Even though many companies tour nationally, regional companies are disadvantaged from their outset, and are concurrently more reliant on touring mechanisms to extend their audience reach. Equally, dependence on venues and sector support organisations in the cities becomes both critical and restrictive for regional touring companies. Third Angel exemplify longevity in the sector as a regional organisation, one of a proportionately small number of 'quadranscentennial' performance companies in the UK, surpassing 25 years in action. Third Angel were, at the time of writing, in their 28th year; in part due to a withdrawal of national funding announced in autumn 2022, the company decided to cease operating by the end of the summer 2023. As the company turned more keenly toward questions of their legacy, their relationship to their past repertoire and the archival collection they have amassed becomes paramount in defining their contributions to the UK arts landscape.

This thesis argues that for Third Angel, and potentially for other comparable companies, the risk of 'disappearance' can be subversively appropriated as a positive resource towards artistic and collaborative longevity. Longevity is a term not often employed in performance studies discourse. Its central role in this thesis bridges the gap between the 'resilience' identified by arts policy operatives and the 'precarity' observed by economists and arts academics. The vast majority of longevity discourse is centred around the life sciences, healthcare, business and politics. Through this thesis I

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<<https://www.kingsportsmouth.co.uk/update-from-our-ceo-26-jun/>> [accessed 30 December 2023]; Rachel Claire Walker, *The Forgotten Pioneers: The Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent (1962-1971)*, 2021, p.130-1.

investigate the possibilities for such longevity in the UK arts sector. I define 'longevity' as an overarching term for the abilities and conditions that contribute to continuity, often in the face of adversity and threats of decay, demise, and decease. Longevity shares traits with concepts of 'resilience', 'sustainability' and 'survival', and I suggest it has multiple strands that closely align with and encapsulate all three. First, longevity is not a synonym for eternal life, rather it is a measure of duration. Longevity, as I define it, refers to the duration of existence, though is generally an unmeasured duration that cannot be fully quantified, except in retrospect. Third Angel's longevity is retrospectively quantified as a 28-year history. Third Angel are a small company that have consistently worked with external collaborators, extending their reach and impact beyond their apparent size, and operating above the average company lifespan. Their labour reveals an ethos of collection and reuse that echoes their collaborative tendencies, creating networks with people, objects and stories.

Second, in the case of still-active companies, longevity can also refer to a present and near-future resilience, sustainability and survivability; a history and established methodology is loosely defined as a company longevity that also indicates a higher-than-average potential for further continuation into the future. Third Angel's work actively engages with the past by making objects and stories—collected through collaborative practices of remembering and recollection—'live' in the present; their past performance works are revitalised by recreation in new and divergent forms. In contrast to this mode of longevity, the concept of survival as a standalone term tends to be negatively inflected, and is often reactive, a process of continuation based on avoiding identified adverse outcomes (such as harm, or even death).



Thirdly then, longevity is (by my application) positively charged and is often aspirational, as an aiming-toward; it is not quite about seeking the best possible outcome of an uncertain future, but rather an equilibrium and continuation that is already in motion, and which requires one eye on the horizon. Third Angel's embedded reflectivity has been key, I propose, in both producing and understanding the phenomenon of their longevity. Through examining the interplay between Third Angel's specific practices of collaboration, collecting and remembering this doctorate presents case study research towards potential strategies for longevity in small-scale UK theatre practice.

## Research Overview

Central to this thesis is a line of enquiry into the conditions that have contributed to the longevity of Third Angel, a company who have been a significant contributor to contemporary theatre in the UK since their establishment in 1995. The scope of contemporary theatre in this thesis refers to the 1990s onwards. Whilst its origins are located earlier, I have opted to begin at the decade in which Third Angel first emerged in defining my temporal parameters. Reference is made to the periods (and 'generations' of theatre makers) that preceded this timeframe where it supports the study (and a more complete definition of 'contemporary theatre making' is established later in this introduction). Of particular focus to my central enquiry are the company's recurrent practices of collecting and remembering, that span their artistic repertoire and their wider organisational methods. These practices are supported by the very definition of Third Angel as a collaborative group (both in terms of its members and its partners) and the ways in which this constitutes the company both structurally and methodologically.

My research is primarily framed within performance studies, with a secondary emphasis on arts policy. To support these fields, I also employ terms corresponding with wider discourse: precarity and economy, drawn from socio-politics and economics; longevity and vitality, largely used in arenas of healthcare and economics; time and repetition, situated in philosophical and phenomenological debates. The overarching objective of this work is to present arguments that support optimal strategies for longevity in small-scale UK contemporary performance practice, especially in regional and/or touring contexts, as revealed through a close case study analysis of Third Angel's 28-year example.

## Research Contribution

It is in the interdisciplinary nature of this thesis that I locate its strongest contribution to new knowledge: in this study I synthesise terms and theories from an array of wider fields to support the analysis of the conditions for longevity in arts practice. Existing research in academic fields is brought into dialogue with arts policy reports, exposing the limitations of both: terms such as 'resilience' and 'sustainability' and the interconnected 'surviving', 'striving' and 'thriving' all appear within UK Arts Council reports<sup>13</sup> yet rarely acknowledge the condition of precarity that is widely recognised in academic discourse as inherent to artistic labour.<sup>14</sup> Equally, academic discourse proliferates theoretical considerations that are often removed from the context of the real-terms activity and policy that shapes the practice in question. These disparities have been amplified further in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns (2020-21), which saw arts organisations suffer financially: the public were unable to attend live events, performance venues closed, and itinerant hourly-wage (freelance) arts sector workers were without jobs. In this context, arts organisations became more reliant on the state funds to cover their loss

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<sup>13</sup> Sophia Woodley et al, 'What Is Resilience Anyway?: A Review (Commissioned by Arts Council England)', 2018; Arts Council of Wales, 'Strive to Excel...' A Quality Framework for Developing and Sustaining the Arts in Wales, 2015; ACE Draft Strategy: Shaping the Next 10 Years, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Paula Serafini and Mark Banks, 'Living Precarious Lives? Time and Temporality in Visual Arts Careers', *Culture Unbound*, 12.2 (2020), 351–72; Alison Bain and Heather McLean, 'The Artistic Precariat', *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 6.1 (2013), 93–111.

in income (at the time termed 'rescue' packages by the UK government<sup>15</sup>), through which the precarity of the sector was made increasingly evident. The timing of this thesis is also made more pertinent as its research period (autumn 2019 to spring 2023) spanned the pandemic crisis and was completed in its aftermath.

The second significant contribution of this thesis is in synthesising artistic and organisational modes of working, presenting both as inseparable to the context of Third Angel and comparable companies. Two prominent examples from wider literature that have influenced this aspect of my thesis are: firstly, academic and theatre-maker Paul Clarke's doctoral thesis *Collaborative Performance Systems* (2001), that presents an argument for considering the various complex systems that contribute to the syncretic workings of a performance company, and second, Karen Savage and Dominic Symmonds' book *Economies of Collaboration in Performance* (2018) that utilises economics and the natural world as seemingly oppositional dichotomies to expose novel arguments about the effectiveness of collaboration in performance. Both contributions to the field are drawn on substantially in this thesis and are applied to the specific case of Third Angel (with broader reference to their contemporaries) in reconciling the systems of operation described by Clarke, Savage and Symmonds with the unique threats, challenges and precarities encountered during Third Angel's 28-year practice. Furthermore, at the outset of this doctoral project Third Angel anticipated that its contribution would also lie in how the 'research focus on creativity, history and longevity will inform the ways in which we (as "older" artists) anticipate and, to an extent, construct

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<sup>15</sup> DCMS, 'DCMS Press Release 5th July 2020', 2020 <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/157-billion-investment-to-protect-britains-world-class-cultural-arts-and-heritage-institutions>> [accessed 25 April 2023].

Third Angel's legacy'.<sup>16</sup> I would add that this thesis has potential to inform other companies, established or emerging, and to empower their own approach toward a possible methodology of longevity.

## **Methodology**

My personal background combines creative and organisational experience. I have been a founding member of a small-scale theatre company and have worked as both a performer and management-level professional in cultural venues in the UK. This experience includes, most recently, a position as Business Development Manager for a leading arts centre in South-East London. Much of my personal exposure to the sector has revolved around reconciling the importance of creative and artistic work, meeting charitable aims and community interests with the overarching (and necessary) operations of an organisation economically bound within a capitalist Western-European nation.

In part due to my existing perspectives on the sector, the format of this PhD project was of paramount importance to my own interest in the subject matter, and indeed to my candidacy. This thesis is the product of a collaborative doctoral award (CDA), for which I obtained unique access to the work of Third Angel and its members; the CDA approach positions researchers alongside partner organisations with the aim of producing mutually beneficial outcomes. Through this relationship, this thesis has been greatly informed by my observations as an embedded researcher-in-residence within the

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<sup>16</sup> Original project funding proposal (unpublished).

company, both of their day-to-day office work, in the studio and other external settings. During the course of my research, for example, I attended two mentoring sessions, in which Third Angel were mentors to fledgling company The Six Twenty and solo storyteller Irna Qureshi; I shadowed Alex Kelly in a visit to speak with students at Sheffield Hallam University (about the company's then-current practice); I visited mentee Raquel Castro and watched her perform in Lisbon (Portugal), where I also met with company collaborator Paola Diogo; I observed the company in rehearsal at Sheffield Theatres; I worked with the team weekly in the Third Angel office. Most centrally to my research methodology, I also spent a large amount of time at the outset of this project with Third Angel's archive (or as archivists term it, their collection). This involved setting up a working base in their rented garage space, where I catalogued and organised their collection—a sum total of 206 unique entries and 271 total items—into large archive boxes, numbered and stored on correspondingly-labelled shelving racks (barring some boxes of personal notebooks, photographic materials and larger physical objects). This process enabled my immersion in the tangible history of the company, and led me to develop a catalogue and finding-aid—an extract of which can be found in Appendix B—enabling me to access items throughout my research as well as to establish a working system for future visitors.<sup>17</sup> In spring 2023 parts of the collection were accessioned by University of Bristol Theatre Collection, with the aid of this catalogue. My engagement with the archival collection informs this thesis throughout: in particular, it helps reveal and illustrate the conflicts I uncovered between the ephemerality of performance practice

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<sup>17</sup> I had acquired the necessary skills during my time studying archival practices as part of a Masters degree, through mentorship from archive professionals, and my membership with the Association of Performing Arts Collections (APAC).

and the 'records'—documents and archives—that seek to uphold a company's legacy. The contents of the archive provide insight into watershed moments in the lifetime of the company and the contributions of its collaborators, which I draw upon in this thesis to present observations around both artistic works and company longevity.

The CDA project outline was originally developed between Third Angel and the University of Sheffield and was accepted for funding by the White Rose College of Arts and Humanities (WRoCAH), itself a collaborative consortium of three universities (York, Leeds and Sheffield). I developed this initial project outline by narrowing its scope, shortlisting the key research questions posed by the outline, and shaping these lines of enquiry based on my research interests and existing expertise. I opted to lead with the archival research, to underpin my understanding of the company's career to date, with closer observation planned thereafter. The interruption posed by the Covid-19 lockdowns in 2020-21 instigated a shift towards deeper theoretical research and more time spent with the archive, to counteract the loss in contact time with the company. This inevitably results in a thesis more heavily informed by archival findings and pre-recorded materials than on the observations of 'live' practice. However, opportunities arose from this shift, as the prominence of archival 'reading' in the methodology framed my enquiries theoretically and expanded the findings beyond a more exclusive focus on Third Angel. Alex Kelly, co-artistic director of Third Angel, acted as the external supervisor during this research process, and as such was the primary contact for research-related queries within the company. Whilst effort has been taken to ensure the inclusion of diverse voices from Third Angel's core team and network of collaborators, Kelly's involvement in the process and his wider contributions to academic publishing inevitably results in his clearer positioning within this research than other members. Whilst this may pose a limitation of

the research, Kelly is also an academic (Leeds Beckett University) and has completed his own PhD (2018), meaning his understanding of the impartiality required in such projects has ensured that I have been able to inflect my own perspectives, arguments and voice clearly throughout, without bias.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, Walton and Kelly's perspectives from within the company are not defined by fixed positions: both alternate between performer and director in different projects. It should be noted that Walton acts as director, and Kelly performer, in the (five) case study examples of their projects across Chapters 2 and 3; Kelly writes and co-directs and Walton performs and co-directs in the primary case study of Chapter 5. Chapter 2 also includes a project by a mentee, Raquel Castro, who is not representative of the company, but rather of their network of influence. Ultimately, this thesis argues that Third Angel is more than the sum of its parts, as a product of artistic preferences, sensibilities and ethics. Similarly, the case studies I examine in this thesis have been selected in order to reveal commonalities and inferences from across their total portfolio, and to best support the development of my argument. In this thesis I also refer to recordings of performances I have reviewed in video format, as well as to performances unseen; I acknowledge the complexities this raises when examining 'live' events, but make no effort to conceal this. The very fact this type of documentation was central to my ability to complete this research project acts to reinforce arguments made, particularly in Chapter 5, regarding implications of 'collecting' practices for the legacy of performance companies, and their later influence on successive practitioners in their field.

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<sup>18</sup> Walton is also an experienced educator and has taught at numerous universities including University of Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam, Leeds Beckett, University of Hull at Scarborough and Warwick University, as well as at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, and Cuarta Pared, Madrid.



As part of my research, I also conducted a series of interviews between early-2020 and mid-2022 with other performance practitioners that form part of Third Angel's wider network: Raquel Castro (solo artist), James Yarker (Stan's Cafe), Jon Spooner (Unlimited Theatre), Graeme Rose (ex-Stan's Cafe, ex-The Resurrectionists and current Freelancer) and Deborah Chadbourn (ex-Forced Entertainment and ex-Artsadmin). The interview transcripts are referenced throughout the thesis and are included in full in Appendix C. In this way, while this doctoral project centres on Third Angel, my research addresses and selectively reflects the wider landscape of UK contemporary theatre and importantly provides a platform for voices and perspectives from the collaborative constellation that constitutes Third Angel's contemporaries, confidants and friends.<sup>19</sup> These original interviews, together with observation of the company in action, close readings of performances from Third Angel's repertoire, and personal interactions with collaborators and members, have given me unique insight into the organisational workings and artistic, collaborative and compositional methods that fortify their artistic oeuvre, and more broadly, their approach to longevity and legacy.

## **Key Research Questions**

My methodology was informed by a set of four central research questions:

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<sup>19</sup> Any further study into longevity in other areas of the arts sector, different time periods, or geographical focus would necessarily need to conduct further and wider interviews.

1. Firstly, I consider how the preoccupations, aesthetics, processes and mechanisms of a small-scale theatre company impacts their possible longevity in contemporary performance practice. I further explore to what extent the reverse is also true: how longevity in turn affects practice.

2. Secondly, as live performance (the artistic medium in question) is inherently ephemeral, I question what role recording practices play in how a company's legacy is preserved.

3. Thirdly, the research questions the types of relationships that exist between the information in Third Angel's archive and the knowledge held by both its members and collaborators, what types of knowledge are accumulated over time and how these are made manifest in working methods. I extend this enquiry to consider the legacy of the company and collaborators, to identify the extent to which one upholds the other.

4. Lastly, Third Angel's particular methodology of the collecting and retelling of stories is regarded in the light of their company longevity, and by extension, questions the relationship that exists between the repeatability of individual performance works and the longevity of the company repertoire.

These four key enquiries have guided my research. Early in the process I observed Walton's use of the term 'evergreen' to describe shows that seem 'timeless', projects that outlive their original intentions and remain vital and relevant. I encountered a comparable concept from the field of longevity-economics, coined by Andrew Scott, called the 'Evergreen Economy': the market for younger people that may come to value later life more than their predecessors, as the probability of their time alive is extended (through means of, for instance, preventative medicines and procedures, training courses

for future career changes, and pension plans). I saw in the aspiration of an 'evergreen' artwork Third Angel's own consideration of longevity as something that can exceed 'time' and, by extension, through which the artworks may exceed the company itself. In approaching my research questions, an initial hypothesis I established was how longevity as it relates to performance—particularly central to Research Questions 3 and 4—interconnects with that which is both ephemeral (made up of live events) and repeatable (events that usually recur). My research has since been informed by my appreciation of longevity as a distinctly *unmeasurable* state, considering it as an abstract tool for describing a diverse interplay of contradictions, tensions and antagonistic concepts. Considered in relation to Third Angel's inevitable end (which came sooner than I had anticipated), my research questions converge to produce an overall enquiry that demonstrates how acts of legacy-making revealed by their 'evergreen' practices have been part of their wider systems of artmaking, production and storytelling, and indeed how these intersect with economic contextual constraints.

Investigations surrounding the more immediate threats to the company's wellbeing have therefore also been addressed within the associated term 'precarity', which has attained revitalised focus as a current topic within performance studies following the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting national lockdowns.<sup>20</sup> In this thesis, when I refer to longevity, I also encapsulate, first, the role of precarity as its antithesis—a force that threatens to derail continuity—and second, of the threats represented by sets of co-

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<sup>20</sup> Maddy Costa and Andy Field, *Performance in an Age of Precarity: 40 Reflections* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2021); Thomas Fabian Eder, 'Threatened in the Making: Institutional Consolidation and Precariousness in the Independent Performing Arts in Europe', *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media*, 2023, 1–20; Laura Bissell and Lucy Weir, *Performance in a Pandemic* (Milton, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2021).

operative states, defined by antagonistic pairs: anticipation and doubt, hope and fear, risk and security. Chapter 1 includes a dedicated section that addresses precarity, risk and anticipation in detail. The concept of these co-operative states, as it applies to longevity, led me to consider a set of six 'paradoxes of longevity' collectively determined by Swiss thinktank 'W.I.R.E' (Web for Interdisciplinary Research and Expertise), writing from backgrounds in business, economics and socio-politics.<sup>21</sup> Whilst I do not directly address these paradoxes each in turn, I do examine the tensions that arise from some of their proposed pairings to enlighten my enquiry around my four key research questions. In particular, the concept of innovation in relation to survival is identified in Chapter 1; specialisation and diversification are reconciled in Chapter 2 (Memory and Retelling) in establishing a signature of Third Angel's practice that is also inherently adaptive; co-operation and demarcation are explored in Chapters 3 (Collaboration and Co-production) and 4 (Co-labour) in relation to the diverse systems of collaboration that intersect in their practice; a collective vision is central to the values I also identify in Chapters 3 and 4; preservation is addressed in Chapter 5 (Collecting and Legacy), in contrast to the moments of sacrifice that are identified throughout the thesis, as part of generative acts of renewal.

The longevity of collaborative practice in the case of Third Angel—central to Research Question 3—is attended to in Chapter 4, exposing its benefits: how the shared 'languages' of regular collaborators enable shortcuts in the studio—pertaining to Research Question 1—and is coincidentally a form of innovation (in economic terms) that saves time and money. Third Angel, as I demonstrate, have a shared working language

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<sup>21</sup> W.I.R.E. *Forever: On The Art Of Longevity*. p.21; 28; 40; 50; 59; 75.

that generated trust and in turn led to more creative risk-taking, and therefore moments of artistic emergence and revelation.<sup>22</sup> Outside of the company's studio practice, their longevity also aids the sector in the form of expertise passed down to mentees, laterally to their peers, and up the hierarchical chain to arts policymakers. There are other studies, however, briefly examined in Chapter 3, that suggest regular collaboration can, in fact, inhibit creativity and as a result even regular collaboration requires 'new blood' on occasion. This exemplifies another of W.I.R.E's hypotheses, that 'longevity combines contradictory elements'.<sup>23</sup> I propose that it is through the combination of contradictory elements, systems and relations that longevity's optimal conditions emerge.

## **Establishing Key Terms**

### I. Contemporary Theatre Making

As this thesis is concerned with longevity in the particular realm of 'contemporary theatre practice', it is pertinent to establish what is meant by this term. Chapter 1 applies this term in the wider context of the UK arts sector. I use the formation 'theatre making' in the title to this thesis, though this could equally be 'performance making'; I propose that 'theatre' is a sub-type of 'performance' more broadly, and contesting its term is part of

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<sup>22</sup> A graphic of which might look like this: Regular collaboration > Shared knowledge > Economical Practices > (biproduct = Trust) > Increased Risk-taking > Increased Creativity.

<sup>23</sup> W.I.R.E *Forever: On The Art Of Longevity*. p.89-93.

what defines its contemporaneity. I also draw attention to the way Walton positions

Third Angel in this debate:

For the first eighteen years, to a certain extent we chose not to use the word 'theatre': our title was 'Third Angel' – we weren't Third Angel Theatre Company. We didn't want the work that we created to be limited to that notion of 'theatre' and at that point we were restricting theatre to where it happened – the building. But recently we've decided to reclaim the word for us and say that we make theatre, because actually what we want to do is broaden the notion of what that is.<sup>24</sup>

Walton's argument for reappropriating the term 'theatre' has its echoes in the wider scholarship of theatre practice, to what has been cited in discourse as the 'performative turn'. In this watershed moment artists became increasingly engaged in making works that were not traditionally 'theatrical', as illusory events that obscure the conditions of their making (like hiding the scaffolding). With the 'performative turn' language, objects and constituent parts were given prominence and agency in their own right.<sup>25</sup> In Third Angel's particular style, their research is also often put on display; Kelly likens this to performances that 'show their working'.<sup>26</sup> The performative turn informed further delineation between 'theatre' and 'performance' in arts discourse that still resonates within the academy in the early 2020s.<sup>27</sup> As performer-freelancer Graeme Rose reflects:

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<sup>24</sup> Rachael Walton, 'Rachael Walton (Third Angel) – Essential Drama'

<<http://essentialdrama.com/practitioners/rachaelwalton-thirdangel/>> [accessed 10 June 2019].

<sup>25</sup> Carmela Cutugno, 'Interview with Rebecca Schneider', *Mantichora*, Dec.3 (2013), 160–67; Martina Leeker, Imanuel Schipper, and Timon Beyes, *Performing the Digital : Performance Studies and Performances in Digital Cultures*, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'Telling Life Stories: Autobiographical Performance in the Third Angel Repertoire' (Leeds Beckett University, 2018). p.ii.

<sup>27</sup> Many UK Universities operate Theatre and Performance departments, and in many cases 'Drama' courses have also switched to the more granular term 'Theatre and Performance'.

I was never very happy about performing in a bubble, you know, right from the early days of the National Review of Live Art in the late '80s, I was super conscious there was an 'art bubble', which was exciting to be part of, but also the dialectic that was opening up between performance and theatre at that time which made me feel slightly on edge, realising that there was a drive towards an ever-decreasing circle of interest.<sup>28</sup>

Echoing Rose's words Sandy Craig, writing in 1980, identified the 'alternative theatre' of her time as constituted—like the fragility of a bubble—by 'unclear and shifting' boundaries.<sup>29</sup> Third Angel talk of theatre as 'more than just plays'. Emerging from Third Angel's self-assessment and my own observations, the contemporary theatre arena, to which Third Angel are aligned, appears closer to the influence of '80s performance art and experimental theatre. I recognise some of the features that John Ashford associated with these practices including: 'emphasis on process rather than product', a renewed interest in 'collage' and 'juxtaposition', rejection of the authority of the writer, visual dominance (image-over-text), countering traditions of narrative and character, use of non-theatrical spaces and the use of 'multi-media' and inter-disciplinarity.<sup>30</sup> As with the 'paradoxes of longevity' cited in the previous section, these criteria are not explicitly adopted in the thesis, though the implicit influence of these practices from 1980s 'alternative theatre' is identified within my assessment of a 1990s contemporary theatre scene that continued to offer an alternative to mainstream forms of theatre. Chapter 1 (Contexts of Contemporary Theatre Making) maps out the established landscape of '90s theatre, the influence of its preceding generations, and defines its development post-

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<sup>28</sup> Graeme Rose and Rob Fellman, 'Transcript of Interview with Graeme Rose' (Unpublished, 2021).

<sup>29</sup> Sandy Craig ed., *Dreams and Deconstructions: Alternative Theatre in Britain*, (Ambergate, UK: Amber Lane Press, 1980). p.20.

<sup>30</sup> Craig et al. p.99-102.

Millennium. For the purposes of this introduction, and in the thesis as a whole, the terms 'performance' and 'theatre' are often used interchangeably, as both assume inherent tensions between opposing literary (dramatic) and performative (visual, aural, kinaesthetic) preferences respectively; I opt to reinvigorate such tensions in light of an evaluation, a priori, that engages the present landscape as a product of inherited pasts.

*i. Postdramatic Theatre*

When I refer to contemporary theatre making, I also refer, in part, to a widely adopted theory in theatre scholarship, translated into English in 2006: Hans-Thies Lehmann's concept of the 'postdramatic'. Translator Karen Jürs-Munby, in her introduction to Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre*, suggests that the 'emergence of neo-avant-garde art forms' including 'performance art or live art all resulted in a renewed attention to the materiality of performance in theatre and in renewed challenges to the dominance of the text'.<sup>31</sup> Echoing one of Craig's identified features of '80s alternative theatre, this 'renewed attention' was not a paradigm shift, but a revitalisation. Ten years before *Postdramatic Theatre*, David George termed the then-emergent paradigm as jointly 'quantum' and 'potential theatre'.<sup>32</sup> Lehmann also advises that 'it is justified to speak of a new paradigm' but claims that a 'shift' is not justified; instead, 'the prefix

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<sup>31</sup> Jürs-Munby in Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*. (Routledge, 2006). p4; Jürs-Munby also establishes that these challenges 'had previously been championed by the historical avant-garde, most prominently by Antonin Artaud' (p4).

<sup>32</sup> David E.R. George, 'Quantum Theatre — Potential Theatre: A New Paradigm?', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 5.18 (1989), 171–79.



“post” indicates that a culture or artistic practice has stepped out of the previously unquestioned horizon of modernity but still exists with some kind of reference to it’, as an additive or divergent paradigm that irreversibly alters the theatrical form.<sup>33</sup>

Whether termed quantum, potential or postdramatic, challenging the ‘dominance of the text’ is one of the most prominent features of the contemporary theatre paradigm that I define, especially in relation to Third Angel’s position within this categorisation. As Walton suggests:

Both Alex [Kelly] and I work visually, that’s just the way our brains are wired. The visual really is as important to us as the text.<sup>34</sup>

The very title of Lehmann’s book, in the author’s own words, ‘signals the continuing association and exchange between theatre and text’ as something contested and mutable rather than a relationship of oppositions.

## *ii. Devising and Composition*

To lay the foundations for enquiries around working mechanisms and processes—pertaining to Research Question 1—and the types of knowledge held and utilised in those methods—relative to Research Question 2—I first describe how contemporary theatre practice, as I define it, does not use predetermined text to define the structure of the work; instead, two methodological practices take precedence. The first of these,

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<sup>33</sup> Lehmann. p.24; 27.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Rachael Walton (Third Angel) – Essential Drama’.

devised performance, refers to work generated by means other than a script, such as a stimulus or idea that prompts an exploratory process. To present Third Angel's own identification of this practice in their own methods, alongside my own:

We create bricks and then start to build the show out of them. Some are discarded along the way; others, when placed together, reveal gaps that need to be filled. [...] Sections evolve, running orders are re-jigged.<sup>35</sup>

This is not to say that text plays no part in Third Angel's process (and that of comparable companies), but rather its primacy is reduced:

Every devising process is unique, of course, but ours will often draw from the same box of tools for writing – or 'generating text' as we often refer to it. We record [...] transcribe [...] improvise [...]. We come up with rules that govern what a performer might say in a particular section, without ever fixing it from one performance to the next.<sup>36</sup>

To provide an illustration of the myriad ways devising can become manifest as a creative mechanism, in correlation with Ashford's list of identified traits of 'experimental' and art-led performance, Dee Heddon and Jane Milling describe the work of preeminent companies the Wooster Group (1980-) and Goat Island (1987-2006) as employing methodologies of 'collage' and 'montage' respectively (terms initially proposed in this context by David Savran and Stephen Bottoms).<sup>37</sup> *Collage* refers to the pasting-together of contrasting materials in which an element of randomness generates something new; *montage* is often more logic-driven, whereby the composition intends a set of possible

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<sup>35</sup> Third Angel, *There's A Room: Three Performance Texts by Third Angel*, Oberon Modern Plays (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019). p.7.

<sup>36</sup> Third Angel, *There's A Room: Three Performance Texts by Third Angel*. p.8.

<sup>37</sup> Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling, *Devising Performance: A Critical History* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2006). p.195-6.

results and usually comprises of fragments of the same type of medium, often extending beyond static art. Third Angel's devising methodology, in part owing to their background in film—from which the term montage originates—is closer to the latter. Third Angel's live art background informs a use of montage that crosses over into collage: combining image-based media, the textual-verbal, and the three dimensions of a performance space. This methodology may be closer to *assemblage*: the deliberate practice of multi-media construction, 'the fitting together of parts and pieces' of different materials in various ways, and that requires physical, spatial, involvement from the artist.<sup>38</sup> I argue that their compositional method of *assemblage* is less about editing out material, and more about crafting multi-vocal, multi-faceted works that collectively exceed the individual experiences or preferences of the company members.

Multi-vocality in the case of Third Angel is not just limited to the assemblage of different materials, or to the core collaborative nature of the company, but can also refer to the use of opinions and feedback in the making process; often, devising requires the input of an orchestrator or 'outside eye'. These roles are frequently called 'dramaturgs' which, in this case, follows the European tradition of the role (in the UK dramaturgy most often refers to script development, rather than devised work). Walton describes how this role relates to Third Angel's own devising methodology:

[The role of dramaturg] helps in developing a piece, developing writing, within the work we've made historically. Often that role has fallen more to me, having children, not being in the rehearsal room as much as I would have liked. What is that role? How does it happen? Alex [Kelly] likes to research projects and I like to

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<sup>38</sup> Seitz in Ulrich Weisstein, 'Collage, Montage, and Related Terms: Their Literal and Figurative Use in and Application to Techniques and Forms in Various Arts', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 15.1 (1978), 124–39. p.127.

think about how we make it into a show. He works more instinctively, more organically. If something feels right then that's OK. He likes to use the big paintbrush. When it comes to questioning the work, I have a slightly smaller paintbrush, I like to look at the detail. [...] We are very much opposites but I think from where we were when we started, we have swapped roles, I started out with Live Art and time and movement based work and Alex started out in more theatrical territory and now it is reversed. We influence each other's work and we complement each other. Whilst we both have the title of co-artistic director, when it comes to the actual process, we can't have two directors, it just doesn't work. One person takes the lead, the other person will offer outside eye suggestions. That is how we work now. We have worked together for a long time so we trust each other.<sup>39</sup>

Third Angel, then, prefer to appoint an orchestrator-type dramaturg from within, rather than a true 'outside eye' in many of their projects (though they did, more recently, designate regular collaborator Stacey Sampson the role). The 'outside eye', as Walton refers to it, is more about the shaping of each of their creative ideas and impulses, between the two full-time members, Walton and Kelly, and the collaborators they have worked with. The trust the two have in each other's process is a product of their longevity as a collaborative partnership.

### *iii. Collaboration*

Collaboration, therefore, is the other methodological practice that, in conjunction with devising methods, is a central aspect of contemporary theatre-making as I define it

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<sup>39</sup> Rachael Walton and Michael Pinchbeck, 'Outside Eye | The Dramaturgical Turn in Contemporary Performance' <<https://outsideeyeproject.wordpress.com/page/2/>> [accessed 10 June 2019].

in this context. Collaboration is expressed in this thesis as the process of working together and is not just limited to artists and their peers: in works that require an audience, or participants, I consider these roles as collaborators too (a topic I explore in Chapter 3). Companies also often collaborate, and Third Angel are no exception (their project with Portuguese company mala voadora is also examined in Chapter 3). In this thesis I identify a diverse range of collaborations and draw on theories including those of Rudi Laermans in his (2015) book on participation and collaboration in dance scholarship, *Moving Together*, and Eve Katsouraki's (2017) identification of a generative 'antagonism' in collaboration as distinctly politicised acts of resilience.<sup>40</sup> These theories assist in presenting the complexity of such systems and methodologies. As Savage and Symonds identify:

Anyone who has undertaken a process of collaboration in the theatre—particularly a devising process—will be familiar with this vague, alchemical magic. And the hazy nature of collaboration is also evident in the language that is used to talk about it: however well curated they might be, words like 'flow', 'synergy' and 'creativity' are after all characteristically slippery terms.<sup>41</sup>

In this thesis I also refer to 'hazy' terms such as 'flows' of exchange, multi-vocal 'synergies' or the 'syncretic' nature of collaborative systems. I acknowledge the inexactness of these terms, and approach them as part of a phenomenology of performance, which is itself subjective, transient and stirs emotion. In Chapters 2 to 4 I call upon studies of 'embodiment' to assist in refining these 'hazy' terms, to present

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<sup>40</sup> Rudi Laermans, *Moving Together: Theorizing and Making Contemporary Dance*, Antennae Series (Valiz, 2015); Eve Katsouraki, 'Epilogue: The "Trojan Horse"—Or, from Antagonism to the Politics of Resilience', in *Performing Antagonism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017), pp. 289–311.

<sup>41</sup> Karen Savage and Dominic Symonds, *Economies of Collaboration in Performance* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2018). p.59.

otherwise philosophical concepts as reinforced by actual mechanisms and workings of the human state. My intention is that some of the 'alchemical magic' can be dispelled for those readers of this thesis who may not have prior experience of devising and collaborating in a performance setting, whilst still impressing the importance of the phenomena of 'synergies' and 'flows' to my own assessment of longevity in-and-of these types of practice.

In addressing the terminology around collaboration, it is also important to recognise that the term 'company' in this thesis is largely employed to refer to theatre and performance companies (which may also encapsulate charitable organisations) rather than distinctly 'corporate' entities. Past collaborator of Third Angel, Hannah Nicklin, proposes:

I would argue the word 'collective' is important precisely because it can mean many different things at once – it can be shared space and resources, it can be shared interests or objectives, it can be a kind of 'label' without all the business hangups [connotations, nuances] of a 'company'.<sup>42</sup>

Following Nicklin's suggestion, I use 'company' in this thesis to refer to the 'collective' and the 'group' that operate under the Third Angel title: this is a constantly redefining assembly that is, at its heart, a network of collaborators connected by-and-to the central pairing of Walton and Kelly. From my time studying and observing Third Angel, it is clear that they do not always agree, but this makes for a vibrant working environment, and avoids a stagnation of ideas. It is also important to note that the views referenced in this thesis are drawn from both academics and artists, and that their views

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<sup>42</sup> Hannah Nicklin, 'Klondikes'.

may not always reflect their affiliated collectives and organisations as a whole; on the other hand, this multi-vocality is what constitutes collaboration, and is a tension that I identify and address.<sup>43</sup> Further, collaboration also extends into the more altruistic nature of Third Angel's mentoring and sector support. Mentees Action Hero (2005-) claim that 'without Third Angel's hugely generous and thoughtful mentoring support Action Hero would not exist'.<sup>44</sup> Third Angel have been responsible for over 15 years of artist and company mentoring, including (non-exhaustively): Action Hero, Raquel Castro, Michael Pinchbeck, Hannah Nicklin, Irna Qureshi, Molly Naylor, Faye Draper, RashDash, Daniel Bye, Claire Hind, Flickbook Theatre, The Other Way Works and Unfolding Theatre. In particular, Castro's connection to the company is documented in Chapter 2 (Memory and Retelling). Whilst references to mentoring appear throughout the thesis, this topic does not have a dedicated chapter. A task devoted to tracking the full range of wider influences and effects of Third Angel's work is beyond the scope of this research, though my proposal is that: first, an examination of Castro's example in Chapter 2, second, the wider arena of collaboration (particularly inter-company collaboration with mala voadora) in Chapter 3, and third, the legacy of Third Angel's collecting methodologies in Chapter 5, all contribute to a wider ethics of collaboration, mentoring and peer support that becomes evident. Furthermore, I aim that this thesis, as a record of a 28-year practice, itself contributes to the legacy and onward teaching of the company. As Action Hero's co-artistic director James Stenhouse advised in 2013:

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<sup>43</sup> In particular, Deborah Chadbourn went on record to make clear that her views will not reflect her previous company, Forced Entertainment, as a whole.

<sup>44</sup> Third Angel, 'Mentoring | Third Angel' <<https://thirdangel.co.uk/creative-learning/mentoring>> [accessed 7 March 2023].

The culture of 'next big thing' and artists 'breaking through' is a falsehood. It takes a long time [...]. If you've just left university it's unlikely you can make world-beating art.<sup>45</sup>

From Third Angel's debut coverage in *The Guardian* in 1995 as recent university graduates to Stenhouse's comments in 2013, their differing experiences suggest that the landscape of the sector had somewhat shifted.

I've been making a living solely from Action Hero for 5 years (ish). I count this as one of my proudest achievements. But 5 years is not that long and the sands shift everyday.<sup>46</sup>

In 2014, a year after Stenhouse wrote this advice, the average term of office for CEOs in Europe was registered at 5.1 years; politicians operate in four-year periods in the UK, and as W.I.R.E thinktank summarised at this time, 'planning horizons are getting shorter'.<sup>47</sup> As Stenhouse acknowledges, it takes time to find success in the arts: longevity is a virtue and possibly a privilege if it can be attained. By comparison with politics or corporate CEOs, Stenhouse would already have been out of post as a full-time member of 5 years. Action Hero, like Third Angel, had their national funding withdrawn in the same tranche, and another of Third Angel's contemporaries, Unlimited Theatre (1997-2023) also followed. As he further suggested back in 2013:

I talk a lot to other artists who make a living to help me find ways to navigate the tricky territory and find new models all the time to allow it to continue. Some

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<sup>45</sup> Action Hero, 'How to Make a Living as an Artist - Action Hero', 2013 <<https://actionhero.org.uk/How-to-make-a-living-as-an-artist>> [accessed 6 March 2023].

<sup>46</sup> Action Hero, 'How to Make a Living as an Artist - Action Hero', 2013 <<https://actionhero.org.uk/How-to-make-a-living-as-an-artist>> [accessed 6 March 2023].

<sup>47</sup> W.I.R.E (Web for Interdisciplinary Research & Expertise), *The Future Is Ours: Scenarios for the Future of Everyday Life*, ed. by S. Achermann, S. Pabst, S. Sigrist, B. Varnholt, G. Folkers (Zurich: Neue Zürcher Zeitung Publishing, 2014). p.66.



artists have been doing it for 20 years or longer. They are good people to talk to.<sup>48</sup>

In the spirit of collaboration, and the collaborative nature of this doctoral project, I heed Stenhouse's advice and document the words of practising artists throughout this thesis (appended in full) as both an act of legacy-making and resilience in itself.

## Summary of Thesis Structure

In Chapter 1, I outline the history and context of UK theatre and the conditions that reaffirm the contemporary theatre field as introduced thus far. I identify other companies who contribute to this field and establish the emergent practices that are common among this cross-section. I introduce the socio-political factors that have affected Third Angel and their contemporaries, and the crises and opportunities catalysed by these factors. I examine longevity as it relates to three terms that I propose interlink the contextual, operational and artistic methodologies of theatre companies: precarity, risk and anticipation. In Chapter 2, *Memory and Retelling*, through a detailed analysis of the evolution of *Class of '76* (2000-10), I explore how Third Angel's particular methodology of remembering and retelling can be regarded in light of company longevity, making the argument that the repeatability of individual performance works enhances the longevity of the company repertoire. Furthermore, I demonstrate how projects can evade completion, and in doing so amplify the ongoing vitality of a company. In Chapter 3, *Collaboration and Co-production*, I focus in more detail on the systems of collaboration

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<sup>48</sup> Action Hero.

both inside and outside the company's artistic practices, through *What I Heard About the World* (2010-15) and *Parts for Machines that Do Things* (2008), and also the ways in which Third Angel interact with audiences and participants, through *Desire Paths* (2016-23) and *Inspiration Exchange* (2010-23). Chapter 4, Co-labour, extends this analysis to the economic practices and operational strategies of the artistic organisation. Both Chapters 3 and 4 examine how longevity in collaboration impacts on Third Angel's preoccupations, aesthetics, and processes, and argue that collaboration generates self-sustaining ecosystems that promote long-term resilience; a further research question prompted is whether the attainment of a comparative longevity (survival above the odds) is itself a mode of resilience. In Chapter 5, Collecting and Legacy, via an analysis of *The Department of Distractions* (2018-20), its offshoot *Distraction Agents* (2021-23), and other projects that *didn't* get made, I examine the relationships between the information in Third Angel's archive and the knowledge held by its members. I argue that different kinds of knowledge are accumulated over time and that these become manifest in working methods. Another research provocation that emerges is the extent to which collecting is a form of preemptive survival, and therefore an inherent practice of legacy and longevity-making. Central to this thesis is the relationship between the artistic product, its making, and the context in which it is made. Third Angel describe their artistic interest in 'the gap between your dreams and ambitions, and the reality of your day to day life'; applying their ethos to my own study, I turn first to the 'reality' of the arts sector to expose the foundations underlying all the acts of 'memory, imagination

and fantasy' that Third Angel have created out of their own day to day workings, throughout a prolific 28-year journey.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Third Angel, 'About Third Angel | Third Angel' <<https://thirdangel.co.uk/about-third-angel>> [accessed 31 August 2022].

# 1. Contexts of Contemporary Theatre Making: UK Arts Sector, 1990s to Present

## **Introduction**

In the early 1990s Britain underwent a series of significant changes that altered the socio-political landscape and, in turn, the shape of British theatre. The period saw a consolidation of 1980s conservative politics, before centre-left politics took the helm in 1997; wider debates about Britain's relationship with Europe intensified, while poll tax riots, devolution of parliaments and financial recession defined the turbulence of the decade. The ways in which arts organisations survived (or did not) throughout this period were largely determined by three key factors: funding, policy and geography. In this opening chapter I establish the links between economic and creative conditions in the UK throughout the 1990s to the time of writing (2023), and in doing so set the stage for a closer investigation of the creative practices of the primary case study, Third Angel, showing how these have contributed to their longevity to date. Whilst this thesis does not attempt to present an exhaustive, or indeed holistic assessment of an arts sector in its entirety, the intention is to determine how the activities, values and working methods of an individual theatre company may positively impact their social and economic survival within a wider ecology. In Part Three of this chapter I outline the socio-economic condition of 'precarity' and the way this informs the methodologies of arts sector practitioners and, more broadly, I consider the different kinds of risk associated with company longevity in this context. Throughout, my account of this contextual history is

supported by examples of creative and organisational practices drawn from Third Angel and other comparable companies.

To set the scene for an investigation of arts sector 'precarity', in Part Two I chart the socio-political changes in the '90s, and identify the challenges and corresponding strategies of contemporary theatre makers. An early significant milestone in the decade occurred in 1993 when British Prime Minister John Major introduced the National Lottery. In 1994 the UK Arts Councils were devolved, and Major's opposition, 'New' Labour, assumed a more centrist stance in UK politics. By 1995—the year of Third Angel's founding—lottery funding was initiated, with large sums recycled into the activities of the social and cultural sectors (through separate arts, heritage and community funds).<sup>50</sup> A portion of National Lottery funds were allocated to the newly devolved Arts Councils to distribute to arts organisations (within their respective national contexts). Significantly, a 32% decrease in private sponsorship and donations to arts organisations since 1986/7 had been recorded by 1996, making the lottery funds an important source of potential public income for those arts organisations willing to bid for it. In parallel, the lottery-funded scheme A4E Express distributed grants for 5,000 new arts projects, creating an upsurge of new theatre companies that had been afforded a chance to debut work on UK theatre stages. A further shift in policy occurred in 1997, when a Labour government was formed, ousting Major's Conservative party, and the Scottish and Welsh parliaments were devolved shortly after. A year later, in 1998, Arts Council England (ACE) received its first rise in government budget. I suggest the three

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<sup>50</sup> 'Big Lottery Fund - GOV.UK' <<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/big-lottery-fund>> [accessed 9 February 2021].

pillars of funding, policy and geography were (and are) acutely interlinked, their collateral effects on arts organisations amplified throughout the decade by the devolution of political governance and the heightened impacts of a switch in leadership ideology. The longevity of arts sector members during this time required a navigation of these factors, both in terms of organisational decision-making and their creative products. The National Lottery and A4E Express exemplified how funding of the arts had largely shifted from private to public finances, and as such the conditions attached to these funds would reflect the need for wider public benefit: lottery funding changed focus from capital (infrastructural) spend to artistic development, with emphasis placed upon widening participation and access to the arts. The implication for arts organisations was that a key source of funding was now more readily available for creative projects, although with stipulations attached.

This fast-evolving climate was also the backdrop out of which many companies and practitioners emerged. The recognisable names from this period can be loosely divided into three main categories. Firstly, playwrights of British 'new writing', a trend that built upon Britain's literary-dramatic tradition and which was often affiliated to venues; secondly, independent text-based theatre companies, usually with no institutional attachments; and lastly, those defined in this thesis as contemporary performance companies that, for the most part, aligned with 'a stylistic sensibility that could be described retrospectively as 'postdramatic' (as identified in the thesis introduction). In what follows, 'Defining the Sector', I briefly establish the characteristics of these delineations and identify some of the prominent names associated with these groups. Continuing with the contextualisation, Part Two maps these then-emerging trends against the backdrop of socio-economic and geo-political change, particularly in relation

to moments of crisis, austerity, and potential renaissance. In Part Three I establish the connections between this context and the longevity of companies operating (and surviving) throughout this period. Additionally, I introduce conceptual and practical aspects that attend to the main enquiry of this thesis; I refer to the relationships and apparent dichotomies, first, of precarity and longevity; second, of their co-operatives anticipation and doubt, hope and fear, risk and security. Via concepts of 'precarity', 'risk' and 'anticipation' I argue that there is an inherent propensity for longevity identifiable in Third Angel's methodologies that, in part, emerge as responses to their operating context, and that can also come to define contemporary and postdramatic performance more widely.

## **I. Defining the Sector**

The majority of the first category of emergent companies and personalities are the 'new writing' playwrights of the oft-titled British 'avant-garde', or stylistic movement of 'in-yer-face' theatre, including for example: Sarah Kane, Jez Butterworth, Martin Crimp, David Greig, Ayub Khan-Din, Phyllis Nagy, Anthony Neilson, Mark Ravenhill and Rebecca Pritchard. These writers were most commonly associated with the venues and institutions that produced their plays throughout this period: The Royal Court Theatre (London), Bush Theatre (London) who were then transitioning from a pub theatre to a standalone operation, and Traverse Theatre, that had relocated to a new premises in 1992

(Edinburgh).<sup>51</sup> These venues, often referred to as 'new writing' or 'producing houses', differed from the age-old system of repertory theatre; they hired casts, writers and directors to realise each new project, rather than managing all productions in-house. The new writing venues were not newly established at this time, though the 1990s saw their prominence rise, and they offered a viable alternative to what Sandy Craig disparagingly called 'carbon-copy' and (largely middle-class) 'gin-and-tonic rep theatres'.<sup>52</sup> The 'rep' and larger mainstream venues included, regionally: Birmingham Repertory Theatre (now The Old Rep), The Royal Exchange (Manchester), Everyman Theatre (Liverpool) and Nottingham Playhouse, as well as London's National Theatre and Shakespeare's Globe.<sup>53</sup>

A smaller number of independent theatre companies also emerged during this period as part of the text-based tradition, which complicates the divides between literary traditions and institutional affiliations. Both Craig and Steve Gooch have identified a split between 'actor-based' and 'writer-based' companies.<sup>54</sup> In her 2018 doctoral thesis, however, Catherine Love argued for a reconsideration of these practices, not as polarised, but rather as related fields shaped and defined by the institutional and educational contexts in which they are (often retrospectively) examined.<sup>55</sup> Gooch, who was part of the founding of Half Moon Theatre Company (London, 1972), acknowledges

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<sup>51</sup> Aleks Sierz, 'IN-YER-FACE THEATRE A-Z', 2010 <<http://www.inyerfacetheatre.com/az.html>> [accessed 7 February 2023].

<sup>52</sup> Craig et al. p.10.

<sup>53</sup> G Rowell, T Jackson, and A Jackson, *The Repertory Movement: A History of Regional Theatre in Britain* (Cambridge University Press, 1984); 'London, West End & Fringe Theatre Venues | London Theatre' <<https://www.londontheatre.co.uk/info/london-theatre-overview>> [accessed 7 February 2023].

<sup>54</sup> Craig et al. p.25; Steve Gooch, *All Together Now: An Alternative View of Theatre and the Community*, Methuen Young Drama (Methuen, 1984). p.51.

<sup>55</sup> Catherine Love, 'Are We On The Same Page? A Critical Analysis of the "Text-Based"/"Non-Text-Based" Divide in Contemporary English Theatre', (Royal Holloway, 2018).



that it is possible to move the role of text and writing within the creative process, so that work is neither actor- or writer-led.<sup>56</sup> Independent text-based companies from the 1990s reinforce this suggestion, such as Out of Joint (1994-present, rebranded in 2021 as Stockroom)—established by Max Stafford-Clark who began his career with Joint Stock in 1974—and Portable Theatre Company (London, 1968-73). The model of the former involved working with emerging writers, whilst touring those works to various venues, and usually co-producing work rather than residing with a 'producing house'; the latter toured new and provocative writing. Other companies adopted a fully hybrid approach, combining text with non-literary, physical and kinaesthetic forms of expression, such as Frantic Assembly (Swansea/London, 1994-), who followed in the footsteps of predecessors like Complicité (1983-), and Gay Sweatshop Theatre Company (1974-97). The majority of these companies operated independently of venues and institutions, or in some cases toured out from a resident base of operation. Many were established in England (the main focus of this thesis), and more specifically in its capital city where a large concentration of cultural activity was (and is still) directed. Others later gravitated towards London during their careers: Frantic Assembly, for example, started out in Swansea, Wales, but are now resident at Somerset House in London.

As I establish the third category, the contemporary 'postdramatic' performance companies, it is pertinent to acknowledge the breadth of non-text-based UK experimental companies that laid the foundations during a politically-charged period of the late 1960s and through the 1970s. Companies that influenced the contemporary performance scene of the 1990s included: CAST (1965-); People Show (1966-); Welfare

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<sup>56</sup> Gooch. p.51.

State (Leeds, 1968-2006); Red Ladder (1968 as Agitprop Street Players, rebranding in 1971-); The Freehold (1968-1973); 7:84 Theatre Company (Scotland, 1971-2008, an English wing of the company disbanded in 1984); Hull Truck (1971-); The Women's Theatre Group (1973 - rebranded to Sphinx in 1991); Hesitate and Demonstrate (1975-86); Blood Group (1980-86). Some of the venues that supported this experimental work include the short-lived Drury Lane Arts Lab (1967-9), The Robert Street 'New Arts Lab' (1969-71) and long-serving Better Books (1946-1970), which all hosted the early years of the aforementioned People Show and other experimental artists, musicians and poets. These London hubs became the model for a growing nationwide network of arts 'labs' such as York Arts Centre and St Georges Project in Liverpool.<sup>57</sup>

*i. Contemporary Theatre Makers*

The companies of primary interest to this thesis, those I define as contemporary theatre makers, are companies operating: firstly, in opposition to the literary tradition; second, producing work by contemporary methods known collectively (and sometimes inaccurately) as 'devised' theatre, in contrast with the predominant tradition. Of interest to this thesis is how and why a number of companies among this divergent trend of theatre makers are now synonymous with longevity, still active multiple decades later, despite Love's analytical findings of a sector that otherwise reinforces divides and splits between various trends and paradigms (often through funding, institutional affiliations

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<sup>57</sup> Craig et al. p.16.

and the perpetuating discourse of critics, academics and marketers). I use the term 'postdramatic' to describe the contemporary companies that constitute it, as many of the emerging companies in the 1990s contributed to the stylistic 'movement', or formal sensibilities Lehmann came to declare (as mentioned in the thesis introduction).<sup>58</sup> Lehmann's text was only translated to English in 2006 and so, rather fittingly, reached the UK consciousness as even more of a 'post' retrospective, *a priori*. I consider that the term 'postdramatic' is useful so long as it is treated as a reflection rather than a totalisation. Elinor Fuchs argues that Lehmann reframes 'three or more generations of theatrical outliers as a movement', with the result that the particularities of each become oversimplified (such as Lehmann's proposed correlations with the rise of 'performance art', already a distinct creative discipline since the 1970s).<sup>59</sup> I am less concerned with the totalising nature of the term, but rather what led to the ready adoption of Lehmann's theory; I examine the changes over generations and in the conditions that gave rise to the UK's arts sector as it exists today.<sup>60</sup> Devising companies not yet named include the 1990s newcomers; David Glass Ensemble (London, 1990-); Told by an Idiot (London, 1993-); Clod Ensemble (London, 1995-); Improbable (London, 1996-); Theatre O (London, 1997-).

Additionally, there is a cross-section of now-established companies who are notable for their emergence in regions *outside* the English capital, and without permanent premises. Without minimising the achievements of their London peers, it can

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<sup>58</sup> Lehmann.

<sup>59</sup> Elinor Fuchs, '(Review) Postdramatic Theatre by Hans-Thies Lehmann and Karen Jürs-Munby', *TDR* (1988-), 52.2 (2008), 178–83. p.179.

<sup>60</sup> Fuchs. p.178.

be argued that these regionally-based companies began their lives under even more precarious circumstances, further removed from the central influence of the capital's arts scene and on the periphery of the national consciousness. This cohort of companies were described to me by Third Angel's Kelly as 'typically atypical': perhaps due to preferences for collaboration, devising and touring mechanisms, smaller regional companies are typically complex to define as their 'brand' goes beyond their core membership and influences. Among this group of outliers are: Blast Theory (Brighton, 1991-), Stan's Cafe (Birmingham, 1991-), Walk the Plank (Manchester, 1991-), desperate optimists (UK/Dublin, 1992-present, renamed Molloy and Lawlor in 2000), Gob Squad (Nottingham/Germany, 1994-), Lone Twin (UK/Australia, 1997-), Unlimited Theatre (Leeds, 1997-), Proto-type Theatre (Manchester/Lancaster/Lincoln, 1997-) Uninvited Guests (Bristol, 1998-), and Third Angel (Sheffield, 1995-).<sup>61</sup> Third Angel, in their first five years, had produced three theatre projects and a further six exhibition projects (performance art and installations) by the end of 1999 and were working on two more projects at the turn of the millennium.<sup>62</sup> This statement defines much of the spirit that contributed to the postdramatic mindset, at a time when the viable alternative to 'rep' theatre consisted of highly-acclaimed Royal Court productions in London like newly written plays *Blasted* (1995) and *Shopping & F\*\*\*ing* (1996). This type of alternative-yet-play-based performance was also associated with more countercultural theatre companies, such as the aforementioned Out of Joint, and Soho Theatre Company (originally Soho Poly, 1972), and were often collectively branded as part of the 'in-yer-face avant-garde' of

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<sup>61</sup> A timeline mapping some of the key socio-political milestones in parallel with the developments of Third Angel can be found in the Appendix.

<sup>62</sup> Third Angel, *There's a Room: Three Performance Texts*. p192-5.

British theatre.<sup>63</sup> Companies like Third Angel, as part of a growing trend of 1990s independent regional devising companies, represented a further remove from the play-based tradition. In what follows, 'Emergent Practices', I provide a closer illustration of the common practices of contemporary and postdramatic companies and identify the historic sources of these methodological trends. I draw on interviews I conducted with contemporaries of Third Angel to support my definition of the field and to situate the example of Third Angel within it. Part Two then further interweaves their supporting experiences and accounts into the socio-political timeline, to provide the context for a fuller analysis of the longevity of these companies.<sup>64</sup>

## ii. *Emergent Practices*

In 1973 Jeff Nuttall, co-founder of The People Show (1966-), wrote of what he termed 'the long slow death of English teabag theatre' that he felt had become apparent by the mid-1960s, in part a response to 'kitchen sink' realism as a pervasive style of the period, named for its domestic subject matter and realistic character, setting and time.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Sierz, 'IN-YER-FACE THEATRE A-Z'.

<sup>64</sup> There are, of course, a final category of companies that are also of note to this study of arts sector longevity: those of a similar categorisation and origin that have not survived. These companies include: Suspect Culture (Glasgow, 1993-2009), HoiPolloi (Norwich, 1994-2020), Glory What Glory (n.d), Max Factory (n.d), Lovely Plays (n.d), Interference (n.d), Fecund Theatre (1997-2007), and those specifically from Third Angel's home of Sheffield: Reflex Theatre (c.1998), Disturbance Index (n.d), and The OPC (a merger of Reflex and Disturbance Index, n.d). Whilst this thesis does not explore these companies in detail, their inclusion here is an honourable mention and as a reminder that the still-active companies this thesis focusses on are, in many ways, the exception to a rule.

<sup>65</sup> Jeff Nuttall, 'Backpages: The Situation Regarding Performance Art (1973)', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 22.1 (2012), 175-89. p.176.

The other inference to be drawn from Nuttall's statement is the homogeneity that this mainstream style implied. He suggested that theatre spaces had 'entrenched traditions', and that a then-emergent term 'performance art', might be used to refer 'to any one of a vast number of mutually contradictory directions that [had] sprung up recently, a lightly bubbling stewpot labelled, in many places, fringe theatre.'<sup>66</sup> He went on to suggest that 'performance art and fringe theatre are confused in Great Britain' because of contradictory stances from within the ranks of practitioners and makers of theatre; the 'stewpot', over the following decade, had 'shown some sign of boiling'.<sup>67</sup> It is in this bubbling cross-section of disciplines and approaches that original works and company-specific creative methodologies emerged, made stronger still through collaborative and group-led working practices that became more commonplace, partly as a reaction against the monotheistic and institutionally-maintained dunk-and-go 'teabag theatre' Nuttall complained of. The work that Nuttall judged formulaic had become so through its popularity. In many cases, the working-class subject matter prevalent in 'kitchen sink' dramas was, itself, a departure from more classical texts and ushered in a new wave of modern writers.<sup>68</sup> Nuttall's criticism of 'entrenched traditions' is itself reflective of a divergence in theatrical working methods that had become increasingly apparent at the time.

As previously introduced, another divergence from entrenched traditions in UK theatre was the prevalence of devised work, which, at its popular height by the 1990s,

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<sup>66</sup> Nuttall. p.175.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Emily Zarevich, 'The Reality Behind Kitchen Sink Realism - JSTOR Daily', 2021 <<https://daily.jstor.org/the-reality-behind-kitchen-sink-realism/>> [accessed 6 March 2023].

offered a form of creative practice that, typically, favoured collaborative creation and decentralised authorship. In *Devising Performance: A Critical History* Heddon and Milling highlight the difference between the British and Australian preference for the term 'devising' in relation to the US term 'collaborative creation'.<sup>69</sup> Devising can, however, be conducted by individuals, and as such this thesis aims to use both terms where appropriate for the nuances each suggests. Neither devising nor collaborative creation were new in Western theatre in the 90s. Such practices are traceable to the earliest origins of companies such as The Living Theatre (1947-) and Richard Schechner's The Performance Group in the US (New York, 1967-1980)—who utilised a mix of text-based and devised work—and Nuttall's The People Show in the UK (named after their first show in 1966). The mode of collaborative devising is also evident in the work of the 'second generation' companies that followed them, which includes the Leeds-based Impact Theatre (1979-86) and Wooster Group in the US (1975-), who had worked at Performing Garage where The Performance Group had been established before them.<sup>70</sup> Their other contemporaries include: US-based At the Foot of the Mountain (1974-91) and UK's Monstrous Regiment (1975-93), Tara Arts (1976-) and The Combination (1978-90 - originally Brighton Combination, 1968). These companies, in turn, influenced the 'third generation' which included the art-led Chicago-based Goat Island (1987-2009), Station House Opera (1980-), Kneehigh (1980-2022), Trestle Theatre (1981-), Brith Gof (Wales, 1981-2004), Tamasha Theatre (1989-) and—another Sheffield-based company—Forced Entertainment (1984-).<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Heddon and Milling, p.2.

<sup>70</sup> Heddon and Milling, p.228.

<sup>71</sup> Heddon and Milling, p.228.

Both the process- or art-led performances that characterises the work of 'second' and 'third generation' devising companies, arguably share an attitude rather than assuming a common aesthetic style; this relates to what Heddon and Milling refer to as the 'critical position' that is imprecisely grouped under the term 'postmodernism'.<sup>72</sup> Postmodernism encompassed post-war, post-Marxist thinking that had spread to the UK from Europe and North America throughout the 1980s and had become a significant part of post-structuralist discourse, predominantly within fields such as architecture, design and art.<sup>73</sup> Nick Kaye, in the opening chapter of *Postmodernism and Performance* (1994), reflects upon early attempts at identifying the 'emergent rules of a postmodern art', identifying an opposition to 'unity, simplicity and functionalism of modernist architecture', in favour of a 'fragmentation and discord' in which a product was seen as a sum of its parts, without privileging one over another.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, establishing the 'emergent rules' or conditions of the 'second' and 'third generation' companies in the UK follows a similar ethics, as a reaction to the unified or formulaic 'architecture' of a modernist literary-dramatic theatre. To illustrate, as noted in the thesis introduction, Goat Island and Wooster Group have been described as employing 'montage' and 'collage' in their respective creative practices, techniques of an 'avant-garde lineage' that reject a predetermined organisational structure.<sup>75</sup> Nicholas Zurbrugg similarly identified postmodern trends including anti-narrative sentiment, decentralisation of authorship, collective narrative, hybrid aesthetics and a poetics of fragmentation in his *The*

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<sup>72</sup> Heddon and Milling. p.191.

