"…Aaand Scene!":
Moving Towards a Future for the Independent Theatre Landscape in Toronto
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Abstract

While the growing independent theatre scene has served as a catalyst for artistic innovation in the theatrical ecosystem, it is facing its own specific challenges in relation to venues, sustainability, and audiences. Given that, this study seeks to understand how we might secure the future sustainability of the Toronto independent theatre scene. Using semi-structured expert interviews, this study has set the foundation by developing a thorough understanding of and insights into the independent theatre ecosystem in Toronto and its relationships to film and television, as well as the institutional and commercial theatres, at present, as well as identifying practitioner-perceived challenges and changes to those ecosystems. It concludes that to answer the question and ensure the future viability and sustainability of the system, a preferred future must be developed using the input of multiple stakeholders, and proposes a workshop methodology to do just that.

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Dedication

To anyone who has ever worked hard to make something to share with others.

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Statement of Contributions

Excerpts from "Why So Hostile" by Michael Healey was originally published on SpiderWebShow (https://spiderwebshow.ca/cdntimes/become-a-spiderwebshow-maker/), a knowledge commons by and for the theatre community, on November 11, 2014.

Preface: A Personal Perspective

"Hellooooo down there."

Those were the first words I remember saying on stage. I must have been six, wearing a Canada Post outfit that my mom got by asking our letter carrier if they could spare one. I was playing the mailman in *Jack and the Beanstalk* (I think). It was the final production of the Saturday morning kids' theatre class at Magnus Theatre in Thunder Bay. It was one of those things, like gymnastics or scouts, that you sign your kids up for that's not babysitting, but teaches them life skills while giving parents some time off.

Unfortunately, I wound up enjoying it too much.

Fast-forward a number of years. After years of performing in and producing plays and musicals, doing everything from performing monologues to tearing tickets to designing and hanging lights to sewing costumes, I settled in Toronto, the theatrical heart of Canada. Surrounded by the big flashy musicals of Mirvish. The esteemed Stratford and Shaw festivals within reach. Multiple theatre training centres and festivals. The land of theatrical opportunity.

I fell in with the comedy crowd. Sometimes, I was on stage at least five times a week at different venues, all for free or, when lucky, a drink ticket or two. I did plays at the Fringe and with a few companies. I was writing and performing and developing my comedic voice. I was living and creating in the independent scene, seeing great work at weird venues, in the back of bars, on fire escapes, and in physical and digital spaces. So much interesting, innovative, and exciting work was happening.

After what felt like a boom of exciting creative activity, I started to see many of my talented friends leave. They said Toronto was too expensive; they hit a ceiling; they weren't being seen; there weren't paying opportunities; they were just tired. The ones that stayed had conversations about having to choose between starting a family and an artistic life; about scraping together cash for projects because funding agencies didn't recognize their work or their discipline. Venues like Unit 102 and Storefront Theatre closed; Honest Ed's, the heart of the Fringe Tent, shut down, forcing them to find a new location. Not only did it feel like the scene was losing a lot of talented artists, but also their spaces, and their audiences. It felt like the independent theatre scene in Toronto was in crisis.

I wanted to help my friends. I wanted to help my collaborators. I wanted to give back to those people and places that had trained me and taught me. I wanted to make sure that a scene that

had given me space to grow and hone my artistic voice would still exist into the future to help other artists do the same.

I hope that, in some small way, this project makes a contribution to doing so.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Crisis in Independent Theatre

There are changes that are occurring to the overall arts, culture, and entertainment ecosystem that will not only affect Toronto's theatrical ecosystem in general, but also the independent theatre sector in particular. The funded institutional and commercial theatres may have the ability to plan, strategize, and advocate through their professional associations in order to prepare for and manage those changes.

However, those in the independent theatre scene in Toronto may not have access to the same structures and advocacy that the institutional theatres do in order to prepare to address these changes. For example, creators in the independent space may or may not belong to labour unions, meaning that they may or may not have access to that form of advocacy. Given the project-based nature of the work in the independent space, coupled with its inherent fluidity, those in the independent sector may not be considered and be overlooked and unrecognized. Thus, an understanding of the independent theatre sector at present, along with the forces of change that are affecting it, are necessary for its continued survival.

Many of the reports on Canadian theatre have been focussed on the commercial or mainstream sectors, while much of the academy has focussed research on the era of nation building in the 1960s and 1970s (McKinnie, 2007). Very little attention has been focussed on what is known as the "independent" theatre sector in Toronto (beyond Helen Yung's report examining sector builders in the independent scene (Yung, 2017)). The independent theatre sector in Toronto has been viewed as a transition space from training in school to work in the institutional and commercial theatre, but it is growing as schools graduate more practitioners with no corresponding increase in jobs at the institutional theatres (Yung, 2017). The independent sector has high turnover, few formal structures that can advocate for the sector, and little money to finance those working within it. However, it contributes greatly to the ecosystem in Toronto as the seat of theatrical innovation (both in artistic content and organizational structure), as a learning ground, and as a place to experiment with new ideas that would not flourish in the mainstream presently, but may be adopted later.

This function of Toronto's independent theatre sector is vital, as arts and culture are important to Torontonians' lives. Not only do residents value the arts highly (Toronto Arts Foundation, 2016, 2018), but also artists flock to Toronto to engage in artistic practice, believing that making it in Toronto is a badge of success (Yung, 2017). The arts help us to engage in conversation,

express ourselves, and come together. As the largest city in Canada, and home to the headquarters of many of the nation's leading companies, Toronto offers opportunities, both economic and social, to artists that are not available elsewhere in Canada. They also contribute to the national economy, with creative industries accounting for 3.1% of the GDP in 2010 (Statistics Canada, 2014).

Theatre has a long history of being interwoven into the arts and culture fabric of Toronto. From touring road shows in the early twentieth century to the present day, Toronto has been a seat of theatrical creation. The Toronto theatre scene has also played a national cultural role; Toronto is considered the birthplace of a Canadian theatre, written by Canadians, performed by Canadians, for Canadian audience, in the 1960s and 1970s (Johnston, 1991). Nowadays, Toronto often lays claim to the title of the third largest centre for English theatre, behind New York City and London (McKinnie, 2007). That large theatrical ecosystem in Toronto plays an economic role in the fabric of the city, as the financial impact of a night at the theatre affects the local economy, with $132 million spent on tickets on shows produced by members of the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts (TAPA) in 2019 (Toronto Arts Foundation, n.d.). There are social and wellness benefits to the theatre as well, encouraging people to find a meeting place, and a sense of participation in a live event.

The fluidity of the independent theatre scene, along with its role as the seat of theatrical innovation, and as a training ground for newly-graduated artists on their way to audition for the institutional and commercial theatres are some of the characteristics of the independent theatre scene that are highly valued. Indeed, these three characteristics (fluidity, innovation, and training) have positioned the independent theatre landscape as vital to the theatrical ecology of Toronto. However, these same characteristics are driven by unsustainable practices within the sector.

The fluidity that occurs, for example, enables practitioners to practice in institutional, independent, and commercial theatres, as well as film and television. This results in expanded personal networks (which is vital to an artist), cross-pollination of ideas, and transfer of knowledge, which all also enable the innovation of the independent landscape. However, the fluidity is driven by the precarity and instability of paying work in the independent landscape.

While theatrical innovation is enabled by that fluidity, it is also enabled by the young nature of the independent theatre scene, as there is a perception that many of the practitioners in the scene are young. Younger practitioners, it is believed, are eager to build their reputations and have less to lose, and may not yet be beholden to institutions (like unions, for example), that may restrict the ways in which they can work. However, burnout drives the trend towards youth

in the sector. This is because the longer an artist is in the independent theatre sector, thy are confronted with more challenges, from lack of resources or pay, to perceived oversaturation, to exhaustion from "hustling" or balancing their lives and schedules. Given those circumstances, practitioners may burn out and leave the space. Couple that with the lack of pay, which may limit a practitioner's future decisions, such as having children or owning a home, an apparent vicious cycle begins to appear.

Finally, the independent theatre does fill the gap for practitioners between graduating from a training institution and working at institutional or commercial theatres. It provides them with an opportunity to train and develop their artistic voice. The institutional theatres use the independent theatre space as a resource for talent and innovative programming. They do this to elevate voices, surely, but also to remain relevant and transfer a show that has already proven its potential. This places more of the risk of creation on the artist. In exchange, the independent theatre artists receive resources, space, reputational currency, and hopefully, financial compensation. The various sectors have become co-dependent on one another for their existence. However, there is also a longing in the independent theatre scene for the ability to be a full artist in that space without the need for institutional theatre.

Thus, some of the positive characteristics of the independent theatre scene are driven by corresponding unsustainable practices. While overreliance on these unsustainable practices threaten the balance within the ecosystem, theatre itself is resilient; it has existed since time immemorial, with its European interpretation finding roots in Ancient Greece, and survived since then. However, theatre, along with the greater arts, culture, and entertainment context, is changing, which will then change the meaning that is made: for example, traditional definitions of theatre and performance are being challenged, while the economic impact of film and television production (thanks in part to Netflix) is increasingly appealing to creators to join their ranks. The digital space and new media not only affect audiences (who spend increasingly larger amounts of time with their screens) but also the marketing, casting, and creation processes for theatre. Those, coupled with, Toronto's real estate market, loss of smaller independent venues, cuts to arts councils, and other changes are pushing the independent theatre scene into what could be described as a crisis mode, creating questions about the future of the independent theatre in Toronto.

The Research Question

Given the importance of the theatrical ecology to Toronto, and the importance of the independent theatre space to that theatrical ecology, this study is pursuing the following question:

Given the perceived changes in the cultural and entertainment ecosystems in Toronto, how might we ensure the future sustainability of the independent theatre sector in Toronto?

This yields several smaller questions that this study also aims to answer:
- *How might we understand the current state of the independent theatre system?*
- *How might we understand which changes practitioners believe will change the landscape, for better or worse?*
- *How might we understand the future of the independent theatre sector from a practitioner perspective?*

This study seeks to answer the primary and secondary questions by examining the past, present, and future of the independent theatre ecosystem in Toronto. Examining the independent theatre system on its own, the role it plays within the larger theatrical ecosystem, and how it connects to other independent-yet-related ecosystems, will help build a foundation for understanding the future of the independent theatre ecosystem.

Cultural Materialism

To more accurately understand how independent theatre lives within this theatrical ecosystem, how the institutional and commercial sectors of theatre may influence it, and how it differs from them as well, we borrow a framework from a cultural materialist view of the theatre. Cultural materialism, developed from Marx's analysis of the systems of production, understands cultural practices as inseparable from the conditions of production and reception, and thus, influential on the meaning that is observed (Harvie, 2009). As an example, Jen Harvie, Professor of Contemporary Theatre and Performance at Queen Mary University of London theorizes that:

> We would expect two very different versions of [Carol Churchill's play] *Serious Money*, for example, if one was staged during an economic boom in a luxurious theatre crowded with patrons dripping with disposable income and the other during a recession in a poorly resourced theatre before an audience with little money. The former production might affirm protecting the wealth of the rich at the expense of the poor, and the latter might offer an aggressive critique of capitalism. Even the same production witnessed under very different economic conditions would produce different experiences and interpretations (Harvie, 2009, p. 23).

Harvie's comparison of the two theoretical performances offers a more concrete example of how the conditions of performance and reception may affect the interpreted meaning of a

theatrical event. Knowles (2004) offers a framework to illustrate this production of meaning from a theatrical event (figure 1).

Figure 1: Triangular Model for Making Meaning of Theatre. From Reading the Material Theatre (First Edition, p.19) by R. Knowles, New York: Cambridge University Press. Copyright 2004, Cambridge University Press.

Three elements form the corners of a triangle: performance text at the apex, and the conditions of production and conditions of reception at the other corners. Each element is connected by arrows back and forth. The arrows indicate that each corner interacts and influences the other, forming an ecosystem that generates or facilitates the creation of meaning. Thus, Knowles' form of material and semiotic analysis encourages the examination of the means of production and reception of the theatre as essential to the creation of meaning, rather than divorced from the larger analysis of meaning.

Knowles' framework not only provides an acknowledgement of the influence of the conditions of production and reception on the interpretation of meaning, but it also recognises the interconnected nature of those conditions. For example, a change in the availability of funding (which is a condition of production) not only directly affect the working conditions of the rehearsal (another condition of production), but also then affects the marketing budget, which in turn affects the selection of avenues for marketing material, which in turn may affect the message of the marketing material (which are all conditions of reception). Some conditions span both corners; the location of the theatre could be considered both a condition of production (since it can affect and influence the production of the work), and a condition of reception (as the venue can also shape the audience's experience as much as the work itself).

It also follows that the meaning made by audiences at commercial, institutional, and independent theatres are all separate and distinct, as their material conditions are distinct: for example, when looking at the conditions of production for the independent scene, venue availability is scarcer than that of the other forms, which means that the independent theatre audience may have to see the show at the back of a bar off a side street in a part of town far away from the downtown core. This new venue may make audiences feel less formal than as if they were in a proscenium theatre, or they may feel scared, or they may have a drink in hand while they watch the show. Regardless, it may create a different type of familiarity with the work being done, or a different expectation or pre-show experience, altering the audience's frame through which they will interpret what occurs, and thus the meaning that they will

interpret from the performance. Whereas commercial theatres have access to large proscenium theatres in the heart of the downtown core which enable them to create replicable spectacle in an accessible and safe environment, creating a different experience and frame of mind for the audience through which to interpret and make meaning from the production. However, given the interconnectedness as well as the fluidity between the independent, institutional, and commercial theatres, the material conditions in one will also affect the other.

A corollary of this framework is that any change to the material conditions of performance or reception of the independent theatre landscape will necessarily change the meaning of theatrical events within the independent space. Put differently, the changes that are occurring to the landscape, whether intentional or not, are going to change the meaning that audiences make of the work in the independent space.

This report will focus on two corners of the triangle: the issues surrounding the conditions of production and reception within the independent theatre scene. These conditions, as previously stated, will differ from the other, more studied theatrical sectors. They undoubtedly affect the making of meaning within the independent scene, which is why we will focus on them in more detail than the actual making of meaning. They will be examined through a practitioner's perspective, as the perception of the ones who are operating in the ecosystem will provide a valuable context for understanding the anxieties and concerns that are causing the feeling of crisis.