<sup>73</sup> Heddon and Milling. p.190.

<sup>74</sup> Nick Kaye, *Postmodernism and Performance* (London: Macmillan Education UK, 1994). p.6.

<sup>75</sup> Heddon and Milling. p.195-7.



*Parameters of Postmodernism* (2003), a wide-ranging study Zurbrugg himself described as consisting of 'far-flung intertextuality' and demonstrating the difficulty in corralling a holistic depiction of postmodernism.<sup>76</sup> These identified trends are also ever-present in the work of the 'second' and 'third generation' companies, Forced Entertainment's work, for example, is typified by placing centre-stage the fragmentary and anti-narrative nature of their devised performances. More broadly, these trends are apparent across the devising spectrum, to varying degrees of application, through means of co-created scripts, highly visual stage languages, interaction with audiences, and community non-theatre contexts. These devices and working methods will form part of the analysis of contemporary theatre-making practice across the following chapters.

Throughout these prior generations, despite a turn toward postmodern discourse and Lehmann's declaration of the 'postdramatic' in specifically theatrical terms, the literary-dramatic tradition held fast among the mainstream of British theatre. Simultaneously, the primarily collaborative nature of devising companies redressed the dominant mode of single authorship and direction. In tandem with this structural difference, anti-narrative and anti-institutional ethics permeated devising practice, and was reflected in that many of the companies pioneering this type of work were also highly politically engaged, either forming around shared socio-political ideals (such as workers' rights or feminism) or being positioned to the 'left' of the political spectrum by virtue of anti-hierarchical collective structures.<sup>77</sup> The socio-political landscape by the 1990s would determine the scale of the emergent 'fourth generation' (Third Angel et al),

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<sup>76</sup> Nicholas Zurbrugg, *The Parameters of Postmodernism*, (London UK: Routledge 2003). p.xii.

<sup>77</sup> Heddon and Milling. p.95-106.

both as a result of domestic conditions and, as Liz Tomlin (previously of Point Blank - 1999-2006, formerly Reflex Theatre) described it, 'the unstoppable march of globalisation'.<sup>78</sup> The following chapter sections will draw together the socio-political developments and the creative trends emerging during this same time.

The UK arts scene was by the 1990s considered a 'sector' in its own right rather than a sub-division of culture and heritage (as is still the case in other European contexts), supported by government subsidy to complement companies' earned income, fundraising and philanthropic donations. Baz Kershaw identified the 'double-edged success story' of British theatre, wherein the very establishment of this 'sector' infrastructure favoured the more 'conservative companies to survive, forcing out more radical groups'.<sup>79</sup> As a result emerging devising companies, working against the backdrop of a politicised and anti-institutional movement that preceded them, came to be increasingly supported by university and conservatoire settings, as well as other government-funded organisations. Performer Graeme Rose recalls how, while studying Drama at University of Lancaster, his cohort 'were introduced to a kind of new aesthetic, which was very, very physical and quite beguiling, and wrenched us out of this kind of literary tradition'.<sup>80</sup> Through the 1990s, the popularity of devising grew, and it shifted from a countercultural movement to a more viable alternative to mainstream practice. Alison Oddey suggested, in 1994, that by the 'cultural climate of the 1990s, the term

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<sup>78</sup> Liz Tomlin, *British Theatre Companies: 1995-2014: Mind the Gap, Kneehigh Theatre, Suspect Culture, Stan's Cafe, Blast Theory, Punchdrunk*, ed. by G Saunders and J Bull, Bloomsbury Methuen Drama (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015). p.1.

<sup>79</sup> In Heddon and Milling. p.20-1.

<sup>80</sup> Graeme Rose and Rob Fellman, 'Transcript of Interview with Graeme Rose' (Unpublished, 2021).

“devising” [had] less radical implications’.<sup>81</sup> This does not mean that companies were altogether apolitical, rather through these contingent connections ‘radical’ devising groups could better weather the storm of sector governance and fiscal instability by virtue of their adjacency to the establishment. The postdramatic turn, whilst not a sector-wide paradigm shift, was adopted more readily by the academy. Forced Entertainment was founded by then-graduates of Exeter University, Unlimited Theatre from the University of Leeds, and both Third Angel and Stan’s Cafe evolved from relationships first established at Lancaster University. Despite Stenhouse’s claim referenced in the thesis Introduction, that post-university work is unlikely to be ‘world-beating’, a distinction must be made between the conditions for his company, Action Hero (with Gemma Paintin, graduating from University of Leeds), in 2005 and those emerging from universities in the ‘90s. If, as Stenhouse claims, the notion of ‘breaking through’ is a falsity without time and hard work, Third Angel’s achievement of having their debut show covered by *The Guardian* newspaper suggests a certain amount of luck and serendipity is also at play. Seemingly, the protective testing-ground of the ‘90s academy provided a running start for Third Angel and their contemporaries, yet also imbued them with a status of institutional affiliation that was perhaps more accepted by ‘90s bookers, funders and audiences, a kudos that had diluted by the early ‘00s. Meanwhile, as Heddon and Milling suggest, the adoption of Complicité by the National Theatre in 1989—with the provision of rehearsal space—has led to a now long-established system of co-production between the two organisations.<sup>82</sup> The balancing act between conservative theatre-making and more ‘radical’ practices by contemporary theatre-makers at the turn of the ‘90s and

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<sup>81</sup> Alison Oddey, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* (London, UK: Routledge, 1994). p.8.

<sup>82</sup> Heddon and Milling. p.21.

beyond, into the new millennium, would become key to the latter's survival outside the academy in a supported sector that would, ultimately, demand return on its investment.

In the following, Part Two, I deviate from the emergent practices of contemporary theatre makers, to provide a closer examination of the key contextual factors that have proved significant in the bid for survival for UK-based theatre companies through the 1990s and beyond. In doing so, I expose the challenges and risks associated with survival throughout this period. I outline the complex relationships between arts organisations and government subsidy and interrogate the contrasting accounts of the period after the turn of the millennium as either renaissance or crisis. I identify the means through which companies strived for resilience, introducing the key concepts of precarity, risk and anticipation. This, in turn, establishes my specific treatment of longevity as it applies to the primary thesis case study, Third Angel, and their contemporaries.

## **II. Setting the scene: the socio-political landscape**

This, Part Two, sets the scene for a productive interrogation of longevity in contemporary theatre practice that underpins my case study, Third Angel, via a detailed account of the socio-political landscape out of which it emerged. The triad of factors I address in this section are: access to financial subsidy, geographical locus (both in terms of a base of operation and approaches to touring), and external socio-political governance (the guiding hand of local authorities and sector-support organisations). I have identified these factors as areas of primary importance because of their direct influence on the arts

sector, the modern condition of 'precarity' to which they contribute and the ideological tensions they have come to represent.

*i. Funding and Subsidy*

In a 2003 article provocatively titled 'Art Flourishes in Times of Struggle' (originally a quotation from playwright David Mamet), Aleks Sierz proposes that 'it's good to remember the sheer perversity of British theatre, its astonishing capacity to survive – whatever subsidies are granted or withheld'.<sup>83</sup> This comment came at a time when small independent London theatres were trying to shake off the 'fringe' label, and to take advantage of the more cost-effective 'new writing' shows that had become popular in the wake of the Royal Court's successes with this type of work through the 1990s.<sup>84</sup> In the regions outside the capital, there was a 'fragile renaissance' in the arts sector in the early 2000s that followed the publication of the Arts Council's 'Boyden Report', which promised more attention to and funding for the regions.<sup>85</sup> Sierz suggests that British theatre in the 1990s was identifiable via an avant-garde aesthetics of 'streetsmart sensibility' and its 'in-yer-face' new writing.<sup>86</sup> A streetsmart and self-aware British theatre is characterised as such both despite and *because of* its complex socio-economic

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<sup>83</sup> Aleks Sierz, "'Art Flourishes in Times of Struggle": Creativity, Funding and New Writing', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 13.1 (2003), 33–45. p.45.

<sup>84</sup> Sierz, "'Art Flourishes in Times of Struggle": Creativity, Funding and New Writing'. p.38.

<sup>85</sup> Fiachra Gibbons, 'Theatres Singing Again as Cash Pledge Sparks Renaissance | UK News | The Guardian', *The Guardian*, 2002. <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2002/feb/04/arts.highereducation>> [accessed 24 January 2022].

<sup>86</sup> Sierz, "'Art Flourishes in Times of Struggle": Creativity, Funding and New Writing'. p.36.

positioning. Craig suggested (in 1980) that by the '70s 'the subsidised theatre - geared to its audiences' aesthetic edification and with the artistic director rather than the producer at the helm – had become unequivocally the British theatre'.<sup>87</sup> The streetsmart alternative that 'in-yer-face' theatre represented was not designed to edify, rather to antagonise; as Tony Thorne summarised, 'in-yer-face' theatre was 'the British throwing off their traditional reserve and shyness', and was a phrase used approvingly.<sup>88</sup> I argue that, as a defined 'sector', the arts in the UK has an enmeshed, and often precarious, relationship with the national economy, treading a tightrope between public subsidy and antagonistic social commentary, and between 'company' operations (whether incorporated or charitable in nature) and artistic freedoms. International cultural critic Brian Holmes suggested in 2008 that, to those on the left of the political spectrum, 'the economy had traditionally been seen as the opposite of art, just as the act of selling is the opposite of the spontaneous gift', however an overview of UK arts practice in the 1990s shows a relationship of co-existence that developed as a result of changes in both social habits and political agendas.<sup>89</sup>

The UK's Arts Council was formed in 1946, fulfilling a governmental 'arms length' policy of national cultural subsidy that aimed to maintain a distance between subsidy provision and use.<sup>90</sup> It was also described as a 'quango', or, 'quasi-autonomous national

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<sup>87</sup> Craig et al. p.13.

<sup>88</sup> in Aleks Sierz, 'IN-YER-FACE THEATRE' <<http://www.inyerfacetheatre.com/archive21.html>> [accessed 13 February 2023].

<sup>89</sup> Holmes in Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider, *Precarity and Performance: An Introduction*, *TDR/The Drama Review*, 2012, 56.4. p.8.

<sup>90</sup> 'House of Commons - Funding of the Arts and Heritage - Culture, Media and Sport Committee' <<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmcmds/464/46405.htm>> [accessed 18 January

government organisation'.<sup>91</sup> At the time of writing the Arts Council is funded by the Treasury, via the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, with that money paid out as grants to organisations categorised as Performing Arts.<sup>92</sup> The Arts Council today has two streams of funding: the grant-in-aid funding described here, and designated proceeds from the National Lottery. Grant-in-aid funding is made available through application to specific programmes, such as Grants for the Arts (2015-2018) and the more recent Creative People and Places (2018-).<sup>93</sup> The majority of grant-in-aid funding, however, is invested in a portfolio of Regularly Funded Organisations (RFOs). RFOs include both large national organisations, such as the National Theatre or the Royal Opera House, and smaller local and regional companies such as Third Angel, Stan's Cafe and Unlimited Theatre. In 2010, the Arts Council replaced RFOs with a newly-titled National Portfolio (NPO) funding programme.<sup>94</sup> Arts Council England (ACE) bestows upon NPOs 'a collective responsibility to protect and develop our [English] national arts and cultural ecology', effectively handpicking those they perceive to be 'leaders' in the sector.<sup>95</sup> Whilst grant-in-aid funding is of great importance to the UK arts ecology, in particular to emerging companies, the NPO system is of primary interest in this chapter as it is quite unique to the UK system of arts funding (Wales uses the term Arts Portfolio Wales; Scotland still operates under RFOs), and is often considered a benchmark for other

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2021]; Stephen Hetherington, 'International Journal of Cultural Policy Arm's-Length Funding of the Arts as an Expression of Laissez-Faire', 2015.

<sup>91</sup> Craig et al. p.178.

<sup>92</sup> Alan Peacock, Public Financing of the Arts in England, *Fiscal Studies*, 2000, 21.2. p.175.

<sup>93</sup> 'How We Invest Public Money | Arts Council England' <<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/about-us/how-we-invest-public-money>> [accessed 24 January 2022].

<sup>94</sup> 'House of Commons - Funding of the Arts and Heritage - Culture, Media and Sport Committee'.

<sup>95</sup> ACE, *How Arts Council England Works with National Portfolio Organisations: Relationship Framework*, 2018. p.5.

European nations.<sup>96</sup> NPOs receive guaranteed funding for three or four years, depending on the funding round (compared to the definite three years under the RFO scheme), contingent upon agreed outputs being delivered.<sup>97</sup> In 1989 Baz Kershaw identified that around 270 arts sector companies could be identified as then-RFOs, a figure that would rise to well over 500 by the early 2000s.<sup>98</sup> At the time of writing (2023), the UK Parliament suggests this figure has now reached 950.<sup>99</sup> The NPO scheme provides fiscal security for those granted the status, earning the ability to plan activities ahead, rather than working reactively to year-to-year and project-to-project budgets. However, as this chapter will later explore, the effect of the NPO as an aspirational status also creates meritocratic divides between different scales and methods of working, as well as running the risk of geographical (and thereby socio-cultural) imbalances.

The National Lottery continues to function significantly as a way for the government to generate funding for charity, sport, and arts sectors without depleting the central coffers. The lottery fund was to be managed by these newly devolved Arts Councils in 1994. In fact, lottery funding for the arts already exceeded governmental Arts Council funding in its first year (a trend that continued through to 1998), which gave the devolved Councils a much-increased level of responsibility. With such responsibility, came

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<sup>96</sup> Hetherington; Rob Fellman, 'External Evaluation Report: National Cultural Fund of Bulgaria', Unpublished (Sofia, 2021); Rob Fellman and Various, 'Anonymous Interviews with Funded Organisations (2020 One-Year Program)' (Sofia: Unpublished, 2021).

<sup>97</sup> Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic in 2021 ACE opened a fifth-year extension that existing NPOs could apply for.

<sup>98</sup> Tomlin. p.56.

<sup>99</sup> 'Arts Council England's Investment Programme: Key Data | Campaign for the Arts' <<https://www.campaignforthearts.org/news/arts-council-englands-investment-programme-key-data/>> [accessed 12 April 2023].



greater authority. Certainly for England, as David Inglis and John Hughson suggest, 'this devolutionary break also had the effect of creating a more effective means of centralised control within the respective national contexts', due to this condensed relationship that, ultimately, reduced the established 'arm's length' distance between central power and the sector.<sup>100</sup>

Meanwhile, external to the incumbent government, Tony Blair's opposition party (the reformed New Labour) adopted a proposed 'third way' of British politics, aimed at bridging a gap between a Thatcherite, free-market neo-liberal Conservative past and a brand of top-down state socialism that would instead commit to a revised mode of centre-left 'new' liberalism: a politics concerned with marrying ethical socialism with liberal economics.<sup>101</sup> In the same year, the Australian Labour government's policy document 'Creative Nation' (1994) was produced. Robert Hewison explains that this document influenced the future 1997 Labour cultural manifesto in the UK, with some of its phrasing echoing closely its Australian counterpart. Furthermore, Hewison proposes that the title's reference to "'creativity'" suggested a classless freedom and personal autonomy, positive values associated with what was increasingly understood as the postmodern economy of signs and symbols'.<sup>102</sup> This language made an appeal to widespread postmodern thinking within the sector, aligning what was an egalitarian and

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<sup>100</sup> John Hughson and David Inglis, 'Towards a Third Way' in Cultural Policy?', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 7.3 (2009), 457–78. p.461.

<sup>101</sup> This political stance is also more widely known as Social Liberalism, or Modern Liberalism in the US; Jen Harvie, *Fair Play - Art, Performance and Neoliberalism*, Performance Interventions (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013). p.12-13.

<sup>102</sup> Robert Hewison, 'Cultural Trends "Creative Britain": Myth or Monument? "Creative Britain": Myth or Monument?', 2011. p.236; Hewison also later compiled a report on behalf of Arts Council England at the turn of the millennium.

democratic school of thought with proposed liberal ideals of 'freedom' and 'autonomy', outside of the traditional British modes of 'high culture' or elitist artmaking. These positive connotations in the Australian policy, combined with the word 'nation' signalled an inclusive, community aspiration towards such egalitarian values. By this reading, the postmodern turn in the UK had become evident as a pervasive paradigm shift that had altered the social sphere, and therefore, the political. It is, however, often the case that language used is not evidence of intent: another reading could suggest that the idea of postmodernism had been peddled back to the sector from whence it came. By such logic, the 'creative nation' rhetoric had effectively reified postmodernism as a socio-political instrument.

In 1997, regardless of the original political intent, rhetoric would become policy; Britain saw the Conservatives step aside as a Labour government was formed under Blair. The 'creative' sector came to encompass more than just the arts. Chris Smith, the Secretary of State for the newly merged Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), wrote a series of essays collectively titled 'Creative Britain' in 1998, a header later borrowed as the title of Labour's 2010 cultural manifesto. Hewison foregrounds Smith's description of the Arts as a 'whole industrial sector' not before seen as an 'industry' that Smith now termed the 'creative industries'.<sup>103</sup> As opposed to traditionally-founded views of a high-low culture split, the conversation had become more nuanced under Smith and Blair. Unlimited Theatre's artistic director Jon Spooner remembers:

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<sup>103</sup> Smith in Hewison. p.236.

We got a little start-up grant from somewhere, maybe Leeds' city council, to buy a computer. There was also a free 'supporting startup businesses' thing... Thinking back, there was a lot of support that was coming through at the time [1997-8].<sup>104</sup>

The new imperative in the late 1990s was to deliver *economic* value; the case for funding would now 'be largely based in the terminology of the market'.<sup>105</sup> Spooner's recollection of access to technological equipment and 'startup business' support makes evident a turn from artistic subsidy toward subsidy of the 'industry' that now encompassed creativity. As Inglis and Hughson argued in 2001, under the banner of creative industries, 'where success is measured by economic outcomes' such as cost-effectiveness, the arts that *cost* (performing arts) were now 'expected to look to the arts that *pay* (popular and commercial artforms, such as television and cinema) as a guide to lifting their performance.'<sup>106</sup> In this case, 'performance' refers to measures of success, both in terms of contributions to the economy and labour market, as well as through audience statistics. The traditionally-assumed freedoms of the creative way of life posed complex questions about working conditions, contracts, governance and the precarity these fostered. This is not to suggest that the New Labour model of culture inhibited creative and progressive artmaking, as Spooner's positive testimony shows, nor that the overall agenda was an all-told failing, but rather that its proposal for a 'third way' had implications for the administration and creative practice of arts organisations throughout the UK in the ensuing years.

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<sup>104</sup> Jon Spooner and Rob Fellman, 'Transcript of Interview with Jon Spooner' (Unpublished, 2021).

<sup>105</sup> Hughson Inglis. p.466.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. (*my emphasis*).

In order to appreciate the implications of the 'third way' for arts organisations, it is pertinent to establish, first, the two traditional ideologies that formed the basis for the political debate surrounding cultural policy at the turn of the millennium. These positions have been referred to respectively as the widely established *democratisation of culture* and *cultural democracy* methods.<sup>107</sup> As Hughson and Inglis explain:

The democratisation of culture approach advocates a top-down dissemination of the arts, whereas the cultural democracy approach advocates that the arts work from the bottom-up whereby people are taught to explore their own creativity from their early years. [...] It is in relation to the question of public funding that the two approaches come to loggerheads.<sup>108</sup>

The democratisation of culture position is inherently in favour of an elitist, or 'patrician' stance that voices concerns about cultural standards, believing that the expertise of a few should be available for all to enjoy: that the 'best' work should be supported. Cultural democracy conversely assumes that all people are creative and should enjoy the same access to participate in the making of a 'popular' art and culture. What becomes crucial to the question of survival, or indeed longevity, in the UK arts sector, is the interplay between these ideologies, access to funding and changing public attitudes towards cultural ideals. In addressing such changing attitudes, playwright and cultural commentator David Edgar identified, in 1999, an 'emergent "cultural geometry" (since the 70s) [that] reflects developments in international politics, whereby the traditional bipolar model' of a high-low class divide has developed into a 'conversation between corners of a triangle'. Edgar suggests a 'third way' that mimics the policy of Blair's New Labour, that

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<sup>107</sup> Hughson and Inglis. p.473; François Matarasso and Charles Landry, *Balancing Act: Twenty-One Strategic Dilemmas in Cultural Policy* (Strasbourg, 1999).

<sup>108</sup> Hughson and Inglis. p.474.

proposes 'a political program to steer a course between welfare state socialism and an unregulated market economy.' Edgar's triangle suggests that traditional models of either 'patrician' or 'popular' culture might be complemented by a 'provocative' third model, in which elitists could maintain a quality of work, whilst proving to populists that such work could counteract elitism in specifically social terms.<sup>109</sup> In practice, such a methodology might find its corollaries in the current usage of terms such as 'outreach' and 'engagement', that suggest tangential or temporary presentations of works in social settings outside of cultural institutions.

Despite differing stances on what might constitute art, whether high-versus-low culture or its chiasmic reversal (embodied in an elitist patrician stance juxtaposed against a populist and access-driven stance), attentions at the turn of the millennium looked to address this provocative model of cultural policy; a middle-ground of both politics and cultural economy would need to be reconciled. As Hughson and Inglis also observe, the democratising impact of television—to which one might add the rise of home computing and the internet—had fundamentally changed public consumption of culture.<sup>110</sup> Labour believed that archaic policy needed a drastic overhaul and to undergo rigorous 'future-proofing' to sustain this new combined 'industry' under the auspices of the Arts Councils and the DCMS.

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<sup>109</sup> In Hughson and Inglis. p.469-70.

<sup>110</sup> Hughson and Inglis. p.472.

ii. *New Millennium, New Labour: the Boyden Report*

New Labour's first year in office saw the Scottish and Welsh parliaments devolved from the central seat of Westminster, in a move that mimicked the devolution of the Arts Councils three years prior. In the arts sector, bodies such as the National Rural Touring Forum were constituted at this time, to support regional touring promoters (such as Creative Arts East in East Anglia, and Performance Republic in South Yorkshire). Arts Council England (ACE) received its first rise in government budget. Two years later, ACE were allocated further year-on-year budget increases which continued until 2003/4. What seemed like good news for the arts sector proved complex in practice. Alan Peacock writes in 2000 (from the perspective of fiscal studies) about what was termed the 'Baumol disease':

One of the most influential propositions concerning the performing arts emanates from the identification of a 'cost disease' which is alleged to be endemic in the performing arts, from which the conclusion has been drawn that their long-term survival depends on ever-growing amounts of public subsidy. The *locus classicus* of this proposition is the pioneer work of Baumol and Bowen which appeared in 1966.<sup>111</sup>

Baumol and Bowen's hypothesis suggested that—across most sectors—as an economy grows and wages incidentally increase, productivity innovations can offset the rising costs to the employer.<sup>112</sup> By way of an illustration, for manufacturers these innovations may be

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<sup>111</sup> Peacock, 2000. p.197.

<sup>112</sup> W J Baumol and W G Bowen, *Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma: A Study of Problems Common to Theater, Opera, Music, and Dance (1966)*, Twentieth Century Fund Study, Reprint (New York, NY: Kraus Reprint Company, 1978).

technical, such as the automation of factory processes; for service-based industries the implementation of new software, for instance, might help employees to improve their efficiency. For specific sectors within the creative industries, like the performing arts, the outputs are so intrinsically linked to the personal services of its makers that the technological offsets found in other sectors do not apply in this way, causing Baumol's 'cost disease'.<sup>113</sup> To further illuminate: economists Alex Tabarrok and Eric Helland, as recently as 2019, established that the time-to-output ratio required for four people to produce a performance of Beethoven's String Quartet No. 14 was exactly the same in 1826 as it was in a version produced in 2010, despite the fact that the cost-per-head of those performers had risen in real wages over time (in the case of Beethoven's Quartet, twenty-three times more expensive).<sup>114</sup> Third Angel's Kelly proposed that:

Some art - because of its form - finds it easier to be self sustaining - because it is reproducible, for example. Some art doesn't. But all of it is important. [...] Live performance that is created for an audience of just a couple of hundred people a night, or fifty people a night, is not going to be affordable if the cost is divided between 200 or 50 each night.<sup>115</sup>

In this context, it becomes clear that assumptions about the role of government subsidy of the arts create a divide between not only political considerations around level of state

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<sup>113</sup> Eric Helland and Alex Tabarrok, *Why Are the Prices So Damn High? Health, Education, and the Baumol Effect* (Arlington VA, 2019). p.18.

<sup>114</sup> Helland and Tabarrok. p.36-7; Similarly, if a rendition of a classical play is reproduced today with the same cast numbers as required by the original, even in light of sector-wide best practice developed throughout the years, well-tested rehearsal methodologies and perhaps relative rises in the training and skill levels of performers, such 'innovations' in this way do not sufficiently offset the rises in costs across the entirety of the performing arts.

<sup>115</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'A Bit Cross, Actually', 2011 <<https://thirdangeluk.blogspot.com/2011/03/bit-cross-actually.html>>.

involvement, but also between the types of value that circulate, both economic and social.

A significant milestone in the development of the UK Arts Sector during this phase of increased funds for ACE, partly (and indirectly) concerned with avoiding the effects of Baumol's hypothesis, was a 2000 report by management consultant Peter Boyden into the funding of regional theatres, later to become known as the Boyden Report. In the House of Lords on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2000 Lord Bragg declared to his peers, in support of the report, that 'subsidy is not a pension for life', that 'the regional theatre in particular has been kept in business only by the low wages paid to those who work in it'.<sup>116</sup> In a statement that further acknowledged the effects of the so-called Baumol disease, Lord McIntosh of Haringey briefed the House the same day:

Boyden concluded that there had been fewer performances, contributing to a reduction in audiences. There is less employment in the theatre, the average actor being employed in the theatre for only 11 weeks a year. [...] [T]hey are badly paid, particularly in the regional theatres. Boyden also concluded that there are smaller casts; shorter rehearsal periods; less new work being commissioned; a significant reduction in the number of tours; and an accumulated deficit of £4.4 million to the end of March 1999. [...] I am afraid it is true that during the period 1993–99 the national theatres had a standstill in cash terms and the regional theatres had an increase of only 10 per cent compared with a growth in the economy of 15 per cent. That is a significant decline.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Lord Bragg further suggested that: 'it is possible now to build a new environment, [...] look at Leeds, Manchester, Colchester, Watford, Nottingham, Sheffield, Keswick, Ulverston...'. It is no coincidence that a number of these places appear as central to this thesis, as regions already leading the way ahead of Boyden's summaries in 2000.

<sup>117</sup> 'Theatres (Hansard, 5 October 2000)' <<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/2000/oct/05/theatres>> [accessed 27 October 2020].



Lord McIntosh's address evidenced the direct real-time effects of the so-called Baumol disease, as arts organisations worked to reduce their production costs throughout the '90s in order to maintain their presence in a sector that saw funding becoming an inflexible 'pension for life', as a basic level of support designed to maintain activity through drip-fed financial sustenance rather than as a working salary. This basic life-support did not regard the sector as an intrinsic, reflexive, and relative part of national socio-economic growth. In her seminal work *Stages in the Revolution* (1980), Catherine Itzin observed:

[T]here were signs in 1979 that subsidy to alternative theatre would be reduced. In their first budget, the Conservatives cut the government allocation to the Arts Council, increased Value Added Tax (VAT) to 15% and enforced reduction in local authority expenditure. [...] It was not inconceivable that subsidy to this area would dry up altogether by the mid-eighties.<sup>118</sup>

Thankfully Itzin's worst fears were not realised, though the legacy of the VAT increase was still being felt three decades later; in 2010 Kelly wrote to then-Secretary of State for Culture Ben Bradshaw on the issue. Kelly received a response in which Bradshaw confirmed that, in fact, 'VAT income on theatre tickets is greater than the public subsidy theatre receives from Arts Council England'.<sup>119</sup> By this logic, arts funding is not in fact a true subsidy, but an investment that breaks even (returns its value) on tax alone.<sup>120</sup> The

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<sup>118</sup> Catherine Itzin, *Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain since 1968* (Bungay, UK: The Chaucer Press, 1980).

<sup>119</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'The VAT Question', 2010 <<https://thirdangeluk.blogspot.com/2010/04/vat-question.html>>.

<sup>120</sup> Hilary Foster, Third Angel General Manager also noted, as Kelly explains in the same blog, that the National Insurance contributions of arts sector employees also feed back into the government funds.

excess profits generated by the government from the tax on ticket sales can then be spent across other areas of civil interest.

The Baumol effect emphasised how arts organisations were dependent on their fatal bind to economic inflation. The arts sector, as such, is subject to the inequalities of the Baumol effect that become exacerbated when combined with the changes in public and market spending habits; greater access to the arts comes at greater cost than a pension-type, or investment-logic subsidy could ever hope to address.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, if, as echoed by Peacock in 2000, 'the question to be asked is why the large majority of the major performing arts companies [had] survived over the last four decades', where funding growth had actually stalled in real terms relative to steady inflation, it may be possible to identify specific changes and adaptations in the working practices of companies within this context.<sup>122</sup>

To survive over 'four decades' of stalling growth suggests either a series of successful survival attempts, or an ongoing process of survival, both of which might indicate the occurrence of a wider *modus operandi* of surviving companies, in which longevity is a contingent part. One such reason suggested by Peacock, and illustrated by Lord McIntosh, is that survival was made possible because public demand for new work had remained consistent, offering companies 'the opportunity of diminishing the size of casts down to the ultimate stage of the one-person show', without compromising on the capacity of attendant paying audiences.<sup>123</sup> New writing and devised theatre are both

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<sup>121</sup> Trends towards service sector dominance in the UK has increased academic scrutiny around the concept of precarity, as Part Three goes on to explore.

<sup>122</sup> Peacock, 2000. p.198.

<sup>123</sup> Peacock, 2000. p.198.

modes of working that can be tailored to evolving contextual parameters, such as smaller cast sizes, and often smaller production teams overall.<sup>124</sup> However, further restrictions placed upon funding pose a greater risk to smaller organisations, where additional demands on outputs limit the opportunities for flexibility to sidestep the ever-endemic 'Baumol disease'. In summary, the combined effects of a reification of the value of the arts through the language of the 'creative industries', combined with historic debates around the role of the arts in society, created an uneasiness around the sector. For Third Angel and their contemporaries the weight of administrative policy and tighter budgets tested their resolve: the vaunted 'arm's length' principle was under threat, with taxpayers' money seemingly being treated as investment capital for the public purse, as its returns exceeded its funding, no longer a true subsidy for greater access and equally greater art.

### *iii. Renaissance or Crisis?*

Discourse around sector survival in the 1990s and to the present day has largely been concerned with questions of crisis, both in regard to defining the proposed features of such a condition, and versus its reality. The assessment of a variety of crises, as sector members have identified, points towards its antithesis: the resilience shown by

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<sup>124</sup> Complications particularly occur for physically larger organisations, such as orchestras and theatre venues, that are mired by their relative inflexibility, both in terms of existing staffing commitments and their artistic commitments to fill larger stages with appropriately sized casts, and auditoria with risk-averse audiences (at minimal financial risk to all concerned).

sector members in overcoming crises. Crisis, as I consider it here, can represent fiscal or economic crisis, as well as creative and personal. Kelly remembers how, in the '90s, ACE were proclaiming that artists should not just survive, but 'thrive'; arts organisations, however, were forced to adapt their working practices in order to rationalise costs whilst still keeping the quality of outputs high to meet the demands of a loyal audience base. The socio-economic and geo-political factors laid the groundwork from which artist-led and devised practices concurrently existed. I propose that the 'avant-garde', as a term referring to the vanguard of British theatre, creating a path for change, complicates the issue; ultimately, the features this work truly embodied was its ability to create new, contextually relevant and socially charged work at the lowest cost possible. Artist-led work also fits under this same 'avant-garde' terminology, and as such I make extrapolations between the energies of '90s new writing and the experimental devising practices of contemporary performance makers.

To begin tracing the apparent crises in '90s UK theatre, I draw upon several other contemporary accounts. Back in 1980 Craig wrote: 'if alternative theatre is seen as a phoenix – continually emerging, continually being threatened with incorporation into an impoverished mainstream – then it is not being overly optimistic to see it as rising again from those ashes.'<sup>125</sup> In 2002, then-editor of *TheatreForum*, Jim Carmody, wrote: 'at the end of the 1990s and at the very beginning of the 2000s, we are still in crisis'.<sup>126</sup> Crisis, he claims, is 'theatre's perennial status quo [...] even if the contours of crisis have shifted

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<sup>125</sup> Craig. p186.

<sup>126</sup> in Caridad Svich et al, *Theatre in Crisis?: Performance Manifestos for a New Century*, ed. by Caridad Svich and Maria M. Delgado (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2002). p.23.

over time.<sup>127</sup> He further claims: 'that is precisely the situation in which we are most comfortable.'<sup>128</sup> Carmody's inference is that it is the creativity of the artist that generates resilience against crises, to the point where the sector's very operation is based on the balance between crisis and creativity. On the other hand, Sierz warns of this 'powerful modern myth – the seductive notion that comfort encourages complacency and that a certain amount of discomfort can generate creative solutions'.<sup>129</sup> Third Angel mentees Action Hero similarly believe that the suggestion "'starving artists make better art'" is 'peddled by people who should know better', though they also suggest that limitation positively imposes 'structure and rules on your process which can actually facilitate more freedom of thought elsewhere'.<sup>130</sup> Despite Lord McIntosh's suggestion that there had been fewer performances overall between circa 1993-99, Sierz suggests that an avant-garde of new writing had begun around 1994 with writers like Philip Ridley and Anthony Neilson, whilst Caridad Svich, in *Theatre in Crisis?*, draws on examples of successful works similar to those Sierz highlights, with Mark Ravenhill's seminal *Shopping and F\*\*\*ing* and Sarah Kane's now-iconic *Blasted*, both part of the 1994-5 Royal Court Theatre season in London.<sup>131</sup> Svich drew attention to an article from *The Guardian* newspaper columnist Lyn Gardner on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2000, in which Gardner had 'asked whether the Renaissance in British playwriting' (which may have, by some portentous power, coincided with Sarah Kane's suicide in 1999) 'was at an end'.<sup>132</sup> Such an end is arguably a reconfiguring of the

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<sup>127</sup> in Svich et al. p.22-3.

<sup>128</sup> in Svich et al. p.23.

<sup>129</sup> Sierz, "'Art Flourishes in Times of Struggle": Creativity, Funding and New Writing'. p.35.

<sup>130</sup> Action Hero.

<sup>131</sup> Sierz, "'Art Flourishes in Times of Struggle": Creativity, Funding and New Writing'. p.36; Svich et al. p.8.

<sup>132</sup> Sierz, "'Art Flourishes in Times of Struggle": Creativity, Funding and New Writing'. p.36; Svich et al. p.8.

'contours of crisis', a watershed moment or paradigm rather than a 'paradigm shift'; like the postdramatic that decries a change rather than that which follows an end, the renaissance of British playwriting may have left a crisis in its wake, or the crisis may be the kindling for another movement to follow. Craig, two decades before had said that if 'fringe' theatre was dying, 'it is taking a long time over it'.<sup>133</sup> The energies of this '90s alternative progression influenced the future of the sector in subsequent decades. This chapter section maps the territory of the UK arts sector's developments into the new millennium, as further attentions shifted toward regional arts, and the somewhat 'fragile renaissance' observed by *Guardian* columnist Fiachra Gibbons in 2002.<sup>134</sup>

The second half of the 1990s saw an outpouring of creativity in which, for venues, 'the winners were not those theatres with the biggest budgets, but those that used their funding to stage a critical mass of productions' in an effort to bolster funds from ticket sales.<sup>135</sup> The Royal Court reported an average of just over 50% more shows than their budgets might have been expected to support, between the years 1995 and 2002.<sup>136</sup> London's Royal Court, however, is not representative of all UK theatre venues, let alone artist-led regional and touring companies. The Boyden Report recognised this relatively London-centric, countercultural and text-based trend at the turn of the millennium, and correspondingly emphasised the importance of new work, championing new writing in preference to the historical canon, as well as favouring forms of co-production between venues and makers. Extrapolations from the Boyden Report indicated that such a

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<sup>133</sup> Craig. p.186.

<sup>134</sup> Gibbons.

<sup>135</sup> Sierz, "'Art Flourishes in Times of Struggle": Creativity, Funding and New Writing'. p.36.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

continued so-called 'avant-garde' fervour, if adopted more provincially into the 2000s, could drive down the UK's average cast sizes (*Blasted* had a cast of 3, *Shopping and F\*\*\*cking* a cast of 5) and create projects that relied more on innovation in playwriting and directing, than in the expensive business of transposing classical plays and elaborate sets into modern venues (the National Theatre's *Richard III* in 1992 had a cast of around 36).

Beyond London and the Royal Court, the first few years after the Boyden Report 'led to a renaissance in regional theatre' in which one contributing factor, the subsequent three-year ACE stabilisation scheme that followed, liberated companies and venues alike: more stable income allowed for longer-term forward planning.<sup>137</sup> Unlimited Theatre's Spooner suggests 'it definitely runs in two- or three-year cycles for us. Because that's probably as far ahead as we can really realistically plan [...]. I hope it's not about the NPO cycle, it kind of inevitably is sometimes, but for quite a long time I've been encouraged to think of that as like a series of false deadlines'.<sup>138</sup> Spooner's indication is that confirmed funding durations created stability, and that the 'false deadlines' represent the funding review milestones along a trajectory of activity planning: like a 'false summit' these milestones are not the end of the journey, as the company's ambition is always to plan beyond the three-year horizon. Despite what appears to have been a golden-age of new writing that had already drawn to an apparent close—as declared by Gardner—the Boyden Report aspired towards a sustained process of practice innovation, to become more economically efficient, to break the spell of the Baumol

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<sup>137</sup> Sierz, "'Art Flourishes in Times of Struggle": Creativity, Funding and New Writing'. p.40.

<sup>138</sup> Spooner and Fellman.

effect. Jen Harvie refers to the dangers of 'creative destruction' to describe how 'capitalist economic creativity, innovation or development [...] seems necessarily to destroy the existing economic context—or at least significant parts of it—making it obsolescent.'<sup>139</sup> In the opinion of Dominic Dromgoole (then-Artistic Director at London's Bush Theatre) ACE's ambitions had enacted such creative destruction: as he observed, the mid-'90s avant-garde was a 'ferment of energy on the margins' that had, by 2001, been subsumed by an 'overconcentration on the centre'.<sup>140</sup> Some of the venues perceived to be more successful across this period via a metric of increased activity, such as the Royal Court, would become the model cases for both aspiring fringe venues and, indeed, for ACE's future planning for regional theatres. The effects of the Boyden Report on ACE's policy materialised in an attempt to harness the movement that had begun in London in the mid-'90s, and in doing so, would ultimately curb its development. Like taking the billows to dwindling embers, the chance of blowing the fire out for good far outweighed the chance of any kind of revival.

If the mid-90s had become synonymous with creativity, dynamism and an entrepreneurial 'do-it-yourself' spirit (Gob Squad [1994-], contemporaries of Third Angel, even specifically refer to their practice as embodying a 'do-it-yourself' aesthetic<sup>141</sup>), the early 2000s, by contrast, could perhaps be seen as a period of consolidation and introspection. The survival of companies (venues and makers alike) had been rooted in their adaptability, the extent of which would, however, be tested by the increased

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<sup>139</sup> Harvie. p.87.

<sup>140</sup> Sierz, "'Art Flourishes in Times of Struggle": Creativity, Funding and New Writing'. p.37.

<sup>141</sup> Johanna Freiburg et al, Gob Squad and the Impossible Attempt to Make Sense of It All (Gob Squad, 2015).



scrutiny from ACE and from the increasingly mainstream adoption of previously 'radical' creative outputs. The continued corporatisation of the sector introduced more pressure from unions and regulatory bodies on arts organisations, which would prevent then-common sectoral practices such as the overworking of staff (the Royal Court had some staff-members working over seventy hours weekly during the '90s).<sup>142</sup> The trajectory of UK theatre through this time was thus unsustainable, and in many ways such regulatory reform was welcomed by companies and staff alike: previously, theatre companies such as Monstrous Regiment, Women's Theatre Group (WTG) and Red Ladder had all undergone structural changes prior to the start of the '90s, switching from non-hierarchical collectives to private business-styled hierarchies that mirrored ACE's own structure. Such bureaucracy-led reform was therefore not new, and had benefitted some companies in the past: while Monstrous Regiment lost their funding in 1994, WTG re-branded as Sphinx in 1991 and still work today, Red Ladder also continue to operate.<sup>143</sup> Longevity, in these examples, I suggest is partly due to their adaptations, and more specifically in aligning with hierarchical structures recognised and understood by ACE. However, whilst it may be that creative energies intensify when work is made in conditions of crisis, prolonged periods under a scarcity of funding meant the flexibility afforded by small casts of low-paid performers (and fringe venues operated predominantly by volunteers) would run dry: the surge of creative freedom came with an economically-induced lifespan. The ability for venues to present increased numbers of shows to generate necessary revenues relied on the energy and goodwill of its low-paid workforce. As regulations tightened, identifying alternative revenue streams became

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<sup>142</sup> Sierz, "'Art Flourishes in Times of Struggle': Creativity, Funding and New Writing'. p.39.

<sup>143</sup> Heddon and Milling. p.119-20.

increasingly paramount. Further adopting the models of 'the arts that pay' and of their corporate-leaning cousins within the 'creative industries' bracket, small-scale and regional arts organisations were becoming further co-opted toward delivering New Labour's socio-political agendas.

From 2004, mandatory policy was introduced that required ACE to report against its Public Service Agreement (PSA), a set of formalised standards and criteria that held ACE more accountable to the government.<sup>144</sup> ACE, in turn, further challenged the 'arm's length principle' by introducing stringent reporting from its funded organisations to measure progress against its PSA objectives. Whilst ACE was traditionally not involved in policymaking, its role as mediator was (or at least outwardly appeared to be) leaning considerably closer to the state than the sector it supported. Increased reporting created a top-down target-driven policy around 'investment' rather than 'subsidy', as outputs would be measured to justify inputs. Spooner explains the effect this had on Unlimited Theatre's work:

[There's] a whole bunch of other stuff that we're talking about trying to get made that we don't put into those formal business plans, because then the risk is, we have to tell someone why we *didn't* do them, [when] it was totally speculative. [...] Whilst I'm not prepared to commit us to having to do that, one of them [projects] will come off, and I know that from experience.<sup>145</sup>

Reporting against targets created a subservience of artists to ACE that mimicked corporate hierarchies, revealing ideological clashes in New Labour's 'third way': supposedly appeasing socialist inclusivity agendas through installing measurable

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<sup>144</sup> Tomlin. p.34.

<sup>145</sup> Spooner and Fellman.

outcomes, itself simultaneously a neoliberal approach that placed differing degrees of value on artistic work (often at the expense of artistic freedom). Furthermore, in Spooner's example, the experience and skill of the artists are devalued, particularly when the speculative planning of a creative organisation is often intrinsic to their artistic process and is a skill in its own right.

As government strived to create a cultural democracy model of policy, PSA stipulations around terms such as 'engagement' and 'access' permeated through ACE funding criteria and funded-company evaluation reports. Social value is complexified when perceived in relation to economic value. On the one hand, as proposed in the 2016 Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) report, *Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture*, 'economic impact, often defined more narrowly than conventionally understood by economists'—such as Peacock, Baumol and Bowen, Tabarrok and Helland—'has become the principal way for proponents of arts and culture to argue its economic importance': ultimately, 'the flow of statistics from those making the case for funding should dispel any doubts about whether the cultural sector is recognised for its contribution to the economy'.<sup>146</sup> On the other hand, such 'impact' reporting is indicative of what was, as early as 1979, cynically described by political writer Raymond Williams as a 'wrist's length' principle, by which the actual relationship between government and publics—via ACE—was much closer than purported to be.<sup>147</sup> By the early 2000s, ACE had become increasingly politically operative by virtue of its ever-closer relationship with government: the 'flow of statistics' running back uphill to the top-down policy-makers. In

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<sup>146</sup> Geoffrey Crossick and Patrycja Kaszynska, *Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture: The AHRC Cultural Value Project* (Swindon, UK, 2016). p.36-7.

<sup>147</sup> Raymond Williams, 'The Arts Council', *The Political Quarterly*, 50.2 (1979), 157–71. p.159.

turn, subsidised arts organisations were looked to as remunerated operatives of government cultural policy: the reification of culture into a political tool had, by the early 2000s, met its inevitable conclusion.<sup>148</sup> What arises is what Hughson and Inglis term 'an emergent form of cultural corporatism' whereby ACE became positioned as the 'intermediary body responsible for drawing an array of relevant organisations into a bargaining process to facilitate the framing of national policy'.<sup>149</sup> As the real-time effects of the national policy, in which access to the cultural sector was simultaneously a democratic right for all, and yet was required to 'innovate' its own commercial diversifications in order to fund its survival, the working practices of arts makers, resultingly, further constricted in the following decades.<sup>150</sup>

The difference between output quantity and quality became more divisive in the early 2000s: the arts, as socio-political mediator, posed a complex qualitative metric that went far beyond the quantitative 'how many', of audiences a company could reach. The indication that ACE hoped to stimulate a post-millennial succession to the creative fervour of the 1990s was rooted in its problematic approach to engagement and impact reporting: activity figures became a quick-glance indication of whether projects were reaching an acceptable breadth of audiences, and in doing so, returning a basic metric of social 'value'. This is not to say that the work in the '90s was necessarily more creative

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<sup>148</sup> The long-fashioned reification of culture, once foretold by Georg Simmel in 1903 when he suggested that money 'becomes the frightful leveller – it hollows out the core of things, their peculiarities, their specific values and their uniqueness', was coming into full view. (Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life (1903)', Wiley-Blackwell, 2002, p.14.); Alice Lagaay suggests that Simmel was referred to by some as being 'postmodern *avant la lettre*', in 'Secrecy vs. Revelation. Reflections on the Dramatics of the Hidden', (*How Performance Thinks*, 2012, p132).

<sup>149</sup> Hughson and Inglis. p.462.

<sup>150</sup> Harvie. P69-70.

than in the early 2000s, since decreased activity is not the same as decreased creativity; however, more risks in terms of new writing and controversial content *could* be afforded amongst the much busier 1990s 'critical mass' programme (and was evident in the uplift in emerging companies due to A4E Express funding) than in the immediate period following the Boyden Report watershed. In the initial period between 1999-2002, Third Angel's Kelly highlights how they were able to secure funding to devise, premiere and tour four shows, with a single grant application for each, based on a title, a premise and evidence of a tour. In conversation, he suggested this was quite unique, and that stagnation of risk-taking in the sector occurred later into the 2000s, as the momentum wore off and changes to funding took full effect. Vast increases in funding pledged could stimulate a boom in activity, but, of what quality or value was, at the time, an unknown. Statistics by mid-2002, according to Sierz, show that a 'ten per cent increase in funding produces a twenty-five per cent increase in activity; and twenty per cent amounts to an increase of fifty-seven per cent'.<sup>151</sup> The exponential growth in activity where funding increases does, to an extent, confirm that more audiences can be reached with funding stimulation (even before any analysis of the quality of such work). What becomes apparent, adopting the terminology of the market, is that speculation and forecasting have a role to play in a post-millennial arts sector. Echoing Spooner's 'false deadlines', Yarker talks of how a recent round of ACE forecasting for NPO applications put him at a 'low ebb', 'jumping through hoops a bit and trying to envision [the] future', as a complex dialogue interfaces both creative and economic risk.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Sierz, "'Art Flourishes in Times of Struggle": Creativity, Funding and New Writing'. p.38.

<sup>152</sup> James Yarker and Rob Fellman, 'Transcript of Interview with James Yarker' (Unpublished, 2021).

The Boyden Report also served to amplify other disparities, such as that between regional and London theatre. In a 2010 retrospective interview, Gardner talks of the Newcastle-based company Northern Stage Ensemble, suggesting they were unusual for their particular European influence and reminds readers that this was 1998, before the Boyden Report; Gardner proclaimed their work 'a very good reason to leave London'.<sup>153</sup> She goes on to suggest that 'the introduction of that international element combined with the local theatre' let the local, Northern audiences 'have a head start' in the exposure to contemporary devised performance.<sup>154</sup> In 1998, Gardner was recognising a divide in regional-capital performance making, in which regional companies and audiences perhaps felt more affinity with their European counterparts than the text-led traditions of the London scene. In 2004 the regional North West venues' consortium was established, consisting of venues from Manchester, Liverpool and Lancaster, amongst others.<sup>155</sup> Regional consortia and specially-designed production companies, like Fuel in 2004 (following the model of Artsadmin established in the late '80s) emerged as a response to the developing conditions of the sector; theatre company Improbable also set up an ongoing forum for arts sector professionals in 2006 called 'Devoted and Disgruntled' that continues to meet.<sup>156</sup>

Forums, consortia and production companies all embodied risk-mitigation strategies, allowing sector knowledge and experience to be shared to best navigate the demands of ACE and national policy. External production companies could also act as a

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<sup>153</sup> Duška Radosavljević, *The Contemporary Ensemble: Interviews with Theatre-Makers* (Routledge, 2013). p.82.

<sup>154</sup> Radosavljević. p.83-4.

<sup>155</sup> Other consortia, such as House (1998-) which consisted of venues from Farnham, Brighton and Oxford, amongst others, were later established in a similar vein.

<sup>156</sup> 'Devoted and Disgruntled' <<https://www.devotedanddisgruntled.com/>> [accessed 6 March 2023].

buffer between artists and the increased bureaucracy in venues and, equally, to reinstate some distance between the makers and ACE themselves. Organisations in such consortia aimed to hold one another accountable, and at the same time, gain more leverage in their relationships with ACE and local authorities: at the time of writing, a national cross-regional consortium, Future Arts Centres, declares a commitment to 'championing the unique importance of arts centres at a local, regional and national level', language that positions the collective body of venues as an amplified voice in policy conversations. The establishment of consortia also made touring more economically viable, as increased bargaining power meant that tours could be booked collectively with the same artists and makers. However, these trends came at the expense of companies previously operating in those consortia-defined regions as touring, by definition, need not be local to the tourer. Spooner recalls how Unlimited Theatre struggled to maintain a presence in Leeds, instead chasing their popularity in Manchester, believing that 'the hardest place to try and get your work supported is the place where you're based'.<sup>157</sup> The bargaining power of consortia also disadvantaged the diversity of work produced 'outside' of the collective ethos and preferences of consortia members. There are regional divides (such as the North-South divide, partly historic and partly upheld by income-versus-productivity disparities) that often reflect political and cultural divisions further complicated by the supra-geographical overlay of consortia territories.<sup>158</sup> To illustrate, Future Arts Centres includes The Albany in South East London and ARC Stockton, separated by a North-South UK divide, around 260 miles of road, catering for different

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<sup>157</sup> Spooner and Fellman.

<sup>158</sup> 'Mapping Inequality in the UK' <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/dvc1370/index.html>> [accessed 6 March 2023].

audience demographics, and yet regularly collaborate in programming the same works.<sup>159</sup> Arts policy researcher Francois Matarasso recorded a 171% increase in touring production between 2000 and 2003, yet Lichtenfels and Hunter suggested in 2002: 'devolution in Scotland and Wales has left England grasping after past identities [...]; art with energy is art that looks forward [...].'<sup>160</sup> I propose that the earlier devolution of the Arts Councils forewarned of further devolutions and separations within the sector; despite the rapid expansion of rural touring as a result of the Boyden Report, Matarasso concluded in 2004 that 'the long-term viability of the work at current levels of support is questionable'. This exposes a complex interrelation of art and society that is underpinned by funding policy, itself rooted in politics and/of identity, which has been amplified in the 2020s with a government 'levelling-up' agenda that aims to boost regional towns and cities.<sup>161</sup> To illustrate, following the 2023 NPO funding decisions, at the time of writing ACE are attempting to convince English National Opera (ENO) to relocate to the North, without first liaising with Opera North about their intentions; ENO face a full cut to funding unless they comply, Opera North will likely suffer from the increased competition. Furthermore, this funding round also saw Third Angel, Unlimited Theatre, and Action Hero with their funding revoked; the 'levelling-up' agenda appears to reinforce former ideologies of elitist artmaking, as value becomes tied once again to the virtuosity of artforms like opera over the small-scale contemporary theatre companies that grew out of their regional contexts, made worse still by the implication that a

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<sup>159</sup> 'The Cultural Venues of Tomorrow - Future Arts Centres' <<https://futureartscentres.org.uk/>> [accessed 20 April 2021].

<sup>160</sup> Francois Matarasso et al, *Only Connect: Arts Touring and Rural Communities* (Nottingham, UK, 2004). p.11; Svich et al. p.40.

<sup>161</sup> Matarasso et al. p.113.



London-based company is the answer to 'levelling-up' the Northern arts ecology. What appears to be another possible renaissance may indeed be a new crisis.

*iv. Resilience in times of Austerity*

In 2008 the world was shocked by a crisis in banking that changed the course of the UK's socio-political landscape irreparably. In the following year the EU declared a Eurozone national debt crisis and delivered a series of bailouts for member states affected. In 2010 the Conservative-led coalition was voted into power in Westminster, seen then by the British people as the party of business and finance that would be best equipped to steer the nations through the troubled economic waters ahead.<sup>162</sup> National austerity measures were introduced that very same year. A steep drop in NPO funding from ACE in the following years, prior to 2013/14, caused a responsive rise in earned income and philanthropy to account for 73% of NPO's income. This data, later presented in a 2016 ACE 15-year retrospective report, would also show how the balance appeared to be skewed by organisation size rather than geography, with larger organisations better able to bring in earned income and philanthropy than smaller organisations (under 10 staff): only 1% of the earned income total was made up by these companies, such as Third Angel, Unlimited Theatre and Stan's Cafe, despite their category representing 25% of all NPOs at that time.<sup>163</sup> This retrospective report revealed

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<sup>162</sup> Graham Wilson and Wyn Grant, 'Business and Political Parties', *The Oxford Handbook of Business and Government*, 2010. p.193.

<sup>163</sup> Richard Naylor et al, Arts Council England Analysis of Theatre in England, 2016. p.14-15.

inconsistencies in existing arguments for or against increasing subsidy, versus developing private revenue:

Reductions in public funding post-2004 have accelerated since the turn of the decade, driven in particular by cuts to local authority budgets: existing research suggests that money to NPOs from local authorities has fallen by more [than] 27% (in cash terms) between 2010 and 2015. Arts Council England investment in theatre NPOs has fallen less steeply (4% in cash terms over the four years to 2013/14).<sup>164</sup>

Following the short-term-high-output example of the mid-'90s when funds were steady (albeit not in line with inflation), accelerated decreases in subsidy, twinned with growing disparity between different scales of organisation (evidenced in the 2013/14 data examined above), led, in turn, to greater divisions geographically. Identified in the report, London NPOs accounted for 43% of all NPOs, with Yorkshire and the North West next in line with 14% and 13% respectively.<sup>165</sup> By 2015 a 50% decrease in ACE's own administrative budget since 2010 saw production companies and consortia increase in significance as theatre makers relied more heavily on them to offset ACE's own reduced capacity, as alternative protective mechanisms of internal sector support; in practice this meant more bargaining power with ACE for the consortia and less self-determination for small-scale touring companies.<sup>166</sup> Following austerity measures, in real terms, as Gardner observed in 2011, not only were theatre makers affected, but 'as touring costs have risen, some venues, particularly in the north, are no longer able to afford decent touring

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<sup>164</sup> Naylor et al. p.14.

<sup>165</sup> Naylor et al. p.15.

<sup>166</sup> Tomlin. p.58-9.

productions'.<sup>167</sup> Since by 2016 London-based companies made up 43% of all NPOs, a significant amount of the national cultural output was no longer as accessible to regional communities. This illustrates a shortfall in the UK's aspirations for a model of cultural democracy.<sup>168</sup> As a result, Gardner argued, 'the places visited by the major companies have taken on a distinctly southern bias' and indeed, 'the idea of tours filling the gaps in the regional rep network is a fiction'.<sup>169</sup> By 2016-17 ACE itself acknowledged:

The risk that we are perceived as not allocating our resources fairly in terms of geographical distribution remains a concern. To address this, we have put in place a series of measures to increase the amount spent outside London. They include a commitment that at least 75 per cent of our Lottery investment over 2015-18 will be spent outside of London, and a 4 per cent increase in National Portfolio investment outside London for the 2018-22 period. Despite this there is a risk that the perception will continue, fuelled perhaps by regional disparities in other areas like economic growth.<sup>170</sup>

The catchword of this Annual Report was 'resilience': a word that both recognised the 'perversity of British theatre', lauded for 'its astonishing capacity to survive', whilst simultaneously acknowledging its continued plight. The term took on still more significance when, in 2016, Britain voted to leave ('Brexit') the European Union, to follow an isolationist trajectory that was sold to public voters as a choice in favour of sovereignty. In a fate intrinsically linked to socio-politics and economics, the arts sector's own trends toward consortia and regionalisation had been a situational precursor of the

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<sup>167</sup> 'On the Road to Nowhere | Culture | The Guardian'

<<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2000/may/31/artsfeatures1>> [accessed 26 January 2021].

<sup>168</sup> In 2014, London also dominates the sector in terms of output, with 47% of all performances (Naylor et al, p.15.)

<sup>169</sup> 'On the Road to Nowhere | Culture | The Guardian'.

<sup>170</sup> ACE Annual Report 2016-17. p.75.

UK exit from the supra-national EU economic region. Similar to how 'EU supranationality was perceived by Eurosceptics within Britain as an erosion of British sovereignty, territoriality and autonomy', the UK's domestic regions had opted to develop their own structures of regional determination; I argue that this was ultimately an act of self-preservation, to counteract the capital-bias of the national authority. The Conservative-led coalition government promoted, what political geographers David Featherstone et al dubbed 'project austerity localism', a position that enacts an anti-state rhetoric and simultaneously avoids engagement with intra-regional inequalities.<sup>171</sup> This resulted in treating unequal localities equally but not equitably, which would have instead involved providing greater support to areas more in need. What had aimed to democratise the sector through decentralisation may in fact have had the unintentional effect of rehearsing a more conservative trend of regional isolationism that, following the 2016 Brexit referendum, then translated to the national identity on the world stage.<sup>172</sup>

ACE's 2020 10-year plan demotes 'resilience' in favour of 'dynamism' as the word of choice. This key change in rhetoric arguably represents a backward step from their 2016 acknowledgement of the 'regional disparities', towards decentralising funding-distribution, as if invoking a mid-'90s spirit of self-determined 'do-it-yourself' success. Concurrently, the plan promotes 'investment principles', stating that companies should strive to be: 'dynamic, highly collaborative, inclusive and relevant'.<sup>173</sup> As previous analysis has shown, the Baumol effect illustrates how an investment model of funding is

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<sup>171</sup> David Featherstone et al, 'Progressive Localism and the Construction of Political Alternatives', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 37.2 (2012), 177–82.

<sup>172</sup> Wendy C Grenade, 'The Round Table Paradoxes of Regionalism and Democracy: Brexit's Lessons for the Commonwealth', 2016.

<sup>173</sup> ACE Draft Strategy: Shaping the Next 10 Years, 2019.

problematic, unless that funding closes the gap between service and goods-based sectors, in a move towards an equitable model in which service sectors are given a proportionate boost to compete with the growing wages and training costs that are inflated by goods industries. In an example from the 10-year plan, ACE proposes that the arts should play a significant role in 'paving the way' for environmental concerns, highlighting a national policy that indicates the cultural sector as an extension of its own 'wrist length' reach. Great responsibility falls upon the arts, then, as 'creatives are charged with motoring innovation and the affective life of a globalizing service economy', rather than holding to account responsible economic bodies and corporate entities.<sup>174</sup> What appears as a positive use of 'dynamism' as an empowering term reveals, on closer inspection, a sector whose reliance on its subsidy becomes the very *status quo* that benefits the state.

Peacock surmised in 2000 that 'those concerned with arts policy justify what they are doing with reference to welfare economics terminology, if only in incantatory form', whilst in reality 'the link forged between the public's preferences and the thrust of policy tends to be of a somewhat tenuous kind'.<sup>175</sup> By 2020, the 10-year report exemplifies and maintains how the national policy agenda still advocates for inclusion, but in doing so dilutes creativity and generates artwork that may not fully satisfy paying audiences. The danger of such an outcome is that the already-precarious position of arts organisations becomes increasingly unstable, as the tightrope is walked between policy, economy and creativity. Peacock further suggested that 'the link tends to become stronger when arts

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<sup>174</sup> Ridout and Schneider, 2012. p.11.

<sup>175</sup> Peacock, 2000. p.189.

organisations perceive that they are under threat because government subsidies and/or direct receipts from the public are not considered sufficient to satisfy their aspirations'.<sup>176</sup> The implication here is towards optimal subsidy arrangements for the arts, in which the balancing act falls to the state, as the overseer of economic variables, rather than on the artists and creatives themselves. If the 'creative industries' are to be considered both as fully publicly accessible (in order to promote national policy) and simultaneously as innovative, entrepreneurial and 'dynamic', optimal subsidy conditions that allow for such a position to become viable would need to be reached.<sup>177</sup> As an idealistic vision (a 'fourth way'?) is sought out in the early 2020s, creatives continue to develop and innovate, to embody 'resilience' by fitting to the mould of this industry-by-design. Perhaps the closest evidence we have for such a balance is the creativity-surge of the mid-'90s, a period out of which many existing companies were born. Despite the curbing of the movement at the turn of the millennium, the very fact that several companies born out of this period are still in operation today tells a bigger story about how their working methods may embody survival strategies in an ongoing battle against the precarious conditions of working in the arts. Shortly after the ACE 10-year strategy was released, while the final EU exit deal was still being negotiated, a global pandemic was declared as the Novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) took hold of the world (and is still transmissible in evolved forms in 2023). This new crisis further amplified the precarity of the UK arts sector, following national lockdowns in 2021-22 which set back the British economy. The resulting landscape was exacerbated by the recent NPO funding cuts that

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<sup>176</sup> Peacock, 2000. p.189.

<sup>177</sup> Such a strategy would, arguably, also need to consider geographical and regional disparities, by a factor of scale.

contributed to the closure of some long-standing small-scale companies, despite their survival through the pandemic. The factors introduced in this chapter thus far that contribute to the precarity of small-scale performance in the UK, such as the Baumol Cost Disease, the 'fragile renaissance' following the Boyden Report's attempts at stimulating regional theatres, the 'wrist length' distance between sector and governance, and enduring debates about the access and availability of the arts underpin a complex balance of factors, poised on the edge of instability. The unseen and unprecedented crisis of a global pandemic exposed many of these instabilities, calling upon the political system to intervene in the survival of UK arts organisations, arguably to the benefit of those larger in scale (who have a higher proportion of full-time staff eligible for furlough payments, and infrastructures to help support distance working) and to the detriment of smaller touring and devising companies like Third Angel, Unlimited Theatre and Action Hero (who all rely on freelance staff and are less well-resourced). In Part Three I explore more closely the methods of such contemporary companies, to assess the longevity-inducing variables that are within the control of the artists, and in doing so establish the reality of working as a creative or collective in the context outlined thus far.

### **III. Longevity and 'ways of working'**

Central to this line of enquiry are the voices, experiences, and archival records of contemporary performance makers. My analysis foregrounds three topics: 'precarity', as the inherent instability of modern arts practice; 'risk', as both the threat and challenge of this condition; and 'anticipation', as the forward-looking aspect that underpins both. In

my discussion of 'precarity' I explore the interaction between precarity in economic terms, and in artistic terms. This lays the foundations for my argument that 'risk' is a (counter-intuitively) positive characteristic of artistic careers, in part for: its implications in artistic survival; as a quality within performances; in the investment and trust placed in that practice by audiences. I argue that the 'do it yourself' aesthetic can be both a conscious artistic ethos and equally a necessity for economic survival. I further suggest that the concept of 'anticipation' is central to this connection, as it can be linked to the idea of future value, whether artistic, social, economic, or otherwise. In a sector that is increasingly managed by project outcomes and promissory objectives, the anticipation of a funded arts company's future is, most often, tied to its economic and socio-political achievements.<sup>178</sup> Longevity, I propose, is a condition that is perceptually reinforced, in part by exceeding it: I argue that that the motion and energies of infancy or emergence can be retained and revitalised through tactics of refreshing or maintaining spontaneity.

I begin by acknowledging the most recent crisis to befall the UK arts sector, and the ways in which this has intensified pre-existing discourse around the 'precarity' of creative labour in the arts.<sup>179</sup> The UK was late to respond to the spread of Covid-19, as

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<sup>178</sup> It is worth noting that the majority of private funders also have criteria attached to their funding, with the exception of some more recent examples in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic 2020-21, such as the Necessity fund who supported artists both in terms of personal finances and project costs, and required no detailed budget to be submitted in advance.

<sup>179</sup> François Matarasso, 'How Arts and Cultural Institutions Have Responded to the Pandemic #1' <<https://parliamentofdreams.com/2021/01/24/how-arts-and-cultural-institutions-have-responded-to-the-pandemic-1/>> [accessed 24 January 2021]; 'Where's the Spark? How Lockdown Caused a Creativity Crisis | Financial Times' <<https://www.ft.com/content/27364b27-6c0c-4dec-b109-17c054b49465>> [accessed 25 January 2021]; 'Building Foundations for a Flexible Future-Proofed Workforce (Recording) | Theatre Means Business' <<https://theatremeansbusiness.info/webinar/building-foundations-flexible-future-proofed-workforce/>> [accessed 16 October 2020].



international peers swiftly declared social distancing measures and national lockdowns to curtail the spread of the virus. The arts sector in the UK has been, once again, irreparably altered. What also became more apparent during this time was the increased sense of risk and fear, of the ever-present fragility of human life as we understand it. Precarity has long been written about in fields of study such as politics and economics, and more recently has become a significant recurrent topic within performing arts discourse, as established in the introduction to this thesis. In this, Part Three, I establish the theoretical topology of this thesis, in relation to a body of lived experience. In doing so, I build upon previous discourse around precarity, as a product of post-Fordist capitalism, and the ways in which precarity positions itself as an uncomfortable bedfellow of the creative arts. The aim is to look back from beyond a significant present threshold with new insight and experience—*a priori*—to better illuminate precarity, not in-and-of itself, but rather as a ubiquitous condition that both counteracts and counterbalances longevity in the arts sector. Additionally, I propose links between both economic and creative precarity, and in doing so set the stage for a closer investigation in the ensuing chapters of the creative practices of the primary case study, Third Angel, that contributed to their longevity.

In the introduction to a special issue of the journal TDR (The Drama Review) titled *Precarity and Performance* (2012), editors Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider claim that 'precarity is life lived in relation to a future that cannot be propped securely upon the past'.<sup>180</sup> Here they echo the words of Judith Butler, who wrote that 'every drive has to be propped, supported by what is outside itself, which is why there can be no

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<sup>180</sup> Ridout and Schneider. p.5.

persistence in life without at least some conditions that make life liveable.<sup>181</sup> The drive of progress requires a society that culturally understands time as a linear trajectory, as that of advancement towards unknown futures. With this in mind, Ridout and Schneider argue that precarity 'has become a byword for life' under capitalism, or, 'capitalism *as usual*'.<sup>182</sup> In the same issue, art policy theorist Randy Martin suggests that, etymologically, precarity 'teeters between prayer (*precor*) and debt (*precarius*), between a wish tendered on a promise' and a yet-unrealised claim.<sup>183</sup> As these propositions establish, precarity occurs within a shroud of inherent ambiguity, between promises and the provisional uncertainties that underpin them, foregrounding the fact that life itself is 'essentially "risky"'.<sup>184</sup> In order to approach the central interests of this thesis, namely the role and constitutive conditions of longevity in contemporary theatre making, this must be understood first: in relation to the situation and lived experience of precarity that represents its most constant threat; secondly, in the risks inherent in this condition, and in the mitigation of these risks in a move, uncertainly, toward anticipated and hopeful futures.

*i. Precarity*

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<sup>181</sup> Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (Verso, 2016). p.21.

<sup>182</sup> Ridout and Schneider. p.5.

<sup>183</sup> Randy Martin, 'A Precarious Dance, a Derivative Sociality', *TDR/The Drama Review*, 56.4 (2012), 62–77. p.62.

<sup>184</sup> Amanda Grenier, Liz Lloyd, and Chris Phillipson, 'Precarity in Late Life: Rethinking Dementia as a "Fraild" Old Age', *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 39.2 (2017), 318–30. p.10.

Precarity is a term rooted in both socio-economics and healthcare, disciplines that are also more often associated with studies of longevity; I argue the case for an interdisciplinary approach, drawing diverse studies to bear upon this present thesis. A secondary outcome of this approach is that it reveals how performance studies might, in turn, be applied as a frame through which to understand precarity from both ontological and phenomenological perspectives. Where Part One has shown the complexities of the sector in the 90s and millennial eras, the close relationship between creative careers and precarious labour is a particularly keen-edged example of this 'capitalism as usual'. Cultural theorist Mark Fisher called precarity the 'ugly neologism' for a condition in which people become 'unable to plan for the future', due to short-term labour contracts and market instability.<sup>185</sup> Anticipation of the unplannable future comes with a threat: the fear of failure or of disappointment. Threat signifies the space between doubt and hope, a persistent state of precarity-in-motion, in navigation towards the utopic possibilities that longevity itself represents.<sup>186</sup> This three-point methodology aims to establish a holistic view of longevity that might be applied—both retrospectively and proactively—to the working methods and creative practices of contemporary theatre-makers.

In the early history of precarity discourse urbanist Richard Florida wrote a seminal 2002 article in which he declared the birth of the 'precariat', an emerging class comprised of (formerly) middle-class creative professionals, stoked by the rise of creative industries and immaterial knowledge-economies (as opposed to the material labour that

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<sup>185</sup> Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (John Hunt Publishing, 2009). p.20.

<sup>186</sup> Helen Nicholson, 'The Poetics of Failure as Pedagogy', *The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 18.3 (2013), 213–15. p.215.

characterised prior decades).<sup>187</sup> While Florida importantly drew attention to the precariat as a social 'class' (grouped together by the 'unifying force' of precarity), his study overlooks the differentiating factors between individual experiences and their variations across different sectors and occupations.<sup>188</sup> As Part Two has explored, 'creative industry' rhetoric positioned flexibility as a positive outcome of the capitalist agenda. This totalising view of the inherent precarity in modern labour misses out the cases like part-time artists, or, the even more extreme case of bloggers and influencers who are not paid in typical ways, and whose 'work' is also their personal life.<sup>189</sup> I argue that the 'precariat' is much less defined a class than Florida first determined, but rather a more generalised category of workers within—or exploited transnationally by—Western neoliberalism: those with first-hand experience of an omnipresent precariousness that underscores life in contemporary capitalism. If, as Schneider and Ridout proposed, precarity is capitalism '*as usual*', the economic watershed commonly termed 'post Fordism'<sup>190</sup> can be considered as a 'manifestation of neoliberalism', with precarity and

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<sup>187</sup> Richard Florida, 'The Rise of the Creative Class; Why Cities without Gays and Rock Bands Are Losing the Economic Development Race', *Washington Monthly*, 34.5 (2002); Richard Florida, 'The Creative Class and Economic Development', *Economic Development Quarterly*, 28.3 (2014), 196–205.

<sup>188</sup> Orian Brook, Dave O'Brien, and Mark Taylor, "'There's No Way That You Get Paid to Do the Arts": Unpaid Labour Across the Cultural and Creative Life Course'. p.4.

<sup>189</sup> Brook, O'Brien, and Taylor. p.3.

<sup>190</sup> Fordism returns to the roots of the production line, pioneered by automotive mogul Henry Ford, and refers to a model of economics that replaces artisanal craft with the mass-replicable commodity. Fordism therefore assumes a position in favour of heterogeneity and equal access to goods: Ford famously proclaimed, 'you can have any colour you want, as long as it's black' (see page 54 of *The Expanded and Annotated 'My Life and Work'*, Ford, Crowther and Levinson; 2013). Therefore *Post-Fordism*, as a manifestation of neoliberalism, promotes choice, competition and, therein, individualisation.

precariousness as a resultant effect.<sup>191</sup> Alison Bain and Heather McLean observed in 2013, in relation to creative labour and neoliberal individualisation:

[A]rtistic creative labour is conventionally understood as individual, project-based activity that demands originality of expression, sensitivity, intuition and self-organization within intensely competitive, gatekeeper-mediated environments. This 'individualisation of risk' requires artists to cover the costs of their own training and professional development, insurance, benefits, sick and maternity leave, finding new work, and time management between projects.<sup>192</sup>

The implications of the private and professional domains converging in this way are therefore not new to the UK arts sector; rather, this narrative is amplified as similar effects seep into the wider creative industries and other immaterial sectors. Graeme Rose, freelancer and co-founder of Stan's Cafe and (later) The Resurrectionists (1996-2005), talks of taking on performing jobs as a 'leap of faith': in the relationships that brought about the work and in the intuitive excitement stimulated by an opportunity. Rose is a regular collaborator of a select handful of companies rather than, as he terms it, an indiscriminate 'gun-for-hire'.<sup>193</sup> He suggests that his personal survival in the sector—'somehow against the odds'—is directly related to an ability 'to be able to yield to the unknown'.<sup>194</sup> Bain and McLean's observation significantly exposes the problematic assumptions of arts sector labour as individual-led (rather than driven by long-established institutions that could otherwise define its parameters, such as banks in the financial sector, or museums in the heritage sector); the mobile and unfixed nature of both arts organisations and the freelance individuals that move between them constitute

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<sup>191</sup> Jorinde Seijdel, 'Editorial', *Open*, 17: A Precarious Existence (2009), 4–5.

<sup>192</sup> Bain and McLean. p.98.

<sup>193</sup> Rose and Fellman.

<sup>194</sup> Rose and Fellman.

a dominant portion of the sector. Colloquially, within the sector itself job roles defined by either 'company-' or 'venue-side' suggest a more granular divide than is often assumed from outside the sector. Looking in from outside, itinerant artists and creative workers, like Rose, are thereby empirically assumed to be more readily exposed to the risks of creative labour and therefore more flexible and dynamic in their ability to manage, and react to, *economic* risk in turn.<sup>195</sup> Rose talks also of the positive aspects of creative 'fleet-footedness' in his experience in the sector, whilst also acknowledging that 'poverty' and feeling 'bereft' between periods of work are the biggest threat to his motivation and purpose. Despite risk-readiness, artists, however, have less protections against their liability for risk—both creative and economic—particularly for those not organised within limited-liability company structures: a freelance performer, for example, may only have one bank account for both personal and professional use, little-to-no liquid assets to jettison, and, as in the case of Rose, place their own name and reputation at greater risk than permanent members of collaborating groups, when they engage in creative labour; the freelancer's own name becomes synonymous with their reputation, unlike collaborators with permanent positions whose names may be part-obscured within an overarching brand.

The reality of the sector is not only individuals operating between establishments, but companies may also be itinerant; the fact that theatre companies exist separately from the buildings in which they rehearse and perform, also perpetuates this vision of the freedom of the artist, yet does so as a collective of individuals. This assumption is complex and, I argue, leads to further assumptions that have implications for small-scale

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<sup>195</sup> Bain and McLean. p.98.

companies. As previously explored, the term 'dynamic' also appears in the 2020 ACE strategy, which Third Angel addressed as a benchmark within their '21-'22 planning documents under the objectives: 'professional development training', 'staff strategy days' and 'regular reviews of wellbeing policies'.<sup>196</sup> 'Dynamism' in this way is less about external economic risk than about addressing the personal aspects of life working *within* an arts organisation, where the tensions of precarity permeate and are felt throughout its make-up, not just as pressures from outside the gates. In an ACE report in 2018 titled *What is Resilience Anyway?*, 31% of respondents equated resilience in organisational terms to 'flexibility' and 'adaptiveness', the highest scoring answer. Where dynamism might be equated with mobility or flexibility to the majority (and particularly in the case of individual artists like Rose) in the specific case of Third Angel, it is applied to a combined managerial, clerical and interpersonal resilience. Sociologists Orian Brook and colleagues stated as recently as 2020 that, cultural work specifically, 'is often seen as an exemplar of precariousness' itself.<sup>197</sup> Performer-photographer Manuel Vason suggests that whilst 'precarity denotes structural inequalities' the concept of 'precariousness' is rather socio-ontological, and denotes an existential vulnerability. Put differently, by Vason's reckoning the cultural sector, because of unstable socio-economic structural inequalities, has been encumbered with an inescapable fragility: a constant state of pervasive precariousness.<sup>198</sup> This goes further than the precariousness proposed by Florida as a uniting feature of a class, instead describing a quality or experience that

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<sup>196</sup> Personal records.

<sup>197</sup> Brook, O'Brien, and Taylor. p.2.

<sup>198</sup> Manuel Vason, 'The PhotoPerformer: The Performance of Photography as an Act of Precarious Interdependency' (University of Brighton, 2019). p.37.

pervades western society as a whole. The cultural sector is an exemplar of existential precarity, in part because it is inseparable from it. The phenomenological nature of precarity itself is a mutable condition that exists between recognised dichotomies or frames, such as might be labelled in antonymic pairs: 'success' and 'failure', or 'hope' and 'doubt'. The risks inherent in the survival or demise of creative endeavours are experienced as a threat of an imaginary dial that might swing, at any moment, toward the less favourable pole.<sup>199</sup> Navigation of risk is an inescapable factor toward the prospect of arts sector longevity.

*ii. Risk*

Within contemporary theatre-making I propose that there are significant correlations between postmodernism—as that which evades precise structural definition—and the lived experience of precarity-inducing post-Fordism. If, as Bain and McLean suggested, the artistic life is inseparable from economic risk, the key fundament of postmodern performance to use, adopt and respect *creative* risk in practice appears, at first, counterintuitive. Sara Jane Bailes famously referred to a 'poetics of failure' in 2010 which goes further, suggesting that the risk of failure itself is, in fact, intrinsic to performance more generally, 'as a constituent feature of the existential condition that makes expression possible'.<sup>200</sup> My argument aligns with Bailes' analysis in identifying

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<sup>199</sup> Butler.

<sup>200</sup> Sara Jane Bailes, *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure* (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010).



failure as a positive (rather than negative) attribute of creative work that postmodern performance embraces and turns inward, upon itself.<sup>201</sup> Performance company Gob Squad, for example, frame the performance space (both the physical space of performance and the socio-cultural spheres within which it is facilitated) as fail-safe spaces, declaring: 'where else do you have the possibility to fail nowadays? Working with risk and the unforeseen is fundamental'.<sup>202</sup> Taking ownership of risk, and thereby the chance of failure, mitigates the negative effects of unplanned or indeterminate outcomes; as Kelly suggests, devising, as a working ethos, 'embraces serendipity'.<sup>203</sup> Failure reframed as 'possibility' becomes generative as it 'indexes an alternative route or way of doing or making' and reveals previously unseen (and perhaps otherwise undesired) outcomes.<sup>204</sup>

Risk, then, manifests itself both in terms of the precarious socio-economic lives, of both a company and its members, but also separately within the creative choices made behind the closed studio doors. In some cases, risk is foregrounded in the performances too, creating a mutual risk-taking between performers and audiences (who are, after all, paying for the spectacle of the unexpected). Rose recalls a project from his formative years, in which his university cohort 'half-cocked' a dance sequence: 'we couldn't dance, so it had a rawness and an energy to it, which changed the way that we were thinking about making work'.<sup>205</sup> It is, as Goat Island's Matthew Goulish termed it, the 'untrained effort' that exposes the performance act on stage: there was no attempt by Rose and his

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<sup>201</sup> Bailes. p1.

<sup>202</sup> J Freiburg et al. p.120.

<sup>203</sup> Heddon and Milling. p197.

<sup>204</sup> Sara Jane Bailes, 'Introduction: Failure and Representation', in *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2010). p.2.

<sup>205</sup> Graeme Rose and Rob Fellman, 'Transcript of Interview with Graeme Rose' (Unpublished, 2021).

collective to hide the reality of their actions, as perhaps one might expect of highly-trained ballet dancers or opera sopranos, whose goal is to show effortless virtuosity, to seduce audiences into the temporary suspension of their disbelief.<sup>206</sup> The risk for Rose, and Goulish, lies precisely in the exposure, asking: will the audience appreciate the untrained effort as an artistic statement or device in its own right, or will they be disillusioned by it? Rose and Goulish are professionals, of course, but their performative skill is in the very orchestration of such moments of effortful anti-virtuosity, in relating to their audiences as fellow beings, rather than appearing as dramatic characters of ultra-trained elite. In other cases, such as durational works, the audience may attend 'projects in which material itself (not just sequence and tone) will be invented by performers in real time in front of spectators who are free to arrive, depart and return at any time', for example, with a twenty-four-hour showing of Forced Entertainment's *Quizoola!*<sup>207</sup> Writing about the show, Gardner notes how 'durational performances require the audience to surrender to the changing rhythms of the show as exhaustion overtakes the performers and failure becomes an integral element. [...] [I]t feels as if we are all in this together'.<sup>208</sup> William Drew, writing about his experience of *Quizoola!* for *Exeunt* magazine, recalls at times 'drifting in and out of consciousness' whilst, by 05:37am, he explains how the 'repetitions in the questions have started to pay dividends', even as the collective

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<sup>206</sup> Joan Dickinson et al, 'Talking with Goat Island: An Interview with Joan Dickinson, Karen Christopher, Matthew Goulish, Greg McCain, and Tim McCain', 35.4 (1988), 66–74.

<sup>207</sup> Tim Etchells, 'Live Forever / In Fragments, to Begin...', *Performance Research A Journal of the Performing Arts*, 2015. p.92.

<sup>208</sup> Lyn Gardner, 'Who Wants to See Quizoola!, A 24-Hour Play? | Forced Entertainment | The Guardian', 2013 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2013/mar/05/quizoola-forced-entertainment-barbican-lyn-gardner>> [accessed 15 February 2023].

exhaustion of audience and performers begins to take its toll.<sup>209</sup> A spectator may find that for the time they are present, seemingly nothing of note occurs (as they perceive it), on the other hand, one may be present precisely at the time a unique moment of improvisation unfolds live in front of them (that they may deem more significant). The greater the risk, perhaps, the greater the possible reward.

In a similar way to how contemporary, postmodern performance demotes actorly virtuosity in favour of the 'untrained effort', virtuosity itself, in light of this age of precarity, takes on a new conceptual shape. James Yarker, artistic director of Stan's Cafe, explained: 'one of my little mantras is "there's no point in doing it if it doesn't scare you". [...] You don't have to be skilled, you just have to be cussed enough to drive it through.'<sup>210</sup> In theoretical parity with this, Bailes also established that 'failure exposes the economy of value and exchange through which live performance conducts its business; it offers new conceptions of virtuosity and mastery.'<sup>211</sup> Sociologist Pascal Gielen also suggested (via his studies of philosopher Paolo Virno) that artisanal virtuosity has shifted under conditions of immaterial labour, to 'linguistic virtuosity'. Without tangible outputs, individual virtuosity in labour 'presupposes the presence of others, of an audience': skill, therefore, becomes performative. As Gielen himself summarises: 'the immaterial worker is a good performer'.<sup>212</sup> Virtuosity, by this theory, is only achievable (or at least validated) by virtue of collaboration, or of relational skill. Contemporary performance 'conducts its

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<sup>209</sup> William Drew, 'Quizoola! - Exeunt Magazine' <<https://exeuntmagazine.com/features/quizoola/>> [accessed 15 February 2023].

<sup>210</sup> Yarker and Fellman.

<sup>211</sup> Bailes, 'Introduction: Failure and Representation'. p.13.

<sup>212</sup> Pascal Gielen, 'The Art Scene: An Ideal Production Unit for Economic Exploitation?', *Open*, 17:A Precarious Existence (2008), 8–16. p.12.

business' relationally; indeed, contemporary business is also itself performative. As Forced Entertainment's director Tim Etchells elaborates, such works co-opt 'an organic rhythm of failure, discovery, consolidation and eventual collapse that a spectator feels (knows, intuitively) is real'.<sup>213</sup> The gamble in this way, of discovery or collapse, echoes the precarity of everyday life, gamifying and reifying precariousness in the unspoken contract between audience and performer: precariousness becomes currency.

To reflect again on the claim of Brook et al that cultural practices are exemplars of precariousness, I propose these practices are exemplary precisely because risk is *of value* to those theatre-makers and audiences that embrace it. Contemporary companies (particularly those engaging with a postdramatic aesthetics) live dangerously within their existential vulnerability, inhabiting it, so as to own it: in survival terms, like smearing oneself in the mud of the forest floor to mask one's presence from the dangers of the forest. I argue that an initial step towards longevity, as evidenced by the likes of Forced Entertainment and Stan's Cafe, may be in accepting one's place as part of an ecosystem of risk and reward, and going further, to acknowledging the potential value that resides between both positions, vitally enacted in the playing of the game, in the testing of the performance contract that echoes and intensifies the 'organic rhythms' of precarious life. Furthermore, another survival tactic that precarity oft-necessitates is that of a strength in numbers, which Vason offers as a way to revisit precariousness as a positive condition, as a 'creative dependency on each other and a force of survival and resistance against the constraints of neoliberal individualism'.<sup>214</sup> As explored in Part Two, the creative economy

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<sup>213</sup> Gielen. p.12.

<sup>214</sup> Vason. p.1-2.

celebrates collaboration, but rewards individualism rather than shared risk and ownership: the arts sector is simultaneously seen as predominantly individualistic (itinerant companies and freelancers) and yet is lauded for the cultural outputs of cooperation. Bailes suggested that one of collaboration's 'most radical properties is that it operates through a principle of difference rather than sameness.'<sup>215</sup> The aforementioned 'do-it-yourself' aesthetic, with its roots in 1960s countercultures, reacts to the structural inequalities of precarious life, demarking an ethics of self-reliance against the (capitalist) mainstream. Bailes' poetics of failure too has an affinity with 'DIY' experimentation and 'multiply-authored devising processes' that are constituent of a wide spectrum of postmodern performance works, including the collaborative devising methods of Third Angel, as I discuss in Chapter 3. Both Vason and Bailes identify the uniqueness of artistic collaboration precisely in its apparent contradictions: a radical dependency and self-sufficiency—by collectives and companies—is an act of distancing from the locus of the external forces they seek refuge from.

A paradoxical 'frictional harmony' occurs between individuals in a collective—whether as part of a company or the wider 'scene' that it becomes a constituent part of—as the relational distance (and difference) between members is what, ultimately, defines the boundaries of the group; a harmony, in musical terms, occurs at the simultaneous presence of more than one, different, notes.<sup>216</sup> In 2009 Gielen wrote of the economic exploitation of the art 'scene' (which the editor claims was 'barely taken seriously' by sociologists), in which he argued that the otherwise loose form of social

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<sup>215</sup> Bailes, 'Introduction: Failure and Representation'. p13; p2.

<sup>216</sup> Vason. p.32.

organisation of the 'scene' is actually 'a highly functioning part of our [arts sector's] contemporary networking society'.<sup>217</sup> For example, Critical Art Ensemble (1987-), a collective practising at the intersection of art, political economy and new media, similarly advocate for what they term 'alliances of precarity' in which one's own situational context might create mutual support structures with another.<sup>218</sup> To illustrate: rehearsal spaces are sometimes offered as part of a tax-break loophole under the legal designation of 'meanwhile use' for unoccupied buildings, benefiting the landlords and artists alike (an initiative that was further bolstered by the Greater London Authority, among others, as a response to the Covid crisis in 2020).<sup>219</sup> In the alliances between, or sometimes exploitations of, arts organisations with-and-by those from other sectors, their differences act to reinforce the 'scene' as a social functioning organisation that operates differently to other sectors. Speaking of such frictional harmonies, Yarker describes Stan's Cafe's 10-year acquisition of the A.E. Harris building in Birmingham (2009-2019):

[W]e had a crisis meeting about letting go of the space so that we could continue being a theatre company [...] [We] let the vast majority of it back to our landlords, which worked out well, because they'd expanded their operation, and we've retained the storage and our office and a courtyard, and a venue that is sort of a 50-seater venue. So it's still ridiculously brilliant and we'd given away thousands and thousands of square metres of space [for free to other artists]... So yeah, it was an amazing 10 years.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Gielen.

<sup>218</sup> Critical Art Ensemble (CAE), 'Reinventing Precarity', *TDR/The Drama Review*2, 56.4 (2012), 49–61. p.57.

<sup>219</sup> 'Meanwhile Use London A Research Report For The Greater London Authority', 2020.

<sup>220</sup> Yarker and Fellman.

Collaboration itself, inside or outside company walls, is therefore founded on trust: that differences can be positive and generative; that diversity of knowledge and experience exceeds what is possible alone.

Trust is a hopeful counterpart of risk. In this way, even the self-sufficient collective risks its own harmony as members come and go, as decisions are made and as life priorities change. Gob Squad wrote of how, in 2002:

Group members now live in Hamburg, Nottingham and Berlin. Some have children, some are pregnant and some are in therapy. It seems impossible to draw up a rehearsal schedule which meets everyone's needs. Everyone agrees *Room Service* [the production they were working on at the time] will be Gob Squad's make-or-break project.<sup>221</sup>

As it happens, *Room Service* went on to be hugely successful, as it restored group morale, and filled their calendar with 'gigs' for the following year; *Room Service* marks a turning point in the company's life-story rather than a moment of crisis, or even collapse.<sup>222</sup> Similarly, Yarker describes how Stan's Cafe's parting with co-founder Graeme Rose marked one such crisis point for them: 'it was tough around the time that he left, that parting-of-the-ways there was personally difficult.'<sup>223</sup> Rose also shared similar sentiments: 'I was less interested in the idea of running a company because I wanted to do different things. [...] But that allowed James to grasp the tiller, really, and drive through his creative agenda.'<sup>224</sup> The alliances of precarity located within the creative

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<sup>221</sup> Gob Squad and Aenne Quiñones, *The Making of a Memory: 10 Years of Gob Squad Remembered in Words and Pictures* (Synwolt Verlag, 2005). p.170.

<sup>222</sup> Gob Squad and Quiñones. p.172.

<sup>223</sup> Yarker and Fellman.

<sup>224</sup> Rose and Fellman.

collective can, by chiasmic reversal, be considered not just as alliances of precarity but, simultaneously, as precarious alliances. The microcosm within the art collective or theatre company is therefore inherently precarious, though differently so: economic and personal financial risk are mitigated, whilst a greater creative risk (more opinions in the room) becomes indicative of a situational creative precarity. Both Yarker and Rose have gone on to successfully sustain careers in the sector, and both work together to this day as collaborators and friends: frictional harmony represents, once again, a reframing of potential failures or crises as generative, or even *valuable*, outcomes. The contradictory and dialogic balancing act of frictional harmony necessitates a form of social precarity that demands the formation of interpersonal 'alliances' (no matter how precarious or tenuous they may, themselves, be) to ensure survival, and to increase the chance for—and duration of—longevity.

### *iii. Anticipation*

The cultural sector's longevity-enhancing mechanisms, both for-and-against its inherent precariousness, are manifest both in terms of collaborative working practices (a well-established fundament of the postmodern approach) and also in the very founding of theatre companies, collectives and of the socio-cultural contemporary performance 'scene' itself (as Gielen advocates for) as places of creative assembly. In understanding theatre's ontological proximity to other systems, it is possible to map a network of disciplines, scenes and practices in which risk, failure and the anticipation of uncertain futures converge. In this final section I focus on anticipation, and draw upon wider



discourse to further argue for the positive redressing of precarity, which underpins arguments made in the case-study analyses in the following chapters. Firstly, I make a correlation between aspects of postmodern artmaking, the forms of risk identified thus far, and the performative ambiguity of wider socio-economic life; borrowing from Randy Martin:

The postmodern dancers, hip hop artists, and boarders who by tradition would be assigned to populations at risk also craft corporal economies where risk counts as its own reward. A risky move is granted immediate value by the creative ensemble; it need not await final delivery in a concert, competition, or recording precisely in the manner that a derivative affords a price on a good or service that has not yet been made or come due.<sup>225</sup>

In Economics, 'derivatives' is a term used to illuminate what is often referred to as the 'performativity of the market'.<sup>226</sup> It is through this analogy that I draw another thread between the precarity and performativity of both the arts and the socio-economic environment in which it must operate. Martin infers that 'corporal economies' of risk bind groups of artists together and give value to risk-taking creativity in the making or rehearsal process, praising and appraising the artistic choices that might make for the most effective moments in front of an audience or consumer. The value generated by the ensemble in the creative process is, too, derivative: valuable for its creative spontaneity, for its virtuosic skill, or for other reasons as deemed worthy of praise from the ensemble itself, long before the economic benefits are felt (as tickets are sold and spectators invited in). I argue that the way both precarity, and the risky business of

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<sup>225</sup> Martin. p.74.

<sup>226</sup> Franck Cochoy, Martin Giraudeau, and Liz McFall, 'Performativity, Economics and Politics: An Overview', *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 3.2 (2010), 139–46.

performance collude with economics provides a fertile ground for a theory of longevity, which can reconcile both economic and artistic risk. The management of derivatives, translates to the ability of an ensemble to recognise *in advance* the effectiveness or success of creative ideas, which in this case represents its eventual economic and artistic value.

Anticipatory practices of appraisal and evaluation of economic and artistic values, I argue, are therefore key to company longevity. Jon Spooner, artistic director of Unlimited Theatre, explained that the 'values part' of the company 'feels really important', in part because he 'always felt very clearly that the company was the people that set it up'; they used to describe Unlimited as 'what happens when these three artists come together to make work'.<sup>227</sup> A company's core values—a converging of the personal values of its individual members—may be identifiable by audiences within its work, and may act in the same way as economic derivatives: predicting the values that will be reflected in future works and thereby foregrounding possible levels of success in terms of an audience following, or chartable marketing trends. Spooner noted that 'through a conversation with the board [of trustees]' (appointed in 2006) the description of the company became less about the individuals in the collective and more clearly defined by a joint goal of 'blurring the boundaries between Art and Science'.<sup>228</sup> In such a way, the branding of a company can act as a reified set of values, and I have found this to be true of the longevity-exhibiting companies that I reference throughout: Unlimited, Third

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<sup>227</sup> Spooner and Fellman.

<sup>228</sup> Spooner and Fellman.

Angel, Stan's Cafe and Forced Entertainment (at least, from the perspectives of the members interviewed) all speak strongly about upholding core company values.

Furthermore, Spooner explained how he was (in July 2021) 'interviewing for a new co-artistic director. It's come about because, maybe, now that I'm older, I'm less precious about it.'<sup>229</sup> In acknowledging his reassessments of the values associated with Unlimited Theatre throughout its lifetime, Spooner has allowed the external changes and the ebbs and flows of parting colleagues and new board members to influence the keel of Unlimited Theatre. I reference Martin's introduction of derivatives in economics and the performativity of the market to identify an etymological segue: from derivatives to the utopic hopes of the '*dérive*' (or 'drift').<sup>230</sup> The *dérive* was a concept born out of the practice and discourse of the Situationists in the 1960s as a way to reconfigure everyday interaction with public spaces. The practice involved 'drifting' as a poetics of walking: new experiences granted through randomised route-making and the deliberate obfuscation of habitual spatial interactions. In its reconfiguring of the everyday, drifting proposes versions of the world that can be 'other than it is.' CAE consider this 'the utopian gesture', whose 'constant companion is precarity'.<sup>231</sup> Rose, in many ways, personifies this mode, claiming to have 'always just picked along one step at a time' (a self-proclaimed 'survivor').<sup>232</sup> Throughout this thesis (as established in the thesis introduction), the word longevity is assumed to be aspirational and intangible, as an

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<sup>229</sup> Spooner and Fellman.

<sup>230</sup> The English 'derive' comes from the Latin roots '*de + rivus*'; meaning 'down-stream'; the French '*dérive*' also still retaining a nautical usage of the phrase 'to drift'.

<sup>231</sup> CAE. p.52

<sup>232</sup> Rose and Fellman.

aiming-toward, a navigation to seek not the best possible outcome of an uncertain future, but rather to avoid identified *negative* outcomes.

Nonetheless, sustaining vitality in the face of atrophy is an affliction all groups (as they age) must face, more so the longer they continue to exist. Though it is bound by the laws of time, longevity *can* be extended; many theorists in healthcare and economics work tirelessly to this end. Performance practice is uniquely positioned to explore longevity, through its microcosmic abstractions of time and its inherent impermanence. Rose identifies the fatal bind, the atrophy that is inseparable from the motions of life:

Changing your patterns, changing your rhythm, keeping fleet-of-foot, keeping on your toes, just has a vitality, inherent in it that keeps you alive. [...] But I have to think now about a future physical decline, and what that means, and how I can sustain work when I'm potentially less employable.<sup>233</sup>

Whilst it is possible to lay aside thoughts of survival in favour of those more immediate and rejuvenating, Rose acknowledges the need for adaptability and awareness in order to maintain vitality in different ways. This need is more significant for Rose as a freelance artist, as he does not have the structure or 'brand' of a company to carry forward his values or legacy in the way that Stan's Cafe do, or Unlimited and Third Angel have done. Longevity, as a utopic ideal, may contain within it a form of aspirational 'previval', as coined by Coleman Nye, as a form of anticipatory survival: making or doing things in the present that decrease future risks.<sup>234</sup> Previval, applied to collectives rather than individuals, can also acknowledge the fact that collective ideals and values are key to

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<sup>233</sup> Rose and Fellman.

<sup>234</sup> Coleman Nye, 'Cancer Previval and the Theatrical Fact', *TDR/The Drama Review*, 56.4 (2012), 104–20. p.106.

posterity and legacy. Prevalence contests precarity, as everyday life under capitalism does not always lend itself well to aspirational acts of horizon-gazing or blue-sky thinking.

## Conclusion

Parts One and Two charted the circumstances surrounding 1990s contemporary theatre making, positioning context in relation to practice: to extract is not to remove entirely, but rather to understand it on its own terms, as well as part of a larger system. I defined the landscape within which Third Angel and their contemporaries emerged, and survived, arguing that their divergent postdramatic sensibilities became a counterintuitively positive force of this 'fourth-generation'. In defining companies like Third Angel, Unlimited Theatre, Stan's Cafe, Gob Squad et al within a broader context as 'fourth-generation' is, in itself, problematic. This is not to suggest that the term is not useful in placing companies in relation to those that came before them; on the contrary, I argue that this is an act of 'propping' them on the 'secure pasts' that Schneider and Ridout proposed, and is actually itself a way to counterbalance precarity in how we construct and perceive the narrative. If companies are seen as developments or continuations of those that inspired their practice or, as I have reasoned, of larger sets of shared values, such as the postdramatic represents, the precarity (at least conceptually) is arguably tied up in the successes or failures of others. Rose explained that it was Impact Theatre's Pete Brooks arriving as a tutor at Lancaster University that directly influenced Stan's Cafe, who later performed their own version of Impact's *The Carrier Frequency*; Spooner similarly spoke of the 'Venn diagram' that Unlimited Theatre occupy in overlap with Third Angel,

sharing collaborators and, ultimately, friendships.<sup>235</sup> Other companies have emerged from Unlimited's original team, including China Plate (2006-) and the newly formed Civic Digits (2021-). Emerging companies owe their influence to the mentorship of many of these companies, for example The Six Twenty (2015-) who I observed under Third Angel's mentorship in early 2020.

In Part Three, by combining the contextual histories of Part Two with the methodological practices of collaboration and risk-taking as a response to precariousness, I have demonstrated the origins of practices that arise out of contextual need, often in relation to preempting crises and threats. I argued that postmodern performance practice, as a form that often subverts traditional narrative structures, expected performance durations, and actively engages with collaboration outside of a company's core membership, improves chances of longevity precisely through a readiness to fail, to challenge a *status quo*, and in doing so, its readiness to challenge continuity as we perceive it. I have shown that within the culture of the sector a performative and affective thinking constitutes the very familiar labour of contemporary theatre-makers. Uniquely positioned to find value in *values*, Rose suggests, 'there are ripples of influence that extend way beyond this sector, which are often undocumented and unrecognised'.<sup>236</sup> As the everyday and the representational interweave and overlap a possible definition of liveness is located, borrowed from Field's reflections on Forced Entertainment: that liveness is felt 'when safe passage back to the everyday no longer seems assured'.<sup>237</sup> It is in this precisely performative ontology that I locate the fulcrum of

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<sup>235</sup> Jon Spooner and Rob Fellman, 'Transcript of Interview with Jon Spooner' (Unpublished, 2021).

<sup>236</sup> Rose and Fellman.

<sup>237</sup> Costa and Field. p.210.

precarity and longevity, in a double-failure: the insecurity and ambiguity of life as that which can never be fully apprehended. Steve Bottoms suggested that the creative use of 'fragmentation reflects our experience of contemporary life in postmodern times.'<sup>238</sup> This thesis proceeds with a close analysis of case studies from Third Angel's repertoire, to illuminate the relationships between the everyday and representational, and the ways their practice uses its 'liveness' to anticipate the future. In Chapter 2, I argue that the way the company approaches the telling of stories, how narratives are created and manipulated, gives insight into the vital processes of re-framing and re-configuring that occur in everyday precarious life, in order to apprehend something close to our lived experience: as their form reflects content, and indeed, context. Understanding more closely the working practices and *modus operandi* of contemporary companies like Third Angel is key to establishing hypotheses for previal—as I will argue in the following chapters—towards sustained and successful futures.

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<sup>238</sup> Bottoms and Goulis. p.64.

## 2. Memory and (Re)telling: Stories in Motion

### Introduction

The previous chapter established the context out of which primary case study, Third Angel, emerged and the conditions through which they have navigated. The complexity of running a theatre company (in fact, many operate as charities) can, as evidenced, clash with artistic values. Freedom of expression is often at odds with securing funding, without which many small-scale contemporary companies would not be able to survive. However, the economic and social context is only one part of the picture; I argue that it is the artistic methodology of Third Angel that gives insight into their longevity, as a set of inherent values, artistic sensibilities and creative preferences that cross into their approach to more administrative and organisational business. In this chapter I begin to identify a vocabulary to bridge these realms, by first turning to the example of Third Angel's creative preferences, and in particular their prominent methodology of telling, remembering and re-telling stories. I propose that this mode of performance is central to their longevity and previal (a term established in Chapter 1), revealing a keen appreciation for narratives that break with a linear tradition of time, reflecting the postdramatic tendencies the company exhibit. I move from the organisational, contextual and 'real-world' analysis of history and milestones in Chapter 1, to a phenomenological and philosophical reading of the same issues of precarity, risk and anticipation in Third Angel's artistic practice; the two perspectives and their differing research and evidence echo the complex relationship between artistic and organisational longevity. In exploring their use of storytelling, I introduce the first case study of the thesis: Third Angel's *Class*



*of '76*. *Class of '76* is central to this study of both memory and retelling in Third Angel's practice, as it is simultaneously autobiographical and self-referential of its own form. In examining the longevity of this project within their wider repertoire, I consider how individual projects can index a company's longevity more broadly. In this chapter I explore the role of nostalgia in this context, and introduce it as part of a wider system of imaginative and affective remembering, an interrogation of which reveals other artistic devices that I argue, in turn, contribute to a wider methodology of longevity.

*Class of '76* was originally performed as a 15-minute sketch in January of 1999 at a cabaret night titled *Successophobia* in Coventry, UK. Its first full-length version was performed at Site Gallery in Sheffield in 2001; it has since toured the UK several times, and was also presented at Trama Festival in Porto, Portugal in 2006.<sup>239</sup> *Class of '76* is an autobiographical account of the journey of its performer, Kelly, who embarked on a task of reconnecting with his primary school classmates, from a photograph of the 35 children taken in 1976, at Chuckery Infant School. In making *Class of '76*, Kelly undertook to trace each of the children in his photo. As he introduces the children to his audience, he holds up a blank card that captures a section of the photograph that is projected into the performance space (Fig.1).

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<sup>239</sup> 'Class of '76 | Third Angel' <<http://thirdangel.co.uk/shows-projects/class-of-76>> [accessed 15 October 2019].



Fig. 1: Kelly holds up a card of an old classmate in *Class of '76* (Third Angel)

The projection is otherwise unseen, and the capturing of the faces of the children within the frame of the card has the effect of conjuring them into being. The grainy, aged quality of the 1970s analogue photograph seems somehow anachronistic with the mode of projection, adding to the impact of the apparent conjuration of the past into the present space – a simple but effective 'school hall magic'.<sup>240</sup>

*Class of '76* inspired another work, *Turma de '95* [*Class of '95*] by Portuguese performer Raquel Castro. It is atypical for devised work to be performed by other artists (such as in the case of Stan's Cafe's revival of Impact's *The Carrier Frequency*, referenced in Chapter 1), particularly when work is strongly autobiographical; in this instance

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<sup>240</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'What Can I Tell You?', in *Small Acts: Performance, the Millennium and the Marking of Time*, ed. by Adrian Heathfield (London, UK: Black Dog Publishing, 2000), pp. 48–51. p.49.

Castro's revisiting is not a direct replication, but rather a homage that transposes key formal elements of Third Angel's project into her own, unique, performance. Moreover, I argue that *Turma de '95* exists in relation to *Class of '76*, as part of the longevity of the original, rather than superseding it. I interweave both case studies to expose the dialectical relationship between parallel concepts that are central to each work: memory and anticipation, digression and nostalgia, and the imaginative qualities that both bind and furnish them. Through this close reading I reveal the relationship between storytelling and memory in Third Angel's autobiographical strand of projects, and examine its role in their wider oeuvre. As I show, *Class of '76* and *Turma de '95* bring to the fore the mutability of space and time in performance, particularly in contemporary and postdramatic contexts, as neither attempts to suspend the disbelief of their audiences (for instance, by means of costume, 'set' or characterisation). In this chapter I propose that Third Angel's work often calls into question the supposed 'ephemerality' of performance: as I argue, their mode of representation often becomes something mobile and formative, rather than simply as a form of (live, nightly) disappearance. Via *Class of '76* and *Turma de '95* I show how the anticipated finitude of the performance event echoes the anticipatory movement of life outside it and argue that a *potentiality* is inherent in this uncertainty. Third Angel and Castro demonstrate how re-telling stories harnesses a virtual and imaginative potential, re-vitalising it. Emerging from their work, I propose that *Class of '76* and *Turma de '95* amplify how live performance exists at the edge of an anticipatory present, in constant relation with its past. This particular project and its inspired offshoot affirm the place of Third Angel as a vital part of a postdramatic paradigm at the millennial turn, and both are exemplary of the longevity of projects (and indeed companies) that live in the anticipatory present itself: embracing principles of

continuity and motion rather than appealing to theatrical conventions of disappearance. I proceed in Part One by introducing the case studies in turn, presenting their functions in line with the storytelling traditions they adopt, and I establish the theoretical concepts underpinning my analysis of the interplay between remembered pasts and potential futures. Expanding on these concepts, I then provide an argument in three parts, (Re)Telling, Remembering and Re-vitalising, to present the diverse operations of storytelling and performance practice in *Class of '76* and *Turma de '95*, arguing that their stylistic shifts between autobiographical and collective nostalgia reveal an inherent capacity for longevity.

## I. Presenting the Past

In what follows, before I examine *Class of '76* in detail, I briefly outline and clarify definitions as I later apply them. Particular complications with terminology are evident, especially in the use of autobiography and oral history as defined practices of storytelling (from personal and social perspectives respectively) that aim toward varying degrees of truthfulness. Michael Wilson wrote in 2005, that in contemporary theatre practice, the 'differences between storytelling and theatre become more blurred and less distinct'.<sup>241</sup> Autobiographical theatre that also employs oral history (and biographical furnishings from wider contextual conversations and interviews), such as Third Angel's *Class of '76* (and much of their wider repertoire, such as *Cape Wrath* [2013], *Lad Lit*

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<sup>241</sup> Michael Wilson, 'Theatre and Storytelling' (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 120–42. p.142.

*Project* [2005], *Inspiration Exchange* [2010-] and *Partus* [2016]) illustrates this blurring of practices—echoed in the work of many of their peers—as ‘theatre companies continue to produce shows that adopt the techniques and repertoire of the storyteller.’<sup>242</sup> I use the term ‘storytelling’ in what follows, understanding this as a practice related to but not defined by the overarching term of ‘theatre’. This treatment opposes Wilson’s assumption that ‘if these trends continue, then theatre and storytelling will once again converge, becoming indistinguishable from each other’, in which he establishes the two as presently disparate concepts rather than empirically interwoven disciplines.<sup>243</sup> I instead argue that *Class of ’76* illustrates how the performer’s work can require them to skilfully shift between roles of ‘actor’, ‘storyteller’ and other modes of presentation as required by any given moment of performance. I thereby tend towards a discussion of ‘performer’ and ‘performance’ as encompassing terms. Furthermore, *Class of ’76* in its totality of versions is understood as one performance, and *Turma de ’95* as another; I consequently also refer to ‘performance’ as the overall ‘performance-concept’ (‘show’, ‘play’). Each rendition or retelling of either performance will here be referred to as an ‘iteration’.

*i. Class of ’76*

*Class of ’76* is a solo work that occurs in ‘actual’ space, with no allusion to any external or imagined space, in which Kelly moves between a nostalgic reflection of his

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<sup>242</sup> Wilson. p.142.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

own childhood, his current practice as a theatre maker and researcher, and the telling of the life stories of his fellow classmates. Shifts between these lenses are indicated with the use of formal changes to the storytelling. At times Kelly 'reads' text directly from a clipboard, indicating a 'truthful' account of text and factual information pertaining to past iterations of the performance and its formative research. At other times Kelly speaks unaided as he warmly recalls memories, utilising the live event to show the memories as they are *now*, in the present moment of telling. In other moments of rehearsed nostalgic reflection, akin to a classroom activity of show-and-tell, Kelly presents to his audience objects from his childhood, such as a toy army soldier and a set of marbles. These functional shifts act as conduits for moving the audience between positions of nostalgic reflection and a present spectatorship of storytelling practices. Kelly creates a collective nostalgia of childhood as a backdrop upon which he superimposes the life-stories of his classmates, inviting his audience to question their own stories, their nostalgia, as individuals in a collective multiplicity of a shared, yet different, past.

*Class of '76* presents the ways in which collective life memories of audience and performer can co-exist with the difference of individual memory, compounded by stories of his classmates, in which their common past informed vastly distinct individual futures. In correspondence with Dee Heddon, Kelly explained his motivations for telling the story behind this production:

Childhood potential vs adult achievement. For us it raised, somewhere at the back of our minds, in the back of the work, the awful question, 'Are most lives a disappointment?'

And also it was because I believe that lots of people do wonder what their old classmates are doing – people whose lives were massively intertwined with your

own for a period of time, but aren't any more... [...] [S]o I thought an audience would be interested to know what happened if we did [that research].<sup>244</sup>

Discussing projects of this type with artist Bryony Kimmings, Kelly suggested that Third Angel 'assume if something's really important to us, if it really nags at us, then it'll probably be important to *some* of the audience.'<sup>245</sup> Taking this to be true, I infer that the longevity of the project owes some of its success to the trust Third Angel placed in its relative formal simplicity and the audience relatability, in part, inspired by nostalgia.

*Class of '76* began its life as 'Version 1', not only as an autobiographical account of Kelly's story, but also as a collection of biographies, of the other children in the photo. In the show Kelly explains how, in the original sketch presented at Successophobia, Third Angel filled in the gaps and invented stories 'about those innocent faces' in the photograph, 'staring out at the audience ... the sublime and the ridiculous side by side'.<sup>246</sup> He admits: 'I couldn't even remember everybody's name, so we made some of those up as well'.<sup>247</sup> Kelly suggests of Third Angel: 'we are used to making work that strays into the grey area between the truth and fiction, memory and imagination.' In subsequent early iterations, he tells of how they still 'told fibs', of how, for example, 'Lahkvir Singh played football for the world'. Whilst this was (obviously) not true, the performance proposes to the audience the possibility that such 'fibs' were based on the hopes and dreams that the 35 classmates had for themselves and each other, back in 1976: '[...] a lot of those kids are recognisable in the people we have become [...] some

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<sup>244</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'Telling Life Stories: Autobiographical Performance in the Third Angel Repertoire'. p.12.

<sup>245</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'Telling Life Stories: Autobiographical Performance in the Third Angel Repertoire'. p.76.

<sup>246</sup> Third Angel, 'Class of '76 at BAC (DVD)', transc. R. Fellman (Recorded at Battersea Arts Centre, London, 6 March 2010: British Library Archive, 2010), p. 1DVDR0001704.

<sup>247</sup> Third Angel, 'Class of '76 at Leeds Met (DVD)', transc. R. Fellman (Leeds, UK: Third Angel Archive, 2009).

of us are well-off. Some of us are skint. We all dress differently. We get on like a house on fire.'<sup>248</sup> Kelly's untruths not only present possibilities but are also actualised in their utterance as told stories and imagined futures. This early version of *Class of '76* highlights the complex duality between memory and experience, presenting the gaps between the two, made increasingly apparent through the convergence of multiple different pasts in the immediate moment of live storytelling: the spectator's own past, Kelly's childhood and recent pasts, and the life trajectories of his peers. In choosing to refer to the 'fibs' told in the original version, the act of gap-filling is brought to the fore, inviting the audience to consider memory in parallel with imaginative storytelling, as that which is changeable and, perhaps, unreliable.



Fig. 2: Postcard copy of the original class photo (Third Angel)

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<sup>248</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'Telling Life Stories: Autobiographical Performance in the Third Angel Repertoire'. p.35.



In 2000, Third Angel performed a revised *Class of '76* on the very spot, at the very school (Chuckery Infant School, Walsall, UK) where the photograph was taken, a performance Kelly calls 'Version 2'.<sup>249</sup> The photograph shows four rows of children in shirts and blouses of varying pastel hues with jumpers or striped ties, facing forwards (as the style determines) and bookended by their stern-faced teachers; they are set against a teal-blue wall (Fig. 2). Some of the people in the photo were present at this event.<sup>250</sup> Version 2 differed from Version 1, as Kelly recalls: '...this time we tell the truth'.<sup>251</sup> The variations of the full-length show in the following years, performed in theatre spaces, collectively make up 'Version 3', which include Kelly's memories of the process of 'telling the truth' itself: the necessary procedure of researching, writing and re-writing those stories. In this analysis I refer to two iterations of the show that formed part of 'Version 3', revival performances (2008-) that include the addition of a text titled 'Still Telling This Story'. The two iterations of *Class of '76* that I examine are here referenced in the form of recorded documentation: one from Leeds Metropolitan University (UK) in 2009 and a version presented a year later at Battersea Arts Centre (London, UK) in 2010.<sup>252</sup> I was not present at either original event, so use these recordings as my experience of it. By holding both of these showings side-by-side, the variances between two shows in the

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<sup>249</sup> Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: Class of '76 Programme Note: Still Telling This Story', 2010 <<http://thirdangeluk.blogspot.com/2010/01/class-of-76-programme-note-still.html>> [accessed 3 April 2020].

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Third Angel, 'Class of '76 at BAC (DVD)'

<sup>252</sup> Third Angel, 'Class of '76 at Leeds Met (DVD)'

same 'version' are made apparent, and thereby reveal the reflective capacity and self-referential nature of the more recent work to lay bare its own past.

In these more recent iterations Kelly also tells his audience: 'I wasn't going to tell this story anymore', and whether truthful or not, this inclusion acknowledges and foregrounds the extended and incomplete journey that the performance represents.<sup>253</sup> Through his telling, Kelly acknowledges and deliberately foregrounds the uncertain and the mis-remembered. Kelly, with director of *Class of '76*, Walton, draw attention to the decisions made in the making of the performance, asking audiences to question not just the authority or primacy of *this* version of the text (that is being witnessed), but also to make its status clear as a waypoint in an, as yet, unfinished journey (in common with the life-journeys of those watching). I propose that *Class of '76* possesses an inherent potentiality: in not being complete (despite certain consistent or fixed elements), there is a greater capacity for change at every iteration, in different choices made, in new stories added or adapted. In *Living with Stories: Telling, Re-Telling, and Remembering*, editor William Schneider posits that 'stories aren't bound; they grow with each new telling and opportunity to find meaning and to relate the past to the present.'<sup>254</sup> Kelly offers to his audience, 'it's still unfinished business'. As the performance amalgamates its prior versions within each retelling, and as new discoveries and stories are added and embellished over time *Class of '76* becomes a storytelling performance that is not 'bound' by its close reliance on the ever-changing present, but rather it benefits from the

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<sup>253</sup> Third Angel, 'Class of '76 at Leeds Met (DVD)'.

<sup>254</sup> William Schneider, *Living With Stories: Telling, Re-Telling, and Remembering*, 2008. p.8.

perpetual state of evolution it necessarily inhabits, yielding to the uncertainty of its future.

Despite the evolutionary uncertainty in the present, 'the viewer is always ahead of the present of the performance'. Writing on storytelling in performance, Benjamin Wihstutz observes that as the 'creative potential of imagination' underlies the spectator's perception; 'the presented future arises between imagination and expectation, between digression and anticipation'. He goes on to suggest that 'performance also unfolds a theatre of imagination' by which 'divergence [...], fantasising, remembering and anticipating' are all integral to the experience of theatre.<sup>255</sup> In my furthering of this interrelation, I demonstrate how there is, too, a theatrical quality of the imagination. *Class of '76*, in its adoption of nostalgia, raises the question as to whether the uniqueness and unrepeatability of a discrete performance iteration reflects the transience of the spectator's own existence. Wihstutz draws on Heidegger's concept of the 'death drive' to propose that an audience is concerned with 'the anticipation of a certainty of the future'; in this case as 'the future occurrence of death is certain', this notion can be understood 'as a subconscious presentation' underlying everyday life. He further suggests that the temporality of the theatre allows the audience to imagine the future, which (drawing from Heidegger), 'can be understood as a "forward to death" [*Vorlaufen in den Tod*]'.<sup>256</sup> I suggest that the notion of a human preoccupation with finitude is complicated by a 'drive' to tell stories that connect with the past. Despite Kelly's intention not 'to tell this story anymore', he is (seemingly) compelled to do so. He

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<sup>255</sup> Benjamin Wihstutz, 'From Digressing and Anticipating. The Performance as an Idea of the Future', *Forum Modernes Theater*, 25.2 (2010), 159–71. p.160.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

explains in parallel to his father's relationship with sculpting: 'my Dad said to me that he didn't make sculptures because he chose to, he made sculptures because he had to'.<sup>257</sup> This drive is then further complicated by the repeatability of performance, which indicates something closer to an endless deferral of finitude, as each 'end' loops back on itself. I recognise a *modus operandi* in Third Angel's preference for the imaginative reconfiguring of possible futures. I argue that, in *Class of '76*, it is the structural interruption of this anticipatory drive that foregrounds the complex relationship between narrative and story in contemporary and postdramatic performance. It is in the particular storytelling devices of nostalgia and digression that I locate features that I propose pertain to artistic longevity (and in turn influence the company's longevity as a collective): the anticipatory motion towards a future propped on its past, and simultaneously ruptures of non-linearity. A closer inspection of *Turma de '95* and its role in the longevity of *Class of '76* reveals and amplifies the wider effects of nostalgia and digression as practices that can exceed the individual projects in which they are first employed.

ii. *Class of '95*

*Class of '76* owes part of its effectiveness to the journey of sense-making pursued in the performance, a detective-like mode of unveiling rather than in a culminating 'end'

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<sup>257</sup> Third Angel, 'Class of '76 at BAC (DVD)'.

or 'pay-off'. Later in this chapter I discuss the strategies—particularly the use of digression—that contribute to this formal narrative upending. I argue that, in *Class of '76*, there is scope for further digression and diversions made exponentially greater as more narrative threads are introduced and left incomplete. I argue that there is potential inherent in the incompleteness of the project itself; digression, I propose, is similarly not limited to the narrative of a discrete, specific event but also to a series of events as a whole. This is illustrated in the development of *Turma de '95*, as Castro adapts Kelly's telling to her own story and class photograph.



Fig. 3: Photo of Castro holding a card in *Turma de '95* (Bruno Simao)

In December 2019, Castro performed *Turma de '95* to an audience at Teatro do Bairro Alto, Lisbon (Portugal).<sup>258</sup> The stage space was empty, apart from a small table bearing a tiered cake-tray. Castro began her performance alone on stage, before reaching to the wings for a blank piece of card. Similarly to *Class of '76*, she proceeded to conjure the faces of her former classmates on the card by capturing the—otherwise unseen—projected image (Fig. 3). She tells the story of her childhood, and that of her friends, and shares with her spectators the journey she took to collect their stories, past and present. One of the distinct differences between the two performances is, as Castro explained: 'the fact that I did this in 2019, with Facebook and Google, made my play really about them [the classmates] and not so much about the process of finding them'.<sup>259</sup> By contrast, in *Class of '76*, Kelly explains that he didn't have social media, that he bought a CD-ROM to help with tracking down his classmates (that failed), and that the photograph itself was physically 'found in a box'.<sup>260</sup> Nonetheless, common threads unite the performances, not limited to the fact it was also created after a similar time removed from the photograph's capture: circa 25 years.