The Journey

Chapter 2 will examine and provide definitions of theatre and independent theatre with the Toronto context. From there, it will begin with a look to the past, providing a brief overview of the history of theatre in Toronto and Canada. Then, moving to the present, the current independent theatre ecosystem of Toronto, how it influences the greater theatrical ecosystem, and how it connects to other ecosystems (including film and television), exposing how the vibrancy and innovation that is valued about the sector is based on its precarity.

Chapter 3 will review the reasons and importance of the methods selected for gathering and analysing data about the current and future ecosystems, as well as the process for data analysis. A literature review, semi-structured interviews with experts (with a distinction made between those who have published or carry domain knowledge (domain experts) and those whose expertise lay in their experience in various parts of the ecosystem (practitioner experts)), thematic coding of the interviews and of data from the literature review, and affinity mapping were all used, while the VERGE framework and systems tools were used to organize and make

sense of the data. Effectiveness of methods and practice will be noted, as will issues surrounding sampling and participant privacy.

Chapter 4 will provide the data analysis, including comments on the existing ecosystem that fall outside of the previous framework. As well, it will examine the dissatisfaction with the current landscape, and forces for change that practitioners have identified are currently affecting the system, either directly or indirectly. It will review the data from the interview sessions regarding the future state, concluding that there is uncertainty and hesitancy when it comes to trying to articulate a future vision for the independent theatre scene. However, in attempting to answer questions about the future of the ecosystem, it will discuss the lack of structures to facilitate such discussions within the independent scene. It concludes that in order to secure the future sustainability of the independent theatre scene, vision(s) of a preferred future elicited from practitioners must exist.

Chapter 5 will propose an intervention into the form of a workshop for creating a preferred future, based on the three horizons framework, for those involved in the independent theatre landscape, including, critically, the requisite variety needed to ensure an effective workshop and the space through which it can be conducted. It will also provide insights from an independent theatre practitioner who attended a prototyping of the workshop.

Chapter 6 will reprise the cultural materialist framework given the new insights, and also note intended next steps, as well as areas for future research.

All set? Let's go.

Chapter 2: Context

Introduction

To begin to understand the current state of the independent theatre scene in Toronto, we have to understand what it is, where it comes from, how it has emerged as a counter-force to the mainstream (and sometimes developed into the mainstream), and how it connects and intertwines with not only the other theatrical ecosystems in the city, but other media ecosystems at large. While this may seem straightforward, it is actually fraught with nuance, debates, and fear, and will lead into conversations of legitimacy, inclusion, and precarity. While we may hope to come out relatively unscathed, our view of the independent theatre landscape, and the creators within it, will likely not.

A Note on Definitions

For any research report, we must understand, at the outset, what is being studied, and how it is defined. Thus, it makes sense to define "theatre" and "independent theatre." However, theatre is elusive of any form of categorization; independent theatre, more so. As they are both cultural practices, they are difficult to define. They also may not be in alignment with espoused cultural values (Frese, 2015). Further, what constitutes each is difficult to determine, given the acknowledgement of fluidity within the theatrical and artistic landscapes.

Definitions of theatre are often done by the academy, in order to facilitate the understanding and creation of meaning. However, such acts have been controversial since the first definitions appeared in Aristotle's *Poetics*. More recently, since the 1990s, when the academy began to view theatre studies as a field of performance studies, arguments over what constitutes theatre have been ongoing, with a broadening of the definition welcomed by those who resisted the ethnocentrism of the field, but with others questioning if broadening the definition left anything distinct about theatre studies as its own form of practice (Nellhaus, 2017).

The act of defining "theatre" and "drama" has also been debated by practitioners, though without necessarily the same precision or rigour of the academy. Discussing the difference in the use of the terms "drama" and "theatre", Jonathan Fox, founder of Playback Theatre, noted that the differences between the use of the two terms has been vague at best (Fox, 1992). However, he notes that the term "drama" has been used,

both by those who wish to separate themselves from the hierarchical, product-oriented literary culture [of theatre] and by those in the other camp who wish to keep at arm's length what seems to be unartistic and unredeemedly [sic] homespun improvisational approaches to performing. The distinctions between theatre and drama seem to depend significantly on concepts of specialization and context. (Fox, 1992)

Thus, practitioners may engage in acts of definitions as acts of legitimization and delegitimization of theatrical form or practice.

While the academy debates the definition of theatre, the definitions that surround theatre (i.e. what is included in theatrical practice, who is professional and emerging, what is non-profit, etc.) are vital to the infrastructure and funding agencies. They use those definitions are used by them to determine resource allocation within the theatrical landscape. While the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA), the primary national funding organization for arts activities in Canada, does not explicitly define theatre, it defines acceptable theatre practices, including the creation of original Canadian work, musical theatre, puppetry, mime, clown, site-specific, and digital theatre, amongst others (Canada Council for the Arts, n.d.-a). The Ontario Arts Council (OAC), the provincial equivalent of the CCA for Ontario, follows a similar practice (Ontario Arts Council, n.d.-b).[1] Statistics Canada, which gathers helpful statistics on the various ecosystems, uses the North American Industry Classification System, which differentiates between theatre companies that operate their own venues and others that do not, and places musical theatre with opera (while including comedy troupes as theatre) (Statistics Canada, 2018).

As such, the value of defining theatre may not be in order to make meaning of theatre, but rather, to understand and contextualize the structures and agents that surround it.

Defining "Theatre"

Theatre can be many things to different people: it can be a building that serves as a place where audience and performers meet; it can be a song-and-dance routine performed before a curtain falls; it can be a single story told by a single performer to an enraptured audience. Theatre can be a gathering place, a way to make sense of the world, a way to pass the time. Since many people have had some exposure to theatre and the dramatic arts, they may have each formed their own concept of what is and what is not theatre. It is critical that we create a common

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[1] While we cannot ascribe motive, it can be assumed that, in some cases, the act of not defining theatre is an attempt to ensure that a restrictive definition of theatre is not put in place, which might hamper innovation.

understanding of what we understand to be theatre, as depending on the definition that is used, certain practices, genres, and traditions may be privileged, excluded or overlooked.

In the opening of veteran British director Peter Brooks' 1968 canonical writing on the theatre *The Empty Space*, he writes:

> I can take an empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space, whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged. (Brook, 1968/1996, p. 9)

Using Brooks' statement as a starting point, we define theatre as follows: an act of performance that requires three basic elements: a performer, an audience, and a performer-audience relationship. It is difficult to add or subtract other elements to the definition without imposing restrictions. Must theatre require a playwright? If so, that would exclude the practice of collective creation. Must theatre require text? If so, that would exclude improvisational and unscripted theatre. Must theatre tell a story? If so, then happenings would be excluded.

Such a broad working definition may seem to incorporate other areas of the performing arts as well (consider dance, music, or the circus arts, the other areas of the performing arts supported by the CCA (Canada Council for the Arts, n.d.-a)). However, the distinction between the various performing arts disciplines is blurry at best. John Rockwell, former editor of the Arts and Leisure section of the New York Times, noted,

> the barriers between the different performing arts are fluid: dance flows into theater, which flows into music and song and stage pictures. The emphasis among the various elements of performance shift, from piece to piece, from creator to creator, from decade to decade. (Rockwell, 2006)

Given Rockwell's statement, keeping a broad definition of theatre allows us to consider theatre performance, creation, and creators in a holistic, comprehensive, and multidisciplinary way. The definition is not dependant on genre (e.g. musical, Shakespearean, modern, comedic, etc.), artistic tradition (e.g. clown, puppetry, physical theatre, classical, avant-garde, improvisation, etc.), mode of delivery (e.g. traditional proscenium, site-specific, immersive, etc.), associated artefacts (e.g. text, space, costumes, etc.) or power and taste hierarchies (e.g. education, experience, high-art, etc.). A broad definition incorporates the ideas of the theatrical experience that are challenging the conventional traditions of the established theatre.

Way too broad for Broadway: Justifying a Broad Definition of Theatre

The broad working definition may be bothersome to a few, given the controversy in academia noted earlier. However, the discomfort may extend beyond academia: when discussing the National Theatre of Scotland's theatrical innovations, the late Mark Fisher, theatre critic for *The Guardian* newspaper, noted that "it would take a small leap for our definition [of theatre] to encompass standup comedy and a spectacle such as the Edinburgh Military Tattoo" (M. Fisher, 2010). He argues that a broad definition of theatre may incorporate non-traditional practices that have not found a place under the umbrella of more "traditional" definitions of theatre (M. Fisher, 2010).

However, that is exactly why it is critical we maintain a broad definition of theatre. By defining theatre broadly, we recognize that it is evolving beyond the boundaries of a classical or traditional definition, which may take theatre as simply a live event in a proscenium stage between actor and audience, with a text as an artefact that follows a three-act structure. As Gay McAuley, founder of the interdisciplinary centre for performance studies at the University of Sydney notes,

> what seems at one period to be inherent in the art form itself, and aesthetic truth, valid for all time, is revealed a few years later to have been a product of historical, cultural, and social factors. While this fact has bedevilled theorists and philosophers throughout art history, the problem has been compounded in the 20th century by the way artistic enterprise has involved continual challenges to existing boundaries, the continual breaking down of distinctions between genres, between art forms, and between media. (McAuley, 1988, p. 45)

Thus, a specific definition of an art form such as theatre is actually a reflection of it context, rather than inherent to the form itself. As the form itself is changing due to the blurring of lines that McAuley articulates, maintaining a broad definition helps to mitigate a narrow focus dependent on the current, present context and enables us to strive for endurance.

Practically, in 2016, the Siminovitch Prize, Canada's largest award for direction in theatre in Canada, went to Nadia Ross, whose theatrical practice, involving video projections, puppetry, and live performance, "does not fall into the mainstream definition of 'theatre'" (Nestruck, 2017). Recognition of a performance practice that does not fit the mainstream definition of "theatre" as theatre occurring at this high level would imply that there is acceptance in the artistic echelon to validate our broader definition of theatre.

Further, audiences are broadening their definition of cultural activities. When asked to define "culture," Canadians have a broad definition with 52% of people including traditional theatre and musical theatre in their definition and 35% including comedy and variety shows (which are all captured under the broader definition of theatre) (Business / Arts, 2018). As the colloquial meaning of "culture" becomes broader, the definition of the umbrella disciplines (and creation of new sub-genres within) should expand to incorporate those disciplines that have not traditionally been included.

By contrast, using a classical or traditional definition of theatre allows for the reader's underlying assumptions to remain unquestioned and may reinforce traditional thinking and bias. McCauley notes that,

> discussion of the essence or specificity of an art form is very quickly liable to become normative: critics establish the 'essence' of a particular art form from their own historical, cultural, and personal perspective, but they then all too easily begin to use that definition in order to exclude all manifestations which run counter to it. (McAuley, 1988, p. 45)

Thus, using a normative definition can lead to exclusion of countervailing art, or privileging of underlying assumptions. For example, The Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters & Sciences (colloquially referred to as "The Massey Report"), which set the stage and structures of Canadian arts and cultural sector since its release in 1951, and helped establish the cultural infrastructure in Canada, does not explicitly define theatre (Massey, Surveyor, Mackenzie, Levesque, & Neatby, 1951); however, the report itself carries the underlying assumption that culture needs to be mediated for good taste, and that popular culture has a negative impact (Pannekoek, Hemmings, & Clarke, 2010). This assumption may find its roots in the 19th century American and European idea that societal elites should be guardians of culture and art and protect it from popular entertainments (Gabler, 1998).[2]

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[2] As Gabler notes,
> prior to the arrival of mass-produced entertainment, American culture, like European culture, had been the special preserve of the wealthy, the educated, the refined… they assumed the responsibility for determining what qualified as good because they felt they alone were capable of enjoying [it]. (Gabler, 1998, p. 28)

He continues:
> For the custodians of culture, art was sublime. It redirected one's vision from the sensual to the intellectual, from the temporal to the eternal, from the corporeal to the spiritual, all of which made art a matter not only of aesthetics but of morality as well because its effect was to encourage one's better self. (Gabler, 1998, p. 28)

Further, he notes that,
> in contrast, cultural aristocrats sneered, the new popular entertainment was primarily about fun. It was about gratification rather than edification, indulgence rather than contemplation, escape from moral instruction rather than submission to it… moreover, while it was a tenet of culture that art demanded effort to appreciate it, specifically intellectual effort, entertainment seemed to make no demands whatsoever. (Gabler, 1998, p. 28).

Because of the Massey Commission's influence, this preference for the protection of "high-art" may be a systemic part of the arts and culture in Canada, which means if we use a narrower, unspoken, or official definition, we run the risk of replicating the same bias.

Defining "Independent Theatre"

Just as it was difficult to define "theatre" in general, defining "independent theatre" is tricky as well. The label, as it now exists, differs from country to country, region to region, or even city to city (Wilson, 2010). For example, in Europe, independent theatre was originally defined as a movement that was connected with the emergence of modern drama, with its aesthetics of realism and naturalism as they are understood today, with 19th century playwrights Henrik Ibsen, Bernard Shaw, and Anton Chekov at the forefront (Ballard, 2008; Hatlen, 1963). The movement began as a way allowing the practitioners of independent theatre to showcase the works of these playwrights that were being ignored by the sentimental commercial stages (Hatlen, 1963). The European definition of independent theatre has since evolved to mean essentially a theatrical organization that is does not have commercial intent nor is it dependent on state subsidy (Koch, 2017).

However, in Canada, the Canadian Actors' Equity Association (CAEA), the union representing professional actors, directors, and other stage artists in Canada, gives its criteria for independent theatre companies (for the purposes of their Independent Theatre Agreement) as professional theatres that are not part of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT) (Canadian Actors' Equity Association, n.d.). In a separate agreement, the CAEA defines independent theatre as theatre created with limited resources (Canadian Actors' Equity Association, 2016). In Toronto, the Dora Awards (which are organized by TAPA and honour the best of Toronto theatre and performance) restricts entrants in the "Independent Theatre" category to companies which do not have their own venue (known as "non-venued" companies) who have created performances with a budget less than $100,000 (Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts, n.d.).

Gabler argues that the hostility towards popular culture of the cultural aristocrats sprang from not only their disdain of anything fun, but also their distrust of the popular sensibility, and the fear of the removal of the old cultural order and replacement with a new one (Gabler, 1998). From the view of the masses, on the other hand, Gabler argues that popular culture was,

> a deliberate, self-conscious expression of cultural hostility - a willful attempt to raze the elitist's high culture and destroy their authority by creating a culture that the elitists would detest…. Whatever else it was, mass entertainment may have begun as the democrats' revenge against the elites they despised. (Gabler, 1998, p. 29)

He then gives the Astor Place theatre riots in New York City in 1847 as an example of the separate of popular entertainments and high-art in the theatre, leading to the elites protecting their version of culture in the theatres, changing audience behaviours, and leaving the popular entertainments like vaudeville or burlesque, to occur in their own venues and beer halls (Gabler, 1998).

The "official" definitions in the theatrical landscape are driven by the politics of art (Wilson, 2010). Thus, using a definition that was born out of Toronto circumstances, like that of TAPA that uses "venue" as a defining factor makes instinctive sense (especially as venue, space, and location have been and continue to be legitimizing factors in the Toronto theatrical landscape (McKinnie, 2007)). However, using such a definition runs into the same issues as using a traditional definition of theatre: reinforcing traditional thinking and traditional values.

As such, we choose to dig deeper than using a definition based on the circumstances of the moment as those circumstances can shift and lose relevance to the context of the landscape. One practitioner mused:

> What would I say is independent theatre? I mean, that's really changing, but is it changing, or is it just like... Where in 10 years ago it might have been about precarity or it might have been about working out of certain institutions, in the last five years, I think that's really changed because institutions are desperately trying to make themselves more relevant and so they're looking to the indie theatre to do that. And so, everyone is precarious now. Maybe say you're not independent theatre if you're not getting more than $500,000 from a single grant from a funder. Maybe. But where's the line? ...It's just like the lines are blurring is the best point. We're now seeing small independent companies producing three shows a year. Are those seasoned? Is that different from the past? Is it different than having a venue or not having a venue? ... I just think the markers have shifted too much to make it a clean and efficient definition.

As the expert had noted, many of the previous definitions from ten or five years ago have lost relevance in the current context. However, unpacking some of the various examples, they seem to share a commonality: the lack of legitimacy. The European independent theatre movement began as a rejection of the commercial stages and forms (thus, creating the new forms of realism and naturalism in a space without legitimacy). Given the legitimizing nature of owning one's venue in Toronto (McKinnie, 2007), the TAPA definition, using the non-venued criteria, seems to indicate independent theatre as being created by those who do not own their own venue, or outside of places of legitimacy. Part of the CAEA definition seems to say those companies that do not belong to the official professional theatre company membership organization PACT are those who qualify as independent theatre. Thus, this commonality will form the basis of our definition: as one expert noted, "independent theatre" should signify theatre that is created outside of spaces of legitimacy. Practically, these are theatre companies that do not receive operating grant funding from the arts granting agencies, whether or not they are incorporated. It is theatre created by those who feel that they do not have a home in the mainstream, whether that is due to form, discipline, content, or opportunity. It is an actively

changing category, as it has something to which it always has to run counter. It is a self-defining category, so that if an artist or company believes that they truly belong in this space, then they are incorporated into it; an artist like Nadia Ross, despite winning the Siminovitch Prize, can still be considered a member of the independent theatre landscape (Nestruck, 2017).

Given this previous discussion, it must be noted that these definitions may not be relevant at all. With the fluidity that is characteristic of the independent theatre scene (which will be discussed at length below), these definitions must be fluid also. If considered absolute, they can serve to restrict access to resources (including funding and legitimacy), and to what can be examined. These definitions exist within this present context and time in 2019, and even though we are striving for enduring definitions that are not exclusive, they will (and should) be challenged by art and artists, and thus, should be reevaluated over time.

A Brief Historic Overview of Theatre in Toronto and Canada

However, to better understand the current state of theatre in Toronto, we must understand the evolution of theatre in Toronto. As Canadian theatre scholar Denis W. Johnston notes, "at each stage of Canada's development, Canadian theatre has reflected the society's needs, deserts, and wants; and to do so it has undergone a sequence of redefinitions as social and cultural conditions changed." (Johnston, 1991, p. 8). He continues, noting about the evolution of Toronto's theatrical scene that "in other Canadian cities, when new theatres arose to fulfil changing needs, they tended to replace an outmoded form…. [In] Toronto, however, with its larger and more diverse population, older forms of theatre persisted alongside the newer ones. (Johnston, 1991, p. 10).

Thus, one can infer that some of the practices, structures, and attitudes that surround the theatre scene in Toronto today have been borrowed, shared, and grown from those since the (relatively young) theatrical tradition in Toronto began. As such, by examining the historical context, insight can be gained into the cycles that have influenced the perceptions, attitudes, mindsets, constructs, and infrastructures that surround and continue to shape theatre in Canada in general, and Toronto in specific.

Many of the formal accounts of theatre practice exist within the colonial history of Canada and exist within those same frameworks. However, from time immemorial until the arrival of the settlers, the indigenous peoples of North America engaged in acts and forms of storytelling (Petri, 2013; Schafer, 2013). Henning Schafer, whose PhD thesis focuses on indigenous theatre practice in Canada (both historical and contemporary), argues that the similarities between the indigenous storytelling tradition and contemporary theatre practice are undeniable; "the

storytellers have always been performers, rehearsing their performance continuously, taking on different roles, engaging the audience in their stories, and accompanying them by gestures and facial expressions" (Schafer, 2013, p. 20).

With the arrival of the settlers and colonists came the installation of their practices and culture. Theatre practice of the new settlers was established following the British theatrical tradition of amateur theatrical guilds. Amateur guilds were non-professional performers who would perform because they enjoyed doing so (along the lines of today's community theatres). Early garrisons brought the army tradition of these theatrics along with them when they settled at the outposts of the British Empire (including Halifax, Quebec, and Montreal) (Middleton, 1914/1996). That tradition continued for a long time, as Ruth Harvey, the daughter of C.P. Walker (who built the Walker theatre in Winnipeg in 1907), noted in her autobiography that, growing up, "the English tradition of amateur theatricals was strong in Canada. Every town of any size had at least one flourishing club devoted to putting on plays and one amateur operatic society" (Harvey, 1949/1996).

While amateur guilds were strong in early Canada, the homegrown professional scene was not. Only by the 1910s did the idea of pursuing theatre professionally loose the stigma that it had in the turn of the century (Lee, 2016). However, at that time, even to do so without the stigma meant moving away from Canada: while it was sign of prominence for a Canadian city to be on "The Road" (the colloquial name for the touring circuit), and while it was lucrative for the touring syndicates to come to the Canadian cities, the syndicates operated out of New York and London, and selected and cast their shows from there (Lee, 2016; Sandwell, 1912/1996). For the public who attended the theatre, proximity to British and American stars was a driving force for legitimizing for people and places (Lee, 2016). Thus, at the time, Canadian theatre meant, "theatre performed for Canadian audiences" (Johnston, 1991, p. 8).

In the following years, in response to the touring circuit, the Little Theatre Movement gained momentum in Canada (Gardner, 2016; "Little Theatres Dot Canada, With Professionals Engaged," 1923). Inspired by the Little Theatre Movements in America and Europe that rebelled against the crassness, mass production, and professionalization of the theatre (Hatlen, 1963), the Little Theatre Movement manifested in Canada as experimental theatres created by amateur artists across the country (though, in this case, the term 'experimental' meant the showing of Canadian work as well as the theatrical innovations of its time) (Johnston, 1991, p. 9; Massey, 1922/1996).

As time progressed, the touring circuit became less lucrative, due to the rise of cinema and vaudeville (the "lighter forms of amusement") (Voaden, 1929/1996). They drew the popular

melodramas and slapstick comedy routines away from the theatrical tour circuit, and with them, their audiences (while World War I (WWI) and the Depression did nothing to help the touring circuit) (Johnston, 1991; Lee, 2016; Voaden, 1929/1996). Because of that decline, Little Theatre Movement began to fill the theatrical void, rising in prominence in critics' minds and, because of their experimentation with creating their own dramas, sowing the seeds for a national drama (Caplan, 1929/1996; Voaden, 1929/1996). It culminated in the Dominion Drama Festival, a one-week festival where amateur theatrical troupes came from across the country came to compete and share their works (Gardner, 2016). In the 1930s, alternative left-wing arts clubs joined the movement, with worker's theatrical clubs and agit-prop theatre joining the repertory of the Dominion Drama Festival (Johnston, 1991, p. 17).

After World War II (WWII), the landscape changed again. The left wing and agit-prop theatres lost their popularity due to post-war affluence (Johnston, 1991, p. 17). As well, with growing post-war nationalism, and in response to the amateur theatre that was dominant, came the professionalization of theatre in Toronto and Canada.[3] The Massey Report, issued in 1951, realised the need for a national theatre and advocated for the establishment of a regional theatre system, the Canada Council, professional training, and other systems to help establish a professional art scene in Canada (Massey et al., 1951). Now, artists were able to pursue professional theatrical careers in Canada, subsidized by their work in radio and television broadcasting (Massey et al., 1951; Sperdakos, 1999). The general opinion, however, was that there was still no taste for Canadian-written theatre at a professional level; in order to build the professional theatre, people reasoned, it would be necessary to appeal to the classics. The founding of the Stratford Festival in 1952 helped to provide opportunities to theatrical professionals and create high levels of classical culture, not necessarily Canadian-created pieces (MacKay, 2003). In Toronto, theatre companies "embodied an Arnoldian ideal of theatre practice that dominated Toronto's aspirant high-culture at the time: the presentation and celebration of the theatrical touchstones of Western development" (McKinnie, 2007, p. 35). Several professional companies arose, producing the classics of English language theatre; however, unlike in other Canadian cities, these theatres could not find a permanent home in Toronto (Johnston, 1991).

The rise of Canada's centennial (along with some specific government funding) helped establish the rise, in Toronto, of the Canadian theatre. This movement became known as the "alternate" theatre, for "reject[ing] the mainstream theatre, but embrac[ing] the infrastructure to fund it." (Johnston, 1991, p. 11). It included Theatre Passe Muraille (TPM), The Factory Theatre, and the

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[3] Canadian theatre scholar Dr. Robin Whittaker notes, however, that even in the present day, "the ironic reality is that the further Canadian theatre practice professionlizes, the less self-sustainable it seems to be" (2010, p. 2).

Tarragon Theatre, amongst others. Indigenous artists and theatres were also a part of this theatre revolution as well, with the establishment of different collectives and institutions, including the Native Theatre School that provided summertime training to indigenous artists (Schafer, 2013).[4] This group began using Canadian written / created material in a professional environment, with resounding success, often with line ups around the block (Julien, 2017), while the companies producing the classics began to wane, with several of the most prominent companies going bankrupt or closing down (Johnston, 1991, p. 14; McKinnie, 2007, p. 35).

With the economic transformation taking place at that time in Toronto, theatre became not only part of the cultural but also the economic fabric in Toronto (McKinnie, 2007). In the 1980s, the companies that were considered the seed of the original theatrical revolution in Canada (TPM, Factory, and Tarragon) began to acquire space, and consequently, began to weave the legitimization of professional theatre into urban space and downtown life (McKinnie, 2007). They were, however, required to meet funding bodies' requirements and subscription bases (Brown, 1989), much like the Regional Theatre and establishment theatres that they were the alternates to (Czarnecki, 1985).

At that time, in the eighties and nineties, a new alternative began to take shape in response to the nationalist Canadian theatre. As a result of the multicultural policy enacted by the Federal Government in 1971, and the liberalization of Canada's immigration policies, multicultural theatre companies based on identities began to arise (Knowles, 2009/2011). In response to the idea of a homogenous national theatre, these theatres began to run counter to the concept of a single "Canadian" mainstream identity (Julien, 2017). When these identity-specific theatre companies (such as Buddies in Bad Times and fu-GEN Asian Theatre), as well as indigenous companies (such as Native Earth Performing Arts) and more broadly-intercultural companies (such as Cahoots Theatre Company or Obsidian Theatre Company) appeared on the scene, they had difficulty accessing the same funding infrastructure as the formerly alternative, now mainstream not-for-profit companies; in the seventies and eighties, through granted through peer-juries, the CCA primarily funded the dominant Euro-centric high-art, while funding for multicultural companies was provided by the Multicultural Directorate, and was only available to those supported by recognized communities (Li, 1994). As the new companies continued to produce work, however, they did not necessarily rise to the institutional level like the other, previous alternative movements; even though funding structures changed in the mid-nineties, the shift "improved the optics, but did not mark a substantive change" (Knowles, 2009/2011). Unlike the previous alternatives, circumstances conspired to prevent them from obtaining

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[4] These collectives helped set the stage and provide training for when contemporary indigenous theatre came into its own in the 1980s and 1990s, with the rise of identity-based theatre companies (Grajewski & Lewis, 2017; Schafer, 2013).

operating funding or space during that time period, creating a dependency on already-established companies to showcase the new companies' work. As Knowles notes, "in the delicate performance ecology of Toronto, meanwhile, the recent loss to developers of crucial venues for the city's intercultural companies has increased those companies' dependency on established theatres for inclusion" (Knowles, 2009/2011, p. 124).

It was in this time of venue scarcity that festivals began to rise in the theatrical landscape. As new theatre companies continued to emerge, they were by necessity project-based, and not necessarily venue based. Festivals arose to provide the administrative support and venue spaces that this new wave of creators was lacking (Brown, 1989). Some festivals also allowed for new systems outside of the established hierarchies within the theatrical community: the Fringe Festival movement (originating in Edinburgh, Scotland and first appearing in Canada in Edmonton, Alberta) operated on a lottery system, removing the juries that could restrict artistic content "to free up the artist to create whatever he or she wanted, unburdened by the mediating forces and strictures of theatre production found in Edmonton's other theatres" (Batchelor, 2015, p. 36). Along those same lines, the Toronto Fringe Festival was founded in 1989 (Toronto Fringe Festival, 2018), while SummerWorks was founded in 1991 in a fringe-like style to support the under-represented small theatre community (SummerWorks, n.d.). Other festivals, both juried and non-juried, also appeared in the landscape during this time (and some have, subsequently, disappeared in the present day).