Castro approached Third Angel for permission to make her homage official and enlisted Kelly as mentor in its making. Castro explains that Third Angel had already 'experimented' to reach their 'end result', and so took the decision to work under Kelly's mentorship rather than to create a show afresh; in Castro's words: 'I think *Class of '76* as a concept (and taking it as I did) [it] is almost impossible to fail, or else, you just need to be really sensitive *not* to fail [...] because the idea is so strong and so universal...'. As she

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<sup>258</sup> Attended in person.

<sup>259</sup> Raquel Castro and Rob Fellman, 'Interview with Raquel Castro' (Unpublished, 2020).

<sup>260</sup> Third Angel, 'Class of '76 at Leeds Met (DVD)'.

tells in the performance itself: 'I talked to Alex and asked him for permission to take up the idea and he said yes, he thought it was great and if I needed help, just say so'.<sup>261</sup> Whilst Castro had the benefit of social media to conduct much of her research, meaning that former classmates were considerably easier to find, the performance still reflects upon the conditions of its making: 'some were already my Facebook friends [...] others I had to search following other clues'.<sup>262</sup> *Turma de '95* also utilises similar structural and aesthetic tropes in homage to the Third Angel work it adapts. Both Castro's *Turma de '95* and Third Angel's *Class of '76* engage with the operation of nostalgia within memory, that invite their audiences to participate in a shared recollection of times past, as well as inviting the imagination to explore potential links between the performers' memories and the audience's own. Both *Class of '76* and Castro's *Turma de '95* present the 'frame' of the children's photographs alongside micro-narrative frames of stories past, near-past and present. As Kelly and Castro move between these stories, they construct an overarching narrative for their audiences that weave both memory and the present together in the act of re-telling. I consider the stories and memories Kelly and Castro tell to be 'virtual' (not actually occurring) and abstract: representational of whole events, seen only from their perspectives and recounted earnestly insofar as they can remember. Both performances rely upon the imaginative capacity of memory to furnish and make whole indeterminate memory-images. In summary, the contract with the audience to trust and to actively imagine the memories Kelly and Castro share is precisely a generative act by virtue of their inherent incompleteness.

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<sup>261</sup> Castro and Fellman.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

*Class of '76* and *Turma de '95* demonstrate how incompleteness is, counterintuitively, a generative and creative device, underpinning my choice to present these case studies side-by-side. I propose that this is key to the potentiality inherent in these interwoven case studies, manifest in a shared desire, between both performer and audience, to reach an anticipated end. In *Class of '76*, in 2010, Kelly announces: 'four years ago I would have said to you that I couldn't tell you anything about Sarah Dolby', as he then reads a belated email she wrote to him.<sup>263</sup> This desire towards completion occurs not only show-by-show, as each iteration fulfils its unfolding in its designated stage time, but rather in the ongoing and continuous function of performed research, pursuing an end to Kelly's own search for—and re-encounters with—his classmates. This is an impossibility for a work that is fed by the history that continues to pass, as there are always more stories, like Sarah Dolby's, to add (rather than in Kelly possessing a complete, scripted knowledge of the fixed conclusion of *Class of '76* from its outset). In addition, *Turma de '95* acts to extend the possible conclusion to Kelly's task, moving elements of the original work into a new narrative context. The audience, on both counts, are invited to view the performances as live versions of an ongoing process; in *Class of '76* to share in Kelly's detective journey. As Kelly contemplates a Raymond Chandler-esque 'stake out' and deciphers his old address book 'full of crossings out and movings on', the viewer may feel as if they are assisting in his corralling of the fragments and micro-stories into a coherent—yet provisional—whole, by the audience's very complicit presence as part of the performance act.<sup>264</sup> Castro's propulsion diverges from

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<sup>263</sup> Kelly. p.15.

<sup>264</sup> Kelly. p.26; p.22.



Third Angel's performance, propelled by her own research—the 'drive' to make the work—made possible by virtue of Third Angel's previous experimentation with the form of the project, and its resulting dramaturgical groundwork. Castro explained that she found everyone in her class photo, had two-hour live conversations with most of them, and refers to her own version as 'documental theatre'.<sup>265</sup> In *Turma de '95* the focus shifts from the detective function, to the cumulation and exhibition of evidence, made possible through the extended application of Third Angel's established dramaturgical structure. The act of telling brings forth both Kelly and Castro's recollections into a present 'now' that marks a moment in the overall development of both performances as separate, yet interconnected, works. In both cases, stories are acknowledged for their constituent parts and contributors, including the teller and their audiences: *Class of '76* and *Turma de '95*, separately and together, present the very conditions of their making as part of a temporally extended narrative of both story and its digressions.

In summary, I argue that *Class of '76* and *Turma de '95* reveal the dialectical relationship between 'actual' experience and 'virtual' memory as sites of inherent performativity. Zornitsa Dimitrova's proposed ontology of contemporary performance supports my following claim: *Class of '76* and its recent influence on *Turma de '95* exemplifies how 'a *drama of potentialities* plays itself out at the very interface between actual and virtual'.<sup>266</sup> Furthermore, this potentiality is inherent in an anticipatory drive,

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<sup>265</sup> Raquel Castro and Rob Fellman, 'Interview with Raquel Castro' (Unpublished, 2020).

<sup>266</sup> Zornitsa Dimitrova, 'A Drama of Potentialities—Toward an Ontology', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 31.1 (2016), 65–85. p.65; Much as with Kelly's compulsion to retell *Class of '76* 'because he had to', the 'unfinished business' that forms part of the show's very narrative structure can be linked to a philosophical concept of 'entelechi motion'. Entelechy is a term for the realisation of potential, which Dimitrova (in an Aristotelian tradition), considers as 'part of the nature of every active entity' and assumes a

which, through a study of both narrative and form, elucidates the idea that contemporary performance's 'emphasis is on motion as a weave of potentiality and actuality', whether non-linear, digressional or otherwise.<sup>267</sup> Building on this argument, I explore Third Angel's methodology of 'collecting' and 'retelling' as revealed in *Class of '76*, through which I establish a conceptual framework that I build upon in Chapters 3 to 5. I argue that collecting and retelling are rooted in an advocacy of the 'liveness' and ephemerality of the performance event, which I instead reframe as forms of continuity, through re-living rather than simply holding on to the disappearing past. By similarly considering memory as a mutable, mobile and indeterminate phenomenon, the virtual and abstracted nature of 'performativity' itself, I propose, is a necessary and intrinsic part of how memory is stored and recalled. I contend that collecting and retelling operate as part of a wider, mobile network of embodied processes and spatio-temporal considerations that are made manifest in practices of performance and storytelling; as evidenced in *Class of '76*, practices that condition the continuity and longevity of the narratives they uphold, both in terms of the work itself, its extension and re-vitalisation in new and divergent forms, and in its wider contribution to a methodology of Third Angel's collective company longevity.

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'natural drive' of working 'toward the realisation' of potential. I adopt this concept when referring to the body's 'actual' movements and workings; I employ the term 'actual' to relate to an entity-in-action, that is, the present state of a 'thing' that is subject to the natural laws of 'entelechiial motion'. (Dimitrova, p.67-9)

<sup>267</sup> Dimitrova. p.67-9.

## II. (Re)Telling

As established in the thesis introduction, longevity functions in relation to time and the recognition of an inevitable state of ending, decay, or disappearance. To fully interrogate the conditions for longevity in the UK arts sector, I offer a philosophical reframing of Western time, inspired by my observations of Third Angel's repertoire, in which a drive toward both a purpose and a demise are counterbalanced by the narratives that describe those journeys, which are often approximate, nebulous, and interpretative. These theoretical concepts are applied throughout the three chapter parts that follow, split into three main categories of (re)telling, remembering, and re-vitalising; there is some interlinking and overspill between sections, as all three contribute to an overarching system of performance-based storytelling that, in turn, gives insight into the narrative of the system's own makers. In this, Part Two, I elect to foreground the act of telling in *Class of '76*, and how its action is a shaping of the narrative of past-in-the-present that simultaneously propagates an incomplete or abstracted version of that narrative. By considering present tellings as a frame of reference for an unexperienced past, I contest the primacy of the past; I propose that *Class of '76* demonstrates how performative storytelling makes-present the past through a process of fragmentation and abstraction, and in doing so generates future potential.

First, the performer must remember in order to retell. In a section of the text, Kelly lists moments of recollection, including his teacher Mr Turner: 'I remember him cutting

his tie in half with a pair of scissors in an assembly. But I can't remember why[...]'.<sup>268</sup> The rehearsal, the script, the movements, all are recalled from the learnt process of a performance's making. Even in cases where a performance is entirely improvised, a performer recounts experiences of past shows, of a lifetime of training, and of drawing upon past life experiences. In the case of *Class of '76* and *Turma de '95*, that have as their very content the memories of the performer, retelling becomes the principal act of performance, rather than solely a tool for its (attempted) repetition.<sup>269</sup> With *Class of '76*, Kelly suggests that Third Angel 'instinctively kept the act of remembering in, as a task in the show', which, if true, blurs the edges of retelling and storytelling. To explicate, the 'task' of storytelling (as Kelly proposes it) primarily engages the imagination to make complete the telling (some stories may be entirely fictional) whilst retelling aims to accurately *tell again* from memory (even if the retelling is of a previously-told fictional story). *Class of '76* blurs these distinctions, as it is constituted as both an act of remembering *per se*, and a performed remembering (a retelling *of* moments of remembering). Such interplay between memory and retelling becomes extended from an embodied process into the immediate performance, witnessed as a live occurrence of recollection in action, presented more explicitly than for a purely written-rehearsed or 'learnt' performance, where recollection is only a part of the event (as actors recall their lines and movements) rather than the very thing that constitutes it. The word 're-

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<sup>268</sup> Kelly. p.43.

<sup>269</sup> Weber and Smith invoke Kierkegaard, who, 'suggests that repetition is not a definitive copying, rather an activity that makes an *attempt* toward a copy: "you can after all take a trip to Berlin, you've been there lots before, and now you can prove to yourself whether a repetition is possible"', 2009 (*my emphasis*).

vitalising' becomes more adequate for *Class of '76* in its invoking of a 're-living' of one's past and I use it as such in the context of this thesis.

Additionally, the act of performance inherently relies upon memory, deliberately engaged or otherwise. As a chiasmic reversal of this phrase, memory is inherently performative; developing this proposal (already established), I further the argument that memory is staged 'in images that raise a problem of imprecision for the narrator', that the imagination attempts to make these imprecise images whole.<sup>270</sup> I argue that to perform a re-telling is therefore to imaginatively *make complete* the past in its present iteration. A 'retelling' suggests a 'telling again' as privileging a present or future act. Gabriella Giannachi suggests 'the prefix 're-', which means 'again' and also means 'back', implies both a return to a previous condition and the repetition of an action.<sup>271</sup> For this reason, I employ the hyphenated 're-telling' to refer to the distinction that every telling is linked to both its past and future versions.<sup>272</sup> Re-telling, in this context, is the performative act of memory *made live* and embodied in the present. Part Four, Re-vitalising, later employs the 'mnemonic imagination' as presented by Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering, in proposing that memory performs an inherently imaginative and performative creative function.<sup>273</sup> By extension I propose that *Class of '76* evidences the existence of an embodied imagination, as the *past experience remembered*, and the

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<sup>270</sup> Mieke Bal, 'Reflection: Memory and Storytelling in Proust', in *Memory: A History*, ed. by Dmitri Nikulin (Oxford University Press, 2015). p.2.

<sup>271</sup> Gabriella Giannachi, 'At the Edge of the "Living Present"', in *Histories of Performance Documentation*, ed. by Gabriella Giannachi and Jonah Westerman (Oxon: Routledge, 2018), pp. 115–31. p.120.

<sup>272</sup> A similar distinction would be that of 'recollecting' as a *thinking-back*, as opposed to re-collecting as a *bringing-together-again*.

<sup>273</sup> Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering, *The Mnemonic Imagination: Remembering as Creative Practice*, 2012.

*present experience of memory recounted* both concern the actual movements and workings of the body in space and time.<sup>274</sup>

Third Angel's *Class of '76* (like several of their other small-scale touring works) is a work that has been presented periodically by the company as part of their repertoire, rather than in (traditional) consecutive showings at any given venue. The performance has little-to-no set, and as such has no qualities of verisimilitude that define an imagined stage-world of any sort. The performance begins with an open salutation from Kelly: 'So, here I am... Still telling this story'.<sup>275</sup> This phrase invites the audience to disregard theatrical traditions of suspending disbelief, instead welcoming the audience to share in a personal and (presumed) honest interaction. Kelly perhaps aims to dispel the possibility of being seen as a character within a dramatic stage-world, instead presenting the exchange that is to follow as one of 'I' to 'you', an intimate act of storytelling; Kelly's use of 'this story', rather than of 'that' or 'their' story, frames 'this' moment shared with the audience as part of the performance as a whole. As he reads on from a clipboard, he unashamedly announces that an obsession with the childhood of his young children has 'complemented' the obsession with his own, that originally gave rise to *Class of '76*: 'when I think of them getting older and going to school, my frame of reference is *my* past'.<sup>276</sup> By implication, I suggest that Kelly's apparent acknowledgement of the elision

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<sup>274</sup> Extending this principle, as the present reconfigures itself in a continuous process of 'liveness' that is neither past nor future, I consider all things in nature as being in constant motion. To illustrate further: space also changes as time passes, not necessarily geographically (an inanimate object may remain still and in place), but as an image of a unique, discrete space-time: like frames of a film.

<sup>275</sup> Third Angel, 'Class of '76 at BAC (DVD)'.

<sup>276</sup> Third Angel, 'Class of '76 at BAC (DVD)'.

between his own and his children's experience invites the audience to correlate their own memories and lived experiences with the performance that is to take place.

Third Angel's mechanism of the apparent conjuration of the photo-images of the children as if, 'summoning ghosts of the living', echoes the recall of the memory-image of past events and remembered faces.<sup>277</sup> Kelly speaks about each of the children, telling their stories both of times shared at school, and of the exchanges he had with their adult selves in his formative research. The image becomes 'the visual peg to hang the stories on'.<sup>278</sup> It is as if Kelly apprehends a memory of their image and invites the audience to witness it: this conjuration is simultaneously an apprehension of the fixed image of the past, and echoes the mnemonic arresting of the image that occurs when committing events to memory. To elucidate, a sourcebook titled *The Storyteller's Way* refers to the 'split gaze' technique:

If you gesture with your hands at something and focus your eyes on that imaginary object precisely enough, the image will spring into being. It will remain there even when you look away, as long as you maintain the accuracy of the gesture.<sup>279</sup>

In a convergence of traditional storytelling and technologically augmented performance, not only does Kelly maintain the gesture, keeping the card in place as he speaks about the person whose childhood visage is projected upon it, but the world he develops and furnishes with each additional story remains in place throughout the performance. The edges of the card in *Class of '76* impose a frame, making discrete the image of one child

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<sup>277</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'What Can I Tell You?' p.52.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Ashley Ramsden and Sue Hollingsworth, *The Storyteller's Way* (Hawthorn Press, 2015). p.168.

from the whole picture of the class. The use of the card in this way, by my reading, echoes the limitations of memory, whilst concurrently showing how one detail might be foregrounded within a bigger picture. The card serves as both a narrative device for directing the spectators' gaze and signalling the changes in focus, whilst in its limited frame it also acknowledges the partiality inherent in memory; memory too evades a full apprehension. These 'vague images of the past' ask audiences not only to recount, but to render, to imaginatively make whole these blurred images of a past actuality by inviting the inherent potential of virtuality into play, precisely in the generative motion toward totality and completion.<sup>280</sup>

Kelly demarks 'childhood' as a framed unit of time, as an event 'with its own particular durational unfolding and its own particular temporal direction within this unfolding' and as a unit of an experienced past, for him, that he now participates in, in his children's present lives.<sup>281</sup> Narrative can be defined as consisting 'of a series of related events, related in time and space with actions driven by intentions'.<sup>282</sup> An 'event' is a marked moment in time, which I employ broadly in this context, weaving together threads of 'performance', a collective 'repertoire' of events, and events that mark 'life experiences'. A performance is an event within a theatre company's repertoire, or macro-narrative; *Class of '76* is just one event within the narrative of Third Angel's story just as it contains within it a narrative—multiple narratives—of its own. Keightley and Pickering

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<sup>280</sup> Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, ed. by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1991). p.82.

<sup>281</sup> Keightley and Pickering. p.32.

<sup>282</sup> Agneta Pihl, Louise Peterson, and Niklas Pramling, 'Children Remembering and Reshaping Stories in Retelling', *Varhaiskasvatuksen Tiedelehti Journal of Early Childhood Education Research*, 7.1 (2018), 127–46. p.128.



suggest that in the act of remembering we 'apprehend an event' and in doing so 'distinguish between 'before' and 'after' within an event, not as separate stages' but rather as constituent parts of the whole unit of event-time.<sup>283</sup> Just as a performance takes place before (and is witnessed by) multiple viewers simultaneously, the event itself is also a culmination of parts into a syncretic whole; in the case of performance these might include (non-exhaustively) the audience, the text, the performer. As *Class of '76* shows, theatrical performance, as an abstraction of lived experience, reflects 'the rhythmic flow running through and running together the various components of an experienced present', whilst operating both in, and in response to, the bounded units of time that envelop it.<sup>284</sup>

The audience of *Class of '76* become part of the syncretic network of the show's components. Each audience member will remember the performance differently, both in the way they imagine the stories told, and their memory of the whole performance as an experienced event. Furthermore, audiences of different 'versions' of the performance may share certain impressions (at least as closely as is possible), but yet contest others. In 'apprehending' an event, encapsulating it between an abstract parenthesis of 'before' and 'after', Keightley and Pickering argue, 'experience is made and remade as memory in a developing process circumscribed only by the limits of human finitude'.<sup>285</sup> Whilst there may be other factors that go beyond a finitude of the 'self', as in cases of collective memory, their claim is a useful consideration of memory as that which is bounded and which only exists in its re-iterability, its interplay with actual experience. Kelly tells his

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<sup>283</sup> Keightley and Pickering, p.32.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Keightley and Pickering, p.34.

audience: 'this class photograph *is* my memory of them', and in doing so forges a direct relation between his own internal memory-image and the now-shared external memory of the performance and its stories.<sup>286</sup> *Class of '76* shows how a memory shared creates a virtual imprint on the consciousness of the receiver: it oversimplifies to say that memories require a teller and receiver to propagate as stories, but rather they always exist as virtual abstractions, albeit as a networked collective of discrete and varied impressions on multiple individuals. Experience of events, demarcated or otherwise, is made meaningful over time, 'in a cumulative yet shifting pattern which involves shaping particular experiences into stories', apprehending them within frames or bounds of narrative—'before'(s) and 'after'(s)—and 'at various stages in one's life reassessing the significance of those stories for a temporally extended self'.<sup>287</sup> Such an extension of self is constituted by an active reviewing of experiences in light of one's immediate condition, whilst simultaneously anticipating experiences yet to occur. The longevity of *Class of '76* is partly due to how it both propagates and makes significant its constituent stories not only for the self but extended to a collective.

Telling the stories of *Class of '76* in 2009, Kelly highlights various events that had occurred to him between 'Version 2' (2000-2008) and this iteration, such as turning 30 and switching his preference from beer to wine, which he claims, 'may or may not be relevant to our story'.<sup>288</sup> In 2010, his statement changes again to assert that these events '*are* relevant to our story'.<sup>289</sup> When a performance is repeated, no iteration is ever the

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<sup>286</sup> Third Angel, 'Class of '76 at Leeds Met (DVD)'.

<sup>287</sup> Keightley and Pickering, p.34.

<sup>288</sup> Third Angel, 'Class of '76 at Leeds Met (DVD)'.

<sup>289</sup> Third Angel, 'Class of '76 at BAC (DVD)'. *My emphasis*.

same. Whether memories are seen as 'relevant' to our then-present story or not depends on multiple contextual factors. Kelly seems unsure as to whether his preference switching from beer to wine is relevant to the story: I argue that this moment illustrates the active reviewing, and therefore evolution, that occurs between iterations of *Class of '76*, as all the stories and Kelly's own perspectives have altered in relation to changing contexts. Performance photographer Hugo Glendinning once said of the photograph: 'people read it in different ways, and even I change my mind [...] as the world and events change around it'.<sup>290</sup> As all the matter in the world spins on its axis, nothing is ever fixed. The question then, in philosophical terms, becomes one of a degree of motion, or a degree of change: (taking a macro view) something we might call a 'fixed' object represents the smallest possible locus of change, changed only by virtue of its *being in relation* to other changeable objects. As 'space is abstracted out of separation' of 'discernible matter', time can be considered as 'just motion (evolution) of matter', thereby, anything subject to the laws of time can be said to be subject to constant motion.<sup>291</sup> A performance repeated exemplifies the 'dynamics of space-time-matter-motion', as a syncretic formalisation of the interplay of these elements.<sup>292</sup> I propose that *Class of '76*, as a series of repeated iterations, is thus also temporally extended so long as it is still being repeated, or conceptually re-vitalised. Castro, in deciding upon creating her own version of *Class of '76*, did so after hearing about the show in 2008 from her partner, recalling: 'it was a

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<sup>290</sup> Hugo Glendinning, *ICA Live Weekends: Futures & Pasts*, transcr. by R Fellman, 23rd May 2 (London, UK: ICA Lower Gallery, 2011).

<sup>291</sup> C S Unnikrishnan, 'Matter, Space, Time, and Motion: A Unified Gravitational Perspective', in *Space, Time and the Limits of Human Understanding*, ed. by Shyam Wuppuluri and Giancarlo Ghirardi (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), pp. 167–83. p.169.

<sup>292</sup> Abdul Malek, 'The Philosophy of Space-Time: Whence Cometh Matter and Motion?', *Journal of Advances in Physics*, 12.2 (2016), 4270–77. P.4275.

really good idea, the idea I wanted to have had'.<sup>293</sup> This illustrates that the generative faculty of the imagination is also employed based on the traces a performance leaves behind. I argue, then, that the memory of a performance *previously seen* also extends its vitality, as the spirit of the remembered event has the potential for reactivation through either recollection or re-telling. The imagination necessarily intercedes in this mnemonic activity, as it 'draws on a reservoir of potential futures inherent in the world's possibilities'; the imagination gives rise to a perception of possibilities *made actual*.<sup>294</sup> This evidences a form of longevity that is both mobile and continual, yet also reliant on the discrete and ephemeral nature of iterations; I have demonstrated how the longevity of a story resides in its actualisation in moments of live telling, reinforcing my argument that longevity in performance practice is largely based on recurrence, rather than solely as a process of extension. Continuation, as it pertains to *Class of '76* and *Turma de '95* is adaptive as Castro and Third Angel redefine their projects' parameters through their evolution. The 'drive' of the projects, the apparent compulsion to tell their stories and to embellish them over time, counteracts the supposed disappearance of the performance events that otherwise circumscribe their iterations.

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<sup>293</sup> Castro and Fellman.

<sup>294</sup> Wihstutz. p.163.

### III. Remembering

In the case of *Class of '76* each performed iteration recalls, in part, its previous. In this, Part Three, I argue that the convergence of storytelling and memory has parallels with the mode of theatrical performance itself; my interrogation of this interplay further reveals how vitality is upheld by re-telling and repeatability. I further argue that two main systems interact in this process, the sensory and the physical, as both combine in the functioning of the imagination.<sup>295</sup> I propose that the philosophical considerations of virtuality and actuality provide a framework for this analysis, and in turn assist in making the connections between the 'real' time of a performance project's life (from conception to completion) and the stage-time of its content (the nostalgia for 1976, the previous iterations of the project, and the research that is re-presented). This philosophical framing, by extension, brings the phenomenological aspects of performance as a distinct practice into contact with the specificity of *this* performance and its task of reconciling memory, story and nostalgia. I then apply these findings to specific acts of re-telling that mark part of a holistic process of extension, as these complex systems combine to reveal a form of longevity and continuation that translates from the virtual realm of the artwork, to the everyday operations of the company.

Memory, story and nostalgia share much in common; Schneider suggests that remembering is 'the first step in actually re-telling a story to others' as 'our recall of the story in our minds is a form of personal storytelling, of re-creating meaning for the

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<sup>295</sup> Bergson. p.138.

present. [...] The telling or performance becomes a critical part of not only the form, but the content'.<sup>296</sup> Following Schneider, I argue that performance practice more generally exists not only as an abstraction of the very embodied process of memory, but also presupposes an extension of this process.

*Picks up a marble (a fobba) and the clipboard.*

*Stands stage left. Reads rules from clipboard.*

How to Play Marbles.

Rule 1: Selection.<sup>297</sup>

When Kelly reads out the rules for a game of Marbles his audience knows they are not on a playground but in a studio: however, the imagination furnishes the image, as the black dancefloor may be momentarily and imaginatively transformed into a chalky tarmac, or something similarly recalled from each audience member's childhood. Exemplified in this example, performance aims to re-vitalise the past (its rehearsed action, its stories re-told) by harnessing its unique qualities as a live art form. In moving from pure *representation* to mediated *action*, a performance engages with a dualistic system of sensation-and-movement in both the performing of the stage-action and in the perception of its audiences. The complications surrounding this *memory*-image occur precisely because they are not self-existing, but exist in relation to other memories, contexts of recall, and the spatio-temporal bounds of their bodies in the present. To

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<sup>296</sup> Schneider, William. p.10.

<sup>297</sup> Kelly. p.28.

connect the storytelling device of the 'split gaze' with the actual recall of memory, a further philosophical leap is required; as Bergson posited:

...we may speak of the body as an ever advancing boundary between the future and the past, as a pointed end, which our past is continually driving forward into our future [...] consequently, those particular images, which I call cerebral mechanisms, terminate at each successive moment the series of my past representations, being the extreme prolongation of those representations into the present, their link with the real, that is, with *action*.<sup>298</sup>

Contrasted with the fact that the memory-image inherently exists outside of this denomination (it is internal to one's consciousness); the 'split gaze' shares qualities with memory, Kelly's body is at the 'pointed end', extending the past into the present through physical action.

*Turns to face across the stage, and places right foot on the fobba. Then demonstrates what follows [...]*

As each player hands the turn over to the other, he or she states,

"Yours," to indicate that the turn has indeed passed to the other player.

Yours.

Yours.

*A look at the audience. Back to the game.*

Yours.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Bergson. p.78-9.

<sup>299</sup> Kelly. p.30.

Kelly places marbles on the floor to indicate the rules of the game; whilst he doesn't *actually* play the game (it requires another player), the audience can imagine it being played, in part by calling upon memories of other games and experiences, whilst aware that this is *not the game itself* being played. The representation of the game retains something of its virtuality, else it is mistaken for the 'real' images it represents.<sup>300</sup> In cases where other experiences are called upon to furnish the representation, it is no longer solely a representation of the actual; the virtual is a version of the actual that the memory-image allows us to apprehend.

In *Class of '76*, Kelly also describes his return to Chuckery Infant School, mapping out its shape so that the audience might create a mental image. He tells how he used the staffroom as his dressing area, and how the teachers had labelled their cups, with one marked 'visitor'. The audience are not only invited to imagine the space, but to imagine Kelly's perspective of the space as a returning 'visitor' who once walked those corridors in a former time. This moment in the performance relates to what philosopher Samuel Weber terms (in a discussion of repetition) a 'theatre of the image':

[...A]s soon as you start to realise that the image is not something inert, something once and for all, that, on the contrary, it implies some type of temporal process in its production, reception, and circulation, then a temporal category such as repetition is not in principle as alien or as strange to it [the image] as it might seem[...] <sup>301</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Bergson. p.82.

<sup>301</sup> Samuel Weber and Terry Smith, 'Repetition: Kierkegaard, Artaud, Pollock and the Theatre of the Image.', 2009 <<https://web.stanford.edu/dept/HPS/WritingScience/etexts/Weber/Repetition.html>> [accessed 7 January 2020].



The audience are, in turn, 'visitor' to Kelly's memory-image of Chuckery Infant School. *The Storyteller's Way* also reminds us that 'if the storyteller's imagination has thoroughly inhabited the pictures, textures and atmosphere of the tale, the audience will have a correspondingly rich experience'.<sup>302</sup> In my application of Weber's proposal, I suggest that the image of the experienced past is not itself repeated but re-vitalised anew. Taking this further, Weber questions how rethinking theatricality relates to the reinterpreting of images, the answer to which, I argue, demonstrates not only the convergence of actual and virtual states, but the complex interaction between the two. Weber indicates that both static art and theatricality 'deal with images for a spectator, for someone else who is not part of the work itself. It is much harder to speak of a self-contained work of theatre than of almost any other artistic genre [...] since it necessarily depends upon the temporal/spatial dimension of the spectator'.<sup>303</sup> Weber looks to Søren Kierkegaard's *Repetition* (1983) for enlightenment and finds a translation of 'repetition' as the Danish 'gjen-tagelse', meaning something akin to 'to take again'. In this linguistic reveal, a sense of forward motion is instilled in the word, implicating a bringing-forth rather than repetition as, simply, a return. Weber also interrogates Kierkegaard's use of the term to 'come walking' to refer to the actor as bringing a whole world in their wake, as in the case of Kelly's description of his return to Chuckery Infant School—mapping the space and describing the labelled cups—rather than simply walking on to the stage.<sup>304</sup> By combining these two analogies, 'taking again' and the world-bringing of the performer, I consider the repetition of a performed action as that of a 'taking again' of experience, a

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<sup>302</sup> Ramsden and Hollingsworth. p.159.

<sup>303</sup> Weber and Smith.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

reliving of imagined moments (whether memories or fictions) defined precisely by a motion that exceeds purely the physical, but rather as all constituent elements of an image in totality (including all its nuanced inferences and emotional connections) 'moved' or brought into the present together *as one*.<sup>305</sup>

The 'taking again' of repetition is also not restricted to the memory of past iterations, as *Turma de '95* demonstrates; Castro did not see *Class of '76* originally, but she was able to perceive its threads and trace them back to an imagined approximation of what the show *might have been*, and indeed, what it was to her. Performance is, in one sense, 'ephemeral', which I propose becomes problematised by the two aforementioned concepts: firstly, of time and memory, that temporally extend the 'live' performance both before and after the staged event; and second, where the experienced present is concurrently an actual embodied mechanism virtually furnished by the imagination. In *Turma de '95* Castro announces to her audience: 'and here I am today'.<sup>306</sup> This line echoes Kelly's original opening line: 'So, here I am...', with the addition of 'and ... today', referencing that something has come before that brings the spectator to this present moment.<sup>307</sup> In relation to such conditions, I argue that the ephemerality of performance as a disappearance might be appropriately reconsidered as elusive, or fugitive, evading any true 'apprehension' of its totality. I correlate this generalised position with the specificity of *Class of '76* and *Turma de '95*: temporal extension and a

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<sup>305</sup> In his wordplay, Weber also suggest that is possible to be 'so *moved*' by a performance that one is no longer within normal physical parameters, which has its correlation with the phrase 'to die laughing' – to lose one's faculties to a heightened emotional response. This further echoes Heidegger's concept of the 'death drive'.

<sup>306</sup> Raquel Castro, 'Turma de 95 - Final Text: English Translation' (Lisbon, Portugal: Unpublished, 2019).

<sup>307</sup> Third Angel, 'Class of '76 at BAC (DVD)'.

fugitive nature reinforce my proposal that longevity is located in motion. I suggest that a truly ephemeral or disappearing event leaves no potential for its recurrence, and it is recurrence that maintains longevity, work that is fugitive like the 'occasional tourer' that is *Class of '76*, but not finite.

In 2010, Kelly wrote: 'I know we've said it before, but these really will be the last UK performances of this version of the show'.<sup>308</sup> To date this is true, (especially due to Third Angel's cessation) though arguably *Class of '76* lives on in name and form in *Turma de '95*, not least in the fact that Castro directly mentions it as an influence on her work, with Kelly as 'mentor'. Frances Babbage notes of adaptation and retelling that 'the advantages and opportunities of intertextuality become apparent: exposing the ways in which stories of different kinds intersect with one another', old and new, suggesting that the 'seemingly authoritative might yet be countered and contested'.<sup>309</sup> *Turma de '95* exhibits a self-aware intertextuality, consciously responding to, and even documenting, the legacy and effect of *Class of '76*. The authority of the original is contested, as the way 'new' audiences may encounter *Class of '76* is through Castro's treatment of it. Castro intertextually references Third Angel's performance in the title as a spatiotemporally dislocated adaptation: 'turma' [class] and '95' reflect the geographical alteration and time difference of its class-photo stimulus. The convention of the projected photograph and the physical act of 'holding' it in place, in both performances, echoes this linking of past and present through an engagement with-and-by documents:

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<sup>308</sup> Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: Plans for 2010' <<http://thirdangeluk.blogspot.com/2010/01/plans-for-2010.html>> [accessed 3 April 2020].

<sup>309</sup> Frances Babbage, 'Storytelling as Adaptation : Adaptation as Storytelling', in *Adaptation in Contemporary Theatre : Performing Literature* (Bloomsbury, 2020), pp. 82–90. p.90.

just as the grainy photographs bring forth the classmates from their past, so too does this convention bring forth a trace of *Class of '76* in *Turma de '95*. As Keightley and Pickering posit, memory-images being recalled 'attain a clear *imaginative edge* or form a distinct line of temporal connection which we have traced in our imagination, so helping to make past and present in some way cohere and have continuity across time' (my italics).<sup>310</sup> It is in the formal considerations of performative devices such as the projections caught on the cards, that more obvious retentional threads conjoining past and present are revealed.<sup>311</sup> The 'distinct line of temporal connection' is rendered only by the imagination; Gabriella Giannachi adds that 're-interpretations are our methods to perceive what is between', to re-enforce these dependant connections and maintain vitality for the past.<sup>312</sup> As *Turma de '95* openly references *Class of '76*, these interconnections are further reinforced, maintaining the continued vitality of the former work through the existence of the latter. I propose that Weber's 'taking again', as the complex performativity of the memory-image brought forth, translates to the re-interpretation of such images (experienced or not) as being represented anew, whilst exposing its virtual relationship to the original experienced event; *Turma de '95* does not pretend to be an iteration of *Class of '76*, but discloses its connections to that earlier work as part of its own form.

As I have shown, the act of re-telling in *Class of '76* is an act of making-present the past, one that opens the possibility and potential for subsequent re-tellings in the

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<sup>310</sup> Keightley and Pickering. p.6.

<sup>311</sup> Alia Al-Saji, 'The Memory of Another Past: Bergson, Deleuze and a New Theory of Time', *Continental Philosophy Review*, 37.2 (2004), 203–39. p.204.

<sup>312</sup> Giannachi. p.129.

future. In the act of recall, an image of the 'whole' past (or something akin to what it might have been) is apprehended in virtual form: all that *has been* is in constant relation with the present, spilling over into the present perception.<sup>313</sup> The conjuration of the projected images in *Class of '76* and *Turma de '95* also acts to frame them, to make different and define their virtuality apart from the actualised space of the theatre.

However, rather than a motion of virtual-becoming-actual (such as in the revealing of a dramatic plot), the faces of the children never *become* that which they represent: their conjuration does not bring the real people they depict to the stage. Rather, in reverse, the *actual* children are moved into the virtual realm, they are abstracted. As with the human preoccupation with finitude, the virtual provides a site for deferral of transience, a form of immortality is achieved by moving from 'real' time to a preserved yet mutable time of repeatability and reuse. It is in this convention of conjured images that *Class of '76* evidences Dimitrova's aforementioned 'weave' of actual and virtual as an interplay rather than a depletion of one state as it moves into the other. Much as the virtual memory-image forms a bridge between the actual present and virtual past, performance operates specifically in the realm of action, as with Kelly's game of Marbles, in the bringing-into-being of internal thought to the external space.<sup>314</sup> *Class of '76* is exemplary of this notion of turning the virtual into the real, distinctly as a process of evolution, or moving-into-being-again; the card makes-real the conjured faces of the children, making their images part of the memories of the audience, and in the performance itself as making manifest the very research it describes by enacting both its memory and its results in the present. The projected 'visual pegs' that Kelly 'hangs' his stories upon is a

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<sup>313</sup> Bergson. p.82.

<sup>314</sup> Al-Saji. p.206.

performative device that reflects how the possible recall of past experiences indicates potential action. I surmise that the mnemonic imagination operates neither in a 'past' or a 'future', rather in a 'not-present'. I suggest that *Class of '76* reveals, under close inspection, how imagination reconfigures this timeline within our consciousness, weaving, threading and conjoining nodes into something more akin to an elaborate, everchanging web: a living network of story, experience and memory where one 'peg' is not defined by its distance from the other along a linear thread, but by their evolving relations to each other point in that same, mobile and timeless network.

#### **IV. Re-vitalising**

I have argued that remembering and re-telling indicate potential futures and in doing so compound the argument that repetition is, in fact, an evolutionary process that induces longevity through constant motion and renewal. I further propose that Third Angel's storytelling devices of digression and nostalgia in *Class of '76* reinforce the case for repetition as a moving-into-being-anew. In this, Part Four, I draw upon specific terminology to support this theory and to contribute to a vocabulary of longevity; first, I apply the term *durée*, as used by Bergson, in referring to 'a continual differentiation proceeding in several directions at once', a continuity of duration that therefore relies upon divergence and evolution.<sup>315</sup> *Durée* proposes instead that constituent difference is not only affirmative (the singular is defined by its relationship to other singularities), but

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<sup>315</sup> Al-Saji. p.209.

*durée* upholds continuity by maintaining separation. I use *durée* in this context to refer to difference that occurs over time, and therefore operates in motion.

I define digression as a narrative device that activates the separation of an original and a version, in a moment of a splitting of trajectories. To demonstrate, in a published text titled *What can I tell you?* Kelly includes fragments of his interview transcriptions that formed part of Third Angel's formative research for the show:

What you don't have is [...?] you see um, Paul Groombridge, and you think he was that smart bastard who didn't have a TV [laughs].

.... I mean its just um, my, I tell you, I tell you a story about, I knew something that happened to me, I went to Paul Groombridge's birthday party, whatever it was ...

Right...

And um, I remember these things stick with you, I remember I had egg sandwiches...

Yeah...

Egg sandwiches, but I was sick as a dog for two days afterwards...<sup>316</sup>

This passage, as a transcription included by Kelly in his supporting text, exemplifies how the form of *Class of '76* actively replicates the digressions within its originating oral histories, both by including paraphrased versions of the actual stories and digressions from the interviews, and in its own structure as that which shifts between nostalgic reflections, stories, and the present detective-work in the live moment of performance. The splitting of narrative trajectory, as the interviewee remembers the egg sandwich incident, is an act of provoked evolution and change, as opposed to a pure repetition of

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<sup>316</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'What Can I Tell You?' p.50.

the interviewee's memory-recall of the incident. Its context as being separated from what came before distinguishes it as an evolutionary digression. Furthermore, the difference inherent in memory shows itself here, as existing at an 'imaginative edge' of present and live potentiality—*where will the conversation go next?*—whilst retaining dialectical contact with the past—*we speak in context of what was said before*.

Digression in its specific application in *Class of '76* and *Turma de '95* illuminates the links between this artistic device and the broader potential for digression and divergence in the company's wider repertoire. *Class of '76* and *Turma de '95* are both examples of a convergence of autobiographical, oral history and storytelling performance that combines multiple narrative threads in telling an overarching story, that owes much of its effect to the nostalgia it invokes, the digressional and nostalgic structure of their telling, and to the imaginative scope they invite their audiences to engage with. Kelly moves between stories of his past, those of the classmates he introduces, the near-past of his formative research, and the present performance of *Class of '76* as it has come to be; the performance re-orders of the 'natural' chronology of the narrative. Kelly tells his audience of how he spoke with one of the teachers at Chuckery Infant School, who said to him: 'come back to the school on Monday [...] and I'll show you all of those children, because they're all still here'.<sup>317</sup> The effect of this line is both to present this story as socially homogenous, as that which applies broadly to a collective memory, whilst also suggesting that perhaps one day this whole story-event (or one similar to it) might undergo a repetition. I propose that the use of digression in *Class of '76*, as a splitting of trajectories, is best illustrated by the application of a theoretical illustration that Alia Al-

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<sup>317</sup> Third Angel, 'Class of '76 at Leeds Met (DVD)'.



Saji terms the 'scission of time', which provides a way to conceive (and speak) of separation and continuity in tandem, and through this illustration I argue that digression and nostalgia, as movements away from a linear trajectory of time, counterintuitively support a future potentiality. Al-Saji defines the 'scission of time', citing Bergson:

In this view, past and present are not simply moments of before and after, but two jets issuing from a common source, simultaneously [...] into "two directions, one oriented and dilated toward the past, the other contracted, contracting toward the future".<sup>318</sup>

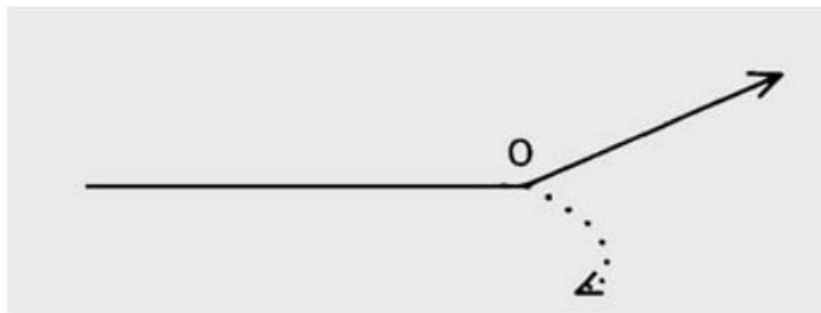


Fig. 4: Gilles Deleuze's diagram of Bergson's *scission* (in Al-Saji, 2004, p.209.)

I suggest that scission of the present, as an interval, reframes the notion of the 'pointed edge' of time as, rather, a locus of separation (Fig 4). Furthermore, the concept of scission in relation to storytelling digressions relates to: *durée*, and the aforementioned Debordian concept of *dérive*. Digression is often assumed to be akin to a '*dérive*' (drift) or motion of 'aimless wandering' that returns to its derivation.<sup>319</sup> The very fact that a digression occurs enacts change upon the original, and regardless of whether it re-joins

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<sup>318</sup> Al-Saji. p.209.

<sup>319</sup> Kenneth Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age* (Columbia University Press, 2011). p.38.

its original path, it has undergone scission that, by definition, is irreversible.<sup>320</sup> By this logic, I argue that digression in storytelling and performance is a form of divergence, rather than of a *dérive*-like wandering return, that both embraces and generates a sense of anticipation: it gestures towards a return that it can never fully realise. The indeterminacy of digression, therefore, is a site of potentiality that uniquely resides on the very edge of anticipation. Divergence in its truest form, on the other hand (such as that which one might see in adaptations or homage), openly displays its difference in affirming both the original and the emergent version. A divergent scission makes an anticipatory forward motion (its potential) and simultaneously a dilating past image of that moment, of a memory-image (that we might call 'hindsight'), this moment of scission is common to both. This complements the idea of digression as a form of divergence as they thereby become part of the same motion of eternal difference through separation and, I argue, are thereby one-and-the-same.

As evidenced thus far, *Class of '76* and *Turma de '95* bring to the fore the confluences of space and time that are inherent to performance, and reflect upon the structures and forms that both resist and embrace the asynchronous and translocated, rather than attempting to 'hide' them in a suspension of disbelief (for instance, among the trappings of scenery or character). Third Angel partly owe their longevity of practice not only to their ability to respond and adapt, to move between forms, but in the case of *Class of '76* by going further in evidencing the process of change itself, between iterations: by showing the evolution of their work, this leaves open the possibility of a

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<sup>320</sup> Francois Dosse, 'The Ontology of Difference', in *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: Intersecting Lives*, ed. by Deborah Glassman (Trans.) (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2010). p.163.

further iteration, pre-empting the project's continuation.<sup>321</sup> In Kelly's account of the teacher telling him of the children: 'they're all still here', his re-telling is structured in such a way as to give this moment a revelatory weight.<sup>322</sup> Keightley and Pickering challenge the oft-perceived notion that memory and imagination are 'antagonistic', instead privileging their 'productive tension'.<sup>323</sup> Experience allows for evolution and development, as one learns by reflecting back in time; 'memory is key to this transactional movement', in which resides the 'creative potential' of memory.<sup>324</sup> This transaction between past and present experience determines that 'memory is mobile and formative, not merely repetitive'.<sup>325</sup> Acts of storytelling can similarly be thought of as 'mobile and formative', operating as an interplay of the experiences (remembered or fictitious) of the teller, sociocultural experience that may influence the telling, and the experiences of each audience member that influence their reception of the story. Furthermore, a collective experience of the live moment of telling will impact this 'experience of experiences', that ultimately synthesises these myriad factors. As an audience member it becomes possible to share, to some degree, the original revelation of Kelly's moment of conversation with the teacher saying, of the children in the photo, 'they're all still here'.

Nostalgia, as I define it, is a form of digression that brings-forth images of the past into the present, doing so to alter or reveal something of the present itself. Hilary Dickinson and Michael Erben suggest 'a nostalgic memory yearns for something that has

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<sup>321</sup> Third Angel, 'Class of '76 at Leeds Met (DVD)'.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> Keightley and Pickering, p.3; p.7.

<sup>324</sup> Keightley and Pickering, p.4.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

gone forever, except in memory'.<sup>326</sup> Similarly, Kelly reminds us that the project of *Class of '76* 'wasn't just about catching up on what people had done for the last 24 years, it was about finding out who those children were back then, and why they became what they did: tracing a line from the past to the present'.<sup>327</sup> In an article titled 'We Digress!' Catherine Evans Davies suggests that opportunities for nostalgia, as marked in moments of digression, such as the 'remembering' of Paul Groombridge and the egg sandwich incident, can also reveal 'a selective remembering of positive aspects of the past': despite the bad outcome of Paul Groombridge's sandwiches, the memory is one of a happier time.<sup>328</sup> However, it 'can just as possibly be a response to the desire for creative engagement with difference, or a sign of social critique and aspiration'.<sup>329</sup> What nostalgia thereby confirms is that remembering as a sense-making—or indeed, story-making—act is one of aspiration and forward motion. Nostalgia presents scission as its cause, a looking back to look forward: yet it may be rather that in cases of nostalgia, the looking back is a focussing-in on a specific image, whilst the future becomes dilated, not seen for what it is (as it has not yet occurred) but seen as an anticipated and imagined shape of the possibilities to come. Robert Eaglestone proposes that 'cruel nostalgia' creates a problematic yearning for a past in which one only has 'the memory of the memory', by which we are removed from its actualities.<sup>330</sup> Nostalgia, as Eaglestone suggests, may in

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<sup>326</sup> Hilary Dickinson and Michael Erben, 'Nostalgia and Autobiography: The Past in the Present', 2006, 223–44. p.227.

<sup>327</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'What Can I Tell You?' p.49.

<sup>328</sup> Kathryn Tucker Windham and Catherine Evans Davies, "'We Digress'", *Source: Storytelling, Self, Society*, 4.3 (2008), 167–84. p.180.

<sup>329</sup> Keightley and Pickering. p.11.

<sup>330</sup> Robert Eaglestone, 'Cruel Nostalgia and the Memory of the Second World War', *Brexit and Literature*, 2018, 92–104; Eaglestone builds upon Lauren Berlant's 'cruel optimism', that suggests a sense of capitalist progress is actually damaging in the present. Berlant suggested, in 2011, that previous 'infrastructures of

some cases be 'cruel', but it also helps us to make affirmations of positive choices, and where we recognise its cruelty, to mourn loss as a 'bittersweet' condition.<sup>331</sup> No more clearly is this seen than in 'anticipated nostalgia', where one may construct their present based on how they think they *might* reflect upon it in future.<sup>332</sup> In *Class of '76* Kelly introduces us to Paul's childhood image, saying: 'I don't really know what a Processing Geo-Physicist is (and he's explained it), but it's no surprise that Paul's one'.<sup>333</sup> As spectators look upon the projected face of Paul in 1976, they are invited to focus in on this specific image, whilst simultaneously imagining what may have taken place between the taking of this image and Kelly's recent interview with him. Castro tells of her own performance: 'I think the show might take us to a place where we [audience and performer] question what's possible, or what's still possible?' Not only do lives become structured in narrative terms, I suggest the mnemonic imagination represents both a social and existential protective buffer, or form of self-reinforcement. I also interpret *durée* similarly, in the making and re-making of memory across time, and in the alienation of both the near-present that *had changed* and the past that was innocent of

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continuity' have been lost. Bailes prefers the term 'fictions of continuity'. These infrastructures are often manifest in physical form, as social and political systems, though are representative of 'fantasies' such as our values and hopeful ideals. Berlant considers 'cruel optimism' as a mode of progressing towards an idealistic future precisely through loss as a counterintuitively generative act, 'detaching from one's own fantasy' in order to reconfigure an anticipated future as that which might embrace other ways of 'being in common' (a state she defines as specifically political). (Lauren Berlant, 'Public Feelings Salon with Lauren Berlant | Barnard Center for Research on Women' <<http://bcrw.barnard.edu/videos/public-feelings-salon-with-lauren-berlant/>> [accessed 28 April 2021]); (Bailes 2010, p.2).

<sup>331</sup> Robert Eaglestone 'Cruel Nostalgia | Forum for Philosophy' <<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/theforum/cruel-nostalgia/>> [accessed 1 March 2023].

<sup>332</sup> Wing-Yee Cheung et al, 'Anticipated Nostalgia: Looking Forward to Looking Back', *Cognition and Emotion*, 2019; This is not to be confused with '*anticipatory* nostalgia' which refers to nostalgia about something which we are yet to lose.

<sup>333</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'What Can I Tell You?' p.52.

its *change-to-come*. For this condition, Ryan Lizardi offers the term 'perpetual nostalgia'.<sup>334</sup> Castro expresses that the essence of the work is an aspirational application of the past: 'the dreams we had, the faces full of possibilities and then somehow, how life happened...' Nostalgia is uniquely engaged with cross-temporality: in the case where performance activates nostalgia, it too can be said to engage creatively with temporal difference, to perform a 'reverse' or backwards scission that dilates the unknown potentials of the future, as aspirational and imaginary.



Fig. 5: Castro with the full class photo in *Turma de '95* (Bruno Simao)

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<sup>334</sup> Ryan Lizardi, 'Introduction to the Perpetual Individual Nostalgic's Playlist Past', 2014.

*Turma de '95* (Fig. 5), as a 'new' iteration that lays bare its intertextual relationship with *Class of '76*, adopts as part of its telling the reasons for its own emergence. As Keightley and Pickering propose, the 'result is not only the re-establishment of continuity', as tropes and conventions are reaffirmed, 'but also the construction of a newly conceived past in order to account for what departed from and broke with it'.<sup>335</sup> In this way, the emergence of *Turma de '95* acts to affirm, and even alter, the past of *Class of '76*, whilst in turn affirming its own existence as a separate entity and in its divergence re-establishes a continuity. When asked about her motivation behind *Turma de '95*, and why she chose to adapt *Class of '76*, Castro explained how she was enticed by the structure of it: 'first presentation, and [then] choosing some of the "best stories" and ending with a magical passage through the whole class.' She also describes the capturing of the projected faces of the classmates as 'the magical dispositif [device]' and the task that the performance inhabits: 'look for all those people in the picture. These were the starting points of my play; all the rest would be my research to lead the work.'<sup>336</sup> Castro explains that the resulting content of *Turma de '95* is an exploration of how 'life is a complexity of things, some that we control and others that are not [controllable] ... there is a structure or a capacity for resilience that makes us turn things around.'<sup>337</sup> To Castro, that 'structure' may be a potential source of resilience, for when things do not unfold as anticipated. Digressional and divergent works of art exist in relation to the structures they depart from, evidenced in *Turma de '95* as homage and

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<sup>335</sup> Keightley and Pickering. p.32.

<sup>336</sup> Castro and Fellman.

<sup>337</sup> Raquel Castro and Ana Bigotte, 'Turma de '95 Programme Notes' (Lisbon, Portugal: Teatro do Bairro Alto, 2019).

adaptation. In devising the dramaturgical structure of *Class of '76* Third Angel opted to combine multiple forms of storytelling; positioning improvised memories and stories against moments of fixed text (clearly demarcated to the audience in the use of the clipboard), and in doing so predetermining the fixed elements of the performance. Cesare Molinari suggests that besides their functional differences, these storytelling devices belong 'to the same category of action' and 'that improvisation can and must consist of formulas, repetitions and quotations is obvious and does in no way undermine' the integrity of a work in its apparent looseness.<sup>338</sup> I argue that the result of this part-fixity is that of harnessing the interplay between narrative and story, as the distinctions between what is fixed and what is open to potential evolution are intrinsic to the delivery of the performance. The 'formulas' that underpin the apparent looseness are what make the divergence of *Class of '76* into *Turma de '95* possible. In the abstracted unit of the performance, the theatrical structure fulfils a role similar to what Keightley and Pickering term the 'emplotment' we enact upon memory: 'actively concerted recollection occurs when storytelling builds creatively on the order of sequence inherent in memory, despite its lacunae and points of disjunction'.<sup>339</sup> Beyond the emplotment of the stories to form the 'shape' of *Class of '76* and *Turma de '95* respectively, the *way of telling* itself further defies the actualisation that narrative gestures towards. The form that the performance takes becomes key to, and privileges, the story in-and-of the work rather than relying on narrative to 'carry forward' (to death) a work necessarily circumscribed by finitude. *Class of '76* and *Turma de '95*, as examples of contemporary postdramatic performance, allow for change and evolution (*durée*) within their own form,

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<sup>338</sup> Cesare Molinari, 'Storytelling, Memory, Theatre', 7 (2018), 25–40. p.28.

<sup>339</sup> Keightley and Pickering. p.35.



embracing their constituent disparity and effectively predetermining or moderating their own variables and potential diversions.

As argued, Third Angel and Castro actively acknowledge performance's capacity to revitalise the past in a present embodiment, evidenced in a return to forms of storytelling. As I argued in respect of 'Remembering' even rehearsed recital involves imaginatively mediated recollection. When describing Third Angel's working practices Kelly tells that co-artistic director Walton: 'often says [...] "Put the notes down. Do it without notes. If it's in your memory then it's significant to you"'.<sup>340</sup> Kelly's 'drive' to create *Class of '76* may perhaps reside in the subconscious realisation of the quality of narratives inherent in specific memories, precisely as the consciousness performs emplotment. I suggest that his desire for completion is one of wishing to circumscribe all these memory-images into one performance-image. Digression, by theory of scission, can also be thought of as a form of, what John Hospers called, 'propulsive theory': creating by being intuitively 'propelled forward to the completion' that one 'could not foresee in the beginning'.<sup>341</sup> In *Class of '76* Kelly admits: 'my Dad was right, I didn't properly know why I was doing this or why I wanted to do it, and I definitely didn't know what we were actually going to make...'.<sup>342</sup> On a similar note, the interviews Castro conducted with her classmates for *Turma de '95* brought up unexpected topics, such as

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<sup>340</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'Testing the Hypothesis', *The 21st Century Performance Reader*, ed. by Teresa Brayshaw, Anna Fenemore, and Noel Witts (London, UK: Routledge, 2020), pp. 527–37. p.535.

<sup>341</sup> John Hospers, 'Artistic Creativity', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 43.3 (1985), 243–55. p.244.

<sup>342</sup> Third Angel, 'Class of '76 at BAC (DVD)'.

a recalling of recurring instances of depression among her interviewees, of which she says: 'I don't think I was expecting it'.<sup>343</sup> Castro further recalls:

I was really led by the stories I found, crossing them with my own [...] when I talked with the first ten of them and seven told me they had a mental issue in their 20s this started to be included in the interviews... So the research also started to go in some directions, prior to the writing of the play.<sup>344</sup>

Babbage suggests that 'practitioners and playwrights gesture towards story to signal the continued potency of a source text or its rediscovered relevance and timeliness; persistently, the borrowed work is described as a story that "needed telling"'.<sup>345</sup> At the very least, Kelly's propulsion may be rooted in a collecting process that aims to draw the 'story' out through its own exploration and self-referencing, rather than the 'story' being the thing that inherently *needs* to be told. Castro's performance itself echoes this 'propulsive' mode of being. In the latter stages of the show, Castro illustrates a moment from her youth:

I'm studying geography  
drawing pictures on the edge of the book  
thinking that [...]  
it was I who would decide the geography of my life.<sup>346</sup>

This passage favours the potentiality inherent in the anticipatory and indeterminate future. Rather than a desire to reach a defined conclusion, the desire here is in embracing the potential of digressions as a positive practice (both in life and art). I argue

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<sup>343</sup> Castro and Bigotte.

<sup>344</sup> Castro and Fellman.

<sup>345</sup> Babbage. p.79-80.

<sup>346</sup> Castro.

that Castro demonstrates how digression, as an artistic practice, can come to represent more propulsive attitudes in everyday life, outside the studio. Castro ends her performance by singing a song by the Smashing Pumpkins:

Time is never time at all  
You can never ever leave  
Without leaving a piece of youth  
And our lives are forever changed  
[...] We're not the same, we're different  
Believe [...]  
In the resolute urgency of now.<sup>347</sup>

In a statement of propulsive intent, the suggestion to her audience that we always leave a piece of ourselves behind as we change echoes the Bergsonian *durée*. 'We're not the same, we're different' marks an affirmation of the single individual as one among a multiple, or at the least we are the same by virtue of our collective differences.

Castro indirectly responds to Kelly's comments that: 'there's way too much information in my notebook, and in the recorded telephone conversations. And other memories are still being recovered and caught each day. [...] I am something of a completist – but when does it end with this one?'<sup>348</sup> Castro's narrative, and the extended journey of Third Angel's *Class of '76*, culminates in drawing the attention of the audience to 'the resolute urgency of now'; the performance is not 'complete', but rather its urgency has been passed on in that moment. There is a sense that she is inviting the audience to take their own reflections away from the theatre with them, to privilege their

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<sup>347</sup> Castro.

<sup>348</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'What Can I Tell You?' p.49.

'now(s)', in contrast to the bounds of the 'before(s)' and 'after(s)' of performance: to live on the very edge of an anticipatory present. Castro's adaptation is still in repertoire, whilst *Class of '76* has ceased to tour, with the upcoming dissolution of Third Angel. Digression can thereby defer and evade conclusions, whether diverting the course of one's own story, or re-articulating that of another. A deferral of the death drive is located in digression, as a motion of *durée* to continually (re)generate, an evolutionary movement to a new state of being that seeks longevity in an attempt to transcend the 'human finitude' invoked earlier in this chapter.

## Conclusion

*Class of '76* and *Turma de '95* productively engage the concept that, more broadly, performance iterations recollect and 'take again', just as they themselves are being recollected and remembered in their re-enacting. As all things are 'already in the world' (and are always in motion), a natural propulsion occurs in the eternal dissymmetry of the scission of time: *durée* and its eternal process of departure and re-establishment. Furthermore, the anticipated 'end' is a definite and anticipated *virtual* event rather than an (as yet) actualised happening. This exposes the 'weave' of actuality and virtuality that Dimitrova proposes, and in doing so the dialectical relationship between memory and anticipation, digression and nostalgia. To illustrate, memory is also a future act of reflection: one *knows* they will remember again but does not know how it will differ. One *anticipates* memory, and indeed that remembering as an act of engaging a virtual and imagined realm is, too, an act of digression from the present situation. My argument, supported by Dimitrova's 'weave', has revealed in the storytelling devices of Third Angel's

*Class of '76* a methodology of deferral, of a virtual and mobile network of memories, actual and imaginary stories, and forms of recall that interconnect in a space that may exceed the limitations of a linear, experienced time. *Class of '76* and *Turma de '95*, separately and together, present the very conditions of their making as part of a temporally extended narrative of both story and its digressions. I have argued that the self-reflectivity and open-ended potential, both within shows and between their iterations, acknowledges and establishes an evolutionary digression. *Class of '76* and *Turma de '95* bring to the fore how the anticipated finitude of the performance event echoes the anticipatory nature of life in the 'actual' worldly context that surrounds it; I have further argued that a potentiality is inherent in this uncertainty. With *Class of '76* and *Turma de '95* I have revealed how imagination reconfigures the timelines of remembered pasts into a living, mobile network of story, experience and anticipation. The longevity of Third Angel's collective narrative has contributed to their previval (preemptive survival) as they have imaginatively furnished the anticipated future, and, over time their collective, networked experience strengthens the retentional threads that connect the future to their long-expanding past. The longevity of both projects have given insight into the narrative of Third Angel as a whole, as part of an interconnected network of people, projects and practices. Having moved from the organisational and contextual analysis of Chapter 1, through this phenomenological and philosophical assessment of the key factors in Third Angel's artistic practice, risk and anticipation, Chapters 3 and 4 draw the contextual and theoretical approaches together, in turn reconciling the complex relationship between artistic and organisational longevity, via their respective focuses on collaboration and 'co-labour' in the Third Angel's creative and organisational activities.