In the late 90s, Simon Heath, a graduate of an acting conservatory program and a candidate in the University of Toronto M.A. program in Drama, said:

> It is very difficult to break into even the smaller theatres such as Tarragon, Theatre Passe Muraille, Factory Theatre - because people associated with those theatres for the past 20 to 30 years are still trying to get their shows produced, and I have no desire to displace them, really. The only thing left is to develop your own work, your own company, and your own theatre. (Heath, qtd in Breon, 1997, p. 21)

Thus, by this time, the theatre companies that had begun as rebellions against the mainstream of previous eras had become mainstream themselves. They were the institutions that artists were seeking to enter, but could not, due to limited space and immobility. The alternative to creating in the now-legitimate "alternative" theatres for young artists was to create his or her or their own work in what can now be recognized as the independent theatre scene as exists today.

It is worth noting that, outside of the publicly funded sphere, the commercial for-profit theatre space had lain dormant for some time. However, the rise of the mega-musical in the late seventies and early eighties led to an era of theatrical impresarios (Petri, Hennig, Lacroix, & Julien, 2012). While Ed Mirvish had owned the Royal Alexandra Theatre in downtown Toronto since 1963, it was more of a tour stop than a centre for theatrical creation (Mirvish Productions, n.d.). However, with the founding of Mirvish Productions, goals were reset to being able to employ Canadian talent in the commercial theatre (Mirvish Productions, n.d.). There were also many others in the commercial theatre space, importing creative teams and performing foreign shows with all-Canadian casts (Atkey, 2006). Eventually, Mirvish Productions became the dominant player in the landscape, claiming to be "Canada's largest commercial theatre production company" (Mirvish Productions, n.d.).

Looking Back to Look Forward: Past Trends in the Past Independent Theatre
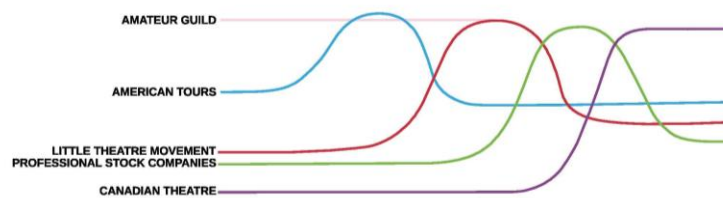
Figure 2: Nested S-Curves Showing the Rise and Fall of Various Historical Theatrical Phases

The brief, high-level historical review, by necessity, will leave out certain details of the evolution of the theatrical landscape. However, that high level overview show that the story of the theatrical landscape is one of alternative theatrical movements, existing outside of the mainstream, that have risen, due to circumstance, to become part of the mainstream. These movements all began as a form of "independent" theatre (i.e. created outside of places of legitimacy). Like a nested string of S-curves, these theatrical movements then rose to form or join the theatrical mainstream. While individual companies and artists may burn out, go bankrupt, or leave the landscape altogether, those that survive to join the mainstream and its associated infrastructure then change the landscape of the mainstream, having impacts that will continue to temporally reverberate on the conditions of the entire landscape. This review illustrates the value of the independent theatre space: it serves as an incubator for ideas and practices that will eventually rise to become part of the mainstream and adopted by the institutional and commercial theatres.

Setting the Scene: The Overall Theatre Landscape in Toronto

By examining the overall theatrical landscape and the relationships between the institutional (i.e. mainstream) theatres and the independent theatre, we can deepen our understanding of

the importance of the role that independent theatre plays within the current system. Looking at typologies of practitioners, the majority of practitioners fall into one of two categories: professional and non-professional (or amateur).

- Professional Artists: The CCA defines a professional artist as an artist who,

  has specialized training in the artistic field (not necessarily in academic institutions), is recognized as a professional by his or her peers (artists working in the same artistic tradition), is committed to devoting more time to artistic activity, if possible financially [and] has a history of public presentation or publication. (Canada Council for the Arts, n.d.-b)

  Other funding agencies, such as the OAC, have similar definitions. These artists receive compensation for their work, and often (but not always) belong to the labour union.

- Non-Professional (Amateur) Artists: These are artists who do not fall into the previous category. They are thought to enjoy creating, but do not wish to pursue it at a source of income. They often perform without compensation. This category includes hobbyists, post-professionals, and amateur practitioners.
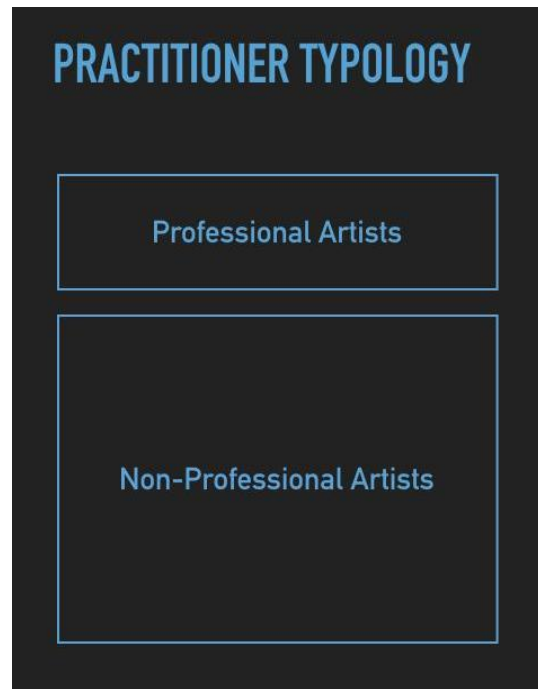
Figure 3: An Initial Typology of Theatre Practitioners

This typology, as illustrated in figure 3, is useful for the institutions of support, as it enables them to clearly define which practitioners are in need of their support. However, based on a sociological analysis of professionals and non-professionals, the categories mentioned above are more nuanced and have various different signifiers (Stebbins, 1992). For example, distinctions in the non-professional category can be drawn according to two distinct meters: dimension of seriousness between highly committed devotees and dabbling participants, and progression along career path, from pure amateur to pre-professional to post-professional. However, one category from that analysis that is considered a subcategory of non-professional (or amateur)

artists is worth noting, due to the special role of the independent theatre scene as training ground. This category operates between the non-professional and professional categories. It is the category of pre-professional:

PRACTITIONER TYPOLOGY

Professional Artists

Pre-Professional Artists

Other Non-Professional Artists

Figure 4: An Expanded Typology of Theatre Practitioners
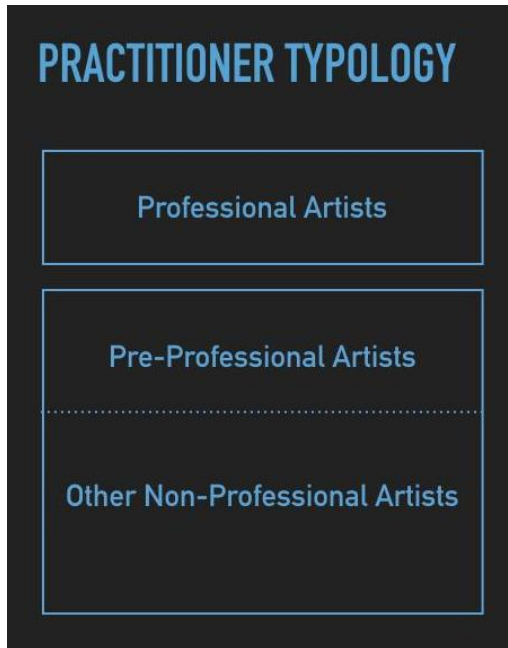
- Pre-Professional Artists: This group is loosely defined as those who are working towards becoming professional artists. As described by Stebbins, "although [pre-professionals] are learning to become professionals, they are doing so in a pursuit they have freely chosen, at which they are still unable to make a living, and from which they derive a great deal of enjoyment" (Stebbins, 1992). While the characteristic of "being unable to make a living" may be debatable as a unique condition only for the artists in this category, it may be best to consider the defining characteristic an intent to pursue their artistic ambitions in a professional manner. This category would include students, recent graduates, or artists who are building their body of work.

Thus, a more accurate typology of the practitioners of the independent landscape, as noted in figure 4, would be:
- Professional Artists
- Pre-Professional Artists
- Non-Professional Artists

When looking at typologies for companies, Petri (2013) offers a framework derived from information developed by the CCA. However, that framework is not of much use to us as it offers typologies of presenters: those who program the work of others. Many of the companies would fall into the category of those that create and present their own work (while the others may present opportunities for creators to monetize their work by collecting artistic fees for having them programmed). A useful typology does, however, appear in a prior report as a result of a historical overview of theatrical presenting in Canada (Petri et al., 2012). They identify the present-day theatrical "levels" currently operating on a national scale, however, they have been

renamed and elaborated upon in this report to better contextualize them to the current Toronto environment:

- Commercial Theatre Companies:[5] this level of theatre operates on a "for-profit" model. Shows are often characterised by spectacle or celebrity. They perform in fairly large houses, and talent and production staff is generally unionized. Examples of some companies in this space are Mirvish Productions, The Second City Toronto, or Starvox Entertainment.

Figure 5: A Theatrical Sector Typology

- Institutional Theatre Companies:[6] this type of theatre often operates on a "not-for-profit" model, and is subsidized by government arts councils, private donations, or corporate sponsorship. They receive operating grants from the arts councils, and may incubate artists and new work. They often (but not always) own their own venue. Examples of some companies in this space would be Theatre Passe Muraille, SoulPepper, or CanStage.
- Independent Theatre Companies:[7] this type of theatre, as noted earlier, operates with little to no operating funding (though they may receive project-based support, or funding from other, non-heritage forms of government). It may be incorporated, or it may not. These do not often have their own facilities or venues, and are dependant on finding rehearsal or performance space. They also do not have administration support. Because of that, they take advantage of festival infrastructure. However, they are often creating new work, sometimes at the boundaries of the art form. Examples of

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[5]Referred to in source document as "self-sufficient, for-profit commercial theatre (mega musicals)" (Petri, Hennig, Lacroix, & Julien, 2012, p. 11). Renamed to "commercial theatre" for simplicity.

[6]Referred to in source document as "regional and festival theatres with partial subsidization, corporate sponsorships, and co-productions" (Petri et al., 2012, p. 11). Renamed to "institutional theatre" to better reflect the Toronto landscape.

[7]Referred to in source document as "alternative / fringe theatre" (Petri et al., 2012, p. 11). Renamed to "independent theatre" to better reflect the Toronto. landscape.

companies in this space would be Leroy Street Theatre, the Bad Dog Theatre Company, and Seven Siblings Theatre Company.

- Community Theatre Companies:[8] this type of theatre is non-professional, and is often done for the pleasure of the performers. It can operate as a "non-profit" charity, and subsists on memberships, box office, or private donations. However, it is not generally funded by government (except possibly by employment grants). Companies in this space include the Scarborough Theatre Guild, and the Scarborough Players.

This typology, as illustrated in figure 5, is helpful, as it was created after consideration of an overview of the theatrical landscape. It provides a classification for companies and practitioners who create and publicly present work to position themselves in the landscape. However, as this framework was still included in a report for the association of presenters, it may exclude those whose primary purpose is not the presentation of work, but the creation of it (for instance, an artist who works with the elderly in a nursing home to create work to present to others in the nursing home).

Relationships of Creators within the Theatrical Ecosystem

Examining the various intersections of companies and practitioner segments, as in Figure 6, reveals how the various sector layouts overlap and interact with the segmentation of practitioners. Community theatre generally sits isolated within the non-professional category. In fact, as one participant noted, pre-professional and professional actors are actively discouraged from participating in that community theatre.

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[8] Referred to in source document as "community theatre" (Petri et al., 2012, p. 11). Name unchanged.
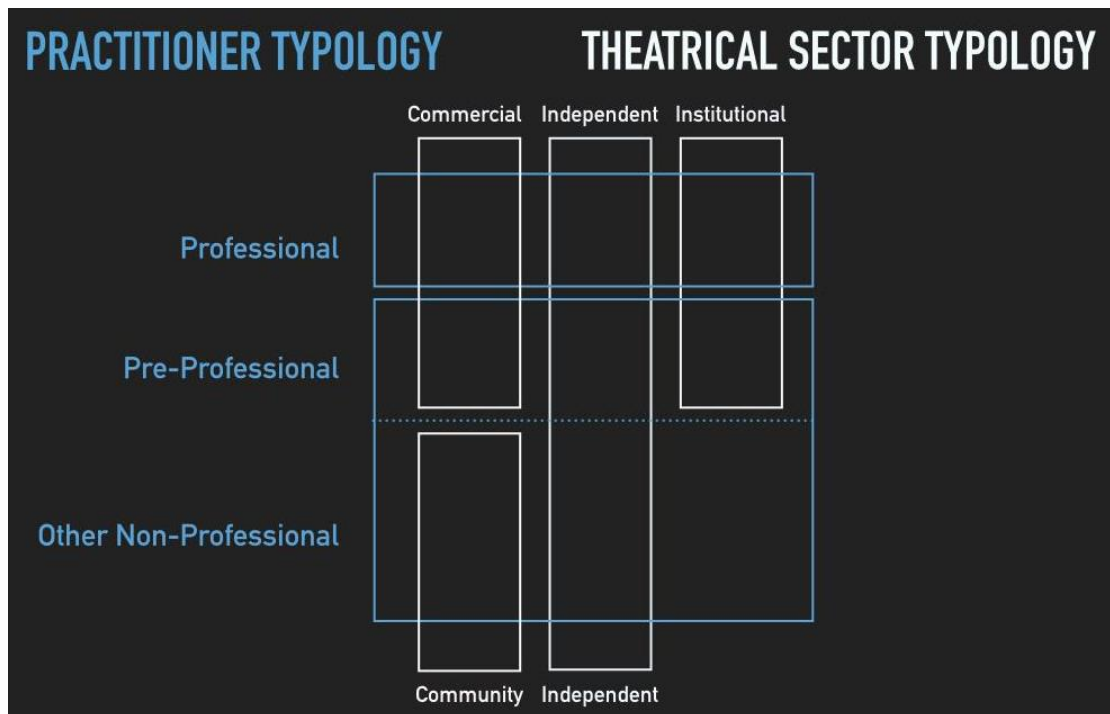
Figure 6: Overlay of Practitioner and Theatre Company Typologies