### 3. Collaboration and Co-production: Greater than The Sum

#### Introduction

In this chapter I focus on Third Angel's methodology of collaborative creation and situate their collaborative practice as part of the wider scene of contemporary devised theatre. While devising is not necessarily collaborative—it is possible to devise material as a solo artist—historically, devising has typically been characterised by collaborative creation, a method which unites the different aesthetic, political and organisational preoccupations of its contributors. I present the additional frictions that come with company longevity and assess the benefits that can be derived from balancing friction and familiarity, addressing wider discourse around creative collaboration in its diverse forms. In particular, I apply sociologist and dance scholar Rudi Laermans' concept of 'co-opetition' to support my argument.<sup>349</sup> I later turn to Eve Katsouraki's application of a surreptitious 'antagonism' in creative assembly, which I use to situate Third Angel's collaborative practice as that which is inherently political, and later build on this theory in Chapter 4, Co-labour.<sup>350</sup> In Chapter 1, I introduced collaboration as part of the devising tradition, specifically in relation to risk and precarity, as part of a 'do-it-yourself' ethics of artmaking. I established collaboration as a generative practice founded on the differences between its contributors, and a diversity of knowledge and experience.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> Rudi Laermans, "'Being in Common": Theorizing Artistic Collaboration', *Performance Research*, 17.6 (2012), 94–102. p.98.

<sup>350</sup> Katsouraki.

<sup>351</sup> Bailes, 'Introduction: Failure and Representation'. p13; p2.

Furthermore, I identified a radical self-sufficiency of collectives and companies, who act to distance themselves from external factors that may threaten the longevity of the group. In Chapter 1 I also demonstrated that theatre companies are positioned within a wider 'scene' of artistic practice, the shared attitudes towards artistic value and the potential for future reward. This, Chapter 3, builds on these arguments, to examine whether contemporary theatre companies like Third Angel may be understood as inherently political through both their position within a taxpayer-subsidised sector and their working methods within a collaborative and democratic convention.<sup>352</sup> Many contemporary theatre makers actively engage with collaboration outside of their companies' core membership, and in doing so challenge traditional perceptions of company continuity. Whilst Third Angel is, at its heart, a collaboration between Walton and Kelly, the company itself now exceeds their original partnership. Rather, Third Angel consider their collaborators as those companies and individuals who make up their wider network, and who are willing to contribute to work that is credited to the 'Third Angel brand', its values, and its methodologies, rather than under their own individual (often well-established) profiles. For Third Angel, collaboration is about working regularly or frequently (though not on every project) with partners who are 'brought in for a particular specialism, but have an influence on other areas of the project'.<sup>353</sup> Walton explains: 'because we're a small company I don't want all the songs to sound the same. With some tunes that is great but we don't want to be producing the same piece of

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<sup>352</sup> Kelly prefers the formulation 'taxpayer-' over 'government-subsidised', as it retains an awareness of the source of the funding. I use it as such here.

<sup>353</sup> 'About Third Angel | Third Angel'.

work all the time. That is why we work with different associate artists'.<sup>354</sup> In this same spirit, I analyse two case studies in tandem in this chapter, both of which involve collaborators: Third Angel's *Parts for Machines that Do Things* (2008) and *What I Heard About the World* (2010-15).<sup>355</sup>



Fig. 6: Thorpe playing guitar in *What I Heard About the World* (Craig Fleming)

As works produced in collaboration with other artists outside their core membership, these projects contrast with the Walton-Kelly project *Class of '76*, analysed in Chapter 2. Chris Thorpe, freelance performer, playwright and co-founder of fellow

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<sup>354</sup> 'Outside Eye | The Dramaturgical Turn in Contemporary Performance'.

<sup>355</sup> Importantly, this chapter refers to existing texts about *Parts for Machines...*, as well as archival documentation, as no full-length documentation exists. *What I Heard About The World*, however, is available on DVD in the University of Sheffield Library, online via Live Stream Archive (<https://livestreamarchive.co.uk/shows/what-i-heard/>) and on the Third Angel website (at the time of writing).



Yorkshire-based company Unlimited Theatre, collaborated with Third Angel on both *Parts for Machines that Do Things* and *What I Heard About the World* (Fig. 6).<sup>356</sup> Performers Jerry Killick and Gillian Lees also collaborated on *Parts for Machines...* (Killick likewise regularly works with Forced Entertainment and Lees with visual artist Adam York Gregory, under the name Gillian Jane Lees). *Parts for Machines...* is also significant in that the project nearly did not happen; Third Angel were invited to apply for circa £60K project funding from ACE's Grants for the Arts scheme, but this application was turned down. A second application for £5k (due to faster turnaround for smaller applications) was successful. The collaborators decided to do the project anyway, as they collectively felt it was a show worth making (a point to which I return in Chapter 5: Collecting and Legacy). By contrast, *What I Heard...* is a product of Third Angel's collaboration internationally with Portuguese company mala voadora (whose name translates as 'flying suitcase'), different for its mode of inter-company working, rather than individuals under the one Third Angel banner.<sup>357</sup> Thorpe's involvement in *Parts for Machines...*, for example, brings a writerly perspective to the devising processes, which demonstrates Third Angel's willingness to explore different ways of working through collaboration with skillsets beyond their own. In a 2019 edition of *Performance Research* journal, entitled 'Staging the Wreckage', Kelly and Thorpe co-authored a reflective article about the show. In this article Thorpe proposed that the links between *Parts for Machines...* and *What I Heard...*

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<sup>356</sup> Thorpe was also invited to be part of *Presumption*, eventually performed in 2009.

<sup>357</sup> Thorpe, common to both projects, has collaborated with mala voadora beyond this initial relationship, originally brokered by Third Angel, which make both performances part of a wider narrative of networked connections between people, companies and places.

(besides the fact both contain explicit references to air travel) are the questions common to both:

[...] [W]hat are the multiple human and performative perspectives we can use to investigate these stories? Who can show us this and how can they/we tell it in a way that reflects the complexity and processes of the systems and material, without reducing the piece to an emblematic story with a single (narrative) point of view?<sup>358</sup>

Focussing on two performances that re-present multiple collected stories at the heart of their performative function, my examination uses these case studies to build upon the previous analysis of *Class of '76*, as a project that also performs an 'investigative' storytelling act. Furthermore, what Thorpe calls the 'complexity' of 'systems', as that which is reflected in both works, is central to both the mode of working collaboratively, and indeed, the complex system of performance that results. This complexity became part of what was shared with the project's audience. Kelly and Thorpe explained the decision, saying: 'we know this is what we're doing – so we're going to *actually* do it', rather than hiding the underlying structure of the performance's task.<sup>359</sup>

This chapter is divided into two parts, which address the diverse systems of collaboration recognisable in Third Angel's practice. In the first of these, Co-operation, I primarily focus on a *closed* system of collaboration: arguing that working regularly with established collaborators or brokered relationships (people connected by common

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<sup>358</sup> Alexander Kelly and Chris Thorpe, 'Performance Research A Journal of the Performing Arts Parts of Third Angel's "*Parts for Machines...*"', 2019. p.5.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.; 'Uninvited Guests' Paul Clarke also makes this connection in his thesis, with reference to Forced Entertainment and desperate optimists as two other examples of companies for whom the 'devising process recurs and is represented in the performance product' (2001, p.vii).

associations) can benefit the sustainability of a company (whilst acknowledging some of its possible pitfalls). In Part Two, Co-production, I introduce in more detail the *open* systems that occur when the makeup of a collective is regularly changed or reconfigured, arguing that these reconfigurations extend to include participating audiences and engaged communities.<sup>360</sup> I introduce two further case studies to illustrate this mobile and adaptive function of Third Angel's collaborative practice: *Inspiration Exchange* (2010-) and *Desire Paths* (2016-). These two ongoing projects align with those previously presented, through their combination of: autobiographical story, the collecting, remembering, retelling of stories and, in particular, the practice of audience engagement and participation which is central to both performances (Fig. 7).<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> Lee Fleming, Santiago Mingo, and David Chen, Collaborative Brokerage, Generative Creativity, and Creative Success, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 2007, LII.

<sup>361</sup> Both performances are still being toured at various intervals and are not considered works with any pre-defined 'end'. This chapter refers to both existing texts, interview and archival documentation and conference proceedings, as no full-length documentation exists.



Fig. 7: Performers and public draw on the street in *Desire Paths* (Chiara Mac Call)

*Inspiration Exchange* was first presented in the same year as *What I Heard About the World*, and consists of three phases: first, the performer invites members of the public to exchange stories with them one-to-one, by choosing a previously-collected title that appeals to them; second, the performer recounts the story; lastly, the member of the public responds to this story, with one of their own, contributing its title to the deck of prompt cards for its possible future re-telling. As the performance develops, the catalogue of inspirational stories grows. Alongside *Inspiration Exchange* I include another long-running and evolving case study, *Desire Paths*: a participatory project in which a group of performers attempt to redraw a map of the city (in which they are situated) with chalk on the floor of a public space. This project was first presented in Sheffield and has toured to Plymouth, Bedford and York, among others. The public are invited, during this project—a performative making process—to rename the streets to reflect their own

experiences of their city. In Part Two, I identify unique modes of open-system collaboration between both expert and non-expert performers, storytellers, and artists in Third Angel's practice.

In this chapter I examine and embrace the fluidity in what Karen Savage and Dominic Symonds call the 'uncertain language' around co-working, with collaboration as one term that is often used interchangeably with 'cooperation, communality and collectivism'.<sup>362</sup> Olga Kozar suggests that cooperation refers to working together, whilst collaboration specifies a sharing of knowledge as part of that process. I follow this same definition throughout this chapter:

Cooperation can be achieved if all participants do their assigned parts separately and bring their results to the table; collaboration, in contrast, implies direct interaction among individuals to produce a product and involves negotiations, discussions, and accommodating others' perspectives.<sup>363</sup>

Another significant term I employ is 'co-production', which refers to a form of working together that is led by a mutual goal that, as Steve Gooch suggests, 'initially at least, is not circumscribed by a system of production'.<sup>364</sup> Writing in 1984, Gooch referred here to a collaborative mode of devising, though his words come closer to describing co-production, as it is considered in more recent discourse, by which art is 'created with the people it is designed for'.<sup>365</sup> Co-production, in this way, suggests a bottom-up hierarchy in which the very systems of co-working are jointly designed and established.

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<sup>362</sup> Savage and Symonds. p.14.

<sup>363</sup> Olga Kozar, 'Towards Better Group Work: Seeing the Difference between Cooperation and Collaboration', *English Teaching Forum*, 2 (2010). p.16-17.

<sup>364</sup> Gooch. p.39.

<sup>365</sup> Arts and Homelessness International, Co-Produced Arts and Homelessness Practice Guide.

The keywords that head this chapter's two halves, 'co-operation' and 'co-production', with the inclusion of 'co-labour' in the title of Chapter 4, signal a complex set of practices and concerns; respectively, they point to the pooling of experience towards mutual interests, its application in making practices, and the combined working of individuals to constitute a shared whole. I argue that these domains provide the basis for an exploration of 'inside' and 'outside' systems, in particular the 'inside' of the collaborating group within its 'outside' socio-cultural context. This dynamic of inside/outside adds further complexity to notions of open and closed systems of collaboration, which can be seen to cut across different domains: I contest that an open collaboration may be simultaneously 'inside' and 'outside'. I further propose that the longevity of Third Angel's practice is, in part, due to a collaborative methodology that plots a course between the democratic internal working of the company, their openness to brokering wider networked relationships (with both artists and audiences) and their inherent methodological opposition to a traditional art 'scene'. Across this chapter and Chapter 4 that follows, I demonstrate how Third Angel's example provides unique insight into the capacity for longevity within contemporary theatre practice in broader terms.

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## I. Co-operation: Sharing Experience

*What I Heard About the World* was born out of a conversation in Lisbon in 2007. Third Angel explain:

Since we had met in 2004 we'd been talking about our two companies, Third Angel and mala voadora, collaborating on a project. As is often the way, we had had a moment of realisation that this collaboration wasn't going to happen unless we actually, you know, started it. (We had had a similar realisation about working with Chris Thorpe a couple of years previously).<sup>366</sup>

Third Angel tell how they discussed collecting 'stories of the inauthentic on a giant map of the world'; the company further explained to me that their appeal was how these stories are often used in place of the authentic. By 2010, Kelly, Thorpe and Jorge Andrade (of mala voadora) had joined forces, each as 'co-devisor/performer'.<sup>367</sup> What resulted was *What I Heard About the World*, a fragmented presentation of often incredible stories that try to make sense of distant places and different cultures. Far from the function of a map, as the co-devisors had originally discussed, *What I Heard...* removed the geographical difference and instead brought together, into touching distance, the rumour and hearsay that connects human experience across the globe, as people attempt to understand their own unique place within it. As reviewer Wojtek Ziemilski put it: 'one person says something to another person. Remember that? That old analogic thinking? [...] What sort of analogy can you make of it? How does your mind

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<sup>366</sup> Third Angel, 'What I Heard About the World | Third Angel' <<https://thirdangel.co.uk/shows-projects/what-i-heard-about-the-world>> [accessed 7 March 2022].

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

cope with difference?' Ziemilski goes on to suggest that 'what the performance brings us, is chaos. A world which is not as we would expect.'<sup>368</sup> The 'chaos' in this case is an effect of the juxtaposition and conflation of these representations presented side-by-side; analogic stories may seem plausible alone, but amplified together they seem increasingly implausible. The fragmented stories are told by the three performers, in a setting described by Kelly as 'a strange hybrid of living space and locker room'.<sup>369</sup> The chaotic, mismatched and inharmonious set becomes more so: confetti cannons are fired, Thorpe regurgitates saltwater into a bucket, supposedly in an attempt to save polar bears by lowering the sea levels, and Andrade shoots Kelly with copious amounts of red dye to represent a massacre. These analogous acts themselves reflect the distancing nature of stories indirectly 'heard about the world', mocked by the performers propagating their own (unbelievable) myth about drinking seawater, and reducing the horrors of a massacre to a toy water pistol and red dye. The performance language—stories and acts—expresses the collective's concern with inauthenticity and approximations, highlighting the complexities of living in ever-connected systems of air travel, human migration and international news that create conditions in which Ziemilski's 'old analogic thinking' is replaced by confrontations with stereotypes and misunderstandings. The performance itself merges direct address to the audience with occasional interactions between the performers, who otherwise deliver their stories with limited input from their colleagues. Some are told, others shown and others sung over live guitar riffs. One of the

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<sup>368</sup> Wojtek Ziemilski, 'New Art: About What I Heard About The World', 2012 <<http://new-art.blogspot.com/2012/08/about-what-i-heard-about-world.html>> [accessed 28 February 2022].

<sup>369</sup> Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: Edinburgh Blogpost 2: Postcard from Poland' <<https://thirdangeluk.blogspot.com/2013/07/edinburgh-blog-2-postcard-from-poland.html>> [accessed 7 March 2022].



stories is spoken in Portuguese and is deliberately *not* subtitled for anglophone audiences. The resulting effect is what Ziemilski calls 'a world beyond our comprehension', an uncomfortable world that is not 'easy to empathise with - or easy to judge'. *What I Heard...* left him thinking: 'how much of my worldview is just about making it easy on myself?'<sup>370</sup> Artist and *Story Map* collaborator Hannah Nicklin draws on philosopher Baudrillard to explain the effect of an increasingly mediated world: 'media replaces *what is* with *the way things appear*, and that after a while we think about things as the way *they appear*, and forget what *they actually are*.'<sup>371</sup> *What I Heard...* presents the world precisely as a complex system of interconnected stories, experiences and contrasting worldviews that, in combination, question the ethics of assumptions.

*What I Heard About the World* is a macrocosmic performance, in the sense that it uses its system of making to reflect and interrogate its subject matter in an abstracted form: making the global local. Birgit Wiens summarises this 'glocalisation' as the way in which increased 'mobility and digital communication have changed spatial relations'.<sup>372</sup> As sociologist Manuel Castells put it, 'we carry flows and move across places', a dynamic which acts to conflate the global exchange (flows) of information and currency with simultaneous 'local' interactions: one can email a friend abroad whilst face-to-face with another.<sup>373</sup> *What I Heard...* is also macrocosmic in the way that it collects the flows of stories passed between global spaces and presents them in theatres, localised places.

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<sup>370</sup> Ziemilski.

<sup>371</sup> Hannah Nicklin, 'A Psychogeography of Games'. p13-14.

<sup>372</sup> Birgit Wiens, 'Glocalisation', in *Mapping Intermediality and Performance*, ed. by C Kattenbelt et al (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), pp. 98–99

<sup>373</sup> Manuel Castells, 'Space of Flows, Space of Places: Materials for a Theory of Urbanism in the Information Age', in *The Cybercities Reader* (London, UK: Routledge, 2004), pp. 83–92. p.88.

Furthermore, by its status as an international collaborative project, it physically represents this coming-together of different global perspectives in a way that opposes the 'textual paradigm' that is part of the tradition of art theory that assumes a work as 'the product of a single creative intelligence'.<sup>374</sup> Whilst collaboration, as a working method, opposes this condition (as established in Chapter 1), Stephen Wright suggests that to simply submit that 'collaboration is founded upon *mutual interest*' is to reduce it to something 'all too reminiscent of contemporary political liberalism.'<sup>375</sup> Mutual interest suggests mutual gain, but, as is well established, activity in the arts produces more intangible or immeasurable outcomes. Taking a position between the two, Savage and Symonds prefer to define collaboration as 'the activity of a number of people working together towards a common goal.' The term 'commons' refers to 'something that belongs to no one and therefore to everyone.'<sup>376</sup> The idea of the commons is represented in *What I Heard...* not as a utopian ideal, but, as Ziemilski's response illustrates, as something 'beyond comprehension' at a personal, individual level. The collaboration between Third Angel and mala voadora began with a conversation, as they sought to comprehend the world and its stories beyond the individual. The participation in any common system requires all these frictions and miscomprehensions in order for it to exist; for the (human) world's population to be considered as a 'glocalised' singularity, it has to first be understood as the product of billions of smaller units (people) and systems that interact, often uncomfortably, within it.

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<sup>374</sup> Grant H. Kester, 'Collaboration, Art and Subcultures', *Caderno 02: Art Mobility Sustainability*, ed. by Helio Hara (Sao Paolo, Brazil: SESC Videobrasil, 2006), pp. 10–35. p.10.

<sup>375</sup> Stephen Wright, 'Third Text The Delicate Essence of Artistic Collaboration', 2004. p.534.

<sup>376</sup> Savage and Symonds. p.10.



Fig. 8: Performers analyse a plane crash in *Parts for Machines that Do Things* (Michael Thorne)

Where *What I Heard About the World* is macrocosmic, in contrast, *Parts for Machines that Do Things* takes to the microscope, at times quite literally (Fig. 8). Alfred Hickling for the *Guardian* described the performance:

A group of aviation enthusiasts sit hunched over work benches, piecing together model aircraft from plastic kits, while overhead projectors magnify their endeavours. [...] The cast read transcripts from an aviation inquiry, in which a plane crashed on landing because a complex chain of events led to an engineer failing to replace a warning bulb in the cockpit.<sup>377</sup>

*Parts for Machines...* allows for its subject matter to reverse-engineer the making process. As Thorpe explains: 'we'd made our own wreckage and we were drawing the blueprints

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<sup>377</sup> Alfred Hickling, 'Parts for Machines That Do Things | Theatre | The Guardian', 2008, <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2008/feb/07/theatre>> [accessed 3 March 2022].

of the objects as we went along. We knew the thing we were re/constructing was a show, but there was no original version of it [...] to work towards.<sup>378</sup> As Liz Tomlin observes of the show: 'the performers present what appears to be a documentary account of an air crash, which turns out to be entirely fictional'.<sup>379</sup> *Parts for Machines...* asks the audience to suspend their disbelief, to echo the everyday trust placed in the complex systems people interact with: systems managed 'by other people' who 'you don't know', and who 'won't be around when (if) it stops working'.<sup>380</sup> Both performances, from their different perspectives, tease fact and fiction together in a way that positions each audience member as a complicit and collaborating truth-seeker.

As proposed, I evaluate *What I Heard...* and *Parts for Machines...* in parallel, applying the analysis of one to the other, cross-examining in order to identify a space between the two. Thorpe suggests of *Parts for Machines...* that 'there's a set of rules there that aren't necessarily explained but very readily apparent. And of course the links to other work we made.'<sup>381</sup> It is in this unexplained connection that it is possible to locate a signature of Third Angel's work that results from their collaborative methodology. The space between these two projects is also traversed by other linking threads, side-projects and company interests. The most explicit example is that *Parts for Machines...* examines plane crashes, whilst *What I Heard...* repeatedly refers to air travel: 'In Seoul we only have one option, that's Air Koryo, the North Korean Airline. Don't

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<sup>378</sup> Kelly and Thorpe. p.3.

<sup>379</sup> Tomlin. p.104.

<sup>380</sup> Third Angel, 'Parts For Machines That Do Things | Third Angel' <<https://thirdangel.co.uk/shows-projects/parts-for-machines-that-do-things>> [accessed 7 March 2022].

<sup>381</sup> Kelly and Thorpe. p.5.

worry, they've never crashed.'<sup>382</sup> This thematic preoccupation reflects the company's aforementioned interest in the complex systems that mediate the everyday workings of society. The cross-fertilisation of ideas and influences occurs between Third Angel's core members, between co-devisors, and more broadly within the context that circumscribes their making. Third Angel's creative core, Walton and Kelly, occupy mutual positions both as artists and co-directors. The distance between separate viewpoints is what makes collaboration inherently democratic, as dialogue pursues a truth-seeking consensus in the convergence of differences.<sup>383</sup> To illustrate, a *Metro* newspaper article about *Parts for Machines...* called the 'synergy between' Kelly and Thorpe's ideas on the project 'remarkable'. As the two are interviewed on behalf of the rest of the team, Kelly admits Thorpe originally brought the idea of plane crashes to the making room 'as he's a bit obsessed with them' while Kelly brought the idea of 'cause and effect'.<sup>384</sup> The project comes to exist separately from its constituent makers, and as both *Parts for Machines that Do Things* and *What I Heard About the World* share some thematic content, I propose the synergy of the company and its repertoire also exceeds its individual projects.

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<sup>382</sup> Third Angel, *There's A Room: Three Performance Texts by Third Angel*. p.169.

<sup>383</sup> Alvin I Goldman, 'Social Epistemology', *Revista Hispanoamericana de Filosofía*, 31.93 (1999), 3–19. p.4.

<sup>384</sup> Unknown Author, 'Newspaper Cutting: *Metro*, January 28<sup>th</sup> 2008'. Third Angel Archival Collection, Ref: A.7.c.4/1.99.1.10. (Sheffield, UK).

i. *Collaborative Systems*

My discussion of collaboration in relation to *What I Heard...* and *Parts for Machines...* thus far has illustrated the interconnections between the two projects, and in doing so has situated them within the repertoire of the company. Furthermore, from the recurrent interest in complex systems, shown in these projects, emerges a signature of Third Angel's work that I suggest also reveals a corollary within both their wider creative methodology and their organisational preferences. Speaking of Third Angel's creative process for *Parts for Machines...*, Kelly noted: 'one of the things we latched on to early on [...] was the 'Airfix', model-kit airplanes. When you [Thorpe] started writing I went to a model shop and bought a couple, and built one on the table next to you, with a camera mounted overhead.'<sup>385</sup> I describe this approach as collaborative 'complementarity', which is defined by Savage and Symonds as the 'synergy of bringing together individual elements of a system' to enhance the value of the individual parts 'by virtue of their relationship'.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Kelly and Thorpe. p.5.

<sup>386</sup> Savage and Symonds. p.4.

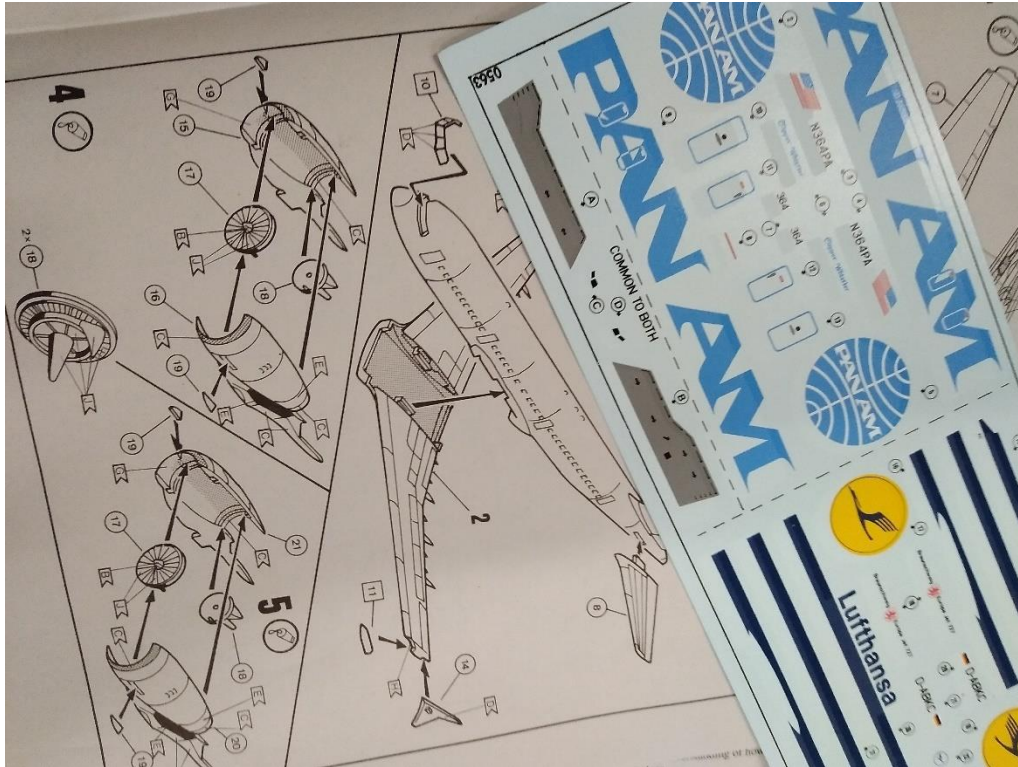


Fig. 9: Instructions from the model kits used in *Parts for Machines...* (Rob Fellman)

The Airfix kit, as a build-your-own plastic model, similarly echoes the syncretic nature of performance making, as multiple smaller parts build a whole (Fig. 9). In this case, it was Kelly and Thorpe who co-operated (worked on their individual tasks) in order to achieve their shared goal (a finished performance). Collaboration (as Kozar established) occurs when cooperative action overlaps, and tasks are shared and negotiated. This is demonstrated in Kelly and Thorpe's recollection:

We had them all [multiple perspectives] mapped out on massive sheets of paper on the wall of the making room. And at some point in that first week, you [Thorpe] started to write those different voices. We would read them out to each other and then talk about them.<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>387</sup> Kelly and Thorpe. p.3.

It is in this complementarity of individuals that Wright concludes: 'collaboration cannot be reduced to common interest. Which is why we can say that art is not merely a set but truly a community of competencies and perceptions.'<sup>388</sup> The skills and competencies each collaborator brings are different, despite some degree of commonality. Elizabeth Creamer, in a 2004 study of pedagogy, identified collaborators of this type as 'multiplists' who agree on core matters but cannot always reconcile other differences. Her research into difference in learning environments found that 'rather than discounting these differences as insignificant, members of this group [multiplists] saw them as playing an instrumental role in pushing them to a more complex or higher order of thinking.' She also determined that multiplists are 'the group where the link between negotiating differences and innovation is most evident'.<sup>389</sup> Just as collaborating members strive to achieve synergy, I argue that a closer analysis of membership systems reveals a synergy between the diverse systems that constitute a performance company in its entirety, such as a methodological 'co-opetition' and the collaborating tendencies of 'multiplists'. Third Angel could be regarded as expert 'multiplists', to apply Creamer's term, in their conscious move to seek out alternative perspectives and new expertise that will bolster more innovative ways of working.

In seeking out wider relationships, Third Angel often position themselves as the instigator and fulcrum between collaborators. This is evident for both *What I Heard...* and *Parts for Machines...*, since, as already mentioned, Third Angel introduced Thorpe and mala voadora who have later collaborated with each other outside of the original

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<sup>388</sup> Wright. p.544.

<sup>389</sup> Elizabeth G Creamer, 'Collaborators' Attitudes about Differences of Opinion', *Source: The Journal of Higher Education*, 75.5, 2004, 556–71. p.564.



relationship. This process is referred to by Business scholars Lee Fleming, Santiago Mingo and David Chen who identify two main types of social interaction systems: 'cohesive' and 'brokered' collaborations. They define 'brokerage' as an act of maintaining 'direct ties to collaborators who themselves do not have direct ties to each other'.<sup>390</sup> They argue that 'if generative creativity is the assemblage of new combinations [of ideas], then brokers maintain an advantage because they are ideally positioned to receive new and previously uncombined ideas'.<sup>391</sup> By contrast, these co-authors further suggest that 'cohesive' collaborations, closed systems in which 'collaborators have independent ties between themselves that do not include the individual' (such as repertory theatre companies), facilitate the exchange of complex information, as well as encouraging trust. Kelly reminisces about an element from the devising of *What I Heard...* that did not make it into the shows:

Whenever a country would get mentioned [in the making process], I would say to Jorge, "What are the people like there?", and he would reply, "They're really nice." We never specifically decided not to use it, it just fell away; I think maybe I liked it more than the rest of the team.<sup>392</sup>

I infer that Kelly found the idea appealing for its note of optimism and generosity, and for the universalising gesture it conveys, strengthened further by the potential repetition of the same exchange in every location on its tour. Despite his role as co-artistic director of the company it was the consensus of external collaborators, Thorpe and Andrade, that

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<sup>390</sup> Lee Fleming, Santiago Mingo, and David Chen, 'Collaborative Brokerage, Generative Creativity, and Creative Success', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 52 (2007), 443–75. p.443.

<sup>391</sup> Fleming, Mingo, and Chen. p.447.

<sup>392</sup> Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: Postcard From Beirut' <<https://thirdangeluk.blogspot.com/2014/11/postcard-from-beirut.html>> [accessed 9 March 2022].

ultimately caused this idea, and others, to 'fall away'. Laermans suggests that, once in the rehearsal room:

Various options will be voiced, thus bringing forth discussion, eliciting implicit and explicit negotiations and [...] necessitating collectively binding decisions. The common cause actualises a potential of possible choices and solutions, a multiplicity that vastly pluralizes the communal activity.<sup>393</sup>

The unspoken exclusion indicates (to return to Manuel Vason's phrase first introduced in Chapter 1) the frictional harmony at work in the collaborating group: a decision was made implicitly, rather than explicitly, as it 'fell away' rather than being cut out. Nonetheless, the sentiment of the question: "What are the people like there?" and answer: "They're really nice" carried over implicitly to the performance. The implicit sentiment is recognisable in the generalised nature of the response "They're really nice", which was also reflected in the analogous nature of the stories told, that highlight the oversimplification of cultural differences in an everyday globalised and bordered co-existence. I suggest that the question-and-answer 'fell away' because the effect of that device was already implicitly present in the project's primary task: the re-telling of stories of the inauthentic, of 'stand-ins' and simulacra (copies that present as 'real'). Fleming et al also argue that cohesion can have 'insulating tendencies'. Open systems allow for more variation, though trust and complexity may be weaker. Their study concludes that 'individuals who have worked in a variety of organisations will bring a greater diversity of ideas' that helps to 'counteract the insulating tendencies of cohesion'.<sup>394</sup> Third Angel's multiplist approach to brokering relationships in their practice is to navigate the closed

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<sup>393</sup> Rudi Laermans, "'Being in Common": Theorizing Artistic Collaboration'. p.98.

<sup>394</sup> Fleming, Mingo, and Chen. pp.443-448.

and open systems of the theatre company and its network in order to manage the balance between creativity and insulation. In their case, brokerage aids their longevity in the sector by selectively introducing frictions rather than maintaining an internalised consensus.

Additionally, I extend this proposal to the analysis of the collaborative process that bore it; Laermans offers that collaboration's 'actual commonality is essentially double-sided, even an oxymoron: it must be defined as the unity of the difference between harmonious cooperation and inharmonious competition', or better still: '*co-opetition*'.<sup>395</sup> Laerman's term 'co-opetition' offers a linguistic bridge between consensus and the dissensus arising from group frictions, which he argues (and I add, much like the global divisions of a single human species) still allows for a third position of 'unity' that acknowledges the 'double-sided' nature of collaboration (and the human sociality it mirrors). I propose, by extension, that 'co-opetition' goes further than Vason's frictional harmony, as it privileges the processual nature of collaboration, rather than its idealised harmonious outcome.

I propose that the company exemplify a working example of this type of co-opetition in contemporary collaborative performance practice. In the case of *What I Heard...* the project is a collaboration with another established company; Third Angel and mala voadora are also both represented in parity, with directors from each company, Jose Capela and Rachael Walton, listed as 'in collaboration'.<sup>396</sup> In conversation, Kelly

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<sup>395</sup> Laermans, "'Being in Common": Theorizing Artistic Collaboration'. p.98.

<sup>396</sup> Third Angel, 'What I Heard About the World | Third Angel'; Third Angel have also credited this project more specifically in their book *There's a Room*, with Capela as Designer and Walton as Director.

described the act of collaborating with mala voadora as a deliberate move to counteract—what Fleming et al identify as—‘insulating tendencies’.<sup>397</sup> In another work together, *The Paradise Project* (2015), the performers for each night were interchanged, and the show programme was designed to reveal this choice to their audience (Fig. 10).

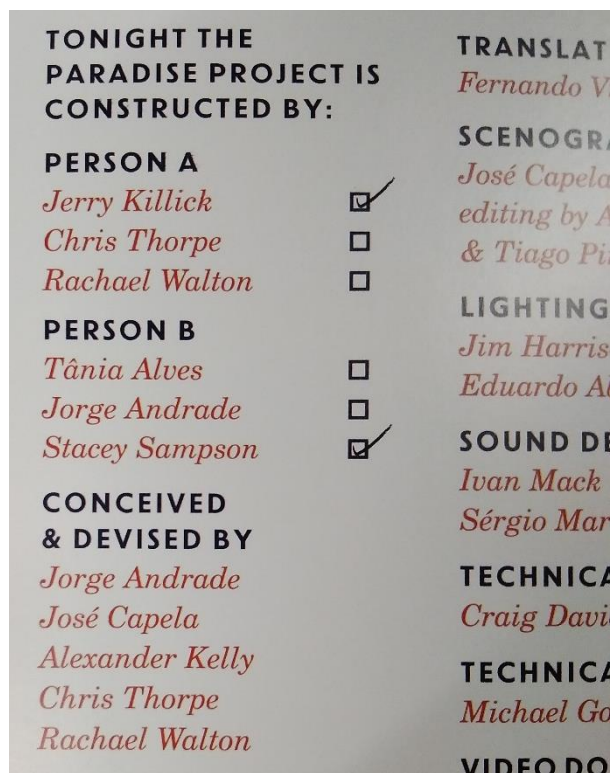


Fig. 10: A programme for *Paradise Project* with a cast appearance ‘tick-list’ (Rob Fellman)

In this case, the project acknowledges the differences individuals bring to bear on a work, and also exposes the number of variant combinations that can occur, depending on the choices made as to who will perform on a given night. Additionally, *What I Heard...* was also advertised as a co-production between Sheffield Theatres and Teatro

<sup>397</sup> Fleming, Mingo, and Chen.

Maria Matos (Lisbon)—which in this case refers to production as the management, technical and design aspects of a performance—and as such introduces an additional layer of ‘co-opetition’, in which agency can be shared and reconfigured at both artistic and organisation levels. Laermans’ concept of ‘co-opetition’ provides a reconciliation of what might otherwise be considered another paradoxical relationship, of consensus and friction, and usefully frames their coexistence. In a similar reconciliation, Uninvited Guests’ co-founder Paul Clarke suggested in his 2001 thesis that ‘collaborators oscillate between positions of having agency and being subjected to others’ agencies’ and that performers occupy ‘both positions simultaneously, as both decision-making subject and the object of their own/another’s authority’.<sup>398</sup> Drawing Laermans and Clarke’s propositions together and applying these to Third Angel, the oscillations between being the subject and object of agency are intensified further in their case, as the broker of relationships. An external collaborator like Thorpe, Lees or Killick may join a project like *Parts for Machines...* as a mutual decision-maker, yet always remain aware of their contingency as external collaborators within Third Angel as a part-open-part-closed system.

Whether a Third Angel project begins life as a Walton-Kelly concept, a cross-company conversation, or a shared interest with an external collaborator, what changes is the ratio of cohesion and brokerage. The practice of collaboration in the making of a performance reflects a multiplist social precondition, made more evident and exaggerated by the focussed energies and creative intentions in the ‘making room’. I argue that Third Angel’s mode of collaboration is less about an alternative way of working, but rather returning to essential creative interactions; I follow Laermans in

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<sup>398</sup> Paul Clarke, ‘Collaborative Performance Systems’ (University of Bristol, 2001). p.62.

thinking of artistic collaboration as that which 'bets on the potentialities of cooperation itself'.<sup>399</sup> To illustrate, one of Third Angel's primary methodologies, most apparent in *Parts for Machines...* through the building of the model airplane, is in the act of 'taking a tiny representation of a section of reality and for a while, in a small room, making it the size of reality itself'.<sup>400</sup> Kelly supposes:

I think this is a recurring theme – or motif? – in our work. How do we (people) picture things (stories, information) in our heads, particularly things that are beyond our day-to-day experience? Things that require specialist or scientific knowledge? Things of a scale we're not used to dealing with? And then how do we (theatre makers) represent those ways that we (people) picture things, on stage?<sup>401</sup>

Ziemilski similarly acknowledged of his experience watching *What I Heard...*:

[The performers] are unavoidable, they will not disappear, they will not stop shooting until they've finished all the red paint. The liveness means each of these stories becomes a real thing once again. A different thing, a represented thing, but once again - palpable. It gains a human scale.<sup>402</sup>

This mode of contemporary theatre practice that rescales the social sphere, and the stories and systems that constitute it, I suggest, is a hopeful practice that, to cite Laermans, 'still anticipates a possible future but is no longer framed by more substantial ideas about an emancipating sociality'.<sup>403</sup> Psychologist and creativity expert Keith Sawyer suggests that 'researchers have discovered that the mind itself is filled with a kind of internal collaboration, that even the insights that emerge when you are completely alone

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<sup>399</sup> Clarke. p.62.

<sup>400</sup> Kelly and Thorpe. p.5.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> Ziemilski.

<sup>403</sup> Laermans, "'Being in Common": Theorizing Artistic Collaboration'. p.94.

can be traced back to previous collaborations'.<sup>404</sup> In this way, collaboration stretches in both directions, connecting present insights with past experiences. Sawyer's claim adds weight to Laermans' suggestion that '*artistic* collaboration is always a collaboration 'yet to come'', or rather, a connection or insight yet to occur. The very fact that the interrogation of plane crashes in *Parts...* is echoed in *What I Heard...* debuted two years later (and running for another five) is evidence of the expanded nature of such shared concepts. So too, as Wright proposes: 'the self, like society, is multiple; we are plural rather than singular – which is why we are different things for different people. There is, in other words, no pre-social, pre-collaborative, individuality.'<sup>405</sup> In this way, Laermans' 'co-opetition' is closer to an idealised position of democracy, the precondition for all co-existence that oscillates between poles of plurality and singularity, competition and cooperation. Identifying the potentiality inherent in artistic collaboration illuminates its nature as a creative and anticipatory act, of which there is no pre-collaborative state; longevity in collaborative arts practice is partly influenced by this social precondition of collaboration that is, already, vital and enduring.<sup>406</sup>

## II. Co-production: Getting Involved

Having established the membership systems that inform the artistic collaborations behind *Parts for Machines that Do Things* and *What I Heard About the World*, in Part

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<sup>404</sup> Keith Sawyer, *Group Genius: The Creative Power of Collaboration* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2008). p.xii.

<sup>405</sup> Wright. p.543.

<sup>406</sup> Laermans, "'Being in Common": Theorizing Artistic Collaboration'. p.94. *my emphasis*.

Two I argue that Third Angel's use of collaboration extends to their audiences. I refer to this as another open system of collaboration, such as when the makeup of an already-defined regularly collaborating party—or otherwise *closed* system—is frequently changed or reconfigured. As established, brokerage is one such example of a reconfiguring of a collaborating party, and cross-company collaboration represents another.<sup>407</sup> Two further case studies are examined to make explicit this claim in relation to Third Angel's practice: *Inspiration Exchange* (2010-) and *Desire Paths* (2016-).<sup>408</sup> These two ongoing projects contribute to the signature of Third Angel's practice, through their combination of: autobiographical story, the collecting, remembering, retelling of stories and, most prominently, the practice of audience engagement and participation.<sup>409</sup> Walton has said that Third Angel's work aims to 'talk to the individual – an audience isn't just this big thing that arrives – it's two hundred individuals[...]'.<sup>410</sup> Furthermore, in this section I outline the role of both the expert and non-expert, and exemplar modes of open-system collaboration between these two positions that arise separately, in different ways, from both *Inspiration Exchange* and *Desire Paths*. The crossover between the different projects explored in this chapter is integral to this analysis, though these case studies are given brief sub-sections below for definition, clarity and ease of reference.

In this current section on 'co-production' (and the 'co-labour' I consider in Chapter 4) I argue that Third Angel's collaborative performance practice reconfigures preconceived paradoxes as complex continuums or oscillatory practices. As such, one

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<sup>407</sup> Fleming, Mingo, and Chen.

<sup>408</sup> I refer to existing texts, interviews, archival documentation, and conference proceedings, as no full-length documentation exists.

<sup>409</sup> Both performances are considered 'ongoing' as they are works with no pre-defined 'end'.

<sup>410</sup> Rachael Walton, 'Rachael Walton (Third Angel) – Essential Drama'.



*modus operandi* that I argue typifies their work is a praxis of paradoxes: a habitual and instinctive methodology that challenges antonymic or opposing concepts or methods through engaging their tensions directly. I also ask whether Third Angel's praxis can be seen as inherently political, inasmuch as hegemonic discourse is often constituted of binary positions, to which Third Angel's work is positioned antagonistically.<sup>411</sup> A key concept I employ here (and in this thesis more broadly) is precisely that of 'antagonism', drawing upon Katsouraki's use of the term in relation to discussion about—and between—different ideological or political positions, and how she suggests it pertains to performance practice in particular.<sup>412</sup> Prevalent discourse, as Katsouraki has proposed, relies on the limits of frames to constitute its positions: referring here to 'frames' as the narrowed or bounded perspectives from which a discourse forms its oppositions. One such example is the frame a mainstream media outlet may apply to its reporting, choosing to exclude details from outside the picture it has chosen to present; by contrast, an antagonism would question what detail has been omitted from the frame (more broadly, antagonism opposes the incumbent discourse by expanding or challenging its frames).

Life and death can be considered oppositional frames, and as such I propose that longevity is antagonistic. In the company's final stage show *The Department of Distractions* (2020) a character tells a story of a man who repeatedly stages his own death, to provoke a response from his partner, (he hopes) to rekindle a connection in his everyday life by playing out the possibility of death. This scene is reminiscent of Judith

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<sup>411</sup> Katsouraki. p.293.

<sup>412</sup> Katsouraki.

Butler's questioning of whether 'we grieve the absence of life, or the presence of death?' Butler acknowledged the apparent contradictions in such discussion of frames, as the whole picture is inevitably that which exists outside of both (or all) frames.<sup>413</sup> I propose that Third Angel actively challenge the life-death antonymic pair in their own methodology, through the deferral of completion decisions (projects that do not 'die') and those that exist as strategic blueprints rather than as bounded or completed products (such as *Class of '76*). In challenging what constitutes the 'life' or 'death' of a performance (or the collective lifeline of a company that bore it), the very concept of survival is drawn into question. I apply Katsouraki's usage of 'frames'—as constituting the stances taken in hegemonic discourse—to Third Angel's methodology, to argue that there is a politics inherent in deferred or unbound projects, based on the statement that 'we no longer live in a linear, binary world of modernist certainties'.<sup>414</sup> In the company's *Presumption* (2006) a couple grapple with their own life story, as they attempt to re-enact events and, quite literally, rebuild the stage world around them. They bring on furniture and props, and replay sections of the performance until they are able to move forward. The second half of the show turns towards their fears and anxieties about what the future might hold. Such a postmodern non-linear sensibility is reflected within Third Angel's praxis itself—as I go on to argue—and proves to be less about seeking synthesis between contradictory frames or incumbent dilemmas, than about upholding an open-endedness or uncertainty that reflects a contemporary postmodern, non-binary and interconnected social spirit.

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<sup>413</sup> Butler.

<sup>414</sup> Katsouraki. p.302.

i. *Desire Paths*

When making *What I Heard...* Third Angel began by collecting stories through research and conversation, culminating in a 'sister project', *Story Map*, a 12-hour durational story-exchanging performance (Fig. 11).<sup>415</sup>



Fig. 11: Thorpe adding to the world map in *Story Map* (Hannah Nicklin)<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> Alex Kelly, 'What I Heard About The World | the CULTURE VULTURE'  
<<https://theculturevulture.co.uk/all/what-i-heard-about-the-world/>> [accessed 28 February 2022].

<sup>416</sup> More documentation images from this version of the show (Hull, UK) are available here:  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/hannahnicklin/albums/72157627585925120>.

The story collecting process involves re-telling the stories, cataloguing them by their titles and icons drawn to represent them.<sup>417</sup> This research methodology is participatory, here in the sense defined by Sruti Bala, exemplifying ‘those methods and artistic concepts that explicitly involve the participation of audiences or lay members of the public as an integral component of the artistic work’.<sup>418</sup> Since members of the public are invited to contribute to the making of *Story Map*, and by proxy *What I Heard...* (as the project its research fed into), I regard both projects as simultaneously participatory and collaborative. As co-creator Thorpe also remarks of the other primary case study, *Parts for Machines...*, to prevent fact-telling “‘wiki-theatre’” [...] we were trying to leave the space in our reconstruction’—the way he describes the making and mode of this show—‘for people to bring their own pieces’ to fill the gaps the performance deliberately left open.<sup>419</sup> This is another example of Third Angel’s approach to participation and their acknowledgement of their works’ position in relation to the social sphere it interrogates and reflects. In this chapter section I reveal how Third Angel’s story-telling practices examined in Chapter 2 (‘Memory and Retelling’) are a key strand of a collaborative methodology, in particular one that engages with audiences through an inclusive approach. In the case of *Story Map*, the collecting of stories was a collaboration with the public that would produce research and content for the making of *What I Heard...* Thereafter, *What I Heard...* became a direct influence for other collaborative endeavours; while on tour with *What I Heard...*, the company announced that they were making a

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<sup>417</sup> Alex Kelly, ‘What I Heard About The World | the CULTURE VULTURE’.

<sup>418</sup> Sruti Bala, ‘The Art of Unsolicited Participation’, in *Performing Antagonism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017), pp. 273–87. p.273.

<sup>419</sup> Kelly and Thorpe. p.3.

new one-off performance, *Desire Paths*, with *Parts for Machines...* collaborator Gillian Lees as co-lead artist.<sup>420</sup>



Fig. 12: Contemplating new road names in *Desire Paths* (Chiara Mac Call)

This project combines the collecting of stories and mapping, and was intended as a one-off performance; however, *Desire Paths* has continued to be produced in various places and communities since that time. To review, *Desire Paths* is a participatory project in which a group of performers attempt to redraw a map of the city on the floor, drawn

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<sup>420</sup> Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: Edinburgh Blogpost 3: Postcards from Paris and Rio' <<https://thirdangeluk.blogspot.com/2013/07/edinburgh-blog-3-postcards-from-paris.html>> [accessed 20 April 2022].

in chalk and blown up in scale, whilst the public are invited to rename the streets as the map develops (Fig. 12). The continual re-performing of *Desire Paths* is reliant on its format as a participatory project, and one that is significant and relevant to the site in which it takes place; *Desire Paths* has been performed in Sheffield, Newcastle, and Plymouth to date, among others.<sup>421</sup> Where *Story Map* occupies a place in Third Angel's portfolio adjacent to *What I Heard...*, *Desire Paths* has maintained its own identity as a standalone project. For this reason, *Desire Paths* is particularly pertinent for an enquiry into the conditions that might foster longevity, as a standalone part of an ongoing development of themes first established in other, completed, projects. At a 2022 conference on modern audiences Kelly described *Desire Paths* as extending an invitation to audience members to 'rename a street of their town on our map, after a hope or a dream, or an ambition they have for the future'. Kelly went on to reflect:

[W]hat we've discovered through creating this work a number of times is that people are really up for that invitation. But what they also want to do is they want to name a street that is significant for them. And *then* what they want to do is tell you a story about why they're choosing that street.<sup>422</sup>

The telling of stories to justify the renaming of streets is, I suggest, a reversal of the function of *Story Map*. In *Desire Paths*, the drawing of the streets and the cataloguing of their new titles becomes the catalyst for the storytelling; in *Story Map*, the story instead stimulates the title and its corresponding drawn icon. *Desire Paths* thus reveals not only

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<sup>421</sup> Third Angel, 'THE DESIRE PATHS | Third Angel' <<https://thirdangel.co.uk/shows-projects/the-desire-paths>> [accessed 13 April 2022].

<sup>422</sup> Alex Kelly, 'Interactive Storytelling', in *The Modern Audience Conference* (Leeds, delivered Online: Leeds Beckett University, 2022).

desires as they pertain to possible (or reimagined) places, but also the desire of the participants to justify their choices.

ii. *Inspiration Exchange*

Third Angel's *Inspiration Exchange* (2010-) is similarly reliant on participation, specifically on the participatory storytelling that is central to its function; Kelly clarifies: 'if no one requests a story, nothing happens'.<sup>423</sup> *Inspiration Exchange* is based on a one-to-one swap of stories, though other spectators may be present in the room (and are invited to join in conversation) (Fig. 13).<sup>424</sup> The format varies for different iterations of the project, but one half-day version (performed at The SHED in Nottingham as part of InDialogue Festival, 2019) documented by Third Angel illustrates its overarching premise: sets of five or six people are present at any one time, with *The Story of the Day* segment at the end of the session summarising the day's exchanges to about twenty-five people, around the table. Many of the people who shared a story during this day returned to the end-of-day sharing, and other festival delegates came to it anew.<sup>425</sup> Whilst different

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<sup>423</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'Inspiration Exchange: The Value of Sitting Opposite', *Performance Research*, 18.2 (2013), pp.27–30. p.30.

<sup>424</sup> A 2011 TEDx version of Inspiration Exchange is available on YouTube at the time of writing, whereby Kelly performs a summary (titled *The Story of The Day*) of a day-long version of the exchange to an audience: <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZYNq1m2TUQ&ab\\_channel=TEDxTalks](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZYNq1m2TUQ&ab_channel=TEDxTalks)> [accessed 20 April 2022].

<sup>425</sup> Third Angel, 'Inspiration Exchange at InDialogue | Third Angel' <<https://thirdangel.co.uk/blog/inspiration-exchange-at-indialogue>> [accessed 3 August 2022].



iterations vary, the central task of the show remains the same; in a 2013 article Kelly described its intentions:

Choose a title you like the sound of and I'll tell you the story behind it. The deal is that you agree to tell me a story in return. Perhaps you already know what you would like to trade. Perhaps you will wait to hear what I tell you before you decide.<sup>426</sup>



Fig. 13: Kelly sharing a story in *Inspiration Exchange* (Joseph S Priestley)

In summary, the participants can decide how they participate (within the rules set out by the performance), what stories they want to hear re-told, and what content they wish to introduce to the story collection (and the ongoing legacy of the ever-expanding performance material):

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<sup>426</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'Inspiration Exchange: The Value of Sitting Opposite'. p.27.



I swapped "I'M GOING ANYWAY!"  
For THEY LOOK LIKE UMBRELLAS

A story for her dad, because he rarely goes out, and does not get to tell people about this, but it is important to him. So our [participant-]narrator chooses to tell this story for him.

Her dad likes fishing for pike. [...] [H]e has noticed over the last few years is that the population of pikes is decreasing, and the population of cormorants is growing, as their migration patterns change. [...]

"What does a cormorant look like?" someone asks.

"They look like umbrellas."<sup>427</sup>

Bala suggests that there are two dimensions of participation in performance practice: this mode of formalised participation-by-design and informal, 'unsolicited acts of participation'.<sup>428</sup> Applying Bala's categorisations, *Inspiration Exchange* is an example of the former, as the facilitated format of the performance openly declares its participatory function. Kelly comments on the project:

Making space and finding time. Sitting opposite. Playing conversation – talking and listening. Over the years, alongside our end-on seated-audience theatre work, Third Angel has returned to the exploration of a mode of performance built on conversation, or interview, with individual audience members: Performance in as much as you [the company] know more about what's going to happen than they [the audience] do. But their interaction is what makes the work. Making the performance involves making the space in which the audience member is encouraged to be creative.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> 'Inspiration Exchange at InDialogue | Third Angel'.

<sup>428</sup> Bala. p.284.

<sup>429</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'Inspiration Exchange: The Value of Sitting Opposite'. p.29.

*Inspiration Exchange* utilises the formalised dimension of participation, in that the performers 'know more' than the audience both in terms of their knowledge of the event and their experience of previous iterations and outcomes. Despite this orchestrated imbalance, the audience's interaction, or knowing participation, is integral to the live 'work' in which they are engaged; if a story is not requested the collection remains dormant, inactive until called upon. Equally, in the case of 'THEY LOOK LIKE UMBRELLAS', the title commemorating the sharing is related to the audience interjection rather than the content of the story about fishing for pike. The formalised dimension allows for otherwise 'unsolicited' occurrences—such as 'What does a cormorant look like?'—to become solicited, by building flexibility and adaptability into the project's formal structure.

### iii. Collaborative Participation

Where *Inspiration Exchange* adopts a structure of formalised participation, *Desire Paths* leans more heavily towards the unsolicited dimension, as passers-by of the map-drawing event become spectators and *potential* participants. As Kelly explains: 'with a project like this [*Desire Paths*], they didn't even know they were going to be an audience, a lot of them, and they didn't necessarily know, even when they would come up to look at something [happening], that they were going to be asked to participate.'<sup>430</sup> In the case

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<sup>430</sup> Alex Kelly, 'Interactive Storytelling'.

of *Desire Paths*, the unsolicited becomes formalised at the very moment the audience (passer-by) is invited to participate, becoming a collaborating maker under the rules of engagement set out by the invitation: choosing to *play the game* rather than being implicated by their passive spectatorship of it. It is in this way that Bala's two distinctions are demonstrated in the example of Third Angel's participatory practice: *Desire Paths*, in particular, operates with both formal and unsolicited participation, shifting between these modes as a form of exchange. Bala advocates for the two forms of participation to be maintained, rather than folded together, as 'they reveal qualitatively different insights'; I propose this similarly reflects the shifting modes of *Desire Paths*, as it allows performers and audiences to share agency, with its designed 'rules' put to the test.

Third Angel's participatory practice evidences the company's awareness of its fluctuations, and how they have worked in ways that accommodate this. Kelly suggests that the invitation in *Desire Paths* is twofold, through what he terms a 'double invitation': first, "'do you have a hope or dream for the future you'd like to commemorate with a street name?'" Secondly, the implied question: "'is there a street you've lived on that you'd like to tell us about?'"<sup>431</sup> I propose that this 'double invitation' stirs a form of counter-nostalgia; similarly to *Class of '76* (see Chapter 2) a two-way scission is at play in *Desire Paths* that prompts audience-participants to look simultaneously toward past memories and future hopes. *Inspiration Exchange* further complicates this device in that it merges the personal with the multiple, encouraging participants to connect their own remembered stories with those of other people as they engage in the Exchange. The potential directions a performance might take are multiplied by these often-unfounded

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<sup>431</sup> Alex Kelly, 'Interactive Storytelling'.

relationships, and yet exist through the basis of a trusting collaborative exchange, both despite and because of the inherent differences between participants, and between artist and public.<sup>432</sup> Both projects exist by virtue of participation, its inherent multiplicity, and the trust that a mutual and democratic participation necessitates.

As the map of the city is drawn out by multiple *Desire Paths* 'performers' and members of the public, all parties engage in a mutual 'work', a shared task to complete the map. Emerging from this example is a type of participatory collaboration termed by Laermans 'the collaboratory'.<sup>433</sup> I consider this term as both a linguistic play on co-laboratory, suggesting a space or place in which collaborative work is carried out, and/or as a conjoining of both *collaborative* and *participatory*. My use of this term in this thesis particularly pursues this second signification, though such a 'collabor-atory' methodology is inescapably linked to the places and spaces of the former (places of labour and laboratory spaces). The co-laboratory, as I determine it, is therefore both place and method; as Third Angel indirectly illustrate, the first question they ask of a new project is 'who's in the room [...] in which the work is getting made?'<sup>434</sup> Walton further proposes that the work will always reflect the experience of the individuals in the room: 'we are in the room [so] we are the right people at the right time to create this piece of work'.<sup>435</sup> Furthermore, the implication is that the right people in that present configuration are, in fact, the only people who can make the work they are about to produce. Extending that idea to the participatory collaboration of the attendant public, her words convey real

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<sup>432</sup> In many cases the originator of a story in *Inspiration Exchange*, or the person who previously named a road in *Desire Paths*, may not be known.

<sup>433</sup> Laermans, *Moving Together: Theorizing and Making Contemporary Dance*. p.280.

<sup>434</sup> Third Angel, *There's a Room: Three Performance Texts*. p6.

<sup>435</sup> Rachael Walton, 'Rachael Walton (Third Angel) – Essential Drama'.

authority on those individuals too. In *Desire Paths*, road names are written over as in a figurative palimpsest as local communities take part in an inclusive and democratic re-naming and re-claiming of their shared spaces.<sup>436</sup> A 'collaboratory'—as a 'constantly-renewing' state of participatory collaboration—opens a space for a nostalgic and reflective re-telling of the past, evidenced by the re-naming and mapping facets of *Desire Paths* as a collective re-writing (of both history and geography) and a de-institutionalisation of common social spaces (originally named by local councils or building contractors) by virtue of the performative act of re-appropriation and renewal. *Desire Paths*, if staged more than once in the same city, would produce markedly different results (stories, road names) on each occasion; it is also quite feasible that any participants joining in a second time would make new contributions. In this way, renewal is as constant as the collaboration: as performances recur with new combinations of participants, road names are renewed once again. Katja Schneider, in a review of Laermans' book *Moving Together*, further advises that the 'positive, perhaps utopian, premise' of the collaboratory 'is that of a constantly-renewing, empowering potentiality'. Building on Schneider's reading, I propose that the collaboratory, for all its complexity—as a 'constantly-renewing' state of participatory collaboration—accurately defines Third Angel's work in *Desire Paths* and *Inspiration Exchange*, since it provides a term for the meeting of collaboration and participatory arts, whilst also signalling the potential and anticipatory function of a democratic, collaborative commons. A re-performance of *Desire Paths* at the same site acts as another layer of the palimpsest, and the same city pavement drawn over with chalk—which, despite being washed away by the rain, leaves

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<sup>436</sup> Kimberly A Powell, 'Remapping the City: Palimpsest, Place, and Identity in Art Education Research', *Studies in Art Education*, 50.1 (2008), 6–21.

a trace of its residue in the cracks—or as the memory of its happening is writ in the minds of its witnesses. In this way, *Desire Paths* as a 'collaboratory' act manifests its own longevity, inviting public collaborators to add to, divert and renew the project as a palimpsest laid upon its own past. In turn, these projects feed back into the vitality of the companies that make them: the more *Desire Paths* or *Inspiration Exchange* are performed, the more the history of each project grows, and the more enriched future versions of the projects become through their accumulation of stories and ephemera.

As demonstrated, *Desire Paths* and *Inspiration Exchange* adopt the collaboratory mode as a site of democratic multiplicity, which I propose occurs through exchanging perspectives as part of a collective discourse and through the questions this raises about ownership: who owns a re-told story, or the right to name a communal space? There is also a particular distinction to be made between the actual collecting of the title-cards in *Inspiration Exchange*, as opposed to the temporary chalk-marked *Desire Paths*. At first appearance, it is the photographic documentation that 'collects' *Desire Paths*, though an interrogation of the company archive reveals pocket-sized performer notebooks that also record the interactions with participants. The ownership of these suggested street names is contested, as some may now reside within an institutional archive in Bristol. In both performances, the anonymity of the collected stories and titles exceeds the contributing individuals. Equally, the traces of both raise questions about the claim to democratic processes. At a book launch for Third Angel's script collection *There's a Room* in 2019—which contains a version of the text for *What I Heard...*—Kelly, Walton and Thorpe (joined by regular collaborators Laura Lindsay and Stacey Sampson) discussed whether Third Angel's work can, or should, be considered political. Kelly and Walton agreed that whilst they tend not to label their work as 'political theatre', it is often perceived by

others as politically motivated.<sup>437</sup> This conversation in 2019 echoed themes addressed by Kelly in a company blog post five years earlier, when touring *What I Heard...*:

On Thursday night we give a talk entitled 'Stories We Didn't Tell', exploring the relationship between *Story Map* and *What I Heard...* [...].

We are pressed to talk in more detail about our selection process for the show. We often talk about how instinctive our process was, choosing the stories that 'appealed' to us. [...] I get a sense from our new friends in Beirut that they think, 'well, if your theatre isn't political what's the point in making it?'

And it occurs to me that I agree with them. That we make theatre with the aim of getting people to stop, look at the world around them, and ask, 'do things have to be this way?'<sup>438</sup>

Despite distancing their work from a formalised mode of political theatre, Third Angel thus acknowledge the politics inherent in their preoccupation with showing and telling stories of difference. *What I Heard...* takes this as its more overt thematic basis as 'it tries, within the act of repeating a story about another country, to say, "yes, but what is it like to be an individual who lives this story?"', whilst *Desire Paths* and *Inspiration Exchange* use participation to provoke new assemblages of communities and their lived experiences.<sup>439</sup>

Where politics is inherent in multiplicity and difference, collaboration as the coming-together of multiple individuals is also inherently political, despite possible imbalances of contribution or control. I propose that collaboration, as constituted by difference, is antagonistic. Katsouraki suggests that revealing a 'moment of difference' is

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<sup>437</sup> Third Angel, "'There's A Room" Book Launch: 14th Oct 2019' (Sheffield Hallam University's Performance Lab: Off The Shelf Festival, 2019).

<sup>438</sup> Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: Postcard From Beirut'.

<sup>439</sup> Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: Postcard From Beirut'.

to 'perform antagonism'.<sup>440</sup> Collaborations are not always enriching, in cases of irreconcilable differences, or unhappy compromises (as first considered in Chapter 1), yet a utopian condition of 'successful' participatory collaborations aspires toward positive outcomes. In this way, I argue that antagonism itself is generative, offering a different view, one that locates forces of resistance and disruption precisely within aspirational practices. Collaboratory projects which embrace such disruption as part of a creative methodology may empower and enrich both the participants and the company they collaborate with. Katsouraki argues that such empowerment comes from 'an indeterminate or in-between relational liminality' in which differences come to either reaffirm or resist otherwise hegemonic perspectives or dominant systems. She suggests that this 'politically embedded mode of resistance' is 'radical' in terms of 'its own precarity, vulnerability, even perhaps failure', and yet 'compels emancipation *through* and *within* a person's participation in antagonistic processes whereby people come to be newly authorised'.<sup>441</sup> Antagonism, for Katsouraki, occurs as a 'practice of negation' that uses 'differences and limits' to promote and frame discourse.<sup>442</sup> I suggest that *Desire Paths* largely exemplifies this proposal through its representative limits: the labels given to streets and the implied boundaries fixed by the map, complete with house numbers, districts and postcodes. Applying this concept, I argue that by acknowledging and negating these limits, the map becomes newly authored, albeit temporarily and fictionally. I suggest there is a collective antagonism directed at the supposed authority of the map, rather than between participants. Additionally, *Inspiration Exchange* is more

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<sup>440</sup> Katsouraki. p.298.

<sup>441</sup> Katsouraki. p.291.

<sup>442</sup> Katsouraki. p.290.



covert still in the way in which it, too, exploits relational differences by negating the limits between them: as a story is exchanged, its recipient may react to it in myriad ways (learning from it, or being emotionally affected by it). A recipient may become a new 'owner' of the story as they recount it to others thereafter, perhaps even as if it were their own, original, story. Whether in the form of participants collectively challenging a status quo in the present, or in the sharing of personal experience across the lifetime of a project, antagonism is a process of reframing and 'negation' through which new, positive assemblages emerge.

The democratic and political aspects of collaborative acts of renewal provide evidence of a mutual longevity that can be found in such projects. Bala argues that:

[I]mpact need not only be perceived as the effect of the big on the small, the powerful on the weak, or of institutions on persons, but can also be meaningfully addressed from a multi-directional, systemic perspective, that is, how non-institutionalisable acts and constituent bodies in turn transform the structures, into which they are placed, by which they may be restricted or empowered, but which never fully, entirely constitute or define them.<sup>443</sup>

Where Katsouraki suggests that a practice of negation creates opposing frames, such as the 'powerful' and the 'weak', Bala adds that one position may, in turn, influence the structure of the other; impact goes both ways. I propose that this is evidenced in both *Desire Paths* and *Inspiration Exchange*, whereby participants are never fully defined as 'performers', yet their collaboration in these projects is vital to the performative acts that constitute the formal structures of each project: the naming of streets, the sharing of stories. Kelly also reflects of *Desire Paths* (quoting game designer John Harper): "the

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<sup>443</sup> Bala. p.275.

Author mode switches off and everyone becomes an audience member." [...] [T]here's a point where, as performers and makers, we [performers] then become an audience, to the contribution the audience member is making, and I really enjoyed that exchange of power.<sup>444</sup> Following Kelly's reading, I also suggest the collaboratory is 'multi-directional'; transformation occurs to the participants, to the performances and to Third Angel, rather than the art leading the transformation of its audience. This interplay of power or meaning-making between director-creator, performer and audience foregrounds what Wright calls the traditional 'holy trinity' upon which art is founded.<sup>445</sup> The multiplicity of the varying, shifting and upending roles of the holy trinity in *Desire Paths* reframes the assumption that the artistic product, made by author(s) and performer(s) is then affirmed as such by the presence of an audience, that it is 'the theatre or methodology alone that affects or transforms people's lives'. Bala proposes instead that 'it may also be the participants who are doing the transformation of the methodology, certainly not for the sake of the methodology itself, but towards the transformation of the conditions of their own lives'.<sup>446</sup> In one iteration of *Desire Paths*, a participant renamed a street as 'Redistribution of Wealth Way', which suggests a desire for the future, whilst another renamed a road 'Family Place', more likely based on an association or a memory. If, as Bala suggests, the methodology itself is altered as an indirect consequence of collaboratory acts, a performance such as *Desire Paths* or *Inspiration Exchange* can be seen as a self-sustaining system that is at once responsive and adaptive to the pushes-and-pulls of its multiple stakeholders. *Desire Paths*, so-titled, also came to reflect the

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<sup>444</sup> Alex Kelly, 'Interactive Storytelling'.

<sup>445</sup> Wright. p.536.

<sup>446</sup> Bala. p.276.

diverse associations people had with roads in their cities, not just their desires. Extending Bala's proposal, the same can also be said of the theatre company as an overarching system, evidenced in Third Angel's case, as a company who are responsive to the developments, deferrals and digressions of projects, such as (non-exhaustively): *Story Map*, that fed into *What I Heard...;* *Turma de '95* by Raquel Castro existing as an extension of *Class of '76*; and their 2009 short film *Technology* derived from devising *Parts for Machines...*<sup>447</sup> This intertextual, cross-project responsiveness to multi-directional collaboration further establishes Third Angel's wider work as inherently political, both through an artistic scepticism towards the status quo and mundanity of everyday life (as with *Where From Here* [2000], *Believe The Worst* [2001], *Presumption* [2006]), and an oeuvre built around interrogating systems (as with *Parts for Machines...*, *Hurrysickness* [2004], *600 People* [2013-]) stories (as with *What I Heard...*, *Inspiration Exchange*, *Lad Lit Project* [2005], *Partus* [2016]) and structures (as with *Desire Paths*, *Department of Distractions* [2018-2020], and short film *Technology* [2009]).

From this cross-section of Third Angel's projects alone, a 'politics of resilience' is not only recognisable but inherent in their methodological preferences. Third Angel variously navigate the human experience both within and without the highly structured world it has created for itself to thrive.<sup>448</sup> This 'politics of resilience', a phrase here borrowed from Katsouraki, describes 'the "political" as embodied and enacted modes of antagonism located in resistance', or rather, 'the discursive mode of a politics of

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<sup>447</sup> *Technology* can be found in full on the Third Angel website at the time of writing.

<sup>448</sup> In the case of 2022's then-work-in-progress *The Future is Decided*, Third Angel's next planned task was in predicting the structures we are yet to impose.

resilience'.<sup>449</sup> Certainly, a 'politics of resilience' that is situated within discursive modes of both collaborative (inside the making room) and collaboratory practices ('outside' in participatory settings) provides a distinction between the two primary arenas in which this resilience is upheld and fostered. However, as a precisely embodied antagonism, this type of resilience is simultaneously public and private, and moves, as people do, between these arenas. The discursive mode is, as Grant Kester posits, 'intensely somatic' as its democratic exchange is played out physically, performatively: 'the effect of collaborative art practice is to frame this exchange (spatially, institutionally, procedurally), setting it sufficiently apart from quotidian social interaction to encourage a degree of self-reflection; calling attention to the exchange itself as creative praxis'.<sup>450</sup> The multi-directionality of collaboratory practice and the mutual transformations that one position (audience, artist) enacts upon another evidences collaboration outside the making room as that which oscillates between formal and unsolicited, continually reconfiguring the position and agency of artist and audience. This process in itself is a praxis, a performance of socio-political antagonism.<sup>451</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>449</sup> Katsouraki. p.292.

<sup>450</sup> Kester. p.30.

<sup>451</sup> Katsouraki adds that the multiplicity of the individual—each collaborating partner constituted of complex idiosyncrasies, viewpoints and experiences—presupposes that a subject 'must be seen not as a hypostatized thing but as a praxis—indeed a performance that is happening in that the subject exists in and is transformed by social discourses'. (p.299)

I have shown how collaboration outside of Third Angel's core membership challenges traditional perceptions of company continuity. I have employed 'co-opetition' as a means of expressing my argument in favour of a form of collaboration that is processual, as a constantly reconfiguring multiplicity, rather than something altogether harmonious. I have argued that Third Angel's longevity is partly derived from balancing friction and familiarity in creative collaboration, across its diverse forms and systems. Whether collaboration is restricted to the makers of performance, or extended outside the making room through participation and public engagement, I argue that its key condition remains: the difference inherent in collaboration is its generative precondition. Furthermore, I have shown how participatory collaboration becomes an antagonistic act, one that challenges the structures of the socio-political context in which the work is situated.

As Kelly reflects upon *Inspiration Exchange*, he remembers swapping 'EMPTY BENCHES for DESIRE PATHS'; the former title appears as the name for a performance section in Third Angel's *Words & Pictures* (2009) and began its life as a text written for *Pleasant Land* (2004).<sup>452</sup> What results here is 'a reciprocal, durationally extended process of exchange', in which the performance far exceeds the frame of the show or project, located instead within the very methodology of collaborative work as an evolving and oscillatory praxis, full of constantly-renewing potential.<sup>453</sup> *Inspiration Exchange* thus illuminates and magnifies the transactional value inherent in collaboration. Whilst it is hard to quantify, by considering this exchange precisely as one of *value*, it is possible to

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<sup>452</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'Inspiration Exchange: The Value of Sitting Opposite'. p.28.

<sup>453</sup> 'Empty Benches' has found itself revitalised in more than one project, and its exchange for 'Desire Paths' may have been the origins for the, now-familiar, project title.

make distinctions between more economical (efficient and effective) processes and where other processes may be wasteful or detrimental; I define economical processes in collaborative performance making are those where the perceived value of collaboration matches or exceeds the efforts and energies of its membership. In such cases, the potential for resilience and longevity may be (at least) conceptually measured in this praxis, in the ratio of elements ascribed to collaboration and participation, and of the multi-directional, constantly-renewing flows of exchange that constitute them.

## 4. Co-labour: The Value of Working Together

### Introduction

Where the previous chapter, *Collaboration and Co-Production*, explored case studies from Third Angel's artistic collaboration, in what follows, *Co-labour*, I build upon this enquiry. I explore how their artistic collaboration relates to their organisational collaboration, and its further implications behind the longevity of Third Angel as a company, positioned between the work and its context. I interrogate the 'value' of collaboration in relation to longevity that, in turn, opens the way to notions of economy. For the title, *Co-labour*, I play on the etymology of collaboration and reify co-working to units of value, to propose an ontological tie between conjunctive domains of artmaking and the economy. In this instance, I use 'economical' to refer to a position of optimal efficiency and effectiveness—processes, practices or systems that minimise wastage and (where applicable) maximise outputs—as well as pointing to the realm of the economy from which such logic is derived. Through an investigation of knowledge-sharing in collaboration, both among artists and with audiences, I argue that balancing these different collaborative modes in turn promotes more economical foundations for future practice. I largely build upon the previously defined concepts of modern precarity and the wider socio-political context of long-thriving companies like Third Angel and their contemporaries (established in Chapter 1), with particular focus on the company's operational competencies, and the strategies and tactics it employs. Through Third Angel's example, I argue that artistic and operational competencies become intertwined over time, and that strategies employed in creative practice can, successively, influence

the operational longevity of a performance company. Additionally, I identify benefits that continual, recurring, or long-term collaborations make possible, not least the evolution of an efficient working language, or 'short-hand', which align with the flexible modes of 'fleet-footedness' that occur inherently in creative risk-taking. Lastly, in establishing a theoretical bridge to Chapter 5 (and partly in a counterpoint to the conditions of *continuity-through-incompletion* established in Chapter 2), this chapter also considers how collaboration affects 'work completion decisions': when and how collaborative works such as those in Chapter 3, *Parts for Machines...* and *What I Heard...*, are deemed finished, and conversely how others, like *Inspiration Exchange* and *Desire Paths*, are perceived as perpetually ongoing. This consideration brings full-circle the proposition of a workable equilibrium between the consensus achievable through familiarity, yet complicated by possible collaborative frictions: questioning whether collaborative makers need always agree.<sup>454</sup>

I develop the arguments made in respect of artistic collaboration by exploring a wider theoretical landscape. Firstly, the 'value' that collaboration generates is difficult to define, which itself explains why previous commentators have sought new vocabulary in a bid to describe or pinpoint its outcomes and effects. That vocabulary I use in this analysis include reference to: *philia*, as the charismatic force that draws groups together (Wallis and McKinney), and the widespread *paradoxes* that represent sets of contradictory and antagonistic concepts that often arise from collaborative working. I employ these phenomenological terms to reinforce my suggestion that collaboration is valuable because it is generative (as already demonstrated) but precisely what the value

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<sup>454</sup> Vason.



is, where it is located or how to quantify it are all harder to pin down. These terms contribute to a single framework that expands my analysis of the generative capacity of a collaborating group, and, in the process of identifying its value, I further argue that collaboration also has the capacity to be re-generative, as an inherent capability to uphold its own longevity through constant renewal. I hyphenate 're-generative' to indicate that it 'creates again', as opposed to regenerating as a refreshing or repair. To pursue the question of collaboration's value further, and to frame this in context of the long-term collaboration of artists over time, I consider the key terms of collaboration and longevity in a wider interdisciplinary context. First, shifting focus from artistic to organisational collaboration, I propose that a regenerative trait of collaboration contributes to a company's long-term economy and therefore, borrowing from economics terminology, can be described as a system of flows and exchange. I return to the W.I.R.E thinktank's model of the 'paradoxes of longevity' (cited in the introduction to this thesis) to assist in my interrogation.<sup>455</sup> W.I.R.Es collective background in business, sociology and life-sciences provides a fulcrum for a theoretical convergence of the different types of value generated by organisations and their ability to exercise resilience against the extraneous socio-political contexts in which they are situated. I suggest that W.I.R.Es proposed schema assists in reconciling the possible economy of flows and exchange with the apparent threat posed by demobilising organisational 'paradoxes'. I repurpose this recurrent theme emerging from contemporary scholarship: the identification of seemingly antithetical or 'paradoxical' qualities in collaborative practice

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<sup>455</sup> W.I.R.E, *Forever: On The Art Of Longevity*, p.88.

that I argue—counter-intuitively—appear to sustain rather than threaten its healthy continuation.

## I. Art / Work

### *i. Deconstructing the Paradox*

I begin by outlining paradox theory, identifying its often-debilitating function, and in doing so I locate its more generative capacity by virtue of this critique.<sup>456</sup> In order to reframe the endemic use of the paradox, I first define it. Much of what is written in the field (and applied more widely) calls upon paradox as a shortcut for self-contradictory phrases, concepts or beliefs (*doxa*).<sup>457</sup> To revisionist scholars, paradoxes are themselves suspect because they necessarily proceed on assumptions of what is 'contradictory', thus they are not in absolute binary opposition.<sup>458</sup> To further deconstruct the term, Schad et

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<sup>456</sup> David Seidl, Jane Lê, and Paula Jarzabkowski, 'The Generative Potential of Luhmann's Theorizing for Paradox Research: Decision Paradox and Deparadoxization', 2021, pp. 49–64; The widespread use of the term 'paradox' may also reflect what education theorist D.R. Robertson believes can be experienced 'as frustrating, debilitating, even paralyzing conflicts'. In turn, such widespread use may indicate a pervasive paralysis, of dead-end thinking that results from taking apparently irresolvable contradictions—in theory and practice—at face value. However, Robertson proposes that contradictions have potential to become, what he calls 'generative paradoxes', or, 'contradictions in which both sides of the opposition are true' and—most importantly—'both sides feed rather than fight each other'. (2005, pp.181-194)

<sup>457</sup> Etymologically speaking, the term refers to seemingly contradictory (*para*), yet interdependent beliefs or opinions (*doxa*).

<sup>458</sup> Similarly, education scholars Tiberius, Sinai and Flak, prefer the term 'dilemmas', as this suggests that such contradictions are solvable, though never entirely. (2002, pp.463–97)

al offer a wide-reaching analysis (also claiming a 'critical juncture' back in 2016) of the use of paradox as a meta-theory that crosses and connects different disciplines, in which they describe the complexity and fluidity that reflects the counter-intuitive nature of paradoxes:

Even as paradox involves a dynamic and constantly shifting relationship between alternative poles, the core elements remain, impervious to resolution. Rather interdependent contradictions incite a cyclical, relationship between opposing forces. This dynamic relationship suggests a processual perspective, understanding how each element continually informs and defines the other.<sup>459</sup>

Developing further in my own analysis, I argue that the 'working through' of opposing forces reveals a cyclical or oscillatory praxis, which reinforces my argument that multiplicity is a generative precondition for creative insight which, like the Third Angel's regularly reconfiguring collaborations, contributes to longevity as a process of constant renewal.<sup>460</sup> Reflecting upon some of the title-cards collected during iterations of *Inspiration Exchange*, it becomes apparent that its open call for audience contributions is limited to the particular size of the blank postcards provided, as longer titles in thick-lined handwriting were often scaled-down to fit (Fig. 14).

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<sup>459</sup> Jonathan Schad et al, 'Paradox Research in Management Science: Looking Back to Move Forward', *The Academy of Management Annals*, 10.1 (2016), 5–64. p.12.

<sup>460</sup> Schad et al. p.32.



Fig. 14: The table after a performance of *Inspiration Exchange* (Third Angel)

This acts as another example of the previously-noted instance of the project's 'formalised flexibility', which evidences a synthesis of both a formal structure (the card) and one that has an inbuilt tolerance for a degree of unsolicited contribution (the titles offered) from its participants. Organisational sociologists Seidl, Lê and Jarzabkowski, similarly inclined to my own stance, call for a 'deparadoxisation', through which the paradox is not allowed to persist and hold such theoretical or organisational weight. In *Inspiration Exchange*, the limitation of the card can also represent a generative focus of its task, to craft a title suitable for its formal design. I therefore apply 'deparadoxisation' to describe methods of shifting the focus away from the paradox to the decision-making process that it invokes. An example of deparadoxisation from the organisational practice of Third Angel includes the hiring of new staff members: a solo managerial decision contradicts the collaborative values of the creative team. Third Angel (in common with many like organisations) utilise a hiring panel for recruitment phases that includes representation from a cross-section of

the company's stakeholders, artistic team and collaborators. The primary way in which this organisational paradox is countered is through the appointment of a diverse Board of Trustees who aim to sense-check the decisions made by Walton, Kelly and their team. On inspection, I propose there emerges an oppositional tension that is lessened by its treatment, reduced to a problem that can be 'worked through' without need for a full resolution. In this case, the representation of the board acts on behalf of the wider set of stakeholders in Third Angel's organisational decision-making, navigating a route between contradictory systems of a top-down management hierarchy and lateral democratic collaboration. I consequently propose (in the contexts of this thesis) two main tensions that the term paradox broadly represents: that which can be *de-paradoxed*—its debilitating effects lessened by effective management—and secondly, those tensions that require a new synthesis, to find resolution. Both types of paradox are generative, though differ in the ways they achieve their productivity. I argue that both organisational and artistic collaboration are not constituted by paradoxical tensions, but rather on closer inspection they reveal other intangible values arising from collaborative and participatory working methods in a 'shifting', dialectical synthesis.

Towards the optimisation of company longevity W.I.R.E. signify apparent contradictory qualities not as 'paradoxical' oppositions but rather as 'dialectical twins'. One such twin that W.I.R.E propose is that of agility and vision: 'longevity is enabled by strategies that embrace short-term agility and long-term visions in order to take correct situation-dependent action'.<sup>461</sup> In conversation with Deborah Chadbourn, previously the General Manager of Forced Entertainment (and later of production company Artsadmin),

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<sup>461</sup> W.I.R.E, *Forever: On The Art Of Longevity*, p.28.

she described to me how, in 1995, Forced Entertainment failed to secure a grant for the first iteration of *Speak Bitterness*. She believed that the funders' decision was influenced by the repetitive and typically durational nature of the show and its lack of a narrative structure or storyline that would help promote the piece to funders and audiences.<sup>462</sup> With help from Third Angel and others, Forced Entertainment subsequently mounted a campaign for local support:

[W]hat it did was establish a kind of way of talking about the company as important within the ecology. [...] So there was this sense of fighting for the sort of principle of that kind of work to exist alongside other kinds of work. And that really didn't create a crisis, of an internal crisis of 'well, you know, we're gonna have to pack in and stop doing this'. I think we probably had a degree of self-belief that we would somehow weather that. [...] And the response of audiences to that, [...] like: 'this is what we create, and this is what we do, and this is how people respond to it'. [...] You know, we talk a lot these days about audience, and I think we didn't talk about it with the same vocabulary then. But of course, you know, theatre requires an audience, the premise of theatre is that it's work presented *in relation* to an audience.<sup>463</sup>

From Chadbourn's account, it is possible to identify two types of values, defined loosely as a conceptual worth or level of importance: those on the 'inside' of a company that reflect a shared vision (core values); and those attributed from the 'outside' upon the fruits of their collective labour (by audiences, critics, networks, funders, or researchers). Those values applied from outside the company also refer to the intangible values generated by arts practice, such as educational or social benefits, as established in

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<sup>462</sup> Shorter ninety-minute 'theatre' versions coexist alongside durational versions of around six hours in length.

<sup>463</sup> Deborah Chadbourn and Rob Fellman, 'Transcript of Interview with Deborah Chadbourn' (Unpublished, 2022).

Chapter 1.<sup>464</sup> It is the intangibility of the artistic product that simultaneously threatens its longevity, as funders and arts councils struggle to identify its effectiveness or importance, and equally represents its biggest opportunity, as that which far exceeds the more obvious economical or financial returns. In the case of *Speak Bitterness*, multiple sets of values are in tension, such as the risky and experimental nature of its non-traditional duration, versus the value of building upon something more proven. As Chadbourn's remarks indicate, there are strategic opportunities available to performance companies in identifying sets of values or principles, both those core to the company and those of interest to their peers, audiences and participants; what is initially seen as risky may ultimately become a defining value that appeals to a company's collaborators and its paying public.

A possible synthesis of agility and vision, as a dialectical twin best understood through the relation of values, is deconstructed by deparadoxisation: Chadbourn's account instead recognises the interplay between short-term tactics and longer-term strategies. I argue that considering the flow of different values through the specific form of currencies opens a similar metaphorical bridge between the flows of potential and the means through which, seen as a currency, potential too can be accumulated. I identify specific methodologies evident within the practice, and praxis, of companies like Third Angel that can exploit other valuable, potent, currencies that art-makers may unwittingly already trade in, beyond that other important currency, money. As Chadbourn has suggested, qualities of self-belief and the shared values with audiences enable

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<sup>464</sup> I differentiate between types of values, though some deliberate slippage between them highlights the relative indeterminacy of some of the terms ('core' and 'outside' values) and the intangible nature of others.

companies to 'weather' financial crises. These findings largely contradict the aforementioned 'Baumol cost disease', discussed in Chapter 1, that suggests performance companies are unable to innovate and increase productivity to keep pace with the financial snare of rising wages. Framing intangibles, skills and aptitudes via the metaphors of economics allows for an appraisal of artistic practices as those that can be *economised*, put to effective use and valued as part of a wider economy of artmaking that exceeds purely financial inputs and tangible outcomes.<sup>465</sup>

*ii. Artistic Competencies*

Identifying the intangible values that are associated with arts organisations like Third Angel aids in the tracing of their exchange, but such identification necessarily remains incomplete; intangible as they are, these values are exchanged in abstract forms, as performances, proxies (short-hands or representations) and promises (future commitments or derivatives). It is, however, possible to identify degrees of control the company has over how it 'spends' these intangible resources by following the logic of economics. Diverse types of values are revealed in Third Angel's practice through a complex ratio of: oft-concealed relations; outcomes of the tactical decisions made in the making room; collateral effects on the strategy of the company; connections with audiences and participators; collaborative relationships and the maintenance they

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<sup>465</sup> Furthermore, such metaphors align with the prevailing language of the UK's government-subsidised arts sector (see Wallis and McKinney 'On Value and Necessity'; 2013).



require.<sup>466</sup> As the previous section concluded, resilience arises from durationally extended processes of exchange. This process emerges from evolving praxis itself, made up of flows of information, experiences and ideas that pass mutually between different systems, entities and people. Uninvited Guests' Paul Clarke suggests that 'the inside of a system is constituted precisely by the flows to-and-from its outside', that exchange 'determines rather than threatens the coherence of a frame'.<sup>467</sup> In this way, the longevity of a collaborating system may be enhanced by its effective management of these flows. These flows strengthen over time as more is shared between them: as trust improves and the exchanges themselves become more succinct and thereby economical. Furthermore, as new entities—collaborators, audiences, venues, funders, and researchers—are connected to these flows, the possible exchanges that occur are exponentially multiplied in number and frequency. This specifically discursive source of resilience can be traced back to Third Angel's formal make-up, as two artists engaged in collaboration who together act as a locus for networked relationships with other artists, collaborators, audiences and participants. In his article '*Inspiration Exchange: the value of sitting opposite*', Kelly proposes that 'the Exchange works best when the table serves as a focus, and we can all sit around it – the stories – the currency – central'.<sup>468</sup> The function of the exchange itself is economical, both in the efficiency and directness of its performance task, and in its transactional nature that makes overt the flows of collaboration taking place, physically documented on the cards. It is easy to imagine Kelly and Walton doing

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<sup>466</sup> Different companies will, of course, find their own formulas, and a similar thesis focussing on a different quadracentennial company would no doubt make for an interesting comparison.

<sup>467</sup> Clarke. p.109.

<sup>468</sup> Alexander Kelly, '*Inspiration Exchange: The Value of Sitting Opposite*'. p.30.

just that, swapping ideas around a table back in 1995, and indeed with collaborators in the making room thereafter. *Inspiration Exchange* represents an acknowledgement of the value in simplicity, in (the return to) the performative act of storytelling rather than an aesthetically determined value of what otherwise might be called 'textual' or traditional maker-centred art.

With a reliance on the term 'art' to describe collaborative participatory practices, the aforementioned utopian collaboratory presents its alternative framing.<sup>469</sup> In an article titled 'The delicate essence of artistic collaboration', Wright proposes that 'art is not merely a category; it is, or rather has become in twentieth-century usage, a performative. As such, it makes things happen [...].'<sup>470</sup> Wright suggests the very performative nature of art also simultaneously '*prevents* things from happening – including meaningful collaboration'.<sup>471</sup> He proposes that art has become a mirror of the economy, as, 'on the one hand, those who hold the symbolic capital (the artists), and on the other, those whose labour (such as it is)'—the participants—'are used to foster the accumulation of more capital'.<sup>472</sup> I argue that this logic can be extended, to unveil a dialectical twin of expert and non-expert in collaboratory settings. In traditional audience-performer

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<sup>469</sup> Claire Bishop also suggests that 'it is tempting to date the rise in visibility of these [relational] practices to the early 1990s', which may locate the influence of this type of participation work on the methodology of Third Angel. Claire Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents', *Artforum International*, 44 (2006), 178–83; Third Angel's earlier performance works can be considered 'art-led'—due to their film training and collaborations with videographer Chris Hall, as well as their use of gallery and (traditionally) non-theatrical spaces (such as *Testcard* and *Shallow Water*)—however, their later works shift closer towards the 'collaboratory' ideal, epitomised by *Inspiration Exchange* and *Desire Paths* (see Appendix A for contextual timeline)

<sup>470</sup> Wright. p.534.

<sup>471</sup> Wright. p.534. *my emphasis*.

<sup>472</sup> Wright. p.535.

relationships the audience are reified by the presence of funding and subsidy in the sector, as audiences become data. In collaboratory work, such as *Inspiration Exchange* and *Desire Paths*, the work is constituted by the expert/non-expert dialectic: each brings its own value to the exchange. Wright, however, suggests that 'the paradox of artistic collaboration' is located in its imbalanced and incomplete exchange; he warns how tensions between expert and non-expert, if not treated equitably, can often cause a hierarchical imbalance between instigating artists and their non-expert participants. To illustrate, he correlates this to the 'paradox of the gift': in acts of gift-giving, nothing is returned to the giver, and as such only a part-transaction takes place. Furthermore, a gift is given in good faith, yet may not be wanted, and may not be freely disposable.<sup>473</sup> Taking this notion further, Mick Wallis and Joslin McKinney argue that 'gift exchange is subversive within capitalist value, not because it is rebellious, but because it is founded on a different sociality – communal rather than individualistic'. They further suggest that resistance to capitalist value is 'to defy the system with a gift to which it cannot respond'.<sup>474</sup> I argue that the irresolvable nature of Wright's gift-giving as a part-transaction is, via Wallis and McKinney, an antagonistic application of tensions between 'community' and the 'individual'. Emerging from the example of *Inspiration Exchange*, gift-exchanges, such as with communities of artistic collaboration (which the performer and their participants become), are incomplete and imbalanced, yet not seemingly in tension as there is no recognisable opposition to its story-gifting act: a gift is usually accepted even if it is not wanted; an audience receive a public performance before

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<sup>473</sup> Wright. p.544.

<sup>474</sup> Mick Wallis and Joslin McKinney, 'On Value and Necessity: The Green Book and Its Others', *Performance Research*, 18.2 (2013), 67–79. p.68-9.

evaluating its quality. Third Angel's politics, I propose, can hereby be seen as both a resilience against external socio-political limits, in particular neo-liberal capitalism (as discussed in Chapter 1) and also as an antagonism that negates the limits of the art scene itself and the imbalanced mock-collaborations it might sometimes engender.

What I propose as an antagonism intrinsic to artistic collaboration inherently promotes a resilience that, in turn, influences the longevity of organisational collaborations more broadly: if the values of the work are front-and-centre (the art comes first), the possibilities for new collaborations are increased and strengthened (others can identify their common interest in the work). I argue that Third Angel's resilience is part-founded in projects that have 'impaired visibility as art'.<sup>475</sup> Third Angel often use games in their devising processes in the making-room, and I participated in a version of their 'guess the year' game as a conference delegate, where a group of participants were invited to collectively guess in which order a series of scientific inventions or discoveries occurred. The 'game', like *Inspiration Exchange*, is based on a simple task that is both a performance and a collaborative exercise. The company also apply these game-playing methods when working with non-performers, young people and mentees. The devising skills that they have nurtured in themselves have become methods now applicable to wider participatory settings, as an outward ripple of skills and knowledges. Wright suggests the author, performer and audience (in this case) are all roles separately defined, but are 'assimilated into collaboration, and so disappear as such', redefined as part of the whole artistic event.<sup>476</sup> Art is seen by Wright as consisting

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<sup>475</sup> Wright. p.535-6.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid.

of 'artistic performances' (*to* and *for* audiences) which, assimilated into participatory collaborations instead becomes identifiable as a set of 'artistic competencies' (art working *with* its beneficiaries).<sup>477</sup> It is in these 'artistic competencies' that I locate a critical transaction between artistic and organisational resilience. Third Angel regularly obscure the visible delineations between performance and the wider artistic competencies at play; their art-making becomes seemingly invisible, drawn from a creative system of symbol and aesthetic, that is absorbed inside the system of participatory collaboration, ultimately reframing aesthetics as practices, and performances as competencies. These competencies are the skills, 'artistic aptitudes and perceptual habitus' of the multiple collaborators injected 'into the general symbolic economy of the real' such as the collaboratory praxis of sharing stories, drawing maps or naming roads.<sup>478</sup> A dialectical tension occurs in collaboratory works, as their utopian objective is never fully realised: even the most democratic group is symbolic, as it is representational of a wider public. Collaboratory works, following Wright, necessarily return to 'the realm of art', because 'the management of incompleteness'—as with the act of gift-giving—'is indeed an artistic competence'. Wright justifiably warns that such dialectical tensions pose 'vicious' circles in theoretical terms, but I suggest that the commonality artistic collaboration presupposes is important precisely as a shifting and oscillatory process in motion.<sup>479</sup> The management of incompleteness, in turn, assumes an aptitude for deferral: experienced artists know when incompleteness is going to function as a positive or generative force. In dealing with the 'symbolic economy of the real', such as the

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<sup>477</sup> Ibid.

<sup>478</sup> Wright. p.535-6.

<sup>479</sup> Wright. p.544.

democratic group seeking consensus, any oppositional or contradictory tensions of artist-audience, or expert/non-expert are dispossessed of their paralysing bind, through a productive engagement with their transactional values.<sup>480</sup> To return to the phrase derived from Seidl et al, they are deparadoxed through the deferral of their incompleteness.

## II. Value and Exchange

### *i. Symbolic Economy*

One such example of the transactional values found in these mediated tensions, and of the 'symbolic economy of the real' in the work of Third Angel, is the sharing of stories in *Inspiration Exchange*, of which Kelly poses the questions: 'What is a story worth? Is the story I give worth the same to you as it is to me? Impossible to say. Is the story I give worth the same as the story I get in return?'<sup>481</sup> Walton cites Peggy Phelan in likening the audience-performer relationship, more generally, to 'an exchange of letters', declaring, 'if I was really going to take it down to the fundamental: what is theatre? Then for me it's that exchange'.<sup>482</sup> Walton's performative exchange and Kelly's 'value of sitting opposite' together correlate with Wright's notion that art is simultaneously performative and discursive, as it removes the symbolic capital from the instigating artist and places it

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<sup>480</sup> Wright. p.535.

<sup>481</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'Inspiration Exchange: The Value of Sitting Opposite'. p.28.

<sup>482</sup> Rachael Walton, 'Rachael Walton (Third Angel) – Essential Drama'.

squarely on the table, occupying a shared space between maker/instigator and participant-collaborator (Fig. 15).



Fig. 15: A table set for *Inspiration Exchange* in Aberystwyth, 2014 (Third Angel)

The 'perceptual habitus', in this instance, is in the questioning of a story's value itself, implied in the project's invitation: "what story will you choose to share?" A participant's decision may be determined by a number of factors, including their own perception of the possible, potential value of their contribution. Laermans also recognises this common question arising from artistic collaborations: 'is it valuable?' Does a new collective idea 'possess potential qualities that can be built upon and further developed through a common effort?'<sup>483</sup> In some cases of collaboratory work, such as *Inspiration Exchange*,

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<sup>483</sup> Laermans, "'Being in Common": Theorizing Artistic Collaboration'. p.101.

the answer to this question of value is yet more elusive: Kelly remembers how 'a few people just listen. Spending time in the room. With the work. Paying attention. It's hard to state how much that's worth.'<sup>484</sup> For *Inspiration Exchange*, the collaboration across the table is not outwardly seeking these 'potential qualities' in a creative sense—the conversation does not overtly address this question—but by the very praxis of exchange this indeterminate value is nonetheless under appraisal:

Of course, you still have your story, and I still have mine, but now I have licence to tell it. A promise has been made to pay the bearer. If I retell your story, I will re-evaluate it. I will tell my version. I will place my emphasis. I will take from it what I remember, what I value, and that's what I'll pass on.<sup>485</sup>

This 'promise' to 'pay the bearer' is the promise to pass on the story in a revitalised form. The 'potential qualities' in this collaboration are, in fact the potential-*giving* qualities, or potentiality: the remembered elements of the story take on value to-and-for the new bearer, becoming the story as it is known to them. The more a bearer values a story, for reasons specific to them, the more likely they are to re-tell it and the more inherent potential that story can be said to possess. In an implicit response to Laermans' 'collaboratory', Wallis and McKinney suppose that 'collaboration thus rests on an accumulative "trust cycle" that facilitates an "ever-renewed potentiality"': as the promise of the project is to remain an ongoing process of participatory collaboration, to constantly renew the potential of the stories that feed into it.<sup>486</sup>

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<sup>484</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'Inspiration Exchange: The Value of Sitting Opposite'. p.30.

<sup>485</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'Inspiration Exchange: The Value of Sitting Opposite'. p.27-8.

<sup>486</sup> Wallis and McKinney. p.73; Schneider, Katja.



In the case of *Inspiration Exchange*, its 'promise' to 'pay the bearer' is actually a promise to pay-forward, a commitment to the longevity of the project and the stories—Kelly's 'currency'—to continue to circulate and be passed on. Following Wright's theory, the symbolic value of art is made invisible by virtue of collaboration (transferred to the value of competencies and skilled collective labour) through which, I propose, the relationship between art and the economy becomes more distinct. Developing this argument further, money—itself a system of promissory notes used for exchange—is representative of the values attributed to commodities or services and defers the exchange so that the buyer need not offer anything of material equivalence in return. Therefore, it is precisely through money's promises that the trade of commodities and services is, instead, a deferred exchange. In their book *Economies of Collaboration* Karen Savage and Dominic Symonds explain that:

[T]he role of money in the economies of exchange is such that it retains its value: passed from one exchange to another, money never falls victim to being "spent". [...] The money's worth has been exponentially increased by virtue of its continued activity.<sup>487</sup>

In *Inspiration Exchange*, the value of the told stories is not just sustained with each re-telling but is in fact exponentially increased. So too is the value of the performance itself, particularly for those performance projects like *Inspiration Exchange* (likewise *Class of '76* and *Desire Paths*) that exhibit what Archer and Livingston call 'deferred completion decisions', meaning that they retain the open-ended potential not only to be performed again but to be developed or adapted at every iteration.<sup>488</sup> The value of the project's

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<sup>487</sup> Savage and Symonds. p.31.

<sup>488</sup> Paisley Livingston and Carol Archer, 'Artistic Collaboration and the Completion of Works of Art', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 50 (2010), 439–55.

continuation is also called into question upon its reproduction. Third Angel ask, before setting off on another tour of *What I Heard...*: 'Why tell this story again?'<sup>489</sup> Laermans argues that 'every valuation' in collaborative practice 'also indirectly appraises the collaboration's nature or productivity'.<sup>490</sup> As such, each repetition of *What I Heard...* includes self-appraisal of the *value* of its continuation.

Recalling *Inspiration Exchange*, Third Angel give the example of one instance of the performance in which a participant chooses the story of 'the inside of a saxophone', preferring to select a story in which she 'can't guess where the inspiration in the story might be', as she hopes to avoid an emotional connection she has with stories of families, mothers or medical procedures.<sup>491</sup> Kelly, as per the rules of the performance, then tells the story which involves imaging the inside of musical instruments using a multitude of technologies, and leads digressively to a story about cataloguing the inside of Kelly's body, concluding with a reference to Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI). Kelly remembers: 'this is not where' the participant 'expected this story to go'. She takes her inspiration from a personal relationship she has with MRI technology, and then chooses to tell in return a story she called 'LETTING GIRLS BE'.<sup>492</sup> She later writes of the experience:

[Y]ou ask if I'm happy for you to retell this story, & I think if I say no you'll probably break your rules for me. & this capitulation, this care, is more than enough, & of course, you can tell the story, although I'm glad I can't stay to hear you speak it. But the next time I'm blindsided by grief's coincidences, there's a

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<sup>489</sup> Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: Packing the Van' <<https://thirdangeluk.blogspot.com/2012/01/packing-van.html>> [accessed 28 May 2022].

<sup>490</sup> Rudi Laermans, "'Being in Common": Theorizing Artistic Collaboration'. p.101.

<sup>491</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'Inspiration Exchange: The Value of Sitting Opposite'. p.28.

<sup>492</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'Inspiration Exchange: The Value of Sitting Opposite'. p.28.

saxophone memory of the small significant kindnesses that conversation can perform.<sup>493</sup>

The effect of this instance of story exchange has far exceeded the initial transaction and can be felt in other areas of the participant's life, as the memory of her story-sharing and the care shown by Kelly (his preparedness to forfeit the rules of the exchange) becomes tied to feelings of kindness, rather than grief. Because the artistic competencies of storytelling and story appraisal are employed by both Third Angel and those who participate(d) in projects like *Inspiration Exchange*, *Desire Paths* and the aforementioned *Story Map*, the longevity of these projects forms part of an ongoing feedback-loop. With each performance iteration the show itself is appraised, added-to, taken-from, and paid forward towards its next iteration, thereby attaining accumulated value. To expand, the invisible art that a collaboratory engenders reflects the workings of 'invisible economics', the process through which the continued exchange of the currency causes many of its transactions to later become, themselves, 'ongoing engines of accumulation'.

The 'saxophone' participant is further unexpectedly reminded at times of her grief, of the saxophone story itself, its memory-image as a prompt, or shortcut, for a transaction from grief to kindness. As dramaturg D.J Hopkins proposes in terms of scholarly collaboration, 'the return on investment is not a mere marketplace outcome but a cultural intervention', applicable too to the interventions of artworks on the daily lives of its participants and audiences.<sup>494</sup> The effects or ongoing value of works like *Inspiration Exchange* exponentially increase the value of the original story exchange in ways that are

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<sup>493</sup> Ibid.

<sup>494</sup> D. J. Hopkins, 'Collaboration', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 25.1 (2015), 83–86. p.86.

difficult to trace or quantify. The longevity of these stories is thereby intrinsically linked to the longevity of the projects, and in turn Third Angel as the originating facilitators. The *value* is a two-fold measure: of the potential for continued circulation, combined with the more intangible effects and interventions that their re-tellings propagate: their 'saxophone memories'. The *currency* of that value—the vehicle that makes its exchange possible—is the story. What is more, 'saxophone memories' is itself an example of a making-invisible (such as the symbolic economy that obscures 'art' within competencies), of a reification of the value of that story to the participant, condensed into two words: a promissory phrase that acts as proxy for the story itself. In effect, this is a short-hand use of language that removes the need to retell this story to those who have shared knowledge of it. The linguistic bridge here is an example of how the term 'economical' allows for an investigation of effective and economised working methods in artistic collaboration, as collaborators develop such diverse and layered forms of currency in the making room. Furthermore, 'saxophone memories' is also reminiscent of Keith Sawyer's creativity exercise of 'conceptual combination', through which new concepts are created by combining otherwise separate things. The results are various analogies that arise: a 'saxophone memory' could be thought of as a 'memory of a saxophone', or as 'memory that takes on the qualities of a saxophone'.<sup>495</sup> In this case, inferred by its context, the meaning may be somewhere between the two: an imagined image of the saxophone from the (remembered) story, and simultaneously something of the incongruity of the saxophone when conjured in the context of grief. The latter perhaps relates the sound of the saxophone, as something of an interruption, making itself (and the memory) known.

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<sup>495</sup> Sawyer. p.113.

The ambiguity of the 'conceptual combination' is generative, as it marks a process of a 'working through' of seemingly incompatible concepts. Akin to the tensions and dilemmas that pervade organisational management, creativity (following Sawyer's writings on *Group Genius*) seeks to create new languages to synthesise concepts.<sup>496</sup> This is a further example of the praxis at play in synthesising dialectical tensions, in this case between multiple, diverse possible combinations.

Similarly to the linguistic bridge of the 'saxophone memories' that occurred, through participatory collaboration, in *Inspiration Exchange*, Third Angel have developed a shared language internal to their making practice as a result of the longevity of their collaboration. One such phrase is 'Beware The Sofa', a warning against spending too much time in the discussion stages of a rehearsal process, and a reminder for the group to avoid the pitfalls of circular conversation (Fig. 16). Working physically in the space, live experimentation instead ensures 'you have something to respond to, together. Something that happened, not just in your imagination, but in the room.'<sup>497</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> Sawyer also proposes 'conceptual elaboration' as a term for this type of creative act: creating something new by changing only parts of something existing.

<sup>497</sup> Third Angel, 'Beware The Sofa', *D.I.Y.*, ed. by Robert Jude Daniels (University of Chichester, 2014). 128-130. p.129.

# BEWARE THE SOFA

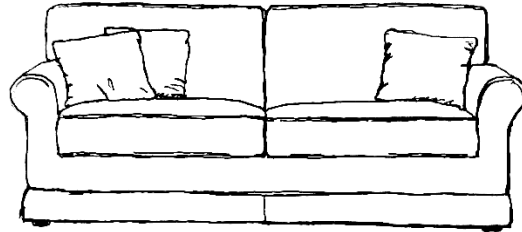


Fig. 16: Original drawing for *D.I.Y* edited collection (Alex Kelly)

'Beware The Sofa' is exemplary of an internal economical method: the value of the phrase exceeds its initial meaning, and provokes action without need for an explicit agreement in any given instance. This phrase not only builds upon the example of 'saxophone memories', but exemplifies an exchange of energies, from verbal discourse to somatic practice (kinaesthetic, haptic): the three-word phrase acting as the currency for this exchange, a promise to 'get up and do something'.<sup>498</sup> I suggest that 'Beware The Sofa' is therefore also a warning against idleness, a language of previval that has become adopted into the very values and ethics of the company itself, that proclaims: "beware the sofa, remain vital".

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<sup>498</sup> Ibid.

ii. *Maintaining the System*

The concept of the shared language reframes an aforementioned dialectical synthesis, identified by Savage and Symonds from the field of economics: 'co-labour'. Just as Wright has proposed a paradox of artistic collaboration, in that its role *as* 'art' disappears within the multiple competencies of the collaborating group, Savage and Symonds address that which becomes *more* apparent, through multi-vocality. They argue that:

To be co-labourers [...] a pooling of resources and a maximisation of the economies of scale, can deliver production figures far in excess of the output of individuals: 'more than the sum of the parts'.<sup>499</sup>

'More than the sum of the parts' is used to imply a parallel between the collaborative nature of theatre and performance as syncretic artforms, that exist precisely as a result of 'a pooling of resources', artistic competencies and shared values and ethics.<sup>500</sup> Co-labourers' voices and values are amplified in their multiplicity, even where there may be elements of friction or dissensus. Certainly, in the case of Third Angel, it is not clear from watching a performance if-and-when such disagreements in the devising process might have occurred, and the final product is attributed to Third Angel regardless of how much material—or consensus—was contributed to by any individual member.<sup>501</sup> In a short

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<sup>499</sup> Savage and Symonds. p.62.

<sup>500</sup> Keith Sawyer also refers to this phrase in a chapter titled 'The Power of Collaboration' suggesting that 'the [creative] sparks fly faster' when 'creativity unfolds across people'. (2007, p.7)

<sup>501</sup> The earlier example of Kelly's omitted line from the making process of *What I Heard...* illustrates how disagreement is also not necessarily targeted, but rather occurs as part of an ongoing and mutual process of group appraisal.

essay titled 'Stories We Didn't Tell' Third Angel describe another piece of omitted material from *What I Heard...*:

Alex was a bit in love with the story of the Friendly Floatees, thousands of plastic bath toys spilled from a cargo ship, now being used by oceanographers to track tidal currents as they make their way around the world, some of them apparently endlessly.<sup>502</sup>

This story was omitted from the final version because it was considered not to fit within the eventual parameters and rules of the show. Much like the earlier reference to Thorpe's 'unexplained rules' that define the structure of *Parts for Machines...*, when a project's parameters emerge through collaborative devising their origin may not be explicitly known but are nonetheless recognised by the group. In further illustration, Uninvited Guests' Paul Clarke writes of Forced Entertainment that:

[They] talk about the point in rehearsal at which the show becomes 'it', takes on an autonomous identity. [...] Robin Arthur, performer, states that 'although I am in 'it' and I have helped to make 'it' I know that 'it' is not mine' [...] Perhaps it is precisely because Arthur and Etchells are in the performance system that they are unable to perceive its functioning without turning it into something other than themselves.<sup>503</sup>

The suggestion here is that the show is simultaneously related to its makers, and yet exceeds them: their co-authorship does not necessarily imply ownership. This is further evidence of Wright's suggestion of the 'disappearance' or assimilation of art within collaboration, in this case how the performance system exceeds the 'sum of its parts', as the individual competencies of its makers are further assimilated into the workings of the

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<sup>502</sup> Third Angel, *There's A Room: Three Performance Texts by Third Angel*. p.133.

<sup>503</sup> Clarke. p.vii-viii.



show, whilst the makers' individual authorship becomes dispersed. Once makers can remove themselves from the 'inside' system of the collaboration, and to perceive the artwork from the 'outside', it takes on an 'autonomous identity' that stands apart from its originators. Similarly, according to Clarke, Etchells and Arthur, the work only becomes autonomous once a maker has either recognised 'it' as its own entity, or otherwise deliberately extricated themselves from it (whether temporarily or permanently). By combining the exposures of the apparent contradictions of artistic collaboration (art disappears in collaboration) with the synthesis of co-labour (sharing vocality amplifies it) another tension emerges: a collaborative system is imperceptible to its contributors until it becomes autonomous, as something that exceeds its makers and takes on a newly synthesised whole. In this way, a collaborative project has its own potential, that separates the possibility of its longevity from that of the group configuration that made it.

From their perspective of the touring process of *What I Heard...*, Third Angel explained how 'each of these [shows] felt like different versions of the same room, and somehow still familiar to perform in.'<sup>504</sup> The venues became collaborators as their hosts gathered different items to adorn the stage (a stuffed giraffe acquired from a nightclub in Lisbon was replaced with a taxidermy owl in Helsinki, and the full-sized 'office zebra' in Bytom).<sup>505</sup> The result, over time, is a show that feels 'familiar' to its makers, yet is no longer fully their own. Emerging from this example is how the autonomy of a project is realised by separation, from stepping outside of its workings, but not requiring this

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<sup>504</sup> Third Angel, *There's A Room: Three Performance Texts by Third Angel*. p.136.

<sup>505</sup> Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: Edinburgh Blogpost 2: Postcard from Poland'.

separation to be permanent. As Laermans suggests, 'the shared experience of an ever-renewed potentiality,' is accompanied by 'a never-drying-up *potenza* [power, force] that empowers those involved and socially unites without any substantial "we".<sup>506</sup> An open-ended project such as *Inspiration Exchange* is an autonomous 'engine of accumulation', in that it holds an archive of stories that is a form of self-sustaining commons, to which Third Angel are merely facilitators and part-custodians. The potential, or collective power of commonality represents another currency in the economics of performance, the currency paid forward and accumulated by the autonomous work that exceeds the individual. To convincingly adopt the power of collective action as a currency of this collaboratory system, a further step is needed, both for these theoretical purposes and for companies to be able to assert (and manipulate) this currency in practice. Participants of *Inspiration Exchange* and *Desire Paths* (as well as collaborators of *What I Heard...* and the wider body of Third Angel's work) generate collective power but, I propose, as an output generated by another currency 'paid in' to the system. Wallis and McKinney (drawing on Adam Arvidsson's extension of Aristotle) introduce the concept of '*philia*', as the social force that draws groups together. I suggest that *philia* is the currency of the value of social organisation itself: for Wallis and McKinney, *philia* denotes the ability to contribute to social production and create community; they suggest that '*philia*, like capital, can be accumulated', that '*philia* generates *philia*'.<sup>507</sup> Developing this argument, playwright and dramatist Steve Gooch, implicitly expresses that 'commitment [to the collective] in the real sense is, ultimately, a matter of control, and the quality of involvement with a show's content still remains the most important and exciting aspect

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<sup>506</sup> Rudi Laermans, "'Being in Common": Theorizing Artistic Collaboration'. p.100.

<sup>507</sup> Wallis and McKinney. p.74.

of the collective approach to producing theatre'.<sup>508</sup> Gooch implies that by giving high quality involvement in the work, contributors gain emotional and creative investment; disseminating control among the collective is a democratising act that actually generates power, rather than diluting it. Following this, the force that amplifies unified voices is therefore not latent: it can be facilitated, and I propose that *philia* is the currency that enables its acquisition and accumulation. Third Angel, as the name given to a wide and oft-reorganising group of collaborators, holds a collective *philia*, symbolic and social capital that is associated with the company itself. I further argue that the extent to which *philia* is generated can be economised: decisions can be made by the company to increase its *philia*, and therefore its ability to bring together communities. The power and potential of the ever-renewing collaboratory project, such as *Inspiration Exchange* or *Desire Paths*, is reliant on the ability of the maker, here Third Angel, to establish a participatory format that can, in turn, accumulate its own value autonomously as it continues into the future. These decisions can be conducted at an overarching strategic level, and/or indeed at a tactical one.

### *iii. Strategy and Tactics*

As with the apparent paradox of autonomy—the ability (or inability) of a maker to extricate themselves from the system of which they are a part—this is achievable (deparadoxed) through adopting a role that oscillates between tactician and strategist.

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<sup>508</sup> Gooch. p.40.

Clarke suggests (via Michel de Certeau) that 'strategy' is 'a practice employing scopic/visual knowledges, whereas tactics draw on complex somatic/body knowledges'.<sup>509</sup> Third Angel's 'Beware The Sofa', for example, illustrates a key movement in processes of devising that takes a company from a strategy phase to employing practical tactics in pursuit of that strategy. Arguably, the terms can be distinguished by viewing strategy as the 'what and why' and tactics as 'the how'.<sup>510</sup> The two are closely interrelated, as Clarke suggests:

In a collaborative process the relationship between strategies and tactics is symbiotic and oscillatory: choices and selections are made both in the event of practice and afterwards whilst reflecting on practices from a theoretical/theatrical position "outside".<sup>511</sup>

The appraisal of the collaboration is conducted by the company itself, both during and after an iteration of a project. This is an example of another feedback loop, as the strategy is appraised and adjusted in relation to the results of the tactics employed (in this case, the specific combination of elements that make up the performance). The ability to conduct such appraisal, however, is not always an overtly planned activity but also occurs precisely as part of the shared language of a company. This aptitude for oscillatory appraisal is also part of an economical working method that is both efficient and effective; it effectively moves the collective closer to achieving its strategy, and does so efficiently with minimal wastage (effort, time, distrust, confusion and so forth). Etchells of Forced Entertainment identified:

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<sup>509</sup> Clarke. p.v.

<sup>510</sup> Enrique Burches and Marta Burches, 'Efficacy, Effectiveness and Efficiency in the Health Care: The Need for an Agreement to Clarify Its Meaning', 2020. p.3.

<sup>511</sup> Clarke. p.v.

Each of us [in the company] has her or his own way of behaving, surviving and of generating change in the particular strange landscape, environment or trap of that work. Each of us over thirty years of collective practice has accumulated skills, tactics, modes, ways of thinking – some individuated, many of them common/shared, overlapping.<sup>512</sup>

These 'traps' reflect possible stagnations and pitfalls in the devising process, that can be averted by the accumulated survival skills and tactics of a collaborating group's members, like 'Beware The Sofa' that compresses the distance between sofa strategy and studio tactics. Over time, as Clarke (a practising theatre-maker) proposes, 'new elements which emerge in devising are incorporated into a "growing" performance territory – a code/logic held and remembered in practice'.<sup>513</sup> Clarke suggests that (akin to Pierre Bourdieu's "'body memories'") through longevity of practice the group come to 'embody a sense of the company's aesthetic borders', through which a 'recognisable signature evolves and with it the notion of an aesthetic field/territory proper to a particular group of collaborators'.<sup>514</sup> I apply this model to the case of Third Angel, defining them as the system itself, or more appropriately in the context of 'body memories', the *corpus*. The recognisable signature of their collective endeavours is held by overlapping collaborators, that exist both as part of this plural memory-system, and also within the wider contemporary theatre network. This recognisable signature in turn generates the *philia* that both entices and sustains the communities organised around its common values, ethics and goals. Furthermore, these body memories (individual or collective) consist both of the successes of the group, and also of a record of progressions, adaptations

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<sup>512</sup> Etchells. p.88.

<sup>513</sup> Clarke. p.60.

<sup>514</sup> Clarke. p.vii.

and failures that become 'subsumed into the habitus' of the company itself: 'Beware The Sofa' exists to avoid a 'trap' that the company or its external collaborators have fallen prey to in the past.<sup>515</sup> In this way, the appraisal of recurrent threats and 'traps' becomes part of the previal of the company (their use of preemptive acts of survival).

As with the 'perceptual habitus' that Wright identifies—as a result of a move in participatory practices from art-as-performance to art-as-competencies—the re-introduction of the term *habitus* here, through Clarke's assessment, supposes that the body memories of the collective may, in cases of repeated collaborations, remove the need for short-hand verbal languages altogether as they become part of normalised social behaviours and habits. Through the experience of collaborative working over time, the ability to identify risks, threats and 'traps' is honed. Spooner of Unlimited Theatre comments:

[W]e'll be very clear with partners and go 'we can't do that.' 'Why?' 'Because it's going to be horrible, probably fail.' But when we're doing it, I think some people [new collaborators] have found that on occasion it's a bit of struggle. 'We're not having a conversation about this', 'why not?', 'because this is how it's gonna have to work.' Mostly [due to] the experience that you have of it.<sup>516</sup>

Through this example, Spooner draws attention to what he considers an important factor with collaborative work, in that the inside system has to remain open and adaptable to the influence of new outside collaborators, being aware of an established-company *a priori*: behaviours or signatures that may not be fully recognised by the group members,

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<sup>515</sup> Clarke. p.102.

<sup>516</sup> Spooner and Fellman.

but are nonetheless present.<sup>517</sup> If this same situation occurred for Third Angel, something like 'Beware The Sofa' might suffice as a substitute for Spooner's 'we're not having a conversation about this' but is only effective once a collaborator has been inducted into the collective language. Equally, the habits and competencies born out of the body memories of the company members cannot be passed on as instruction, but rather must be learnt and entered into through practice, as Spooner elaborates:

On the flip [side] of that, when we were making *Future Bodies*, me and Claire were working mostly with Abbie and Helen from RashDash. And then Becky came into it a bit later. Parts of the process, Claire and I would go 'let's do this', and they'd go, 'we want to do *this*'. Me and Claire, we know where you're going to end up, if you go through that process, because we've done it. And we could either dig our heels in, or actually, [acknowledge that] it's important for them to go through that process.<sup>518</sup>

Phrases like 'Beware The Sofa' become, then, useful entry-level references for new collaborators to quickly grasp the language and signatures of the company, and their presence indicates a wider practice of previval—as they take preemptive action to protect the collective—that, I suggest, becomes second-nature to those companies that have survived, or collaborated over time. If, as I have proposed, the longevity of a company accumulates value where it continues to 'spend' its currencies, some of this value is returned in the form of experience. Third Angel and their contemporaries appear to have adopted both the logic of economical practices and the economising nature of

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<sup>517</sup> This type of instinctive working comes close to parallels Savage and Symonds make to the economical efforts of the beehive.

<sup>518</sup> Spooner and Fellman.

learnt experience into their shared operating languages, such that future-proofing the efficiency of the making room is integral to the process in the present.

A tactic can be the catalyst for reconfiguring frictions in a way that is generative. Third Angel's approach to devising work is described by Walton as identifying sets of 'tightly structured, rule-based improvisations' in response to concepts or images that inspire the content of a project: 'we don't spend hours doing free, spontaneous improvisations [...] we try to connect [the exercises] and then take the scaffolding down that's around them, so the process of making it isn't evident in the work that is shared'.<sup>519</sup> In the example of *Inspiration Exchange*, there are rules to the game: share a story and receive one in return. These rules are a tactic to achieve the overall strategy, the aims of the project itself. Yet, in the case of *Inspiration Exchange*, the game and its rules are the very thing that come to define the project, as that which governs the collaborative transaction that constitutes it. In most cases games and their constituent rules involve the management of competition. In the case of *Inspiration Exchange* the competition is against the game itself: can we build an experience together, and grow a collection of stories for others to enjoy? Akin to the antagonism that gift-giving enacts, *Inspiration Exchange* is a game that cannot be 'won' or 'lost', a game deparadoxed by removing the oppositions altogether. As the project is passed forward to new contributors and custodians the autonomy of the created system exceeds the dissensus or friction that may have occurred in collaboration, to the point that a strategy, or a shared voice, may be the 'common ground' that stitches the collective together. Any dissensus is forgotten and lost, while those small antagonisms and disagreements

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<sup>519</sup> Rachael Walton, 'Rachael Walton (Third Angel) – Essential Drama'.



become part of an archive of tactics (some documented, some remembered), as do the tactical-strategic oscillations that permeated its functioning.