This leaves the commercial and institutional theatres to pull practitioners from the pre-professional and professional categories. While institutional theatres may occasional incorporate the amateur practitioner for specific projects (especially when the artistic intent involves specifically drawing from the community for performers, as, for example, in *The Second Woman* at Harbourfront Centre ("Harbourfront Centre Theatre," n.d.)), the independent theatre space draws from all categories. With lower barriers to entry, and serving as a place where practitioners can create their own work, it makes intuitive sense that the independent theatre sector would operate as a place for practitioners of all professional statuses to cross barriers, yielding a higher level of theatrical innovation.
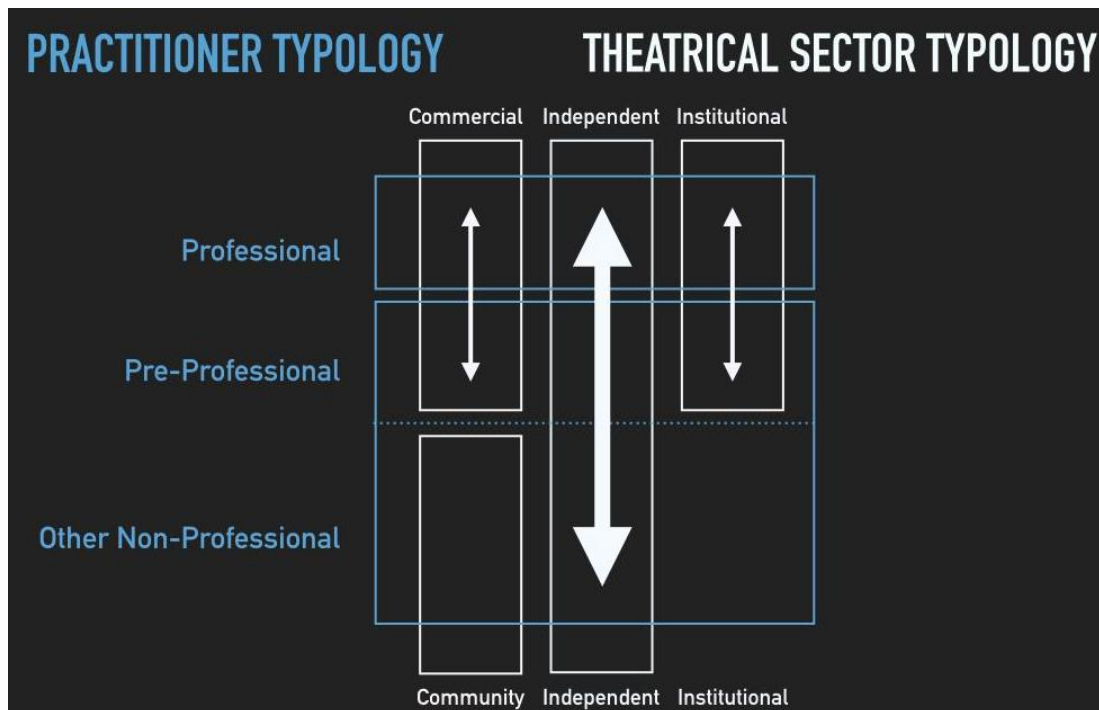
Figure 7: Illustration of Interaction of Practitioners Between Different Practitioner Typologies Enabled by Theatrical Companies

Interestingly, there is not only fluidity in a vertical fashion, as illustrated in Figure 7, (i.e. different artist types interact within specific theatrical sectors) enabling cross-pollination between artists of different professional statuses, but the interview data indicates that it is also horizontal, as in Figure 8, (i.e. artists can participate in multiple theatrical sectors), allowing those same artists to have exposure to all different levels of theatrical production. As Ric Knowles noted,

> apart from Stratford and Shaw, and it's only season-by-season there, we don't have repertory companies, which means that every gig is a one-off, which means that you might be working for Pleiades... today, Nightwood tomorrow, Factory next week, and then do a show for Mirvish. In some sense, the precarity of the profession, which is a bad thing, produces the fluidity, which is a good thing. (R. Knowles, personal communication, February 28, 2019)

Thus, the precariousness of the entire sector does enable the cross-use of artists. However, the financial obligations and organizational constraints on the institutional and commercial sectors may limit its ability for creative, artistic, and audience innovation, leaving such innovation for the independent sector.
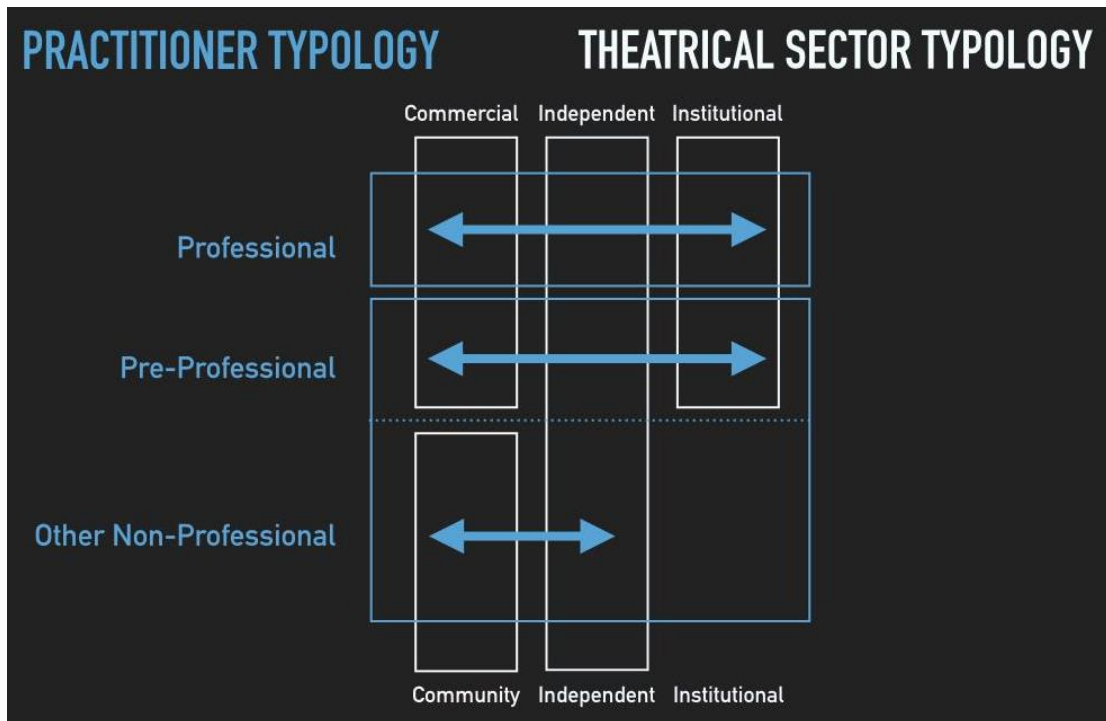
Figure 8: Illustration of Fluidity of the Practitioners Between Different Levels of the Theatrical Ecosystem

Fluidity of Creative Work within the Theatrical Ecosystem
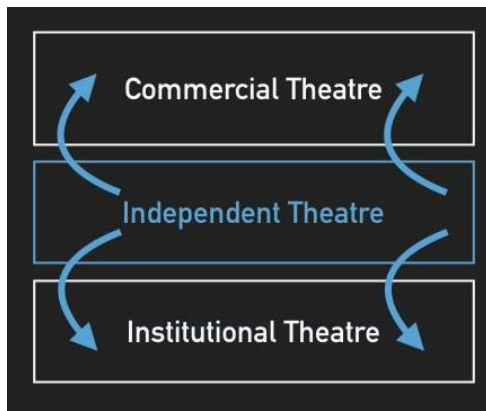
Figure 9: Illustration of the Extraction of Talent and Work from the Independent Theatre Sector by Institutional and Commercial Theatres

Another interesting interaction that was revealed from the interview data is that the independent theatre sector not only provides talent to the institutional and commercial theatre sectors (and vice-versa), but it also is viewed as a resource for theatrical programming as well. For example, *The Drowsy Chaperone*, a musical originally written for a Stag and Doe party, made the transition from the Toronto Fringe Festival where it was publicly performed in 1999, to the commercial Broadway theatre, (with an incubation period with Mirvish in Toronto) where it won five of the 13 Tony Awards for which it was nominated (which was one for every category in which it was eligible) (Atkey, 2006; CBC News, 2006).

The benefits of such transfers is immediately apparent to creators, as they can possibly include validation from the establishment, access to a new or wider audience, and increased reputation potentially leading to additional work. The motivations of the institutional theatres of such transfers are also apparent. Thus, leaning on the independent theatre scene enables the institutional theatres to receive the cache of bringing an "edgy" or "gritty" show to their audiences. Several experts noted that much of the artistic leadership in Toronto is accessible to new and emerging artists (unlike in New York City) and they do want to meet new people and hear new voices.

However, such transfers can also affect the theatrical landscape in unexpected ways. For example, it can alleviate the need for commercial and institutional theatres to take risks, both artistic and financial. As Jen Harvie notes:

> Transfers often move from the not-for-profit sector (where they were developed with state funding - or citizen's tax subsidy) to what we might call the now-for-profit commercial sector. Once here, profits can go to the entrepreneur producers whose only financial risk has been to organise the transfer of an already proven product. (Harvie, 2009, p. 34)

As the independent theatre sector acts as the space of theatrical innovation and it can easily become the "research and development" department of the commercial and institutional theatres. While by transferring productions, or recognizing artists, the institutional theatres may be attempting to help develop new talent or refine new work, the institutions theatres do not necessarily need to put any investment back into the independent theatre sector.[9]

Another expert noted that one of the reasons for the popularity of these kinds of transfers is because the budgets of the institutional theatres have been reduced by government, leaving them without enough resources to develop and program an entire season. Thus, they reach out to independent theatre to program pieces without the need for development costs as it comes already developed, with less risk than developing something new (as, presumably, the piece being programmed has achieved some success). This can become an issue for independent creators, as it shifts the burden of market risk to them in the first instance, without them receiving any support.

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[9]Some may argue that the institutional, state-subsidized theatres do not fall into the same trap as the commercial theatres. However, Harvie addresses the state-subsidized theatre space and argues that "Unfortunately, here too we find a competitive market with many of the same problems as the commercial sector. Subsidised theatre competes in a mixed market with commercial work… even within the subsidised theatre sector, there is competition for state funding" (2009, p. 36).

Further, this curation can begin to reframe the goals of those participating in the independent sector and align them towards "being discovered" and impact the work that they choose to create and engage in. In fact, several practitioners noted, from a practical standpoint, that this was one of the goals. To be programmed by the commercial theatre, work would still need to show the potential of being one of "the most reliably saleable products" (Harvie, 2009, p. 33). Harvie continues:

> The fact that they are saleable might mean they are good, but it might also mean that they are merely familiar or fashionable or have a star cast member…. The result of this so-called free market economy is a theatre culture which, in aiming to be popular, tens to become overwhelmingly populist. Innovation is generally devalued and familiar 'classics' are repeatedly re-staged. (Harvie, 2009, p. 33)

Thus, if creators begin to create work in the independent scene with the goal of being discovered by the commercial theatre, they may then follow the existing patterns and language of the commercial theatre, establishing a reinforcing pattern. It creates an incentive structure to not necessarily produce authentic work, but commercially viable work. And indeed, one expert interviewed noted that such transfers are one part of the economic model in the independent theatre scene: invest your own resources (social, financial, and creative) to create work and hope that it gets the attention of a tour manager or artistic director who likes it and can then tour or program your piece in exchange for a presenting fee or a percentage of the box office. However, if it does not catch the attention of a programmer, tour manager, or artistic director, then the only compensation are the box office receipts.

While the institutional and commercial theatres may take the independent theatre sector as an area for new content and talent, the independent theatres look to the mainstream and commercial sectors for resources, such as rehearsal space or even funding. One practitioner described the relationship as "co-dependent." This symbiotic relationship is not necessarily even across the independent theatre sector. In fact, this curation of relationships amongst institutional companies can also serve to reinforce certain hegemonic value systems. Examining the ecology of multicultural theatre in Toronto, which originated in the independent space, noted Canadian theatre scholar Ric Knowles states that,

> in Toronto, this means that a handful of companies, most of whom have secure production venues, and all of whom are "white," remain on operating funding and control the theatre seasons and performance spaces on which "other" companies rely for co-productions or rental space… The "multicultural" companies are thereby placed

in dependency relationships to the "charter" anglo companies, which are *de facto* given the power to police what productions from the "ethnic" communities are staged, and which tend to favor work that is non-threatening to their largely middle-class anglo audiences. (Knowles, 2009/2011, p. 124)

Thus, due to the systemic resource imbalance between institutional and independent theatre companies / artists, the independent creators must rely on the goodwill of the institutional companies for access to space, audiences, and other resources. This could enable some institutional companies to then act as gatekeepers who can support productions and companies that adopt to, rather than challenge, their audiences.

The Role of Festivals in the Theatrical Landscape

Festivals play a significant role in the overall theatrical landscape. They fill specific gaps in the landscape. Some may exist for a brief time, others for years, as those gaps fill or disappear. As Van Belle notes,

because they bring together many people within a limited space and time to carry out a kind of dialogue with each other, festivals are complex events. They expand our notions of what it is to engage each other within artistic settings, whether we participate in a festival as artists or as audience members. At their core, they provide invaluable opportunities to gain more understanding of diverse experience and the aesthetic those experiences create…. Some of these festivals exist for a few years and then dissolve; these are not failures. They merely are true expressions of the fluid nature of the creative response to the world in which we live. (Van Belle, 2009, p. 11)

Festivals, thus, play a role in bringing audience and artist together, and encourage the exposure to new artistic ideas, leading to artistic innovation. They arise in response to the needs of the landscape, and may exist as long as necessary to fulfil those needs.

In the present day, practitioners generally pointed to two major festivals that impact the independent theatre space: the Toronto Fringe Festival, and Sumerworks. While The Toronto Fringe and Summerworks were both mentioned, most practitioners focussed the role of the Toronto Fringe Festival in the independent landscape. Originally, the Fringe movement was created as a response to the many brokers who mediated the presentation of artistic work

(Batchelor, 2015). Entry is by lottery (as opposed to Summerworks, which is juried), which encourages diversity of experience levels, practices, and stories (and quality).[10]

While each festival has its own individual mandate, in general, practitioners noted that festivals provide entry points for independent artists into the Toronto theatre scene. They provide a platform for artists to put up their own work without the cost and administrative work involved in producing their own show on their own. The festivals take on some of the administrative burden, acting as box office, promoter, and securer of space. They also encourages a form of resource sharing (especially human resource sharing), as they can engage a technician for several shows, for example, rather than having a company engage them for a single production. Further, some practitioners noted that the festivals have a "guaranteed audience." As one practitioner put it, "those festivals are still a major part of the indie theatre year. Of that cycle. Because, frankly, they are still the cheapest way to produce a play. And have a pretty good guaranteed audience."