The autonomous product resulting from the collaborating group subsumes its process, as the 'scaffolding' is taken down, separating its present iteration from the tactics of its making. The scaffolding's removal, however, does not signal a possible collapse, rather the autonomous nature of the product allows it to stand, defiantly, on its own. It is defiant because it survives outside of its makers, and it survives because of its defiance. Katsouraki argues that the "'resilient subject" is the one who fundamentally embodies resistance in the mode of survival as expressed by the motto "To live to fight another day"', so that survival is not in fact the objective, but is part of a process of embodied resilience.<sup>520</sup> Survival, expressed in this phrase is a 'Beware The Sofa' to the everyday precarity of postmodern life, a warning and recognition of protective and anticipatory pre-emption. The 'fight' for survival is not one besieging from 'outside', however, but rather occurs within like the 'Trojan Horse'<sup>521</sup>, in this case challenging systemic hegemony through self-reflexivity and adaptability.<sup>522</sup> This develops the logic of 'owning' or 'inhabiting' one's precarity (introduced in Chapter 1), and indeed Wright's embedded competencies of 'invisible' art; all conceptualising a counterintuitive and deliberately *visible* stance whereby the actual antagonisms the company performs are 'camouflaged'. A performance company in the UK in the early 2020s, as it strives for regular government

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<sup>520</sup> Katsouraki. p.302.

<sup>521</sup> Katsouraki describes in further detail: 'the wooden horse that screams for attention, until it is invited in, presents us also with a deeply theatrical image, exposing theatre's duplicity—in its double, as a political instrument that reimagines resistance, from antagonistic opposition to cataclysmic antagonism taking place right at the heart of the adversary's, or indeed enemy's, camp'. (p.301)

<sup>522</sup> Ibid.

'NPO' funding, is 'camouflaged as part of the hegemonic system, and even appearing ideologically defused by expressing a certain apparent synergy between dominant neoliberal trends of thinking and practices of power'.<sup>523</sup> To expand further, and following Bala's suggestion that impact is multi-directional, contemporary theatre performed under the auspices of Arts Council England may use its platform to critique the socio-political climate in which it is a part, despite its subsistence coming from those in power. To return to Chadbourn's comments on the values she identifies in the longevity of Forced Entertainment:

[I]f you do overtly issue-based work, then people understand that you have a relationship to the society that you exist in. If your work articulates that relationship in a more abstract way, then it's not necessarily thoroughly understood that this is something in relation to the society we live in. [...] And there's something really—again, shared values within the company members—around what it means to live in this society that we live in, what it means to understand inequality, what it means to understand conflicts: [...] there is a sort of politics of this work. But it's not *about* the conflict. It's those kinds of values that also informs, I think, the sort of the longevity, the sense of commenting on, reflecting, understanding, articulating something about the confusion of the time that we live in, about the sort of uncertainties [we share].<sup>524</sup>

Chadbourn's words suggest a timeless resilience in that Forced Entertainment remain contextually socio-politically relevant, by not being overtly so. Third Angel's own attestations of an inadvertently or inherently political methodology can be taken as evidence of Katsouraki's 'Trojan Horse' at work. I agree that *What I Heard About the World*, *Inspiration Exchange* and *Desire Paths* have demonstrated this to a strong degree,

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<sup>523</sup> Katsouraki. p.307.

<sup>524</sup> Chadbourn and Fellman.

as all three projects engage with established neoliberal twin paradoxes or antagonistic pairs—yours or ours, local or global, owned or emancipated, true or false—whilst doing so through the complex exchange of intangible, invisible values.

In relation to these invisible values, I argue that in several of Third Angel's works the value of a story is not necessarily equated with its truthfulness; blurring the binaries of fact and fiction to generate a value in the incomplete and unknown. When packing the van to take *What I Heard...* on tour, Kelly reflected:

I'm thinking about how, on one level, these stories of stand-ins are metaphors; their subject matter reflects the job they do as we carry them in our heads - as a stand-in for knowledge[...] A series of fakes, carefully crafted to let us believe we see the real thing.<sup>525</sup>

I suggest that this artistic device is also a form of organisational or administrative camouflaging, in part, made possible by the creative claim that work is simultaneously fact and fiction; this device keeps funders abreast of innovative artistic content, whilst providing audiences with detective-power and self-recognition in the work (the winks and nods of shared experience). In particular, the focus on true-but-outlandish stories collected for *What I Heard...*, privileging stories about 'stand-ins', such as the 'Flat Daddy' cut-outs of US servicemen given to their children back home (Fig. 17), deliberately walks that line. By contrast, the use of false stories added to early versions of *Class of '76*, mixing the 'sublime and the ridiculous', chooses to blur the line.

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<sup>525</sup> Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: Packing the Van'.



Fig. 17: 'Flat Daddy' life-sized cut-out in the Third Angel archive (Rob Fellman)

The invitations in *Inspiration Exchange* and *Desire Paths* do not specify whether a story should be fact or fiction. Rather they are invitations to learn from their happening and therefore to take something of value away. Third Angel's covert politics can be seen as a form of 'resilience-as-resistance', rather than an explicit opposition.<sup>526</sup> I propose that this very invitation to participate is antagonistic in nature and expresses resilience-as-resistance through the act of blurring fact and fiction, so that the visibility of the antagonism is obscured.<sup>527</sup> If community connection and collective action are values with

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<sup>526</sup> Katsouraki. p.302-3.

<sup>527</sup> Wright. p.536.

stories as a currency—as Third Angel also suggest—that circulates and accumulates these values, the role of the storyteller is that of the community-organiser, the peddler of *philia* that, through its gravitational pull of audiences and participants, accumulates a collective power-for-potential that guarantees to ‘fight another day’. Third Angel’s very acknowledgement of the ‘value of sitting opposite’ may well get to the heart of their own previal: not only a recognition *of* that value, which I also identify, but the simultaneous realisation that this *is* a value that can be accumulated through the exchange of stories as its currency.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have charted how Third Angel’s collaborative and participatory practice, both in its form and content, defers completeness, and in turn accumulates value that both perpetuates and reinforces its longevity. Third Angel’s work evidences a comfort in incompleteness and an instinctive methodology that challenges various opposing tensions: agility and vision; economic, social and artistic values; open and closed systems of collaboration; strategies and tactics. They approach these tensions in an oscillatory and multi-directional fashion, shifting between different modes of working and ultimately deferring any attempt at their resolution, even assimilating these tensions as part of what propels their work. As Kelly wrote in 2012: ‘if I’ve learned anything about making work in the last 17 years, it’s that you should trust your instinct and that the next thing you make should be the piece that you, or your collaborators, *need* to make next. The thing that preoccupies you. The story that bothers you, or moves you. I’m interested in letting *Cape Wrath* [then in progress] evolve, rather like the touring version of *Class of ’76* did,

into whatever it will become[...]<sup>528</sup> As noted previously, the documentary mode of performance itself is somewhat contradictory, as a combination of both practice and research; Third Angel's oscillatory engagement with both reinforces this signature of their work (as Chapter 5 goes on to discuss). I have demonstrated in this chapter how value and exchange is inherent in collaborations, as a form of 'invisible economics' that can, on interrogation, make-visible the antagonism of the 'system' or context of which it is a part. By turning values into exchangeable or flowing currencies, the potential and self-sustaining longevity of Third Angel's practice can be seen as a generative process that arises from challenging tensions, where transactions between apparently fixed poles may otherwise not be immediately recognisable.

Hard to quantify or predict, longevity of practice is more often a welcome bi-product of an effective company strategy, rather than something written into the business plan; Stan's Café's James Yarker identified in interview, longevity for him has been achieved by 'not thinking of longevity as an aim'.<sup>529</sup> Longevity is encumbered with contradiction in itself, as it exists at an optimal conjoining of related concepts of *pre-* and *sur-*vival: as Yarker suggests, longevity can be achieved by acknowledging 'all your experience and your contacts and your momentum' and yet simultaneously 'trying to keep the energy of having just started'.<sup>530</sup> The work (currency) of Third Angel is that which engages with its own potentiality: its ability to adapt, to renew, to be passed on, seen in the versions of *What I Heard About the World* adapted for different national

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<sup>528</sup> Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: Of Work Made and Un-Made' <<https://thirdangeluk.blogspot.com/2012/04/of-work-made-and-un-made.html>> [accessed 2 September 2022].

<sup>529</sup> Yarker and Fellman.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid.

audiences; the reconstruction 'gaps' left unexplained in *Parts for Machines that Do Things* for audiences to interpret; the recurring imagery of phone boxes, empty benches, maps, hand-drawing activities, and the Voyager space probes. This constituent propensity of their work to 'bounce forward' becomes the currency whose flow, in part, determines the recognisable frame and signature of the company. This chapter has demonstrated that the longevity of Third Angel's performance practice is not only effective in propagating this currency, but the longer it continues, the richer it becomes.

## 5. Collecting and Legacy: Deciding the Future

### Introduction

In March 2020, Third Angel held a crisis meeting (as did many Arts organisations around the world). The tour of their show *The Department of Distractions* (2018-20) was cancelled after three weeks, to protect the cast from illness due to the spread of Covid-19; they took the decision shortly before the pandemic forced theatre doors to close, which caused companies and audiences alike to experiment with alternative formats. Much of the digital-first performance content produced during this time was not entirely novel, though the speed with which many companies made digital recordings available or created online versions of current shows was (to use a term hackneyed by the media during this period) unprecedented. At the time, it was not known how serious or how lasting this pandemic would be. Third Angel opted to create 'a companion piece' for *The Department of Distractions*, a play-by-mail and 'virtual experience with real world challenges' to 'be enjoyed from home: part puzzle, part film, part game, part theatre, part real life.'<sup>531</sup> The project was titled *The Distraction Agents* (2021-23). The company acknowledged in June 2021:

The pandemic has hit the arts hard, as you are no doubt aware, and it has hit freelancers the hardest. We specifically wanted to create work for as wide a group as we could afford to. We don't know yet if or when *The Department of*

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<sup>531</sup> Third Angel, 'The Distraction Agents Inspirations', 2021 <<https://thirdangel.co.uk/blog/the-distraction-agents-inspirations>> [accessed 18 June 2021].



*Distractions* will be able to tour again, so this [*The Distraction Agents*] was important to us.<sup>532</sup>

The context of the pandemic in relation to *The Department of Distractions* and *The Distraction Agents* is important to acknowledge and marks a significant crisis that the company have navigated in recent history. A company's longevity doesn't necessarily make them impervious to future crises, though it does indicate a well-practiced resilience.

Third Angel's particular brand of resilience, as I have proposed thus far, is part-evident in their signature use of unfinished stories and recurring images that stitch their performances and projects together as part of an ever-expanding web of connections. Some projects continue while others are committed to the archives, yet in the complexity of this web it is not always clear where one starts and another ends. Much of my preliminary field research for this thesis attempted to redraw these connections: locating objects and texts from Third Angel's archive, to establish possible origins of these recurrent images and references.<sup>533</sup> Another of Third Angel's own performative signatures, particularly evident in *The Department of Distractions*, takes the form of acts of detective-work that attempt to re-tell or reconfigure facts and stories. One section of the playtext is titled 'Detective Story', and the characters refer to (and try to solve) 'The Case of the Missing Traffic and Travel Announcer'.<sup>534</sup> Third Angel self-reflect:

*The Department of Distractions* knowingly plays with some of the tropes of detective fiction, such as red herrings & Easter eggs, as a stylistic and thematic

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<sup>532</sup> Third Angel, 'The Distraction Agents Inspirations'.

<sup>533</sup> In 2022 I even attempted to trace some of these recurrences in a performance presentation for an audience at the TaPRA Conference (hosted by Essex University).

<sup>534</sup> Third Angel, *The Department of Distractions*, Oberon Modern Plays (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020). p.34.

devices [*sic*]. [...] Inevitably, this burying of clues has continued with *The Distraction Agents*. There are references to the original theatre show itself, as well as nods to other ideas, sources and inspirations.<sup>535</sup>

As I have mirrored a similar approach of archive-based detective work—identifying the ‘Easter eggs’ and following the ‘red herrings’—this thesis itself becomes both an extension and confirmation of the company’s own research-centric preferences and reportage-style storytelling. ‘Playing detective’ is referenced in the childhood dreams of *Class of ’76*, and also appeared in Kelly’s audio performance by that name (*Playing Detective* [2013]).<sup>536</sup> By similarly ‘playing detective’, I identify: the relationships that exist between the pieces of information in Third Angel’s archive, the knowledge held by its members and the different types of accumulated knowledge that become manifest in their working methods. I also argue that accumulated knowledge generates creative insight, often distinct kinds that would be otherwise unachievable. Through a reverse application of creativity-psychologist Keith Sawyer’s ‘Collaborative Web’, I show longevity of practice as both positively affecting existing creative outputs and adding value to past projects.<sup>537</sup>

This chapter also argues that Third Angel’s methodology is better termed ‘research-as-practice’, than the more widely used ‘practice-as-research’. I expand on Sawyer’s ‘Collaborative Web’ to reveal how Third Angel’s mode of ‘research-as-practice’, as I refer to it, is part of their collecting-and-reuse methodology, to which I incorporate a related analogy proposed by Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean called the ‘Iterative Cyclic

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<sup>535</sup> Third Angel, ‘The Distraction Agents Inspirations’.

<sup>536</sup> The recording can be heard here: <https://thirdangeluk.blogspot.com/search/label/playingdetective>.

<sup>537</sup> Sawyer.

Web'.<sup>538</sup> Their analogy supports my use of 'research-as-practice' as practice that is not research-first, or research-led, but rather a constantly reconfiguring process in which research plays a vital role *as* a form of performative practice itself.<sup>539</sup> By combining the collaborative web and cyclic web models, I propose that research-as-practice is herewith identified to be a key proponent of Third Angel's company longevity to date.

Having introduced the research-performance relationship in relation to two 'web' models, I proceed first in Part One by establishing the role of research and practice via Third Angel's most recent projects on either side of the Covid-19 rupture, *The Department of Distractions* and *The Distraction Agents*. In relation to these case studies, I demonstrate my further distinction of research-as-practice as a mode of collecting-and-reuse. I then progress with an assessment of the traces of Third Angel's unrealised projects held in the company archive, which I propose are key to company longevity because they expose the otherwise-unseen practices, inner workings and motivations behind the company's project 'completion decisions'. I apply Archer and Livingston's aforementioned study on completion in collaborative arts practice to illustrate this suggestion.<sup>540</sup> Furthermore, I propose that the consideration of such 'practices' as becoming, over time, company-level aptitudes (a concept introduced in Chapter 3) broadens the concern from purely artistic to organisational and systemic practices that are influenced by the creative methods and outputs of the company's core activity. To

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<sup>538</sup> Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean, 'Introduction: Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice - towards the Iterative Cyclic Web', in *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 1–38.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid.

<sup>540</sup> Livingston and Archer.

conclude Part One, I then bring the concept of 'inside' and 'outside' systems, as established in Chapters 3 and 4, to bear upon both the recent projects and those unrealised.

In Part Two I demonstrate how Third Angel's collecting-and-reuse contributes to their previval, as a form of preemptive legacy-making. This leads into a final consideration of the company's future plans (both in the present, and as they *have been* in the past) as integral to the shaping of their own longevity and legacy beyond. Building on earlier chapters this, Chapter 5, further bridges the gap between creative methodologies and company-wide aptitudes. Third Angel's unrealised projects and those recently produced overlap considerably, and as such I present them in tandem where such overlaps are expedient to the line of enquiry. Furthermore, Third Angel's then-current and (past) future plans also intersect in this analysis, in part, as this reflects the working practices of the company as I observed it: *The Distraction Agents* had recently sold out at the time of writing (Spring 2023), whilst a new programme titled *The Future Is Decided* had been undergoing its research and development phase, prior to the withdrawal of NPO funding. Reference will also be made to another parallel strand of Third Angel's work, mentoring and education, of which the importance to legacy-making is made explicit in relation to the intended programme for *The Future Is Decided* and the corresponding concept coined by Third Angel, 'Anywhere Theatre'. 'Anywhere Theatre' is an ethos that drove the planned development of *The Future Is Decided*, and in doing so exposed the relationship between games and performance in Third Angel's work which I illustrate, alongside game theorist Graeme Kirkpatrick's scholarship, through an

assessment of 'ludic form' in contemporary arts.<sup>541</sup> The overlap with *The Distraction Agents* is particularly noteworthy, and the development of both *The Distraction Agents* and 'Anywhere Theatre' as parallel strands is revealed to be noncoincidental. Further compounding the interrelations between creative and organisational practices, in this final section I argue that Third Angel have largely been ahead of the trend of the rising prominence of games-as-artforms, reasoning that Third Angel's 'ludic' sensibility is a form of sharing and 'gifting'. This *modus operandi*, highlighted in their approach to mentoring and education, perpetuates knowledge dissemination outwards, and indeed forwards, as the 'rules of the game' are passed on. I argue that game-playing in performance contexts, particularly in collaborative, participatory and crossover (collaboratory) settings, is a form of active teaching and mentorship and is consequently a practice of legacy-making, and therefore enhancing of longevity.

## I. Collecting

Legacy-making through collecting, the key concern of this chapter, is most evident in archival practices. Some of the key assumptions I include are built upon a foundation of archival knowledge, which is interrogated in relation to the complexity of documenting and collecting performance as a live medium. I make particular use of 'document' and 'documentation' as differentiated terms: a 'document' as that which is recorded of an

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<sup>541</sup> Graeme Kirkpatrick, 'Ludic Form and Contemporary Performance Arts', *Journal for Cultural Research*, 22.3 (2018), 325–41.

event (in this case) and is *singular* (such as a video of a performance); 'documentation' as the process by which the event, often absent in the document, is recorded and is *plural* (such as the combination of a script, soundtrack and photographs).<sup>542</sup> Both 'document' and 'documentation' are simultaneously nouns and the verbs for the acts that constitute them: respectively, 'to document' and a process of 'documentation'. With the additional inclusion of 'documentary' as both a noun and as 'consisting of, derived from, or relating to documents', which is defined as an adjective, all three variations in my usage describe a *function*.<sup>543</sup> I use these terms liberally in this chapter in relation to the contemporary digital *a priori*, acknowledging the progressively virtual nature of the spaces and places we inhabit; documents are increasingly mobile, reproducible, and often intangible.

I also consider 'archive' as an overarching concept, that encapsulates multiple strands of collecting and documentation across both creative and organisational registers: physical storage, digital traces (including blogs and online photo collections), and the embodied knowledge of members, collaborators and audiences. I argue that the term 'archive', as the place or space in which documentation is held, also encapsulates what Susan Stryker terms the 'archival imaginary' which is nonetheless 'firmly rooted in a gross materiality whose particular embodied location(s) are its necessary preconditions of possibility'. To illustrate, Google's server farm is based next to a dam and 'hydroelectric generating station'; cloud storage is, in fact, physical; fibre optic cables carry data

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<sup>542</sup> Toni Sant, 'Documenting Performance: An Introduction', *Documenting Performance: The Context and Processes of Digital Curation and Archiving*, 2017, 1–11. p.2-3.

<sup>543</sup> 'Documentary Definition and Meaning | Collins English Dictionary' <<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/documentary>> [accessed 26 April 2023].

beneath the oceans.<sup>544</sup> Similarly to my use of variations of 'documentation' to describe a function, as 'archive' is also both a noun and a verb I make deliberately loose use of the term as both *that which has been done* (archives are highly curated), and as that which is larger and more nebulous than a single place, or easily identifiable space.<sup>545</sup> Katja Gentinetta, writing for the W.I.R.E thinktank (whose provocations on longevity I cite in previous chapters) asserts that 'if art has no correlation with future happenings, it risks being static and forgotten' and as such, like the function of memory, archives must remain a 'dynamic process'.<sup>546</sup> Throughout, my analysis of collecting and reuse in relation to company longevity is supported by examples from Third Angel's archive, from multiple registers (archival collection, embodied knowledge and wider traces of influence) to reflect the complex and dynamic nature of performance company archives.

*i. The Department of Distractions*

Third Angel's *The Department of Distractions* (2018-21) debuted at Northern Stage in February 2018 (Newcastle) and a revised version opened at Sheffield Theatres in January 2019 (which I saw first-hand and later observed its re-rehearsal in early 2020 for the touring version). The company describe the show as 'a conspiracy theory

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<sup>544</sup> Susan Stryker, 'Bodies of Knowledge: Embodiment and the Archival Imaginary', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 25.64 (2010), 105–8. p.105-6.

<sup>545</sup> Paul Clarke and Julian Warren, 'Ephemera: Between Archival Objects and Events', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 30.1 (2009), 45–66. p.63.

<sup>546</sup> W.I.R.E., 'No 6 - WHAT REMAINS - A Homage to the Enduring - Abstrakt' <<https://www.thewire.ch/en/abstrakt/no-6---was-bleibt-/in-einer-unsicheren-welt-zehn-gewissheiten-von-katja-gentinetta>> [accessed 16 May 2022].

documentary-exposé detective story for the 21st century that asks: What aren't you looking at?'<sup>547</sup>



Fig. 18: *The Department of Distractions* promotional image (Von Fox Productions)

Its central characters are members of The Department (Fig. 18), a 'clandestine organisation whose job it is to plant the seeds of stories out in the world'.<sup>548</sup> In the performance, these characters draw attention to the everyday distractions we encounter, and challenge their coincidental nature. For instance, that lone glove hung on the fence: did someone lose it, or was it put there to make you stop and think 'who did it belong

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<sup>547</sup> Third Angel, 'The Department of Distractions' <<https://thirdangel.co.uk/shows-projects/the-department-of-distractions>> [accessed 2 November 2022].

<sup>548</sup> Third Angel, *The Department of Distractions*, Oberon Modern Plays (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020). p.82.



to, how did they lose it?' Performer and collaborator Umar Butt neatly summarises the show's message: 'pay more attention to the tiny details, ask more questions. Look more closely. Slow down a little.'<sup>549</sup> The Department act as somewhat of a fictional extension of Third Angel, as 'The Department themselves are storytellers', too, within the world of the play, 'and so the show explores the different ways they put stories out into the world, and includes stories within stories...'<sup>550</sup> Third Angel explain:

As we spent some time developing this idea in 2016, it occurred to us that we had been tracking the work of The Department for years. Several of our enduring interests were arguably their work: urban legends, conspiracy theories, telephone boxes, empty benches, the true stories we choose to tell (and retell) [...] clues left in the street or buried in maps or letter pages or puzzles, the small details that can have a large impact...<sup>551</sup>

Third Angel here articulate The Department as a kind of semi-autonomous group, even before Butt and colleagues personified its characters, exceeding Third Angel as a group of imagined pioneers to be 'tracked' and perhaps even revered, despite their fictional and incorporeal nature. The characters are named, and yet also each take on an additional pseudonym, or soubriquet: for instance, Butt's character chooses the name 'Paladin' in the world of the play, goes undercover as 'David', all whilst his character's 'original' name is never revealed. The relationship between The Department and Third Angel is apparent: The Department are performative insofar as they, as fictional characters, adopt characters of their own; there are thus 'stories within stories' and characters within characters. The Department represent a fictional reality that runs

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<sup>549</sup> '10 Questions: The Department of Distractions | Traverse Theatre' <<https://www.traverse.co.uk/news/10-questions-department-of-distractions>> [accessed 2 November 2022].

<sup>550</sup> Ibid.

<sup>551</sup> Third Angel, The Department of Distractions. p.84.

parallel to the everyday world—claiming the credit for the ongoing distraction of, for instance, the Royal Family or the introduction of the Vegan Sausage Roll—an untruthful organisation made real by virtue of their existence at a conceptual level (a sort of theatre-as-theology).<sup>552</sup> Their design is not to suspend disbelief as one might encounter on a naturalistic stage, not mimicking the real, but instead asking ‘what if?’ In an interview with Phil Cleaves, creator of the online research resource Essential Drama, performer-founder Walton responds to the question, in *The Department of Distractions*, ‘is reality different to truth?’

Yes I think it is. I think! The Department of Distractions deals with the nature of truth and reality and where differences lie. I think fiction and truth blend to make the reality of that moment. The context of theatre means there’s an expectation from your audience that at some point they may have to suspend their disbelief. When you enter into that contract, what’s truth and what’s lies becomes blurred anyway.<sup>553</sup>

As a group of stage-world storytellers and story makers The Department ‘create’ distractions in the verisimilitude of the play, yet—as the audience knowingly acquiesce to—many of these distractions are not newly created by The Department, but are variously retellings, re-used images, re-appropriated myths, or fantastical interpretations of the everyday.<sup>554</sup>

*The Department of Distractions* is a pivotal project in Third Angel’s legacy, as I propose it acts as a self-reflective project that draws together many signatures from their

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<sup>552</sup> Third Angel, *The Department of Distractions*. p.18.

<sup>553</sup> Rachael Walton, ‘Rachael Walton (Third Angel) – Essential Drama’.

<sup>554</sup> Third Angel’s own catalogue of everyday ‘distractions’ can be found here: <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/thedepartmentofdistractions/>

past works, as well as providing an active commentary on the role of collecting and re-use. In their introduction to the published *The Department of Distractions* text, the company explain:

Some shows arrive as a really clear idea and we just set out to make them. [...] Other shows emerge from one or more smaller starting points, and it feels more like we gradually realise that they are the next project.

[...]

I think we first identified 'The Department' in 2013 when we were making *The Life & Loves of a Nobody*. [...] In the end The Department didn't figure in *Life & Loves*. [...] And I kept thinking about them.<sup>555</sup>

Beginning their life as a creative concept, The Department became an unrealised project in their own right. Third Angel have previously referred to these offcuts as 'orphan material'.<sup>556</sup> What is particularly poignant about The Department is the way in which they have become a device for the presentation of other orphaned material. The Department, at a small leap, could be seen to represent the creative impulses of the company, as a semi-autonomous simulacrum. To further compound this suggestion, Kelly reflected on *The Department of Distractions*: 'often writing this show I have had the sensation of realising that something has happened, or is going on, rather than having invented it'.<sup>557</sup> Echoing the autonomous systems discussed in Chapter 3, not only does the show exceed the company that made it, but it also has its own register of knowledge that functions precisely because it is decentralised from the individual collaborators.

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<sup>555</sup> Third Angel, *The Department of Distractions*. p.82.

<sup>556</sup> Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: A Perfect Circle' <<https://thirdangeluk.blogspot.com/2009/09/perfect-circle.html>> [accessed 20 April 2022].

<sup>557</sup> Third Angel, *The Department of Distractions*. p.87.

To better understand the interplay between the collected pasts and the enduring practice of the company, I propose that Third Angel's inherent acts of legacy-making can be extrapolated into three modes: capture, dissemination and change. The capture of both performance documentation and peripheral documents creates a lasting record of the works of the company. The dissemination of these captured records is also crucial to the legacy of the company: if no-one knows about the records, what we might broadly term an archive (collection of such records) becomes closer to an archaeology (study of historical things), yet to be dusted off. Dissemination can refer to: archives being made publicly available (The British Library and the University of Sheffield hold some of Third Angel's performance recordings and are in discussion to adopt other documentation); to the (re)sharing of documents and images (such as through Third Angel's ongoing blog content); the recurrence of imagery across their body of work (such as air travel, maps, or the empty bench); the revival of past performances (such as 2000's *Class of '76* recurring in 2010); and the occasional recirculation of performance recordings (such as a blog post at the time of the *There's a Room* book launch, resharing footage of *What I Heard About The World* for free online streaming). This list is by no means exhaustive but illustrates the multi-faceted and active nature of dissemination that, largely, endures while Third Angel continue to operate (ahead of their planned closure). Some of these acts of dissemination *become* documentary threads, as links on websites, intertextual 'nods' or knowing affirmations between shows past and present, forming a constellation of records that all index the performance project from which they arose. Change is the third and final of the acts of legacy-making identified in this chapter, which refers to the more intangible legacy of Third Angel. However, change-acts can be located as points of departure, rupture or shift, such as: the adaptability displayed in creative decisions (such

as creating *The Distraction Agents* in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic that cancelled the tour of *The Department of Distractions*); organisational flexibility (such as employing a Digital Communications Manager in reaction to the aforementioned); and more holistically, in the change Third Angel enact upon the world, including through their mentoring schemes, their collaborations with academics and in the effects and affects of their performance works upon their audiences.

These three modes of legacy-making—capture, dissemination, and change—also interrelate in the work of Third Angel, a closer analysis of which reveals the inseparable practice of legacy-making that accompanies their approach to producing live and (predominantly) ephemeral works. As I have previously established, Third Angel's use of digression, as a storytelling technique and broader creative methodology, applies both to their project-based work and to their activity *between* projects.<sup>558</sup> In 2014 artist-performer Paula Diogo invited Kelly to join a collaborative Portuguese/Brazilian project, to 'write into a devising process'. Diogo was interested in the idea of The Department and the project became *O Grande Livro dos Pequenos Detalhes* [The Great Book of Tiny Details] (premiered in Rio de Janeiro, May 2015).<sup>559</sup> This project included both a text about the imagined Brazilian office of The Department, and a detective story, inspired by 80s TV shows. In *O Grande Livro dos Pequenos Detalhes*, the employees are contacted

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<sup>558</sup> To recapitulate, digression (as defined in the context of this thesis) is an act of divergence from an anticipated future, that eventually reconverges with the original trajectory. Digression extends beyond the narrative or storytelling arena, which takes digressions as recognised in the recent-past, and as divergences that require correction: illustrated succinctly in the phrase 'but I digress...', as the speaker recognises the digression and corrects course.

<sup>559</sup> Photos from the project can be found here: <http://ma-criacao.com/portfolio/the-great-book-of-tiny-details/?lang=en>

by 'the pissing England Office' and refer to their distant English colleagues. At the (real-world) 'Third Angel HQ', in 2016, thoughts about a 'parallel show – a UK version, about one of the England offices' began to develop.<sup>560</sup> The resulting show, *The Department of Distractions*, draws together recurrent themes and wide-ranging intertextual references, which Kelly explains was deliberate: 'In the making process we half-seriously set ourselves the challenge of including a reference to every other Third Angel show, as well as films, TV shows, comics and song lyrics, amongst other things'.<sup>561</sup> These images, once collected, are kept in circulation by the company. Empty benches, for instance, can be found in a Flickr catalogue online.<sup>562</sup> In the Third Angel archive there is a thank-you note from Diogo to Third Angel (for work on another collaborative project, *Off The White*) that contains a picture of an empty bench with two stick-drawn people sat on it, staring out to sea. The revitalisation of the image of the empty bench at various points in Third Angel's portfolio, and its further adoption and dissemination by their network of collaborators, ensures that this catalogue is not just consigned to the role of an archive, but rather defers this eventuality through recurrent reuse.

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<sup>560</sup> Third Angel, *The Department of Distractions*. p.83-4.

<sup>561</sup> Third Angel, 'The Distraction Agents Inspirations'.

<sup>562</sup> 'Empty Benches | Flickr' <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/thirdangeluk/sets/72157604833922553/>> [accessed 20 April 2022].



Fig. 19: An empty bench from Third Angel's catalogue (Third Angel)

Third Angel's preference for recurring images has a similar effect across their portfolio: continued exposure to the image of, for example, empty benches cause them to stand out for their audiences in everyday encounters, made larger than life under the spotlight. Distractions can be seen as micro-digressions that operate as interruptions to the flow of the everyday, not necessarily as digressions in a narrative sense but as momentary ruptures that pull the mental focus from the anticipated. The benches are photographed complete with their corresponding views, implying questions about their origins (who put it there, when?) and use (who has sat there before?); the framing of the images is the recurring trope that connects them (Fig. 19). This is reflected in the way of commonly describing moments of distraction or rupture as 'out of the ordinary', and in the phenomena of *déjà vu*, the frames affirm their difference from the everyday.

Referring back to the proposed modes of legacy-making in Third Angel's work, both the distraction and the recurring image illustrate the crossover between organisational legacy-making, and creative legacy-making. The distractions in *The Department of Distractions* are often disseminations of recurrent imagery: such imagery is (re)captured, in that it is temporarily held apart from its surrounding mundanity; it is simultaneously disseminated, as the well-defined image lingers in the memory of its audience; the remembered image changes, written over as more encounters of a similar nature become related to the same. For instance, the more empty benches one encounters, the more potent their image becomes. *The Department of Distractions* is a prime case study for considering Third Angel's approach to legacy and longevity for this reason, as it represents the way in which a long-collaborating group generate new registers of knowledge through the amalgamations of others. In this case, the past archive meets current practice, and in *The Department of Distractions* the two become separately indeterminate. I argue that this tendency reflects Archer and Livingston's concept of 'extended completion decisions', that also refers to Third Angel's wider practice of making.<sup>563</sup> Furthermore, it provides a correlation between the unrealised projects, and projects like *The Department of Distractions* that have been realised over time, and in various guises, from *O Grande Livro dos Pequenos Detalhes* in 2015, to *The Distraction Agents* five years later.

I propose that Third Angel often extend completion decisions in their work, not by delaying the making of decisions, but rather by deferring or withholding the specific decisions that lead to the completion or 'end' of a given project. Archer and Livingston

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<sup>563</sup> Livingston and Archer.



propose that a work is considered complete when a decision is made to 'terminate the creative process and the revisions it entails'. This involves 'a forwarding-looking intention, namely the intention to refrain from making any further artistically relevant changes to the work'.<sup>564</sup> An indefinitely extended completion occurs where this statement cannot be fully applied. It follows that Third Angel's works can rarely be considered complete by traditional art-world standards, as is often the case for many devised projects. Third Angel consider the studio version of a project as separate from the evolving project that is received by an audience:

We often (and I'm sure many other theatre makers do, too) talk about a new piece being 'ready for an audience'. We don't mean it's finished, but rather that we're not going to learn much more about it in the rehearsal room; we need the live response of an audience to give it a new, different energy. We're ready for the clarity and inspiration that performing to people-who-haven't-seen-this-before gives you.<sup>565</sup>

Even *The Department of Distractions*, a show fully realised in front of audiences, underwent some revisions in its re-rehearsal prior to the planned tour; the process of 'clarity and inspiration' is not restricted to those first iterations shared with the public. Archer and Livingston further suggest that a completion decision is a 'psychological event' in which the maker compounds forward-looking with 'a retrospective assessment or evaluation of the results of prior work', which suggests a meeting of evaluation and intent. If the 'assessment' of a completion decision is based on a company's past work, the subsequent cancellation and resultant making of *The Distraction Agents* suggests,

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<sup>564</sup> Livingston and Archer. p.445-6.

<sup>565</sup> Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: 600 People Update' <<https://thirdangeluk.blogspot.com/2013/04/600-people-update.html>> [accessed 4 March 2023].

again, a deferral of completion that echoes their earlier practices (as with *Class of '76*, discussed in Chapter 2). I argue that Third Angel's work can rarely be considered wholly complete, though versions and iterations are marked out as *having happened*, and in some cases much time has lapsed since their occurrence. What cannot be confirmed is whether earlier projects will ever return as references in, or influences on, future work. By this logic, Third Angel's realised works are neither incomplete nor fully complete; they are simultaneously marked as past events and—as a signature of their 'prior work'—have open-ended potential for revival or reuse. For instance, it could not have been foreseen that *The Distraction Agents* would splinter off from *The Department of Distractions* and carry on the legacy of the imagined Department. If past shows are iterative, whilst their encompassing projects are indeterminably open, it raises further complexity between realised and unrealised works: certainly, in the case of Third Angel the difference between these two states is whether or not projects, in part or in full, reached public reception or not (at least under their designated titles and in their intended forms). Throughout the chapters of this thesis I argue that longevity is contingent on the deferral of an 'end' and an extension of 'life' (a dilemma across all the fields to which longevity relates). I argue that my evaluation of Third Angel's unrealised projects reveals their practices of collecting and archiving as a challenge the well-known idiom that an artist is only ever as good as their last work.

ii. *Unrealised Projects*

In a 2008 blog post titled 'Unrealised Projects', Kelly reflects on a short film by Third Angel of the same name: 'watching it again now, it's worth noting that one of the unrealised projects I talk about in the film, *Evidence*, is back on our to-do list, having been re-invigorated by our work with Teatro Praga in Lisboa', Portugal.<sup>566</sup> It is useful to acknowledge here that 'unrealised' is Third Angel's own term for these projects and does not necessarily mean that they are 'unmade', as some may instead be 'unfinished', and therefore part-made. I use the three terms 'unrealised', 'unmade' and 'unfinished' in this chapter, though I treat 'unrealised' as the umbrella term that encompasses both others. Archer and Livingston prefer to group unrealised projects or orphaned material under the same banner, as 'a draft or sketch or first attempt for a work' [...] 'set aside' and 'on reserve'.<sup>567</sup> Reasons vary for the stop-start nature of some projects, like *Evidence*, versus the latency of others; financial constraints, funding rejections, natural evolution (becoming other projects), a lack of interest, or a combination of multiple of these factors could see projects side-lined.<sup>568</sup> Patrick Duggan muses on the forms and content of works like *Parts For Machines That Do Things* in which the staging of 'wreckage', 'whether through personal narrative, the detritus of performance or the crumpled remains of the fuselage of an aircraft, is a means of trying to deal with the calamity, a

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<sup>566</sup> Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: Unrealised Projects'  
<<https://thirdangeluk.blogspot.com/2008/06/unrealised-projects.html>> [accessed 20 April 2022].

<sup>567</sup> Livingston and Archer. p.444.

<sup>568</sup> '/Seconds. - Third Angel - Unrealised Projects'  
<<http://www.slashseconds.org/issues/002/004/articles/thirdangel/index.php>> [accessed 30 September 2022].

way of keeping it in memory and a deliberate staging of the evidence'.<sup>569</sup> I argue that this correlation between wreckage and detritus extends beyond the explicit in *Parts For Machines That Do Things* and occurs implicitly across the work of Third Angel. *Evidence*, aptly named, is highlighted in the *Unrealised Projects* video precisely as a trace of something incomplete: the detritus of Third Angel's creative practice is not waste-product but evidence of a process.<sup>570</sup> The documentation of these traces in *Unrealised Projects* is, itself, evidence of Third Angel's approach to collecting and re-use: in this short video they present unrealised work as a component of practice, rather than as a series of possible failures.

Despite the positive approach to documenting unrealised projects, such works can often be split into two camps: those forcibly unrealised, and those unrealised by choice, whether artistically or organisationally. Whilst this chapter is not as much concerned with *why* these projects may be unrealised, attempts will be made to hypothesise these deductions with archival evidence where appropriate, or indeed possible. In some cases, reasoning has been obtained from Third Angel themselves, and in such cases their word is taken as provenance; as Archer and Livingstone suggest, 'it is only the artist who has the authority to make such a determination' of a work's completeness.<sup>571</sup> In the case of *Evidence*, Third Angel joined forces with Diogo and Teatro Praga on *Off The White* (as part of a wider collaborative project, *Shall We Dance*) that 're-invigorated' *Evidence*, which originally had some funding and went through an initial research and development phase before access-barriers to suitable performance spaces put the

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<sup>569</sup> Gianna Bouchard and Patrick Duggan, 'Staging the Wreckage Editorial', *Performance Research*, 2019. p.7.

<sup>570</sup> '/Seconds. - Third Angel - Unrealised Projects'.

<sup>571</sup> Livingston and Archer. p.3.

project on hold.<sup>572</sup> Despite re-invigoration, *Evidence* remains unrealised to date; I refer to *Races*, and *Ten Dreams* that stand out as projects to which Third Angel had attributed working titles (also including *Curtains/Privacy* and *A Good Home* not referenced herein).<sup>573</sup> *Races* is of particular interest to this study as documentary material and scripts exist in Third Angel's archive (as well as *Curtains/Privacy* and lesser-noted pitch-stage documentation of *24 Tomatoes*, and *Box*). I apply unofficial titles of my own to other would-be projects, by way of a deserved mention: *A Mermaid in Scarborough*, *Tea Dances*, and a Freedom of Information Act piece known to the company as *A Code for The Real World* (all three are confirmation that some projects remain unrealised in the collective consciousness of the company). Third Angel's unrealised projects are here referred to as a collective case study, of an array of projects that may be described as ranging from those 'that have [only] been talked about', through to those that are adopted or assimilated and 'almost recognisable' within the content of other, fully realised, projects.<sup>574</sup>

In order to pursue certain project ideas Third Angel have often chosen to assimilate those unmade into other projects, as an act of artistic defiance where organisational or external factors forcibly side-line them. Kelly poses in *Unrealised Projects*: 'even if you're still interested in' unfunded projects, 'you have to pursue the projects that *have* got money, in order to make a living'.<sup>575</sup> Financial concerns and funding stipulations are perhaps the most common of the reasons for forcibly unrealised

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<sup>572</sup> '/Seconds. - Third Angel - Unrealised Projects'.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid.

projects, as noted in Chapter 1, and even if projects are completed despite cuts to funding (as with *Parts For Machines That Do Things*, discussed in Chapter 3) their realisation could be considered partial, or with compromises against expectations (of what might have otherwise been achieved). There are also cases where external factors stimulate change, such as the global pandemic in early 2020. Archer and Livingston agree that 'the intervention of more or less foreseeable natural events' can also extend completion decisions.<sup>576</sup> This exemplifies the way in which Third Angel have reacted flexibly to changes in circumstance, and in doing so deny the forced completion of works, instead (to borrow from the terminology of enterprise) converting threats into opportunities. This competence, I suggest, is artistically driven due to their often-propulsive mode of performance making (first identified in Chapter 1) in which the end product is not fully envisioned at the start of the process. Kelly observed the making of solo show *Cape Wrath* (2013-2018) and *Class of '76* (the primary case study of Chapter 2): 'I'm interested in letting *Cape Wrath* evolve, rather like the touring version of *Class of '76* did, into whatever it will become'.<sup>577</sup> The propulsive method of making extends and defers the completion decision in that there may be limited (or no) conditions placed upon the completion of the work. The very language used by the company in describing their creative process is evidence of this methodology:

I would hesitate to call it a work-in-progress. A work at the start of its progress, perhaps. Though that said, it [*Cape Wrath*] has been in process in my head for a while now. But this talk at The Gate [theatre] marks the beginning of making the

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<sup>576</sup> Livingston and Archer. p.445-6.

<sup>577</sup> Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: Of Work Made and Un-Made'.

thought-and-travel-and-research-and-conversation-process-so-far, into what will be a performance. Of some sort. At some point.<sup>578</sup>

*Cape Wrath* exemplifies a then-unrealised project that had no fixed terms for its eventual realisation: no conditions such as 'when we achieve *this*, it is complete'. The realisation of the project is manifest precisely in its sharing with an audience, and perhaps no sooner. This is certainly true of works that I have previously identified as 'collaboratory', such as *Inspiration Exchange* and *Desire Paths*, that emerge only in conjunction with their audience-participants. Projects like *The Department of Distractions* that work from scripted text may reach conditions of realisation sooner, though this is not synonymous with completion of the project, only the iteration (*The Department of Distractions*, for instance, was tweaked in rehearsal before its planned tour, despite having already been realised in front of audiences). *Cape Wrath's* process involved a web of activities, 'thought-and-travel-and-research-and-conversation', that Third Angel aimed to culminate in a performance. Furthermore, Kelly here identifies the conceptual beginnings, the time spent holding an idea 'in the head', that extends the process long before it becomes active through research or practice.

Concepts, like *Cape Wrath*, may be held within the mind of one of Third Angel's members, while others are shared, such as the unrealised film project *Mermaid in Scarborough* that had been discussed for years, but never made. Both can be considered propulsive in nature, as neither has a fully conceived end product. Even a task-based project such as *Inspiration Exchange*, of which its form is its pre-conceived function (a show in which stories are shared) is not fully realised until its story-exchange occurs in

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<sup>578</sup> Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: Of Work Made and Un-Made'.

the live event. Despite no obvious record of *Mermaid in Scarborough* in Third Angel's archive, it is still known to the company as an unrealised project. The use of the term 'unrealised' when referring to projects that are either latent or still in their conceptual phase is, itself, a form of deferral, denying the categorisation as failures, closed opportunities, or projects at conceptual dead-ends. Other unrealised projects, such as *Ten Dreams*, have documentary traces: in an application for *Class of '76* found in their archive Third Angel describe to their prospective funders (Arts Council England) that *Evidence* is currently in development, and *Ten Dreams* is, at the time, planned for a Spring 2000 film shoot. In *Unrealised Projects* Kelly explains how this eventually transpired:

There was the film *Ten Dreams* which never got made, because it got half the money to make it then the last bit of money didn't come into place and then the people who'd promised the first half of the money wouldn't let us do it on just their money, and we'd been developing this for like two years or something, and by then, the thought of going back and having to reapply for the money we'd already been awarded with a different budget and stuff was a bit too soul destroying...<sup>579</sup>

This reveals the complexity of factors involved in reaching, or deferring a completion decision, whether a project is propulsive or otherwise, such as the development of film projects: even works with no fixed end product still have financial projections, staff costs and venue contracts to consider.<sup>580</sup>

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<sup>579</sup> '/Seconds. - Third Angel - Unrealised Projects'.

<sup>580</sup> Despite the cost differences between small-scale performance and film projects, available funding avenues and investment opportunities that differ for each media, which is outside of the scope of this thesis.



The methodology of deferral or extension through which Third Angel projects often overlap and share material between shows, responds to the external conditions that threaten creative prolificity. *Ten Dreams* was a victim of funding and administrative challenges, whilst *Parts For Machines That Do Things* (as addressed previously) was made on a very slim budget in response to the company and collaborators believing so strongly that the work deserved to be realised. Digression—in this case a carrying-over—ensures the story is still told despite restrictions: the work becomes doggedly about defying the forced completion or abandonment of projects where at all possible. With *Parts For Machines...*, the decision to publish some of the research material in the journal *Performance Research* may well have been an attempt to raise the exposure of the project, that had been otherwise reduced in scale due to budget restrictions. Whilst the primary product of a contemporary theatre company is often the ephemeral live event, the volume of unrealised and latent works demonstrates a creative output and labour that far exceeds those actually monetised. The inherent precarity in this type of work cannot be ignored, compounding the argument that digression and deferral become survival strategies in light of economic pressures. Closer attention to the process behind the works may, as Ben Spatz has argued, reduce the primacy of the apparent ephemerality of the works, by considering the volume of unrealised and part-made works as part of wider systems of 'transmissible knowledge or technique'. Spatz proposes that:

As soon as we refocus our discussion on practice and technique rather than performance, much of the conceptual twisting around issues of liveness and

ephemerality evaporates. We are then left with two different and complementary strategies for encountering practice: documents and performances.<sup>581</sup>

His proposal, rather than reducing the importance of the ephemeral product, increases the importance and value of process documentation and respective archives. To illustrate, *Ten Dreams* is known to Third Angel, viewers of *Unrealised Projects*, and to the readers of this thesis, because of its documentation; *Mermaid in Scarborough* influenced an act in a 'city adventure' show Walton made with students in Hull (UK) in which a mermaid emerged from the North Sea, its original concept however only exists in the memory of Third Angel's members (as they explain to me) and in the imagination of those who encounter its proposition (including those Hull students and their audience). Neither project was ever realised, despite existing within different registers of knowledge, one archival, the other conceptual. The budget-defying *Parts For Machines...* (made against financial odds, as mentioned in Chapter 3) and the documenting of *Unrealised Projects* have the same trait in common: despite being realised and unrealised respectively, both projects were made in order to ensure the conceptual was made 'actual', in forms archivable, and I argue, citational. Third Angel's approach to longevity through archival collecting tendencies is, consequently, an extension of their artistic competencies and creative signature of collecting and reuse.

Third Angel's 'archive' cannot solely refer to the place (a storage unit in an industrial quarter of Sheffield) but, I propose, must be considered as a between-place in which their 'transmissible knowledge' interconnects with the objects and documents stored. This thesis has, thus far, identified multiple collecting practices that emerge from

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<sup>581</sup> Ben Spatz, 'What Do We Document? Dense Video and the Epistemology of Practice', pp. 241–304. p.242.

Third Angel's collaborative and participatory practices: collecting stories, knowledge-sharing and collaborative networks. What these all share is a lack of physical fixity, these are largely embodied practices that occur between people, through conversation and exchange. Often, these interpersonal forms of collecting have adjacent documentation, such as the story title prompt-cards in *Inspiration Exchange*, or the hand-drawn movement scores in archived notebooks and scribbles across rehearsal-copies of performance texts. The creative and archival forms of knowledge that overlap in their works are also reflected in the organisational or administrative knowledge of the company: financial records and venue correspondence may not tell us how to reproduce a show, but they reveal both the context of the original project and (as with *Ten Dreams*) why certain decisions came to be. As illustrated by the 'thought-and-travel-and-research-and-conversation-process' of *Cape Wrath*, I propose that similar hyphenated concepts approximate the new registers of knowledge that occur between both archival and remembered knowledge, and between artistic and operational knowledge.

*iii. Inside/Outside*

Building on the exploration of inside and outside systems first mentioned in Chapter 3 (in relation to 'open' and 'closed systems of collaboration and project appraisal), an extension of this concept can be applied to the collecting of knowledge that reveals further interplay between creative methodologies and company legacy-making. The registers of knowledge identified so far can be distilled into two overarching registers, also here referred to as 'inside' and 'outside'. In this case the inside refers to

embodied knowledge, the knowledge held in the body(s) of collaborators, through memory, both emotionally or physically. I use this term as an extension of *bodily* knowledge, as we may still speak of a *body of work*, or an archive as a *body of evidence*. Embodied knowledge is therefore reflective of outside knowledge, as it represents perspectival, interpretive knowledge. Inside knowledge combines to become collective knowledge, through *shared* memory, experiences and working languages. This collective knowledge is embodied, but in multiplicity: not one perspective or interpretation, but many. The work and its evidence combine to make up the 'outside' register of knowledge, which together constitute the outputs of the company. For the purposes of this model, I consider the inside and outside registers as, jointly, the *corpus* of the company. The company itself exists at the point where it is connected and networked with the ecosystem of bodies (members, collaborators) that constitute it (the company is neither only a group of people, nor is it solely defined by its past work). Its *corpus* is the holistic meeting of inside and outside knowledge systems. Shared knowledge represents exchanges between the 'inside' of personal knowledges and the 'outside' of the collectively-known; I argue that these systems interact, generating two oscillatory conditions that are simultaneously movements and states-of-being: the hyphenated concepts of 'inside-out' and 'outside-in'.

To support my argument, I propose a renegotiation of archival logic when related to process-led, research-focussed practice (common to many contemporary devising companies). Susan Kozel proposes a philosophy of 'somatic archiving', 'as a means for understanding existing archival material and for positing new active and resistant

archiving practices', which forms a part of a wider *Living Archive* project.<sup>582</sup> The somatic refers to, in Kozel's words, 'an internal or immanent level of physical knowledge'.<sup>583</sup> Here I appropriate the term 'living archive' to instead approximate Kozel's 'somatic archive', in preference to that of an otherwise purely somatic origin. Considering Third Angel as custodians of a 'living archive', as I use it here, allows for the 'bodies' of concern to somatic theory to be applied, via metaphor, to the *corpus* of the company as a whole entity. This concept accommodates how collecting for legacy and for knowledge intersect in the case of Third Angel, as both occur with the intention of re-use. It is therefore the action of archiving and collection that is simultaneously dissemination (archives as distinctly *active* collections) and change (knowledge that grows and adapts over time).

As part of my early research, I discussed with Third Angel the cataloguing of their archive. Their opinion, reflecting an ethics of the living archive, was that the structure should revolve around projects, rather than operational categories, such as documents grouped under 'marketing', 'finances' or 'correspondence' (see Appendix B). In this way, Third Angel consider operational and administrative documents as a part of their creative projects. A corporate structure may prefer these categories to reflect the different functions they perform within a company, whilst Third Angel's approach mirrors their collaborative working tendencies: work is multi-vocal and syncretic. Kozel et al's project *Conspiracy Archives* aimed to test a model of performance archiving that combined the embodied register with the archival (inside and outside, respectively), opting to record

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<sup>582</sup> This project is based at Malmö University and funded by the Swedish Research Council; <http://livingarchives.mah.se>

<sup>583</sup> Susan Kozel, 'Somatic Archiving', *Transvaluation Symposium* (Göteborg, 21-22 May, 2015).

the voices of audience members, critic reviews, and 'the choreographer's reflection on her own work, taken from a grant application'.<sup>584</sup> Following their example, I draw upon an Arts Council grant proposal for Third Angel's *Saved* (1998), which provides a description of the project by the company.<sup>585</sup> Their description, for its specific purpose of convincing a funder of its importance and risk-worthiness, commits benefits of the funding to: expanding the reach of their work, developing venue relationships, and dedicating full-time labour to the project. The interaction between artistic and operational registers is evident: the ability to develop relationships with venues is made possible by the touring function of the show, which, in turn is made possible through the creative decision to 'rework' the project for each venue.

When combined with other documents regarding the same project, it is possible to make connections between various registers. Firstly, the archival record is elaborated by remembered knowledge: when writing about *Saved* retrospectively Third Angel remember that 'there must have been a conversation about footwear', as the task involved making footprints on a floor strewn with Epsom salts. They explain how the realised project was 'a response to the logistics of the space and to the possibilities of the task'.<sup>586</sup> *Saved*, as it was pitched to funders, was also an unrealised project (originally intended as a durational 'video jigsaw' project, featuring purpose made film); *Saved* as made and toured was an attempt to address the same themes with much more limited resources. Walton and Kelly also speak of their 'original plan' and the way in which

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<sup>584</sup> Susan Kozel et al, "'Conspiracy Archives"- a Process Archive of an Archival Process', *Researching (in/as) Motion: A Resource Collection*, 10 (2019). p.3-6.

<sup>585</sup> *Saved* was later invited to show at an art festival in Switzerland.

<sup>586</sup> Alexander Kelly, Gillan Lees, and Rachael Walton, 'The Distance Between Us', *Performance Research*, 17.2 (2012), 18-21. p.20-21.

things were 'discovered in the process of performing.'<sup>587</sup> As there are rarely clear preconditions for the completion of their works, archival documents for Third Angel are required to record a process that may be non-linear and that may oscillate between different projects; therefore, their documents are seldom of value alone. To expand: I did not see *Saved*, but I might make the connection between the grant summary that describes a project 'in which the performers "catch" video images from the air', and the formal device used in *Class of '76* two years later (2000). The device was, in fact, discovered in the process of making a project titled *Experiment Zero* (1997), which had funding for research and development, but not to tour; Third Angel explained to me how they chose to self-fund a three-month tour, that may have led to the realisation of both *Saved* and *Class of '76* thereafter. Archer and Livingston warn that, in archival encounters, 'whenever the text or artistic structure is not complete, scrutiny of this item should not be taken as adequately revealing part-whole relations within the work'.<sup>588</sup> My wider research in the archive of Third Angel has encountered such issues: the unrealised project *Races* is indexed by 'part-whole' documentation, which also includes among its collection a script titled 'Once Bitten...'. It is not clear, without consulting Third Angel, whether the script is a version of *Races*, or orphaned material that has found its way into a collection to which it is part- or un-related.<sup>589</sup> The case of 'Once Bitten...'—either a complete work of writing, or an early script version of *Races*—also raises the question as to whether unrealised projects can be considered *as* works, or rather, solely as

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<sup>587</sup> Kelly, Lees, and Walton. p.20-21.

<sup>588</sup> Livingston and Archer. p.440.

<sup>589</sup> Closer inspection of other documents in the collection *may* reveal its connection, though at present I prefer to intentionally highlight the issue this raises without attempting to follow the thread further.

documentation of processes. Where Spatz argues that there are two elements to recording practice—documents and performances—he adds that ‘just as performances may be shared with many different types and sizes of audience, there are many different kinds of document with different possible relationships to practice’.<sup>590</sup> ‘Part-whole relations’ between records may index ‘ideational patterns’ and reveal creative signatures, which provide a sense of the stylistic and affective properties of a performance as a syncretic whole, that, whilst still only *part* of the whole, tells more than a lone document can.<sup>591</sup>

I suggest that the model of a living archive allows for a scrutiny of the varying registers of knowledge and relationships between contributing practices. Furthermore, the hyphenated concept of inside-outside, that I employ to describe the oscillatory nature of knowledge registers, is non-hierarchical and does not delimit the direction of knowledge flows. Exemplary of this oscillation is a hand-drawn sketch found in the archive depicting the movement of actors in *The Department of Distractions*, which I presume to be from the making process, to draft an idea, but could equally have been to retrospectively record a sequence (Fig. 20).

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<sup>590</sup> Spatz. p.242.

<sup>591</sup> Ibid.



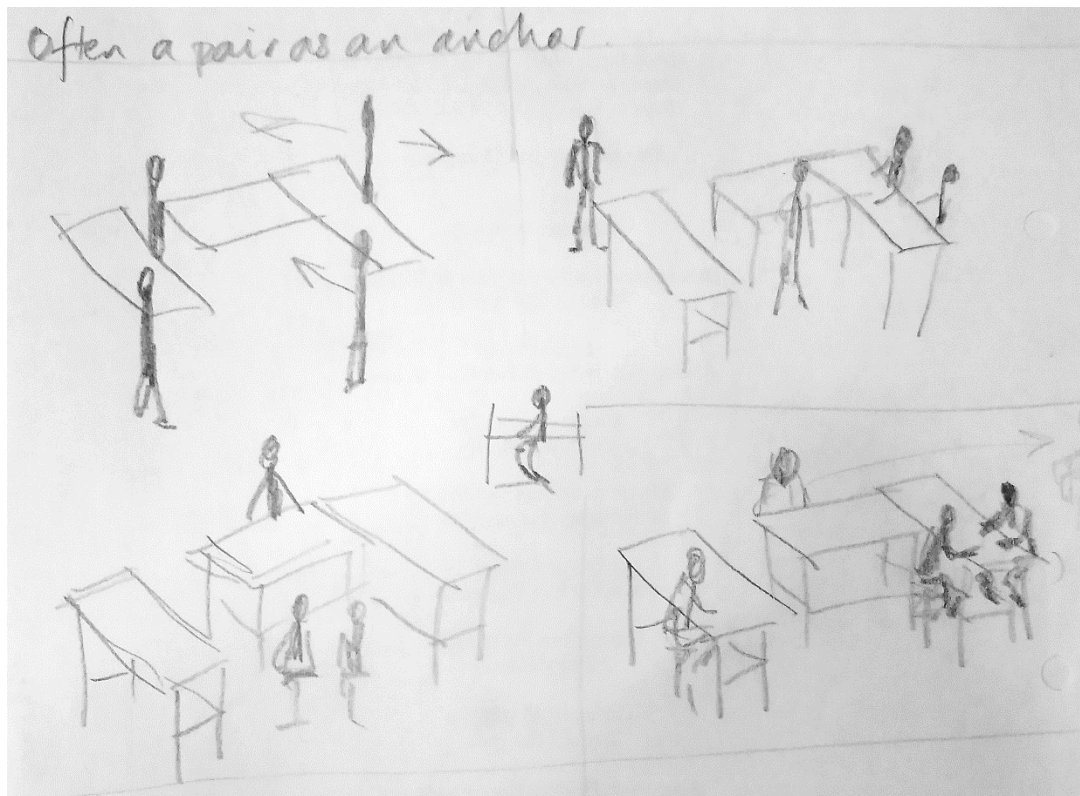


Fig. 20: Sketch from *The Department of Distractions* archival records (Third Angel)

Scholar Juan Carlos Guerrero-Hernández introduces terms that provide a lens through which to comprehend the varying registers and their respective interactions, 'three topologies of performance'. Topography refers to both the features of a place, and the description of that place. Guerrero-Hernández suggests that this duality encapsulates the way a perception of a place may precede its description, and yet the description may also come after the experiencing of those features (both of which may be equally true).<sup>592</sup> In this instance, the sketch is both index of the performance(-to-be) and simultaneously a pre-documentary record. Furthermore, its chronological or authorial

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<sup>592</sup> Juan Carlos Guerrero-Hernández, 'The Threefold Topography of Performance Drawing, Action, and Video in María Evelia Marmolejo's *Anónimo 4*'. p.131.

provenance is not known. Following Guerrero-Hernández, scores of this type represent the complexity of tracing the movement between conceptual knowledge—'corpo-graphy'—of the maker (sketcher), to the embodied knowledge—'corpo-action'—of the performers (of the movements the sketch represents), and finally to the virtual, representational documentary knowledge—'corpo-operation'—as its use changes (indeterminately) from score to record.<sup>593</sup> Third Angel are not unique in their use of sketching as a creative and documentary tool, though the way they apply this rehearsal-room technique to the stage-space of their performances does form part of their signature, particularly when their performance practice itself incorporates its own part-whole documentation, such as in acts of live drawing. Expanding on the living archive, in Part Two I also extend Guerrero-Hernández's complementary analogy in favour of a 'corpo-topography' of Third Angel's corpus, in which their use of live drawing is one example of a crossing-over of documents *into* performances, and vice versa. Having argued that collecting and reuse challenge the concept of ephemerality in performance practice, in what follows I pose the corpo-topography as a means of conceptualising and grounding the potential disappearance of the artform in the actual exchanges that occur between performances in a wider repertoire, or 'body' of work.