Not only do festivals have guaranteed audiences, but they also provide the opportunity for work to be seen by the commercial and institutional theatres. This was echoed by an interviewee at an institutional theatre, noting that:

> It's my field search, like my field study. It's recruitment. It's general auditions for me. As much as we have general auditions at [name withheld], all the actors do is bust out two contemporary monologues and then we chat with them for a bit and that's it. With SummerWorks and Fringe Festivals, it really allows me to see actors in the space. Actors doing scene work. Actors saying text or moving with their bodies. It gives me a fuller picture of actors… It really is a way for me to see who's who. Not just plays but also designers.

Thus, festivals help to raise the profile and build the reputations of independent artists.

Festivals help to build the independent theatre community as well. As Cremona observes "festivals, due to their providing an event in a limited space and time, intimately make communities" (Cremona, in Van Belle, 2009, p. 11). Van Belle expands, noting that "if a festival is its own community, its community members, both audience members and artists, inevitably affect each other through the cross-pollination of ideas and aesthetics." (Van Belle, 2009, p. 11).

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[10]However, one practitioner did critically question the indie feel of the Toronto Fringe Festival, noting that "Fringe isn't as indie as the general indie scene." This observation is reminiscent of Batchelor's (2015) cultural materialist analysis of the Edmonton Fringe Festival, the largest and longest-running fringe festival in Canada, where he notes that it's perception has evolved from its origins as a theatrical event into a municipal party for corporate and municipal branding.

This can be seen in the Toronto independent theatre scene: since there is no physical location for the independent theatre community to mingle, they do so in the temporal space created by festivals. Several interviewees noted that participation in festivals (particularly the Toronto Fringe Festival) encourages the co-mingling of artistic disciplines and artists from various backgrounds.

Everything the (foot)light Touches: The Theatre Ecosystem in Context

It is tempting to place the boundary of the theatrical ecosystem at the foot of the stage. However, the present theatrical landscape exists within a larger landscape. There are connections between the theatrical and film, television and new media ecosystems. Indeed, literature about both stage and screen has often set them in opposition as artistic forms, often comparing both to determining the essence of the other (McAuley, 1988). However, their impact on one another as ecosystems are rarely reviewed or discussed.

Extended Debates and Discourses

Throughout theatrical history, there have been many connections between the theatre, film, and broadcast television landscapes. When film was in its infancy, it was often shown in conjunction with theatrical performances, as its own act in vaudeville shows or before Shakespeare (Gabler, 1998). When the Elgin and Winter Garden theatres were built in Toronto in 1913, they were intended to run programs consisting of both short films and vaudeville acts (with both shows running practically simultaneously on both stages) (Russell, 1989). The Canadian public's early interactions with film left a lasting impression on the discourses in the cultural landscape; as early as World War I, these discourses around film included questions of protection of national identity and the disappearance of Canadian talent to the United States (Lee, 2016), which was a continuation of the questions posed of the theatre scene (Sandwell, 1912/1996) and continue to circulate around the film, television, and theatre (and other forms of content creation) landscapes (Ipsos Public Affairs, 2017). Thus, some of the debates in theatre were incorporated and extended into the film and broadcast television landscapes.

Fluidity Between the Film, Television, New Media, and Theatre Ecosystems

While the national discourses and debates noted above provide one form of connection between the various entertainment landscapes, the interview data suggests that there is also a fluidity of creatives between the theatrical and media ecosystems. Historically, the conditions of theatre changed with the founding of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), which has

been noted as enabling the professionalization of Canadian theatre, as it provided opportunities for actors and writers to earn additional income and practice their craft in the creation of radio and television dramas (Johnston, 1991; Sperdakos, 1999). That has continued into the present day, enabling not only actors and writers, but also costume designers and prop makers, to create in the theatre while supplementing it with more lucrative gigs in the film in television industry. Indeed, the strength of the film and television industry is one reason why so many of those creatives arrive in Toronto; they can survive by engaging in both. Derrick Chua, noted Toronto theatre producer, entertainment lawyer, theatre advocate, and fixture of the Toronto theatre scene, notes,

> a lot of theatre artists, frankly, are able to do what they do because they are able to book some film or TV gigs, and make as much in a week or two on film or TV as they did the rest of the year in theatre. And voiceover work and that kind of thing… It's all part of this ecology. I think that's part of the reason why [the Toronto theatre scene] is as strong and vibrant as it is, is with some artists being able to continue to work on their craft and earn income by getting jobs in animation or radio or with background and stand in and whatever else. Toronto fortunately has a strong film, television and animation industry, all of which contributes to money being out there for at least some artists to get paid and make a living somehow. (D. Chua, personal communication, March 7, 2019)

Thus, the strength and vibrancy of the Toronto independent theatre scene is due, in part, to the financial subsidy of the film and television sector, which enables creators to continue to work and be compensated for their craft outside of the low-paying theatre.

This fluidity does, however, affect the conditions of production, notably in the independent theatre scene. Even when engaged in a theatrical contract (or, if in the independent scene, if engaged in a theatrical process that will pay little to none), as they don't know where the next paying gig will come from, creators must leave the rehearsal process (especially if it is for an unpaid project) in order to audition for the next gig:

> The bad part of the precarity, obviously, is you're always hustling for work. It's really frustrating to be in rehearsal and somebody has to leave in the afternoon for an audition for the next show, and they do, you can't say no... You have to accommodate that, and here's where film and television comes in too, because some of those auditions are for TV commercials, or they're for the latest Canadian TV show, or whatever it is, or they might even be leaving after a performance in the evening to go to a studio and shoot a TV show. They'll be up all night doing that, or a role in a film, or

whatever it happens to be. The fluidity and precarity are a function of people not having secure employment, and nobody except artistic directors and general managers, have secure employment. I suppose that's the biggest single problem. (R. Knowles, personal communication, February 28, 2019)

Or, put otherwise, "the idea has always been to stay employed in one's chosen profession and to survive" (Breon, 1997). Thus, the precarious nature of creative work in the theatrical, film, and television ecosystems gives them the characteristic of fluidity. But this has also affected the very process of creation, thusly affecting the creative work itself.

This is not only restricted to the traditional media. New media, including digital, web, and video games, also rely on the same creators as film and television, pulling them from the theatre, and compensating them for their unique talents. The Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA), which is the union that represents actors who appear in recorded media, have developed their agreements to cover compensation for forms of new media, whether it be to ensure compensation for providing voices in an audio book or video game video game (Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists, 2011), or a commercial airing before a YouTube video (*National Commercial Agreement between The Joint Broadcast Committee of The Institute of Communication Agencies and The Association of Canadian Advertisers and ACTRA*, n.d.).

However, the interview data also seems to suggest that fluidity is not simply an economic matter. Rather, due to advances in technology and the emergence of new media, the process of creating in film, broadcast, and new media has become almost as accessible as putting on a live show, and thus, some independent theatre artists are embracing these new media as new means of artistic expression. As one practitioner noted, "instead of seeing ourselves separated by which medium we follow, we see ourselves as creators with any medium at our disposal."

Thus, while there is an economic aspect to the fluidity between the media, there is also a democratization of form. As the lines between live and recorded media continue to blur, some independent theatre practitioners may no longer define themselves singularly as theatre creators, but rather, simply creators, resulting in work that is fluid between live and recorded as well. *Kim's Convenience*, for example, began as a workshop with the fu-GEN Theatre, premiered at the Toronto Fringe Festival in 2011, and was shortly thereafter programmed into the Soul pepper's season and part of Soulpepper's first Canadian tour, and, ultimately, developed into a show for CBC Television (CBC News, 2012; Skinner, 2018).

Conclusion

The definition of "theatre" is under debate, but for the purposes of this report, we will be using a broad definition in order to encompass alternative theatre practices, performances, and others that may not be traditionally mainstream. That leads to an understanding of "independent theatre" as theatre that lacks legitimacy (which can be a self-defining category). Throughout history, this type of theatre has arisen as a counter to the mainstream, sometimes overtaking it and becoming the mainstream itself. In the present day, though, the independent theatre scene has no place to call home; it does have, however, festivals, which provide a temporary structure and temporary time to gather. They encourage artists to mingle and cross-pollinate ideas across disciplines, blurring boundaries even further. There is fluidity of artists and work between the independent theatre landscape and the other theatre, artistic, and media landscapes. However, this fluidity, which is celebrated, is the result of precarity of work, and results in disruption to the practice of theatre. While it may seem positive that the institutional and commercial theatres look to the independent sector for programming (and thus, can actually pay those practitioners for their work), that places more risk on the independent artist.

As the independent theatre landscape is clearly deeply intertwined with other cultural and entertainment ecosystems, changes within them will certainly reverberate into the independent space. Given the apparently precarious situation of independent theatre, it appears that much that is celebrated about it is actually based in unsustainable practice. As such, given the value of the independent theatre landscape, we want to understand how to ensure the sustainability and resiliency of the future independent theatre landscape. How we might undertake to understand enough to do so is our next challenge.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

As we've seen, the precarious and unsustainable present context of life in the independent theatre scene is troublesome: if it continues along as it does at present, as will be explored in the findings, it may encourage greater burnout and limit creators' lifestyle choices. Plus, given the externality of changes, such as the loss of independent venues in Toronto's burgeoning real estate market, and the dependence of the independent theatre sector on other cultural and entertainment sectors, the future of independent theatre is very much in flux. This leads us to our research question: *Given the perceived changes in the cultural and entertainment ecosystems in Toronto, how might we ensure the future sustainability of the independent theatre sector in Toronto?*

To answer that question, we must understand the present situation in some detail, the breadth of changes that the practitioners are experiencing, and their present attitudes towards the future. With that articulated, we can then enable practitioners to articulate vision (or visions) of a preferred future, sustainable ecosystem, from which we can leverage the present day ecosystem to discover how we may move towards their preferred futures. Thus, before answering the primary research questions, we need to be able to answer several other questions first:

- *How might we understand the current state of the independent theatre system?*
- *How might we understand which changes practitioners believe will change the landscape, for better or worse?*
- *How might we understand the future of the independent theatre sector from a practitioner perspective?*

To answer these questions, information needed to be gathered and understood. The following methods and frameworks were used to help gather and analyze the data in this study:

- Literature Review
- Semi-structured interviews (Domain Expert and Practitioner Expert)
- VERGE Framework
- Affinity Mapping
- Thematic Coding
- System Thinking Tools (Influence Mapping, Causal Loop Diagrams, System grams)

Literature Review

A literature review was conducted to help orient the researcher to the independent theatre ecosystem in Toronto and the topics of concern within. The approach was inductive, with the intent to survey a wide swath of literature relating to the topic of interest, and from there, identify issues, gaps, and forces for change within the ecosystem. Not only were sources varied (including, but not limited to, academic journals, historical documents, newspaper articles, funder and industry reports, and theatre-related blogs), but so were disciplines, with readings spanning arts management, cultural policy, cultural materialism, media theory, performance analysis, historical analysis, and innovation management. Keyword clusters were searched in OCADU's library database and on the Internet and included, but were not limited to, *theatre ecosystems, theatre in Toronto and Canada, theatre and cities*, *independent theatre*, *film and theatre,* and *media theory*.

The index of *Canadian Theatre Review*, the major magazine of record for the Canadian theatre industry, was also examined for articles from the past ten years that may have relevance to the theatre ecology and independent theatre scene in Toronto. Publicly available reports were also gathered from relevant government agencies, non-profit stakeholders, and arts councils, including, but not limited to, the Metcalf Foundation, the Toronto Arts Council, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Canada Council for the Arts.

Given the wide swatch of literature, not all were deemed relevant. However, reference mining of relevant pieces helped to extend the review and provide a larger and more robust set of information in various areas. As new ideas arose from the literature, further searches were conducted to uncover and review fundamental documents and sources for ideas.

Overall, over one hundred pieces of various literature were surveyed (though not all appear as references to this report). This survey yielded a great deal of data, and served well in creating a foundation to answer the first of the research sub-questions relating to the present-day theatrical ecosystem, but still needed to be verified by field research.

Semi Structured Interviews

The Method

Semi-structured interviews are as considered a qualitative methodology. Qualitative methods and research are "designed to explore the human elements of a given topic, where specific methods are used to examine how individuals see and experience the world" (Given, 2008).

Semi-structured interviews use a set of predetermined, open-ended questions, which gives the researcher more control over the topics covered during the interview (Ayres, 2008). Conducting semi-structured interviews with subject matter experts during the exploratory phase not only helps define the direction of the line of inquiry, but also helps capture the latest developments and bring in new perspectives (Kumar, 2013). They enable the researcher to actively respond to the subject, and explore themes of importance to the subject that may arise during the discourse, ensuring necessary flexibility during the interview while maintaining focus on desired topic areas.

The Usage

Semi-structured interviews were selected because of their flexibility. As opposed to structured interviews, they provide enough room for exploration, but unlike open interviews, there is some structure that ensures consistency of discussion topic across all participants. This method was flexible enough to be able to apply to all three of the research sub-questions. Semi-structured interviews allowed for the depth of richness and understanding required in order to navigate those waters.

Interviews were arranged and conducted in areas where the participants would feel comfortable and safe. They were recorded for the researcher's reference, while field notes were also taken.

Participant Selection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with subject matter experts in order to help contextualize the literature review, gain a better understanding of the ecosystems, their underlying assumptions, and the forces for change, and how those are perceived and manifest in the lives of those within the ecosystem. Initial candidates for subject matter experts were uncovered via literature review and a survey of the landscape.

Subject matter experts were divided into categories according to their primary ecosystem of knowledge, and then further subdivided into two categories:
- *Domain experts:* Domain experts were defined as people who had domain knowledge and had previously been published or interviewed (in, for example, an academic journal or in *Canadian Theatre Review*). This group includes academics, theoreticians, and others who have contributed to the public discourse in some way. Their expertise was to provide a broad understanding of the independent theatre sector, as well as they ecosystems that surround it, and help contextualize some of the literature review.