## II. Legacy

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<sup>593</sup> Guerrero-Hernández. p.132; Guerrero-Hernández uses the prefix 'corpo-' to refer to the physical and embodied aspect of performance, where I refer again to the corpus as simultaneously the body of work, body of evidence and ecosystem of bodies.



Fig. 21: Jerry Killick in a publicity image for *Where From Here* (Third Angel)

Third Angel's use of live drawings, as both the documents and acts that constitute them, has its origins in *Senseless* (1998) and *Where From Here* (2000), discussed in the introduction to this thesis, through to *Story Map* and *Inspiration Exchange*, addressed in Chapter 3. Writing about *Where From Here* in 2019 Third Angel recall how the act of drawing on the walls of the stage set 'was both the aesthetic and the mechanism of the show', and simultaneously, the description and features that constitute its topography.<sup>594</sup> The performers sketched out remembered spaces with their eyes closed (Fig. 21), 'because memory, like these drawings, is inaccurate and evocative and indicative'.<sup>595</sup> The drawings were performative moments *of* documentation, yet not documents in-and-of themselves, remaining ephemeral as the walls were wipe-clean by design. Maryclare Foá suggests, in her 2011 thesis, that performativity in drawing is inherent in its 'sleight of

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<sup>594</sup> Third Angel, *There's A Room: Three Performance Texts by Third Angel*. p.63.

<sup>595</sup> Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: Problem Solving', 2009

<<http://thirdangeluk.blogspot.com/2009/06/problem-solving.html>> [accessed 15 December 2022].

hand', in the nature of the drawing that can never become that which it represents. Borrowing from curator Catherine de Zegher, Foá proposes that the drawn 'line', through the conventions and representations of drawing, is rather a trace of a movement that connects to other lines: from 'grid to web'.<sup>596</sup> Part Two cites how the *corpo*-topography—as the features and description of Third Angel as a whole—can be mapped or sketched as a multi-stranded web of knowledge registers, traversing networks of people, artworks, and documents, from the inside and outside of conceptual, embodied and virtual places. I argue that the *corpo*-topography of their living archive, 'dissolves the ephemeral', as Spatz suggests, countering the primacy of the performance outputs, but goes further, in implying that the company-as-archive cannot be extrapolated into only sets of 'documents' and a series of 'performances'. *Where From Here, Story Map*, and even rehearsal sketches in the archive are examples of how, for Third Angel, documents and performances are not always so easily separated. The act of live drawing exemplifies much of Third Angel's collecting practices, as an act that itself is a *corpo*-topographical practice: an extension of the body (as the drawing hand moves away from the body) that makes a mark on its surroundings, in order to translate an 'inside' concept to an 'outside' artwork. As with the 'archival imaginary', it is impossible to create a total, perfect record of the full arc of activity involved in live acts (emotional, physical, documentary and artefact), though the living archive provides a productive metaphor to encapsulate the more nebulous nature of those archives that collect the traces of live, changing events.

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<sup>596</sup> Maryclare Foá, 'Sounding Out: Performance Drawing in Response to the Outside Environment' (UAL, 2011). p.9-10.

Drawing, in English-language parlance, is used to describe (among others): the 'drawing of conclusions'; to 'draw attention' to something; to 'draw alongside' (even to 'draw' one's curtains is to bring them together). Drawing, as both a performative act and a metaphorical register of 'drawing' connections, conclusions and things, reflects both the movement of its action (the drawing hand) and the movements it comes to represent; the 'drawn' object removed (such as a drawn weapon); the 'drawing together' of disparate concepts, which (non-exhaustively) become possible, in part, due to the originating expressive act of drawing as mark-making.<sup>597</sup> It is through metaphor, as *that which carries across meaning*, that I similarly 'draw' conclusions in Part Two; as with the collaborative networks that constitute much of contemporary devised theatre practice, the language of 'webs', which I use again here, aids in the perception of network and knowledge-transfer systems.<sup>598</sup> The corpo-topography of Third Angel, I suggest, may best be described as a 'constellation' or 'web' that not only reflects the collaborative make-up of the company, but also its interrelations, oscillations, and flows. As Sawyer advises, 'information that flows multiplies its total innovations'; I argue that an investigation of the web-like corpo-topography of Third Angel further reveals how their creative activity directly enhances the conditions of their longevity.<sup>599</sup>

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<sup>597</sup> Foá. p.7.

<sup>598</sup> The etymological root of the word 'metaphor' is the ancient Greek: 'metá' meaning 'across or with', and 'phérō' meaning 'to carry or bear'.

<sup>599</sup> Sawyer. p.133.

i. *Re-use: in Praxis*

In *Senseless* and *Where From Here* the act of drawing rooms from memory is, I suggest, akin to the storytelling function of other Third Angel projects such as *Class of '76* and *Cape Wrath* that attempt to recollect (and re-collect) both the stories that constitute them and their founding research. *Senseless* and *Where From Here* are distinct, however, in that live drawing is the primary performance medium for showing these memory-acts to their audiences. At the *There's a Room* book launch, attendees were invited to participate in a room-drawing exercise; I since consider this type of live drawing as *storyshowing*, in that storytelling and its functions of recall (exemplified in Chapter 2) correlate with the drawing-as-remembering exercises in *Senseless* and *Where From Here*. Ultimately, both practices are modes of showing the 'working out', which is both a conceptual thought-based exercise, and a simultaneously physical embodying (storytelling) or marking-down of its process (drawing). Kelly has written about milestones in Third Angel's development, and how their performance-making journey involves—as the title of his text states—'Testing the Hypothesis' and ultimately 'trying to prove it wrong', akin to the experiments of science.<sup>600</sup> In this piece, he introduces the recurring image of the Voyager 1 & 2 space probes, and charts its appearance in Third Angel's works, as well as widespread instances from mentoring programmes and collaborations, from the science-based performance lecture *600 People* (2013-), to the artistic speculations of *9 Billion Miles From Home* (2007-2009). Detailing these acts of storyshowing, Kelly invites his reader to imagine Voyager carrying messages from Earth

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<sup>600</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'Testing the Hypothesis'.

into space (its 'Golden Record' includes examples of artistic achievements from multiple cultures), as this impressive scientific endeavour seeks connection with the most existential questions of the human experience. As a craft coursing an eternal pathway through space, the metaphor of Voyager also works productively to exemplify recurring images within Third Angel's repertoire.<sup>601</sup> I also further employ Voyager to highlight the interplay between art and science in Third Angel's oeuvre. Additionally, just as the Apollo astronauts first looked back upon the (im)perfect circle of the Earth, I suggest that the Voyager's act of carrying its message away from the planet becomes more about our own journey of understanding than it does about an outward projection. I argue that Third Angel's process-driven methodology reflects the human condition, and in so doing contributes to the lasting appeal of their artistic work.

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<sup>601</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'Testing the Hypothesis'. p.29; Rob Fellman, 'Crossing the Circle: A Response to the Role of Research in the Work of Third Angel', *Contemporary Theatre Review: Backpages*, 31.3 (2021), 369–72.



Fig. 22: Kelly performs *600 People* (Ed Collier)

*600 People* is part-lecture part-theatre, a performance in which Kelly shares facts about the universe, space travel, and Earth's place in the cosmos (Fig. 22). Inspired by an initial three-hour conversation with astrophysicist Simon Goodwin, the performance switches between fact-telling and the re-telling of its research.<sup>602</sup> Goodwin collaborated with Third Angel on the making of *600 People* (beginning the ongoing conversational process five years before the show was made). In *600 People* Third Angel describe how Voyager carries the instructions for its possible extra-terrestrial discoverers to decode the

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<sup>602</sup> Third Angel, '600 PEOPLE | Third Angel' <<https://thirdangel.co.uk/shows-projects/600-people>> [accessed 23 April 2023].



data it carries; to confirm the code is successfully cracked, the first image is that of a perfect circle, an image also central to *9 Billion Miles From Home* (Fig. 23).<sup>603</sup> I adopt the perfect circle as the second metaphor in what follows, as a way of conceptualising the inside-outside relations between the company and its context, as well as revealing the generative conflicts between idealised theory and practical research.



Fig. 23: Film still of Kelly drawing a circle with his foot in *9 Billion Miles...* (Third Angel)

What is traditionally termed 'practice-as-research' offers a way to describe an artistic methodology that experiments with knowledge-generation through practice: a process of thinking-through-doing. Kershaw notes how practice-as-research is not limited to theatrical practice, but rather that performance is a form and product of practice-as-

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<sup>603</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'Testing the Hypothesis'. p.527.

research, echoed in the name of an early thinktank on the subject established in 2000 (-2006), 'Practice-as-Research in Performance' (PARIP).<sup>604</sup> PARIP referred to practitioners as 'researcher-practitioners'; in an edition of the *PARtake* journal, William W. Lewis and Niki Tulk refer to the lesser-used term, 'scholartists'.<sup>605</sup> As Smith and Dean have detailed, creative work specifically within the 'university environment' is often 'referred to as practice-led research, practice-based research, creative research or practice as research.'<sup>606</sup> Developing these variations further, I turn to philosopher Michel de Certeau who famously theorised (in 1984) on 'everyday practices'; his proposal likened walking to a spatial poetics, posing the correlations between walking and writing (likely inspired by the Situationists of the 1950-70s).<sup>607</sup> Whether everyday or extraordinary, a multitude of practices (I include: telling stories, reportage, drawing and writing) are considered performative. The inherent performativity of the everyday transposes to considerations of Third Angel's methodology as something that is at once academic (Walton and Kelly began collaborating in the university context; Kelly currently holds a post with Leeds Beckett University) and celebratory of the poetics of everyday stories, images, and distractions. Kelly remarks, in a 2022 conversation with *600 People's* astrophysicist-collaborator, Goodwin:

There's something really interesting there about the difference between a show, a lecture for astrophysics students, a public talk, and then some bloke who works

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<sup>604</sup> Baz Kershaw, 'Practice as Research through Performance', *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts*, 2009, 104–25. Pp.104-108.

<sup>605</sup> William W Lewis and Niki Tulk, 'Why Performance as Research?', *PARtake: The Journal of Performance as Research*, 1.Issue 1-Pushing the Boundaries: Performing Research (2016). p.1.

<sup>606</sup> Smith and Dean. p.2.

<sup>607</sup> Michel de. Certeau, 'Walking in the City', in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 91–110.

for a theatre company coming in for a cup of coffee. You know, about where you [Goodwin] pitch that, the level of information.<sup>608</sup>

The performative aspect for academics like Goodwin lies in curating information, holding back the full extent of their knowledge, whilst Kelly describes *600 People* as a performance lecture given by an enthusiast (himself) 'who doesn't know any more than he's telling you and is getting to the limits of his knowledge'.<sup>609</sup> The research behind *600 People* generates the content for its performance, whose primary mode is in exhausting its findings in front of (and for) its audience, and in revitalising its revelations. I argue that work of this kind is best described not as practice-as-research but rather, by reversal, utilising my term 'research-as-practice', (derived from Smith and Dean's research-*led* practice).<sup>610</sup> I propose this term for its antagonistic opposition of the traditional primacy of practice over research, yet I propose that it is not limited to this polarity in the case of Third Angel: I argue that their research is positioned as both practice and performance, as it is selective and representational of learnt information, and in this way is also a generative form of re-use.

Additionally, I consider Third Angel's methodology of research-as-practice as encompassing non-hierarchical oscillations between research and practice. As established in Chapter 2, I use the prefix 're' not only for its meaning of 'again' or 'back', but for its secondary implication of a repetition in the present. 'Research' itself can be

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<sup>608</sup> Third Angel and Simon Goodwin, 'Original Transcript: Third Angel and Dr Simon Goodwin in Conversation (for "A Small Show About Big Ideas" Article)' (Sheffield, UK: Unpublished, 2022).

<sup>609</sup> Ibid.

<sup>610</sup> They propose that research covers a spectrum of duties in performance practice: '[...] basic research carried out independent of creative work (though it may be subsequently applied to it); research conducted in the process of shaping an artwork; or research which is the documentation, theorisation and contextualisation of an artwork – and the process of making it – by its creator.' (Smith and Dean. p.3.)

deconstructed: implying 're-search' as a form of *looking-again*.<sup>611</sup> The repetition of the act of re-looking is an act of circular return. By this formation, my preference for research as the primary term in 'research-as-practice' in no way exceeds practice, but instead highlights the oscillatory nature of the relationship in which practice enables the re-search, as Lewis and Tulk frame it: the 'practice-research-practice'—or *praxis*—'feedback loop'.<sup>612</sup> As *600 People* is re-performed, its re-search is re-enacted. Kelly's preference for the term 'reportage' is what he terms a 'mechanism for research, for soliciting other people's stories, and for structuring the telling of the story: the narrative of the research process reveals the story it was designed to investigate'.<sup>613</sup> I suggest that Third Angel's mode of 'reportage' illustrates how the oscillatory nature of research-as-practice enables Lewis and Tulk's mutually supportive and looping praxis. Furthermore, Third Angel view their creative methodology not as a linear progression, but rather as a practice in which multiple strands connect: as they note, 'sometimes we go back along a strand to the last junction and go off' on a different journey.<sup>614</sup> These strands form the surface of an intricate and interwoven web of processual movements between research and practice. Smith and Dean propose an illustrative model of the research-performance relationship, which they term the 'iterative cyclic web'.<sup>615</sup>

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<sup>611</sup> Ute Meta Bauer et al, *Intellectual Birdhouse: Artistic Practice as Research*, ed. by Florian Dombois and Michael Schwab, 2011. p.167.

<sup>612</sup> Lewis and Tulk. p.3.

<sup>613</sup> Kelly, 'Telling Life Stories: Autobiographical Performance in the Third Angel Repertoire'. p.42.

<sup>614</sup> Philip Stanier, 'The Distance Covered', in *Devising in Process*, ed. by Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart (Macmillan Education UK, 2010), pp. 110–27. p.118.

<sup>615</sup> Smith and Dean.



Fig. 24: Smith and Dean's 'Iterative Cyclic Web' diagram (Smith and Dean, 2009, p.20.)

This web provides a frame for interconnecting the circular, oscillatory nature of the research-practice relationship with the web-like mode of both retracing and recurrence. They propose that the 'cycle' is the alternations between practice and research, a repetition of *practice-research-practice-research*. Smith and Dean's diagram depicts a circle with nodes around its circumference detailing steps in the research process (Fig. 24). These steps start at 'idea generation' and, moving anti-clockwise, record 'the research process found in both science and the humanities'; whilst tracing the circle anti-clockwise, they reflect the processes of academic research.<sup>616</sup> Each node has threads

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<sup>616</sup> Smith and Dean. p.21.

linking it to certain other nodes across the circle, acting to counterbalance those on the opposite side. This diagram illustrates moments in which a creative process shifts between academic and practical research, and back again: crossing the circle rather than routing along its circumference. The cycle thereby contains within it a web of connections, of 'cross-transit' by which 'iterations', or microcosmic oscillations (such as, *research-practice-research*), can form as ideas are tested, adapted and then repeated through praxis.<sup>617</sup>

In Third Angel's *9 Billion Miles from Home* performers Kelly and Gillian Lees attempt to draw a perfect circle. Kelly wrote in his notebook that *9 Billion Miles...* represents a 'cyclical ritual' and separately spoke of the show as a process of 'making circles':<sup>618</sup>

[W]e realise that what we need is a perfect 3m diameter circle of talc on the floor. Whilst discussing the making of this circle as a part of the set up, I say, 'Getting this circle precise is going to be really fucking hard'. Gillian says a great thing; she says, 'If it's going to be really hard to do, we should be doing it in front of the audience'.<sup>619</sup>

In performing the making of circles to their audience, in the act of *trying*, they show the embodied research alongside the impossibility of perfection. *9 Billion Miles...* encapsulates the metaphor that the iterative cyclic web provides: forms of practice that promote the creative presentation of research, assume the status of a 'cyclical ritual' of their own. The performers attempt to redraw the circle as an approximation, mapped by the imperfect science of the iterative praxical web beneath. What began as *Voyager*,

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<sup>617</sup> Smith and Dean. p.8.

<sup>618</sup> Stanier. p.20.

<sup>619</sup> Alexander Kelly, 'Testing the Hypothesis'. p.535.

became *The Distance Project*, which became *9 Billion Miles From Home*, 'appearing in notebooks and sketchbooks, in rehearsals, [...] education work and even making brief appearances in "finished" projects since about 2002, or even earlier'.<sup>620</sup>



Fig. 25: Cropped section of artists pages (Kelly, Lees and Walton, 2012, p.18.)

In *9 Billion Miles...* a circle of light is pooled in the centre of the playing space, whilst the two performers are attached to each other by rope-and-pulley. As depicted in the

<sup>620</sup> Third Angel, '9 Billion Miles From Home | Third Angel' <<https://thirdangel.co.uk/shows-projects/9-billion-miles-from-home>> [accessed 15 December 2022].

'performance map' published in *Performance Research*, the resulting shape is that of a circle with a line extending out from its centre (Fig. 25).<sup>621</sup> This shape comes to represent what Third Angel refer to as the 'big here' and the 'long now' (terms borrowed from Brian Eno's essay for the Long Now Foundation).<sup>622</sup> The Voyager, at one point in its journey, was 9 billion miles from its home; when its image is conjured in the performance space, sharing the same 'now' makes the Voyager's 'here' feel somewhat closer to the audience's own. The distance between Voyager and Earth is measured in 'light years', a further example of how distance and time conflate with the privilege of scale. In a similar way to the re-use of stories and images from the past, this performative gesture interrupts the (UK) audience's cultural disposition of linear time, interweaving not only past and present, but here-there and here-now. The darkness of space also becomes representative of the uncharted future. Voyager's endless journey outward, in Third Angel's work, is thereby indicative of their engagement with longevity not only as an organisational aim, but also as a creative awareness of universal and timeless concerns. Longevity, as I have argued throughout this thesis, is defined in relation to a deferral of an end, a conception further complicated where linear time is reformulated as that which runs parallel to other trajectories, as experienced universally miles apart. Such a perceptual leap is made possible through the imaginative scale of shows like *9 Billion Miles From Home* when considered as part of a corpus of work that also includes the localised, autobiographical work of shows like *Class of '76*. Third Angel's oscillatory practice places the inside and outside systems, the 'big here' and the 'long

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<sup>621</sup> Kelly, Lees, and Walton.

<sup>622</sup> '9 Billion Miles From Home | Third Angel'; Brian Eno, 'The Big Here and Long Now' <<https://longnow.org/essays/big-here-long-now/>> [accessed 5 March 2023].



now', within the same repertoire of works, interacting to generate a corpus of wide-reaching and simultaneously 'evergreen' works (widely relatable across time).

The interplay between the drawn circle and the intersecting lines of the moveable rope-and-pulley in *9 Billion Miles...* is the symbolic culmination of an artistic representation of scientific research that not only enables a leap of imagination, but effectively reveals Third Angel's research-as-performance methodology. The circle as a metaphor for research-as-practice illustrates the degrees of academic and practical research *in ratio* (whether scientific or artistic in origin). Mathematically speaking, a perfect circle is defined by an equal measurable length from one side to another, at any point along its edge to the furthest opposite point. The result is not a curved line, as when Kelly and Lees draw a circle, but rather an invisible yet mathematically determinable web of crossing lines which pass through the centre like spokes in a wheel. In this instance, the act of drawing is a way of visualising or conceptualising the mathematical perfection. The web analogy further shows the system to be one of constituent relations, as if the circle itself is held up from the inside, the spokes pushing outwards. Walton told researcher Philip Stanier of a moment during the making of *9 Billion Miles...* that marked a processual shift away from factual content, signifying 'the start of a departure from an obsession with Voyager, away from science, towards [the question of] why Voyager was so interesting'.<sup>623</sup> The shift from scientific to artistic priorities no less defines the product of the making process than does the privileging of one form of research over another.

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<sup>623</sup> Stanier. p.115.

My interest in the Voyager as a recurrent image in Third Angel's work lies precisely in its relationship to the perfect circle of Earth, from which it floats endlessly away, out into uncharted space. Walton reflects on the convergence of science and fiction:

[...] [T]here's two things getting mixed together there isn't there? There's the notion [...] that science fiction is, in fact, a metaphor for us to understand our own existence. And then there's the fact of the science, and what it means. And the two are being conflated together.<sup>624</sup>

Despite being an image that relates to the scientific achievements of humanity, Voyager is as much about the *looking-back* upon ourselves; just as Third Angel use the symbolism of the Voyager to reflect upon the precarity of human life, the future is subject to the unknowns of what is to come, or the crises that may follow. Goodwin proposes:

[...] [T]he ideal of science is that it's this pure, purely logical thing. This is where the data, this is where the information, takes you. Now, everybody knows that's not actually how science works because it's done by real people with emotions [...] there are different people with different opinions about what the data is saying[...].<sup>625</sup>

Goodwin's emphasis on the role of individual perception is illustrated by the different ways in which the name of the company, Third Angel, may be understood. One reading relates to an interpretation of Christian theology in which two angels offer mankind an ultimatum: to worship the godly, or the man-made (beastly). As the story has it, a third angel then demands a decision. The godly, taken here to mean that which is outside

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<sup>624</sup> Third Angel and Goodwin.

<sup>625</sup> Ibid.

human understanding, may also correspond to the same imaginary that art attempts to conceive. The scientific is the systematic understanding of the world *as known*, whilst its research aims to generate more logically induced knowledge. Smith and Dean cite Brad Haseman, who sees practice-as-research as 'distinct from both qualitative and quantitative research' and argues that artworks make manifest research findings that are 'symbolically expressed, even while not conveyed through numbers or words (which are themselves symbols)'.<sup>626</sup> Third Angel's praxical web not only intermeshes research and practice, but by extension art and science. Art and science are increasingly inseparable in a digital age, *a priori*, as science and technology put the art of symbols to work, as apps, icons, programming languages and e-currencies, all of which come to symbolise the real-world processes they represent. The argument I make here is that, despite not making work specifically for digital-native audiences, Third Angel's practice has been ahead of the curve, to date. Their approach to collecting and re-use reflects the increasingly prevalent digital culture of remixology, and the playful nature of their work reflects the gamification that corporate attitudes progressively reify.

ii. *Towards the Future*

Prior to Covid-19, Third Angel were touring *The Department of Distractions* and had concurrently begun discussions around a new work, provisionally titled *The Ghost*

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<sup>626</sup> Smith and Dean. p.6.

*Room*.<sup>627</sup> This concept joins the list of unrealised projects, as its early research and development phase was ended in favour of *Distraction Agents*, the latter allowing the company to pursue a distance-based project during the pandemic-enforced lockdowns. Third Angel had already been working on a performance concept, inspired by their own preference for game-playing, out of which their first creative response was then prompted by the lockdowns. 'Anywhere Theatre' is Third Angel's overarching term for a body of their work that generates performance out of game systems, and that can be instigated anywhere (an initial idea was to produce a performance game for a children's hospital, for instance). *Distraction Agents*, which comes under this umbrella of Anywhere Theatre, is self-led, in that a game package arrives through the letterbox, but also has input from Third Angel in the form of pre-recorded video content by which actors provide the game's instructions. These videos arrive via email, across a period of one week. The pack includes a map-based story exercise, an adventure game book, and observational memory exercises (Fig. 26).

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<sup>627</sup> At a similar time to the publication of *There's a Room*, this working title could appear to relate, as it plays upon rooms seen, remembered, and known, connoting instead (from the title alone) rooms *unseen*, or rooms that *contain* the unseen.



Fig. 26: Promotional image showing the contents of *Distraction Agents* (Third Angel)

*Distraction Agents*, as exemplary of Anywhere Theatre, folds together game-playing and performance at a meeting point between role-playing games and narrative adventures, or as what game theorist Graeme Kirkpatrick considers 'ludically informed performance'.<sup>628</sup> I apply to *Distraction Agents* the three elements of the ludic form Kirkpatrick proposes: 'surprise', 'capitulation' and 'space'.<sup>629</sup> As an invited test player for *Distraction Agents*, I saved up all of the emails and video content, and chose to enjoy the experience in one session, much like attending a theatre performance. I could have played each part episodically, reflecting the nature of the distractions that the game emulates—quite literally popping up during the working day—though one of the appeals

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<sup>628</sup> Kirkpatrick. p.328.

<sup>629</sup> Kirkpatrick. p.336.

of the Anywhere Theatre model to which *Distraction Agents* adheres is the participant's own agency in shaping their experience. This agency fulfils Kirkpatrick's 'capitulation', by which the player must feel comfortable engaging in the performance-game on their own terms. Upon opening the first envelope in the pack (when instructed by the first performer, a white-collar-styled character who also features in *The Department of Distractions*), a player's handbook is revealed. The opening of the emails and subsequent envelopes invokes the element of ludic 'surprise'. This book prompts its reader to choose their own pseudonym, to do as The Department have done, to enter a role as a budding member of the organisation. The first exercise involves matching pictures and numbers for phone boxes, a recurring image in Third Angel's corpus making another return. The player must work out the phone box locations, which can be done using the area codes, or conversely, phoning them. With the latter, it is as if the player is performing a real-world version of Third Angel's early show *Hang Up* (1999), in which the performers act out conversations with strangers in phone boxes. Kirkpatrick's study proposes 'a distinctive expansion of the space of representation' in ludic performance, in which 'ideas about space comport with the notion of a distinctively non-linear, expansive fictional space'.<sup>630</sup> Not only does the 'Third Angel Phonebox' have longevity as an image, marking a 'distinctively non-linear' digressive practice from *Hang Up* in 1999, via appearance in *Cape Wrath*, company blog posts and a TedX talk, to *Distraction Agents* 22 years later, it also becomes the conduit through which *Hang Up* is able to extend its own completion, its legacy transferred to the 'expansive fictional space' connoted by the 'anywhere' of *Distraction Agents'* remote-play design.

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<sup>630</sup> Kirkpatrick. p.335-336.

Through Anywhere Theatre's overarching proposal, evidenced in *Distraction Agents*, the imagined world of art co-exists with the everyday. It is through the use of game-as-performance, or ludic form, that this is made possible.<sup>631</sup> Third Angel explain:

We use gaming mechanics in a lot of our devising processes. [...] Several shows are structured around the turn-taking mechanics of game play, too, such as *Story Map* (2010), *Inspiration Exchange* (2010) and *Homo Ludens* (2009).<sup>632</sup>

The last work listed here, as yet unmentioned in this thesis, is a reflection on Schiller's 'Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man' and was developed for Schillertage festival (where Third Angel presented *Stage An Execution* six years prior).<sup>633</sup> *Homo Ludens* is described by the company as 'a piece of work that is at once a game and a performance'.<sup>634</sup> In a blog post from March 2009, titled 'Playful Humans', Third Angel explain:

Our process so far has involved the usual tools of show and tell [...] story telling, playing and deconstructing games, research (inventions and futurology) and writing up big lists.

The images they present alongside the post are 'maps of deconstructed adventure game books', appearing again in *Distraction Agents*.<sup>635</sup> In a short documentary about the show, collaborator and project co-director Lucy Ellinson explains how 'playing human' involves 'creative adventures', undertaken throughout lifetimes 'and beyond, through generations'.

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<sup>631</sup> Kirkpatrick. p.335-336.

<sup>632</sup> Third Angel, 'The Distraction Agents Inspirations'.

<sup>633</sup> 'Homo Ludens' is also the title of a 1938 book by cultural theorist Johan Huizinga arguing that play is a necessary condition of culture.

<sup>634</sup> Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: Problem Solving'.

<sup>635</sup> Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: Playful Humans', 2009 <<http://thirdangeluk.blogspot.com/2009/03/playful-humans.html>> [accessed 15 December 2022].

She cites the playful nature of 'ingenuity' and human capacity for 'inventions'.<sup>636</sup> If, as Ellinson proposes, the playful nature of humanity generates invention, the rule-based function of game-playing also acts as a fulcrum between art and science, between knowledge and the imaginary, and between risk and reward. Furthermore, I suggest that the making of *Homo Ludens* marks a self-awareness from Third Angel of their position between these various poles. Kirkpatrick, however, warns:

The hazard of using games is not that it imperils aesthetic values (technological gimmicks subverting beauty or truth) but rather that having helped 'capitulate' the audience, ludic properties might equally well work to undermine that engagement.<sup>637</sup>

Contrary to Kirkpatrick's warning, I argue that Third Angel's own predilections are revealed in *Department of Distractions*, as the fictional character of the Professor of Beauty and Truth is found (to the surprise of other characters) to be based in the Centre for Mathematics. I argue that the self-critical inclusion of the reference to beauty in mathematics deliberately undermines the authority or primacy of art (to which the performance aligns most obviously) and science, which further ingratiates the audience via the shared, knowing gesture that critiques the event of which they all (audience and company) are a part.

Anywhere Theatre additionally compounds Third Angel's ludic sensibility, as that which is a distinct form of anticipatory legacy-making, and generative of a preemptive longevity. Conjoining the ludic form with research, Third Angel's early-2023 pipeline

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<sup>636</sup> artmetropol, 'Homo Ludens | in the TiG7 in Mannheim' (Germany, 2009)

<<https://artmetropol.tv/videos/beitraege/2009/homo-ludens.html>> [accessed 4 August 2023].

<sup>637</sup> Kirkpatrick. p.336.



project was the first (longer-term) planned contribution under the Anywhere Theatre banner, a programme of work titled *The Future Is Decided*. In this project, they planned to examine the challenge this title implies: is the future, in fact, already decided? The company arranged to interview experts across a variety of disciplinary fields to determine whether, to their specialist knowledge, they already hold the answers. Ludic form reframes the project's question (neither defined by the experts, nor fixed by the statement): *can* the future be decided? The novelist Jane Goodall made a transition from academic to fictional writing and ponders whether this 'helped to fine-tune' her 'intuition as to where you could make it up and where you needed to adhere to a framework of authenticated fact and detail'.<sup>638</sup> She further notes that creative thoughts became a distraction to her but were 'oddly insistent'; she then 'began to invent as well as to search'.<sup>639</sup> Re-search as a *looking-again* is, as Third Angel have shown, often playful, seeking the novel in the already-known (The Department ask their audience to 'look-again' at the world) and the art inspired by the science (circle-and-pulley of the Earth and Voyager). The reverse is also true, as Goodall suggests: to a creative-minded researcher 'a kind of knowledge-based dreaming can take over and researched elements start to lead the way'.<sup>640</sup> Certainly invention, as Ellinson raised, is a form of 'knowledge-based dreaming', or the reverse, an imaginative-searching. The devising games and text-generation exercises employed by Third Angel are indicative of this imaginative-searching, of play as invention-oriented research. *Homo Ludens* staged this playful

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<sup>638</sup> Jane Goodall, 'Nightmares in the Engine Room', in *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 200–208. p.200.

<sup>639</sup> Goodall. p.201.

<sup>640</sup> Goodall. p.204.

inventiveness, reinforcing the role of research-as-practice in Third Angel's methodology, where research is both practice and performance. When making *Homo Ludens*, Kelly had realised: 'I can see a connection in the piece we are making with the future-obsession' of previous work, *Presumption*.<sup>641</sup> If the ludic aspect of being human carries 'through generations', acknowledgement of this by the company in 2009 positions Anywhere Theatre as a contemporary assimilation of their prior-established creative tendency into what is now a legacy-making model of working practice.

Third Angel's use of the ludic form, I have proposed, has positioned them 'ahead of the curve'. As the company wrote, with reference to *Homo Ludens* in 2009:

We set about making a work that deals with the future, and with the finite reality of our lifespans. We talked about work that deals with getting old, but is of interest to the young. We talked about grids, squares, curved corners [...]<sup>642</sup>

Whilst many longstanding companies do not rely solely on the repeat custom of their original audiences but continue to innovate, I argue that Third Angel's inherent ludic form—whether of shows that directly employ game functions or shows whose research and development has been conducted using games—is key to their appeal among younger audiences, many of whom are digital natives, and to whom the gamification of their everyday applications and services is increasingly the *status quo*. Kirkpatrick's study of game-performance revealed, perhaps unsurprisingly, that 'the audience for shows that were overtly game-inspired tended to be younger'; I propose that whilst Third Angel's brand remains recognisable the form it takes (evident in the development of Anywhere

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<sup>641</sup> Third Angel, 'Third Angel Blog: Problem Solving'.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid.

Theatre) and the audiences it reaches is continually reinvented.<sup>643</sup> My prior claim that Third Angel have largely operated 'ahead of the curve' relates to the question 'is the future decided?' I argue that the company's ludic tendencies emulate their capacity for reinvention, which in turn promotes company previval. This statement is supported by the insights of recent healthcare and gerontology studies, which, whilst somewhat speculative, I introduce here as an illustrative concept to furnish my claim. Longevity theorist Aubrey de Grey has proposed a (controversial) notional situation called 'longevity escape velocity'. This hypothetical occurrence is achievable if life expectancy improves at a faster rate than ageing. For instance, if a person's life expectancy can be improved by *more than a year* for every year alive, it is theoretically possible to live forever. Mapping this onto a graph, showing 'life expectancy' versus 'natural ageing', the result of de Grey's optimal condition returns an upward-sweeping curve (Fig. 27).

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<sup>643</sup> Kirkpatrick. p.337.

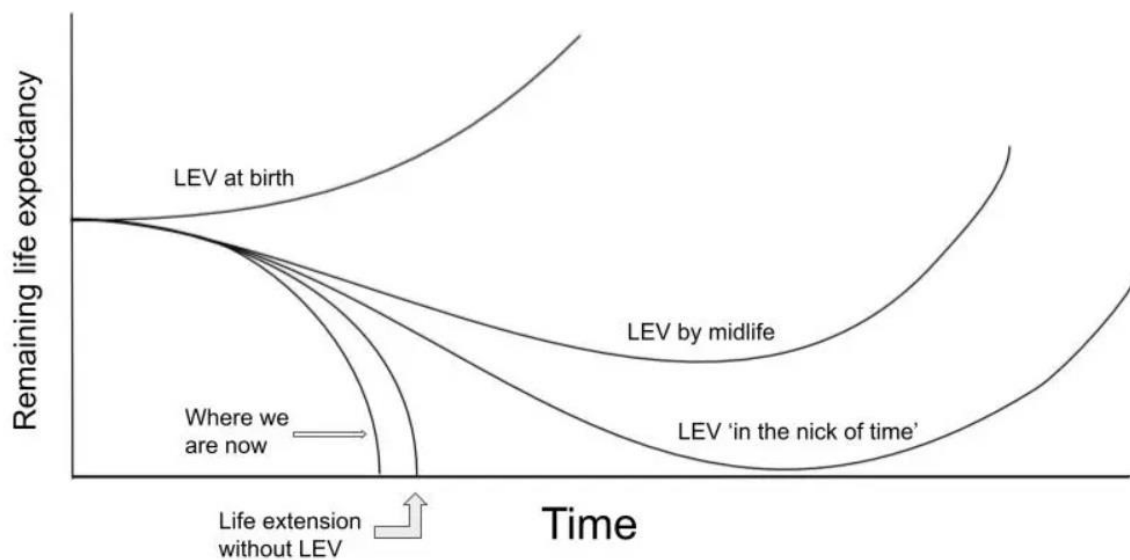


Fig. 27: 'Longevity Escape Velocity' (LEV) scenarios depicted (growinglife.com)

I suggest that 'longevity escape velocity' therefore supposes that an optimum state of longevity is that in which longevity no longer exists, that its relation to the 'end' is severed; if all threats could be removed (such as ageing in the case of gerontology) then it is possible to escape the need to think of longevity at all. Practices of collecting and preserving, whether through archives or less formal compilations, partly uphold the legacy of the companies they index. However, applying de Grey's logic that the optimal state of longevity is that in which it undoes itself, collecting can also be seen to intrinsically co-operate with decay, only deferring the end of a pre-destined material disfunction or obsolescence; even the spinning disc of a digital hard-drive is subject to the laws of materiality and entropy. It is, instead, the *living* archive that resists entropy, by continually re-activating and re-engaging the collected. In this light, Third Angel's legacy-making inherent in their collecting-and-reuse perhaps 'escapes' the need for an archive for so long as reuse by the company has still been possible (until the company

cease activity in summer 2023), or until the traces of their work in that of their mentees and collaborators is no longer recognisable.

## Conclusion

In Third Angel's work, their web-like re-organising system becomes closer to something organic as new connections and links are made, broken and remade between projects and their iterations, illustrated by the use of the term *corpus* to encapsulate this analogy.<sup>644</sup> The body, however, also contains micro-systems (such as bacteria, good and bad) and even decay generates new ecosystems and bi-products (such as the fertilising properties of composted waste). Their practice of reuse is akin to Goat Island's 'small acts of repair', as the decaying artefact is re-vitalised in a new form, or the remains of a past event brought back from the clutches of forgetting.<sup>645</sup> As this chapter has demonstrated, the collecting and re-use methodology inherent in Third Angel's corpus reflects oscillations between art and science, the known and unknown, the extraordinary and the everyday, the 'big here' and the 'long now', the inside and outside. Theorising in terms of a 'corpo-topography' gives definition and form to this mobile and complex iterative web-system. The use of such metaphorical concepts in this chapter reflects a similar practice, shaping an academic enquiry through the process of illustration, or 'the giving of form'. Anthropologist Paul Rabinow observes that 'description is not a naïve act but one that can arise only within a process of inquiry that is engaged in one or another type of form

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<sup>644</sup> Savage and Symonds. p.81.

<sup>645</sup> Bottoms and Goulish, *Small Acts of Repair: Performance, Ecology, and Goat Island* (Routledge, 2007).

making'.<sup>646</sup> Following this understanding, *performance* is a process of giving form to the conceptual, much as the 'discursive, logical' or 'scientific' give form to inquiries they address. The use of research-as-practice in Third Angel's work is simultaneously performative and generative: it gives form to their research, precisely as a re-searching and looking-again. Third Angel's reflection on their unrealised projects in their documentary video intertwines with their preference for detective-like artistic works; the showing-the-working-out of autobiographical practices crosses into the explicit and implicit acts of 'drawing' (physical and conceptual) and the recurrent imagery they deliberately deploy. Kelly reminds us that even 'the *Book of Unrealised Projects* is still an unrealised project'.<sup>647</sup> Perhaps it is better thought of as part of a corpo-topography of their research; the *Book of Unrealised Projects* may be closer to a map than an archive catalogue.

This chapter's investigation of research-as-practice has gestured towards a reverse-engineering of the more familiar practice-as-research that exposes an iterative or oscillatory research-practice in which neither leads the other. Furthermore, I have argued that a perpetual motion between different registers of knowledge, knowledge-seeking and the imagined, enhances longevity (long before a company exists only vicariously through its legacy). A topography of the optimal future for those seeking longevity, if de Grey is ever proved correct, might look like an upward-sweeping curve, which produces a median line projecting diagonally outwards from zero. 'Longevity escape velocity' is aspirational (a motion towards a sort of 'terminal' velocity, an irresistible play on words),

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<sup>646</sup> Rabinow in Kathleen Vaughan, 'Mariposa: The Story of New Work of Research/Creation, Taking Shape, Taking Flight', *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts*, 2009, 166–86. p.169-170.

<sup>647</sup> '/Seconds. - Third Angel - Unrealised Projects'.

where all forces combine to propel the 'life' forward with no change in speed, like a space craft floating eternally out into space. Just as the Voyager space probe reveals in *600 People*, and reflected in the circle-and-line topography of *9 Billion Miles From Home*, like a trajectory line plotting a course away from Earth, the journey into uncharted space is as much about the unknowns of the future, as about taking in the view of what is behind.<sup>648</sup> One contributor to Third Angel's longevity as a company is the very fact that their subject matter has long connected, albeit indirectly, with the discourse around longevity and legacy that, by return, feeds back into their own legacy, as their traces and influences keep floating on, like a record laden with stories of home.

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<sup>648</sup> Al Reinert, 'The Blue Marble Shot: Our First Complete Photograph of Earth', *The Atlantic*, 2011 <<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2011/04/the-blue-marble-shot-our-first-complete-photograph-of-earth/237167/>> [accessed 30 September 2020].

# Conclusion

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, Arts Council England base their interventions and support around their preferred concept of 'resilience' which promotes 'surviving' and 'thriving'. In a 2018 report aptly titled 'What is Resilience Anyway?' they refer to the resilience of organisations, rather than individuals.<sup>649</sup> Even before considering the difference between collaborative practices and more traditional company hierarchies (director- and/or writer-led), it will be clear that theatre inherently operates through the collection of individuals under any structure: even solo performance artists need audiences. Whilst ACE and the report's external consultants (The Audience Agency and Golant Media) deemed individual resilience 'out of scope' for this particular report, the implication of its conclusions is that freelancers or solo artists may only be resilient when affiliated with organisations.<sup>650</sup> As the authors of the report accept, a 'systems view' requires a broader stance, as my research into collaboration and 'precarious alliances' (Chapter 3) has similarly shown. However, my research reveals that ACE's 2018 report into sector resilience misses out the complexity of collaborative systems as mutable, changing structures, with freelancers and individuals coming and going from companies on a project-by-project basis. The authors of the report acknowledged the need to think further about the complexity of those systems:

[...] [T]he arts and culture sector can itself be viewed as a system – constantly changing and adapting, driven by new challenges, threats and opportunities. As with a natural ecosystem, this implies birth, death and transformation. For the

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<sup>649</sup> Woodley et al. p.9.

<sup>650</sup> Woodley et al. p.11.



sector as a whole to be resilient, all the organisations within it do not necessarily need to survive in their current form. [...] [S]ome commentators have argued that a more resilient sector might allow more organisations to come to a natural end.<sup>651</sup>

In 2011 Lyn Gardner wrote a column in *The Guardian* whose title posed a related question from a different perspective: 'What's the secret to eternal life for a theatre company?' In this column Gardner likewise questions whether the 'death' of companies can sometimes be considered positive. Likening companies to natural ecosystems, she suggests 'it is only when you cut away the dead wood that other plants get the light they need'.<sup>652</sup> I agree that longevity may *not* always be a virtue, though for different reasons: organisations may not need to survive in order for their networked individuals to remain active in the sector, which in turn indicates that the demise of some might not straightforwardly enable the growth of others. Furthermore, there is a risk that their collapse might also close down whole networks which they, in part, sustain. As I have argued, Third Angel itself exists out of the ecosystem of bodies - members, collaborators - that constitute it: neither merely a group of artists, nor exclusively characterised by its historic repertoire. Furthermore, as additional people - collaborators, audiences, venues, funders and researchers - become integrated into its flows, the potential exchanges of knowledge, experience and competencies that occur are multiplied exponentially, in number and frequency. In this way, I suggest that the longevity of Walton and Kelly's partnership is a positive force that supports a wider ecosystem far exceeding the

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<sup>651</sup> Woodley et al. p.10.

<sup>652</sup> Lyn Gardner, 'What's the Secret of Eternal Life for a Theatre Company? | Stage | The Guardian', 2011 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2011/nov/16/theatre-company-longevity-life>> [accessed 7 August 2020].

collaborative corpus of Third Angel. Their influence on the sector as a whole is partly determined by the ability of seemingly small-scale companies to exist alongside their larger counterparts: to borrow an analogy from Savage and Symonds, an ecosystem needs its hives of small pollinators to maintain its growth.<sup>653</sup>

In this thesis I have framed longevity as that which only exists in relation to an end: by this definition, the analogy of eternal life is a misnomer. After summarising the key arguments I have made in this thesis, in this Conclusion I extend a further argument that ACE's recognition of resilience as part of life-death cycles of the sector at large actually supports my wider case advocating for the positive nature of longevity. I propose that thinking in terms of longevity opens a discussion of longer-termism that better reflects the wide-reaching and complex networks that grow, often unseen and unmeasured, out of seemingly small-scale artistic enterprises. In the thesis introduction I set out my argument that longevity is a positive condition, and established the scope of my research undertaking in tracing the generative phenomena from Third Angel's methodology towards suggestions of schema for future practice. In this Conclusion, I summarise my findings to support such arguments, and to provide a more hopeful basis for the future.

My thesis has focused on Third Angel's practice since their founding in 1995, a company that its Chair of Trustees, Adrian Friedli, has described as making 'an important and unique contribution to contemporary theatre practice' in the UK.<sup>654</sup> This study is the

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<sup>653</sup> Savage and Symonds. p.97-8.

<sup>654</sup> Third Angel, 'An Announcement from the Team and Board of Trustees | Third Angel' <<https://thirdangel.co.uk/thank-you>> [accessed 25 April 2023].

first to examine their archival collection, and to gain direct insight from its members; it is unique in its context, the observation of the company and surrounding research taking place during the Covid-19 lockdowns, and up to the announcement of the company's cessation in Summer 2023. The question of longevity has been framed by this impending 'end', as the traces, influences and energies of the company are still keenly felt in the sector. Through my case study methodology, I have examined the conditions that promote longevity in collaborative and devised performance practice, through a close analysis and observation of Third Angel. The preceding chapters have traced a series of practices that connect artistic and organisational functions of the company; foremost, I have shown how the recurrence of collecting and remembering in Third Angel's repertoire engages both with an organisational legacy-building and an artistic preference for research-aligned work. These methodologies have been supported by terms corresponding with broader, interdisciplinary discourse: precarity and economy, longevity and vitality, memory and repetition. The use of these terms and their interconnections unites philosophical and phenomenological discussions with real-world considerations of labour, economics and politics, and offers a language through which it may be possible to better communicate around the issue of longevity in the arts.

The overarching objective of this study has been to present arguments that support optimal strategies for longevity in small-scale UK contemporary performance practice, from the vantage point of Third Angel's 28-year model. I have proposed that for Third Angel, and potentially for other equivalent companies, precarity and the risk of 'disappearance' can, counterintuitively, be adopted as a positive resource towards artistic and collaborative longevity; the additional threats posed by company scale and geographical divides necessitate a closer relationship with precarity, one that could turn

its threats into opportunities and assets. I have argued that there is an integrated approach to longevity evident within contemporary practice, which may be closer to a 'pre-' future than the postmodern: this is practice that anticipates what is to come, more than it reacts to the past. Performance extends presence with the promise of resurrection on consecutive evenings, or in a company's commitment to produce more works for future audiences. In this way, performance makers are accustomed to these cycles of reinvention: Graeme Rose, for example, considers theatre shows 'as being like a mini life and death cycle'.<sup>655</sup> I have argued that longevity designates a *recurrent* presence, as opposed to a purely continuous state. As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, the act of repetition is intrinsic to acts of performance, rehearsed or otherwise, and as such places longevity as a result of action, rather than a passive effect. I also argued that Third Angel's methodology of collection and reuse echoes their collaborative and compositional tendencies (Chapters 3 and 5), and that their past performance works are revitalised by devices such as deferral and digressions (Chapter 2); these devices counteract disappearance as they oppose, reconfigure and, ultimately, stave off the inevitable. I suggest that the resilience ACE identifies when addressing arts organisations is better considered in terms of longevity, as that which embraces the processual extension of activity in the sector as something active and interconnected. To illustrate, organisational resilience connotes an individual strength in the face of adversity; one can be *more resilient* than another, but one cannot 'have' or 'exemplify' *more longevity* than

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<sup>655</sup> Rose and Fellman.

another: its conditions are incomparable and unmeasurable.<sup>656</sup> By extension, I propose a series of schema for future practice:

## I. Living is 'not being dead'

Longevity's seemingly linear and binary tensions actually cause oscillations between poles: acts of resilience that push away from death and back to the continual business of 'living'. James Yarker commented on Stan's Cafe's 25th anniversary:

It sort of felt like just celebrating not being dead, and that seems like a really weird thing to celebrate. So I only agreed to have a celebration if we could make a new show, because it feels like you should always be looking forward [...] but with all your experience and your contacts and your momentum and your savings and everything behind you—but trying to keep the energy of having just started.<sup>657</sup>

Longevity is a corollary of survival, which assumes the avoidance of expiration, of 'not being dead'. Longevity, however, aspires for a survival that is more constant and chartable, existing somewhere just beyond the horizon, rather than in the immediate troubled waters of everyday, precarious life. Yarker's determination to celebrate longevity

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<sup>656</sup> The French *longeve*, and English *longevous* come close to describing this comparative or superlative, but even these don't consider any form of metric; the amount of years lived beyond an average might be such a measure, though this doesn't consider the specifics of each individual case, the contexts of each lifetime and the unique crises faced.

<sup>657</sup> James Yarker and Rob Fellman, 'Transcript of Interview with James Yarker' (Unpublished, 2021).

with a new project encapsulates this modus operandi - 'looking forwards' rather than 'hunkering down' - but by maintaining a vitality that always feels immediate and mobile. By 'not thinking of longevity as an aim', Yarker deliberately resists recognition of its fatal bind. An example of forward-looking resistance from Third Angel's recent practice is the making of *Distraction Agents* as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic, switching the tour of *Department of Distractions* for a creative product that would not need to rely on filling auditoria. Crises, decay and atrophy all cause this type of 'adaptive resilience' loop to keep occurring, in turn actually reaffirming longevity as it opposes the demise that is part of its constituent tension.<sup>658</sup> To endure in the fashion of Third Angel is to undergo more moments of resilience, to perform a sustained antagonism of the fatal bind over time. Third Angel's resilience, rather than a 'bouncing back', is closer to the concept ACE identified in 'What is resilience anyway?' of 'bouncing forward'.<sup>659</sup>

## II. Resilience is political

As this thesis has demonstrated, Third Angel employ devices that are also 'artistic competencies' which specifically antagonise and reframe the apparent paradox of longevity; their work is often fugitive, but not finite. In Chapter 3 I drew upon Katsouraki's 'Trojan horse' analogy, arguing that Third Angel, as a long-enduring theatre company, are also surreptitiously antagonistic towards the socio-political system in which

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<sup>658</sup> Woodley et al.

<sup>659</sup> Woodley et al. p.9.

they are situated. Katsouraki suggests that the Trojan horse mode of resilience does not 'exercise a clear set of practices'; it functions as an ethos that 'makes possible the kind of radical democratic awareness' driven by the belief 'that the usual forms of power and resistance cannot work in the old way'.<sup>660</sup> Counter to this, as I have demonstrated in this study, Third Angel's ethos does, however, generate 'a clear set of practices' that contribute to a politics of resilience, embedded in their methodological preferences. The Trojan horse is both an organisational positioning (of affiliation or proximity to another system) and simultaneously one among a set of innate artistic competencies. I have outlined how contemporary theatre companies working with ACE subsidy are inherently political, in part through their responsibilities to the taxpayers who contribute to their livelihoods. The Trojan horse exemplifies an inside-out system of exchange that opposes the omnipresent conditions 'outside' (the UK arts sector) and instead presents opportunities for criticism and reassessment from 'inside' the hegemonic system (of government-led arts councils). Other antagonistic resiliencies include: the democratic underpinnings of a collaborative approach, the act of defying disappearance through collecting and retelling, and competencies like digression and deferral that oppose disappearance. Katsouraki's identification of a politics of resilience contributes to an overarching ethics of longevity for contemporary performance makers, that intersects between the socio-political environment and the artistic competencies that define their labour. Longevity of Third Angel's antagonistic practices has therefore been enhanced by their extended life within the sector and their unique position as a multi-term NPO.

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<sup>660</sup> Katsouraki. p.308.

### III. Time is relative

Linear or chronic time has also been examined in this thesis as part of what constitutes longevity's conditions; longevity, as a *potential duration* is a chronic concept whose possibility elucidates and affirms hope, fear and anticipation. Throughout, I have positioned Third Angel as part of a postmodern and postdramatic paradigm. Inherent in this paradigm is a change in perspective of linear, 'clock' or 'chronic' time in Western society. I propose that in aligning with a 'post' paradigm, there is an effort to position oneself already in the future; the postdramatic is less about a taxonomy of the past, but inhabiting the 'edge of the living present', no longer 'propped' upon the past but able to separate from the everyday condition of precarity. Wallis and McKinney contest that Western history created the myth of 'immortality' to compensate for a religious 'loss of continuity with the dead'. Whether religious or scientific in nature, immortality's 'promise' is based on progress and accumulation (of godly good favour, of financial power, or of scientific development).<sup>661</sup> The implications are twofold: first, that it is counterintuitively a 'loss of continuity' that causes longevity to be conceived; secondly, immortality is considered as a way *out of* the longevity bind, like the 'longevity escape velocity' I speculatively introduced in Chapter 5 (drawing on Aubrey de Grey).

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<sup>661</sup> Wallis and McKinney. p.68.



## IV. Values are valuable

In this thesis I have used the analogy of value (a price afforded to a good or service) and *values* (the weight of importance attributed to things) to bridge my analysis of artistic longevity with economic and organisational longevity. Reminiscent of the 'prayer' (*precor*) and 'debt' (*precarius*) identified in Chapter 1 as the etymological roots of 'precarity', the eternal promise is closer to speculating on derivatives in economics—contracts based on future projected values of products—than it is to a guarantee of immortality (such as agreeing forward transactions to protect crops from future weather risks).<sup>662</sup> Accumulation in the case of Third Angel, like the values with which it is concerned, is also twofold; firstly, the accumulation of archival collections and knowledge registers are based on the future values the company anticipate these things *will (or may) bear*; secondly their accumulation is not founded on a promise of 'eternal life', but rather in paying forward the intangible values associated with their art. Their two modes of accumulation are therefore motivated by their potential propagation, in the ability to extend their value into the future. I have shown how the 'promise' of eternal life has its echoes in the anticipatory mode of deferral and digression in storytelling, that are abstractions of a similar hopeful ideal. I have identified the artistic competencies of deferral and digression, initially evident in Third Angel's storytelling methodology, arguing that these are also transferrable to the *values* of the company: as Kelly

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<sup>662</sup> Elena Esposito, 'The Structures of Uncertainty: Performativity and Unpredictability in Economic Operations', *Economy and Society*, 42.1 (2013), 102–29. p.105; W.I.R.E., *The Future Is Ours: Scenarios for the Future of Everyday Life*. p.77.

proposed, stories, in their work, are also currency. Taking the promissory nature of currencies as a way of accumulating economic wealth (money represents value), and applying this to the hopeful nature of longevity (values tied up in stories and ideals), it is possible to connect the exchange of value(s) with the value(s) of exchange.<sup>663</sup> Artists have been operating on the basis of moneyless 'in kind' exchanges for a long time – the concept of value-exchange is already *valuable* in the sector. For the longevity of companies, new values and cross-disciplinary derivative thinking present the hope for a future that exceeds the fictions of neoliberal progress as that limited by an economic end tied inseparably to the death of the ego.

## V. The here-and-now is expansive

The web-like concept of the 'living archive' frames networked and collaborative thinking both in terms of accumulation and propagation. The living archive, in the sense I have used it (see Chapter 5), is that which traces movements from inside-out and outside-in, crossing creative and operational functions together to most accurately reveal the 'work' as syncretic and multi-modal. As previously outlined, the *corpus* of Third Angel is the combination of these inside-outside systems, and as such I have argued that they are not just custodians of their archive, but rather are a living archive themselves, as an ecosystem of bodies, memories, networks, documents, artefacts, and places. This

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<sup>663</sup> For instance, an artists imaginary rendition of the future in one of W.I.R.E thinktank's publications depicts a service desk offering currency exchanges such as 'Drone Support' to 'Storytelling' at a 3:1 exchange rate. (<https://www.thewire.ch/en/publications/wie-wir-morgen-leben>)

argument compounds the usefulness of reframing archival practices as 'living', in relation to their flexible and often-propulsive approach to artwork completion, and the praxical nature of their research-as-performance preferences. The connections between collecting and company legacy become more acute where—I use another hyphenated term here to make this distinction—the *company-archive* may live beyond the company itself. I have argued that a collaborative project has its own potential that separates the possibility of its longevity from that of the group configuration that made it; I suggest that a living archive, as constituted by multiple networked knowledge registers, similarly becomes autonomous. In a sense, the company will not 'live' beyond their cessation without a form of active archive that does the 'living' on its behalf, disseminating the conceptual 'ideational patterns' of their creative signature. I have demonstrated how Third Angel have propagated this effect in their own practice: the company's influence already exists as traces in *Turma de '95* (Chapter 2); in the actions of their mentees; in the affective memory of their audiences and participants; in the work of scholars that engage with their documentation; in the imagination of the readers of their publications. This list is, of course, non-exhaustive. In their collecting practices Third Angel have also valued unmade and unseen work, which I have argued preempts their legacy, as even these archived projects are citational and have the potential for future vitalisation. The ethos of the living archive reinforces my argument that legacy is possible where a system is still in circulation, its vitality is (re)generated from outside, from those that interact with it beyond its original form or intention.

The living archive is largely conceptual, which, like Third Angel's proposal of Anywhere Theatre, has utopic potential for bringing prior-established creative tendencies into what may become the cornerstones for a longevity-inducing and legacy-making

model of working practice. Virtual systems can uphold deferral, as something gesturing toward immortality is achieved by moving from the bounds and threats of the 'real' to a preserved yet mutable model of repeatability and reuse. In the short-termist, precarious sphere of UK arts labour, longevity for the sector as a whole may rest on a politics of a 'living archive of long-term thinking', a quotation I borrow from Brian Eno, as I prefer to think of longevity less as an opposition to an 'end', but rather as an expanding of a bigger 'here' and a longer 'now'.<sup>664</sup> Gardner's quest for the 'secret to eternal life' for theatre companies may be in removing the necessity of a term like longevity at all, as terms that hope for extended participation in the sector are based on the limits and challenges defined by a precarious capitalist democracy. If companies and organisations could be considered by both the sector and ACE (as its governing body) as the networks and constellations of art-makers that they are, longevity would be removed from the threats posed to smaller clusters of collaborators, instead transposing onto the sector as a whole. The question becomes a greater one, one of the nature of future subsidy and of the future role of the sector itself: what role can a democratic, 'collaboratory' and values-led arts sector play in a wider socio-economic Britain, in the context of recovery from the recent pandemic and the results of an exit from the European Union, that is now (at the time of writing) contesting military invasions at its own borders in Ukraine?

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For the 2023 NPO round, ACE's core grant was cut by 9%. Despite this cut, 27% of the portfolio is now made up of new additions, among which many are 'trusts',

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<sup>664</sup> Eno.

'awards' and 'foundations', as well as a number of museums, libraries, and heritage organisations. Organisations in London still make up around a third of total investment.<sup>665</sup> Among the current NPO organisations that saw their funding cut were Third Angel, contemporaries Unlimited Theatre and past-mentees Action Hero. This appears at face value to reflect, once again, a changing in priorities of government policy, to the detriment of the breadth and diversity of contemporary performance practice. Action Hero have decided to continue without NPO support, whilst both Third Angel and Unlimited Theatre have made the decision to wind down their company activities (with the help of ACE 'transition funding'). In Third Angel's public statement, Walton announces: '[for] Alex and I [...] I'm excited to see what the next chapter may hold, the future opportunities, collaborations and potential new projects'. Third Angel characteristically look to the future, despite the company's cessation. Kelly adds: 'we collaborated with, and mentored, so many brilliant, inspiring people. I am looking forward to those relationships continuing[...]'.<sup>666</sup> I finish by quoting a 2015 article about their making practice, in which Kelly suggests that 'sometimes, you don't realise a [performance] section contains the end' of the show, 'because it isn't the end of that section'. Of this project, he recalls, 'we all knew it was over, but I was still standing on stage talking [...]. It's obvious when you see it. Cut the stuff that happens afterwards, as well, and finish with the statistics'.<sup>667</sup>

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<sup>665</sup> 'Arts Council England's Investment Programme: Key Data | Campaign for the Arts' <<https://www.campaignforthearts.org/news/arts-council-englands-investment-programme-key-data/>> [accessed 12 April 2023].

<sup>666</sup> Third Angel.

<sup>667</sup> Kelly, 'If in Doubt: Editing, Devising, and Third Angel'. p.282-3.

28 Years

55+ Collaborators (from various disciplines)

13 Film and Digital projects

1 Hybrid project (*Distraction Agents*)

21 Theatre projects

23 Performance and Installation projects

99 Programme-based mentees (23 artists, 76 producers over 250 sessions)

20+ Professional mentees

7 Years of regular youth workshops

30+ Publications

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