- *Practitioner experts*: Practitioner experts were the primary driver of the work done on this study. They are defined as those who were members of the various ecosystems and practicing within them. Their expertise was not necessarily academic, but practical, and based on their time spent within the ecosystems. Practitioners were further divided into 3 subcategories based on their function:
  - Funders and policy makers
  - Creators and creation facilitators
  - Administrators and supporters

This distinction was made not only for the purposes of how knowledge was obtained, but also for purposes of participant risk. While domain experts, having been interviewed or published may have had their opinions and insights publicly made known, the practitioner experts have not. As the practitioner experts are in a more precarious position given the precarity of work and the necessity of reputation in the independent theatre scene, their remarks, if attributed, could result in unconsidered repercussions. Given the level of risk and benefit, and in order to ensure that they felt comfortable enough to speak freely, we opted to err on the side of withholding the names of the practitioner experts from quotations attribution or publication. As well, both domain and practitioner expert quotations throughout this report were returned to those who provided them for their review and confirmation that they could be shared.

Further interview candidates were uncovered by using snowball sampling, which is a technique that uses the initial pool of interview candidates to nominate other candidates who fit the criteria for the study (Morgan, 2008). Unlike examining an organization with specific hierarchies and definitions, the independent theatre scene does not have a central organization in which to locate the participants; there are informal networks of artists and participants. Snowball sampling can help to access to those networks. Since the initial pool of candidates was widely varied in terms of ecosystem, function, and form of expertise, it is likely that the snowballing process was able to reach a variety of segments of the total participants (Morgan, 2008).

Candidates' diversity was intentionally sought. Diversity of age, experience, domain, gender, and background were considerations in candidate selection. However, while candidates of both genders were approached for each category of expert, all of the domain experts interviewed were men, while 80% of the practitioner experts were women. While it is not thought that this disparity affects the findings of this report, it should be kept in mind when viewing the findings.

An emphasis on practitioner experts was also sought. Domain experts provided a broad understanding of the context. However, practitioner observations and attitudes were the ones that were primarily sought: not only are they involved directly in the ecosystems, but due to the

informal nature, lack of singular organization, and precarity of their work, they have been sometimes overlooked in discussing the questions of changes and futures. As such, we wanted to focus on their perception and attitudes towards the ecosystems in which they find themselves. Given that, in total, three domain expert interviews and ten practitioner expert interviews were conducted. This is in keeping with the roles of each within the context of the research. Domain experts provided a broad understanding of the context.

The interview data validated some of the literature review pieces, notably surrounding present-day venues and funding. From the literature, we were expecting concern surrounding governance of institutions, but it was noticeably absent in the practitioners' interview data. However, there was still a large amount of data, both from the literature review and the semi-structured interviews to begin to be organized and analyzed. To do that, we sought a framework that would align with the values of the sector under study.

VERGE Framework

The Method

As one of its creators, Richard Lum, notes, "put simply, VERGE is… a way to frame and explore changes in the world" (Lum, 2015). Also known as the Ethnographic Futures Framework, the VERGE framework was developed originally as a framework for environmental scanning, but has evolved into a general practice framework for futures work (Lum, 2015). It was developed to overcome the limitations of the STEEP framework by taking a view rooted in human experience and the cultural touch points of humankind (Schultz, 2011).

The VERGE framework is a framework to organize data. As Lum notes (2013, p.6), it is made up of six domains:
- _Define_: The concepts, ideas, and paradigms we use to define ourselves and the world around us.
- _Relate_: The social structures and relationships that define people and organizations.
- _Connect_: The technologies and practices used to connect people, places, and things.
- _Create_: The processes and technology through which we produce goods and services.
- _Consume_: The way in which we acquire and use the goods and services we create.
- _Destroy_: The ways in which we destroy value, and the reasons for doing do.

The Usage

VERGE was chosen as a framework for this study as the study focuses on an area of human artistic creation, and thus, it felt more appropriate to use a framework tied to what people do, rather than one (like STEEP or PESTLE) that is more rooted in specifically seeking vectors of change. Given STEEP and PESTLE's focus on context, and the lack of an overarching organization in the independent theatre landscape to action, they did not seem appropriate, as the information and insights that they could generate surrounding the context might not be easily accessible or actionable by a loose group of practitioners who are not necessarily organized or unified, which applies to practitioners in the independent theatre scene, who form a loose group and have no discrete organization or entity that encompasses them all. VERGE's domains, however, are centred on actions and cultural creation, which, given the practitioner-focus of this research in this paper, felt more appropriate.

VERGE was initially used to organize the data from the literature review, with data being broken

Figure 10: Photos of VERGE Sort of Literature Review Data

down amongst the different domains. VERGE was used to ensure that there was a breadth of knowledge was achieved. This was beneficial, as doing so revealed a high concentration of data in the "create," "consume," and "connect" categories, which was then remedied by an additional extension of the literature review.

VERGE was also applied to data that was derived from the domain expert and practitioner expert interviews. Interestingly, from the practitioner expert interviews, there was a concentration of data points in the "create" and "destroy" categories, with a comparative lack of data points in the "define" category. These imbalances were not corrected, as they were reflections of the data, rather than, like the literature review, an attempt to ensure breadth.

Figure 11: Photos of VERGE Sort for Interview Data

Concentration in the "create" category of both the literature review and practitioner expert interviews can be expected. Theatre practice, which is central to the theatrical landscape, is a process of creation; therefore, it would be reflected in a concentration in that category. However, interestingly, the concentration in the "destroy" category of the practitioner interviews may point towards the outlook of the practitioners; they were able to discuss the many different ways, processes, and systems within the theatrical landscape through which value is destroyed. While the "define" category has a comparatively lower number of data points, it was also intriguing, as it pointed primarily to forces for change in the landscape.

However, while VERGE helped order the data, it alone did not yield any major insights. Luckily, it can easily pair and combine with other frameworks for further analysis of the effects of change (Lum, 2013; Schultz, 2012)**.** As such, another method was sought out to help rearrange the data in a different and interesting form.

Affinity Mapping

The Method

In conjunction with the VERGE framework, affinity mapping (or affinity diagramming) was used to remap the data generated by the literature review and the interviews. Affinity mapping helps to "capture research-backed insights, observations, concerns, or requirements" (Hanington & Martin, 2012, p. 12), and is used to organize large amounts of qualitative data ("Affinity mapping alpha," 2018). Affinity mapping for contextual inquiry enables a story to emerge about those interviewed, the nature of what they do, and the issues of importance to both (Hanington & Martin, 2012).

The Usage

Affinity mapping seemed like a natural pairing with VERGE, as it provided an inductive balance to the deductive nature of framework-based data sorting (in this case, VERGE) (Hanington & Martin, 2012). Data is written on post-its, and then reviewed and clustered around common themes or patterns that then emerge ("Affinity mapping alpha," 2018; Hanington & Martin, 2012).
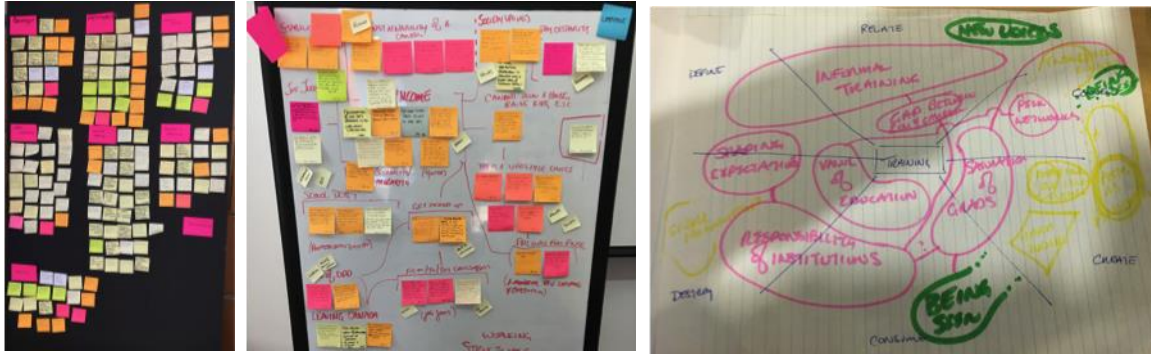
Figure 12: Illustrative Photos of the Affinity Mapping Process: Larger Themes, Sub-Divided with Affinities Extracted, and Second VERGE Framework Sorting

Affinity mapping occurred after each VERGE sort. Beginning with the literature review, affinity mapping provided the construction of the initial framework for the thematic coding of the interviews. Further, building on the first iteration of affinity mapping, domain expert data was then sorted into existing and new categories, followed by the practitioner expert interview data. The affinity mapping enabled high-level concepts and concerns to emerge, such as diversity, inclusivity, and accessibility, media coverage, as well as affinities and connections to begin to emerge, like the establishment and transference of values within the formal training structures. It proved to be valuable when used iteratively in conjunction with the VERGE framework, systems tools, and thematic coding.

Thematic Coding

The Method

The domain and practitioner expert interviews were transcribed and coded for further analysis. Coding is one way of analysing qualitative data generated from interviews (Saldaña, 2016). As Saladaña (2016, p. 4) describes, "a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or a short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data." Data is reviewed and then tagged with

different codes from the coding frame. This process enables emergent theming, which encourages patterns and relationships to be unearthed from the data (Williams, 2008).

The Usage

Thematic coding was selected as it would could help identify how practitioners were discussing issues that had been identified in the literature review. The initial coding frame was developed inductively, through the literature review. As the coding of the interviews continued, the coding frame evolved with additional codes being developed and added inductively. The intent was to use this information in conjunction with the affinity mapping to determine the large categories and conversations that were occurring in these areas.

From the predetermined code set, the issues that were most often discussed were audiences, funding, characteristics of the independent theatre space, lifestyle, theatre practice, and fluidity. From the emergent code set, community, connection, and accessibility became the critical topics that emerged. While concerns about audiences, space, and sustainability of the lifestyle of being an artist surfaced, the blurring of definitions (ranging from the definition of theatre to the definition of professional), the evolution of values surrounding what it means to be an artist, and the perception of theatre being undervalued by the public began to emerge. As well, the concepts surrounding success and the view of the independent theatre space as a transitional space was beginning to shift. Further, anxiety surrounding technology and its effects on the audience and on the theatre itself became a prominent theme, as did some anxiety surrounding discussion of the future.

However, as far as all of the methods used on this project are concerned, interview coding alone was not altogether useful or insightful. The insights above were gleaned more in hindsight. However, through the combination of the spirit of thematic coding, affinity mapping, and to a lesser extent, the VERGE framework, a more thorough analysis of the data was able to take place.

Combining Frameworks

This outline of methods and frameworks may present a linear feel to the gathering and analysis of data, beginning with a literature review and ending with semi-structured interviews: data analysis occurring in between, with a VERGE framework sort and affinity mapping yielding an initial frame for thematic coding.
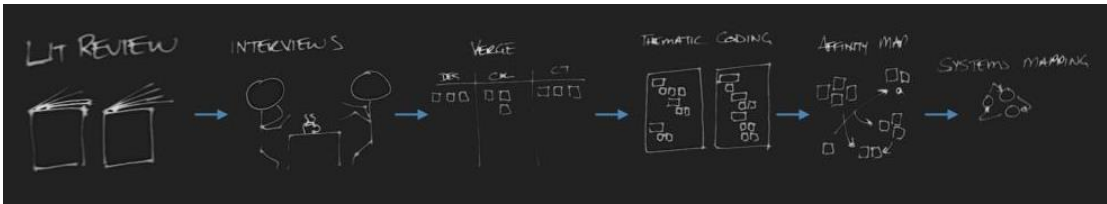
Figure 13: Anticipated Linear Research Process

However, in reality, the process was done interactively, while going back to other methods again and again.
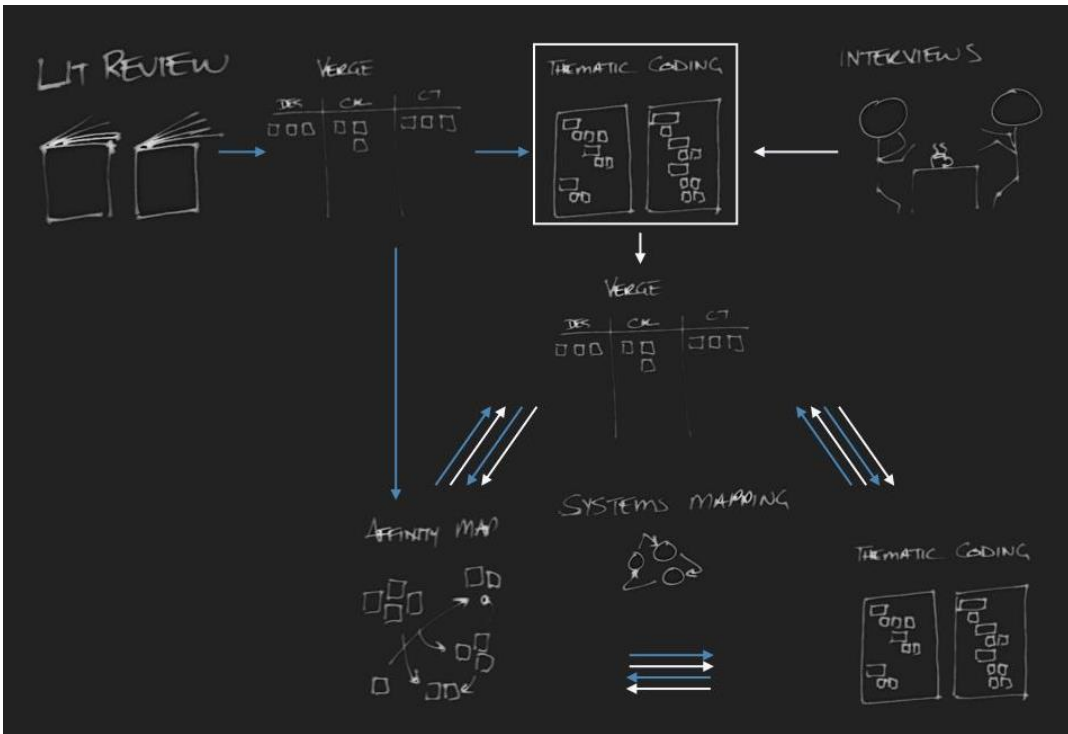
Figure 14: Actual Iterative Research Process

For example, some interviews unearthed some new points that necessitated an expanded literature search. However, the largest amount of interplay was done between VERGE sorting, thematic coding / theming, and affinity mapping. This was done to make meaning of the various, sometimes contradictory, data. Theming and affinity mapping were the most useful methods in the sensemaking process.

Figure 15: Photos of Research In-Progress: A VERGE Sort After an Initial Theming, and a Subsequent Affinity Mapping

After each data gathering step, data was placed on post it notes and thematically coded and arranged. When needed, it was further sub-themed, or grouped into larger themes. The data under each theme was then put through the VERGE framework once more. It was then affinity mapped to further subdivide the theme and see what else was occurring in that topic area. By going through this process iteratively, again and again, themes, patterns, and other connections began to emerge. All told, it yielded over 400 themes, subthemes, and patterns (see Appendix A).
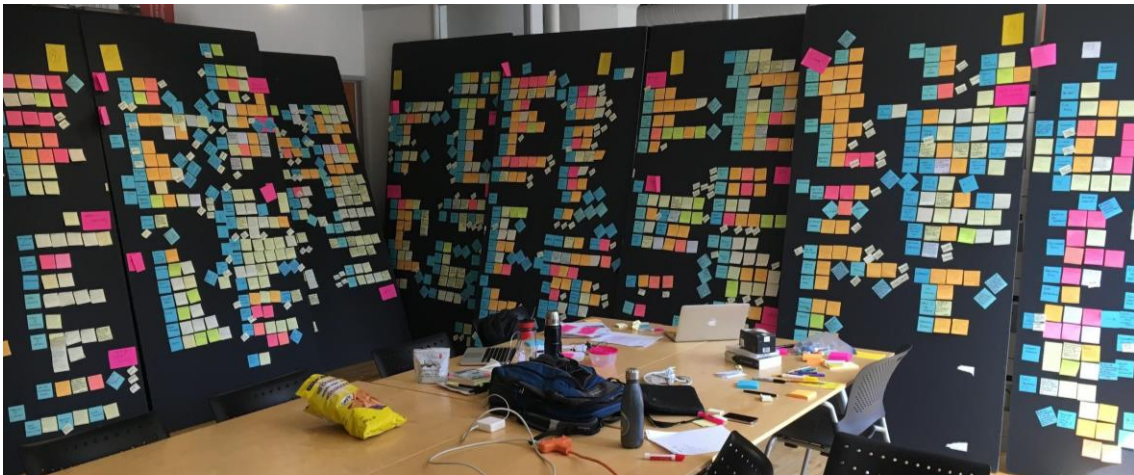
Figure 16: Photo of Data, Post-Synthesis

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Some of the major themes were then mapped back towards the VERGE framework to see where their major subthemes would fall. As well, it was at this point that insights around the present operation of the ecosystems, the practitioner's view of the future, and their impressions and attitudes of what is changing were developed as well.
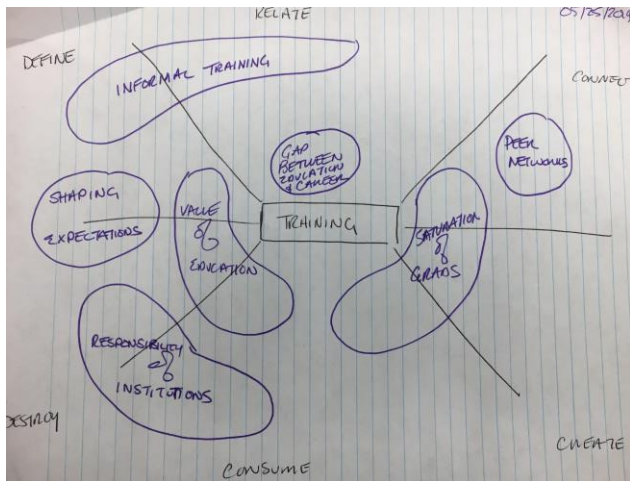
Figure 17: Illustrative Photo of Affinity Mapping and VERGE Combined

All of this was beneficial to creating an understanding of the functioning of the present day ecosystem, the issues within it, and insights into attitudes and behaviour from the data. Given the iterative nature of the analysis, it becomes difficult to point at any single method and identify it as yielding a particular insight. Rather, it was the identification and combination of the data through the different frameworks that enabled a richer understanding to emerge. Through the combination of the frameworks, we aimed to interpret the data and find an answer to all three sub-questions, setting up an answer to the main research question. However, this data interpretation left out answers to the question of "why." For that, systems mapping tools were used.

Systems Mapping Tools

The Method

Systems mapping tools are used in order to help make sense of the relationships and behaviours of parts within an ecosystem. Donella Meadows, a highly respected systems thinking teacher, refers to a system as "an interconnected set of elements that is coherently organized and achieves something" (Meadows, 2008, p. 11). It employs various visual mapping tools, such as causal loop diagrams (Boardman & Sauser, 2008) and systemigrams (Blair, Boardman, & Sauser, 2007) in order to visualize these relationships, and the effects that elements in the system have on one another.

For example, in this particular instance, consider formal training. It can be sought as a way to stand out from the pack. However, as more people graduate, more people begin practicing,

increasing the saturation of artists in the landscape. Artists then need more formal credentials to stand out, etc. It has become a cycle, unearthed by illustrating the relationships between pieces of the ecosystem using system mapping tools.
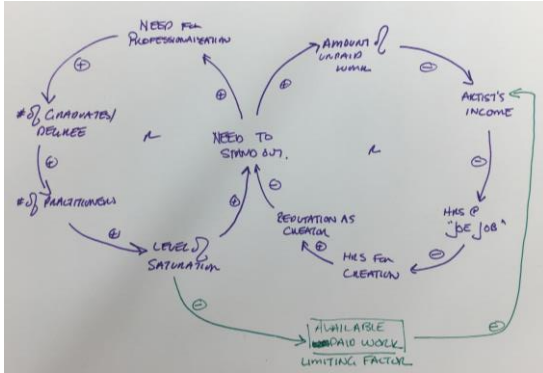
Figure 18: Illustrative Photo of Causal Loop Diagramming

The Usage

Systems mapping tools were chosen to help make sense of the relationships between various parts of the ecosystem, answering the first question about how we might understand the ecosystem today, and laying the foundation for the ultimate question. The intention was to understand and make visible the relationships between various disparate parts of the theatrical ecosystem, given the intertwined nature of the various levels of the theatrical ecosystems.

The systems mapping exercises were incredibly useful in discovering hidden dependencies through causal loop diagrams, like the demands on the practitioner's time and how financial privilege can alleviate that, or confirming particular practitioner perceptions, such as the burnout effect.[11] Each major theme was reviewed for its
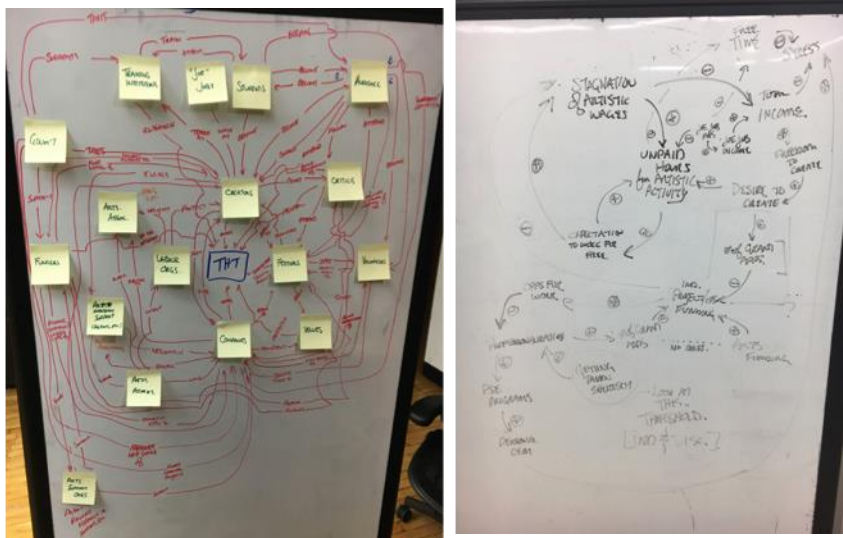
Figure 19: Photos of In-Progress Systemigrams and Causal Loop Diagrams

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[11] Both the issue of time and burnout will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4: Findings.

hidden relationships and dependencies. The insights from the systems mapping tools can be found throughout the findings.

Conclusion

To answer the pressing questions of sustainability in the independent theatre space, a practitioner-led approach was considered valuable; given the practitioner-led focus of the research questions, data collection focussed on engaging primarily those who are active in the independent theatre space, with domain experts providing broad contextual background. Data was collected through a literature review and the semi-structured interviews (with both domain experts and practitioner experts), and interpreted through the use of affinity mapping, thematic coding, the VERGE framework, and system mapping tools. While individual interpretation tools were useful, the combination of affinity mapping, thematic coding, and the VERGE framework in an iterative and integrative process helped increase the level of understanding of the present ecosystem, the changes that it faces, and the practitioners' views of the future.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

Having conducted interviews with domain experts and practitioners, patterns and insights were beginning to emerge. Thoughts, observations, and insights about the independent landscape, the changes that were affecting it, and how it might look in the future, were beginning to emerge. Analysing, consolidating, and organizing that data began to give the impression of the extent of the precarity within the independent theatre scene, a poorly connected, fluid space. As mentioned previously, the difficult knot to untie is the one that links the precarity and unsustainability of the independent theatre landscape to the innovation and fluidity of it, for we want to maintain the positive while mitigating the negative.

By reviewing and understanding the present day ecosystem through a practitioner lens, we can hope to understand some of the relationships between the issues that are of importance and some of their causes. Doing so will take a step down a road towards being able to understand the impact of any future intervention.

Thus, prior to answering the primary research question, "*Given the perceived changes in the cultural and entertainment ecosystems in Toronto, how might we ensure the future sustainability of the independent theatre sector in Toronto?*" we will examine the sub-research questions, those being:
- *How might we understand the current state of the independent theatre system?*
- *How might we understand which changes practitioners believe will change the landscape, for better or worse?*
- *How might we understand the future of the independent theatre sector from a practitioner perspective?*

Research Sub-Question 1: How Might We Understand the Present State of the Independent Theatre Landscape?

Practitioners' Definitions of "Independent Theatre"

As previously noted, the independent theatre space is difficult to define. The interview data, as well, does not point to a single, unified definition; indeed, within the VERGE framework's "definition" category, there were many different characteristics that practitioner experts used

to describe the scene: "gritty," "creative," "innovative," "resilient," "nomadic," "edgy," and "shit disturbers" to name only a few examples. Some of those characteristics that were prevalent from the data were:

- Freedom and Edginess
- Innovation and Experimentation
- Entrepreneurship and Hustle
- Community and Peer Networks
- Diversity and Inclusivity
- Training and Exposure

These characteristics are worth exploring in more detail, as the practitioners ascribe them to the space in which they choose to work. These traits, then, are a mix of observation and identity, and play an important role in how practitioners in the independent theatre see themselves. While these traits are valued, exploring them in some detail may also expose some of the underlying conflicts and tensions within.

Freedom and Edginess (versus Risk and Resources)

The interview data points to a sense of creative freedom in the independent theatre sector. As one practitioner noted, "[when I was in independent theatre], you can do whatever the hell you wanted to. Here [at an institutional theatre], one often has to make sure that the boxes are checked for sure." Because they are not necessarily beholden to a mandate, subscriber base, or funding conditions, those in the independent theatre space can take bold, artistic risks that institutional companies are unable to. This may account for the sense of "edginess.".

As previously noted, in exchange for this freedom, all of the financial risk falls onto the artist. Rather than being employed by a company to develop a piece, the artist is investing in this piece on their own. If it does not succeed at the box office, or is not programmed by another institutional or regional theatre, then the artist has lost their financial investment (though they may happily lose that investment in exchange for artistic satisfaction).

Going hand in hand with the freedom of not being beholden to the funding agencies or others, the data points to a lack of resources in the independent theatre sector, not simply in terms of financial resources, but also time, space, and equipment. There is also a perceived oversaturation of creators in the independent theatre scene. One expert noted that "independent theatre" is the largest category at the Dora Awards (the awards for excellence in Toronto theatre). Others noted that Toronto is a tough city in which to create art, as so many are vying for the same grants, audiences, media, and attention. This lack of resources and

perceived oversaturation has lead to a "scarcity mentality" that some practitioners have noted as informing part of the sector. As one practitioner noted, "everyone is always fighting for whatever little bit they can get because everything feels like it's scarce. Money, audience, acclaim, whatever it is."

Innovation and Experimentation

Hand in hand with freedom goes innovation and experimentation. The data points to the independent theatre scene as the source of theatrical innovation in Toronto, whether it is in terms of form and content, or organizational forms. Given that, due to systemic factors discussed later, the independent scene is filled with younger practitioners, they may be willing to try new ways of working, new modalities of thought, and experiment with new ideas.

As Jordan Tannahill, Governor General award-winning playwright, notes:

> The English language theatre of tomorrow is also being dreamt up in the storefront theatres of Chicago, the lofts of Bushwick, the back alley garages of London and the warehouses of Berlin. This kind of micro-infrastructure is necessary of vanguard work to incubate…. They are the testing grounds for work that will eventually permeate the mainstream. Self-initiated venues enable artists to develop new work outside the financial and programming pressures faced by larger institutions with subscribers, funding obligations, boards of directors and public scrutiny (Tannahill, 2015, p. 81).

Thus, while many view the independent scene as the seat of innovation, it is able to be so because it stands outside of the structures that the institutional theatres stand within. This may enhance the appeal of programming an independent show to the institutional theatres; in that way, they can remain relevant.

Entrepreneurship and Hustle (versus Producers and Sell Outs)

The data points to an entrepreneurial, start-up, attitude in the independent theatre scene (Yung, 2017). Many practitioners pointed to a "Do It Yourself" feel in the independent theatre sector, enabling an awareness of their own agency in creating work. In an industry were a practitioner or creator has very little power (i.e. auditioning and waiting by the phone to see if you have gotten the part), creating one's own work can be very empowering. As noted Toronto,

> being a theatre artist now is often not just acting, it's also producing and creating your own work and opportunities… the days where you're just like, you've graduated and you

wait for your agent to call you for auditions, and that's all you do, you'll be waiting a long time. (D. Chua, personal communication, March 7, 2019)

The emphasis on the theatre artist acting also as producer emerged in the 1990s, trending more and more heavily on the individual artist (Yoon, 2002), and has now become a trait that is normalized in the independent scene. It is often referred to as "hustle." Generator, an organization that is working to enhance the independent theatre sector in Toronto, is working to help theatre artists fill the gap in producer and business training in the artists' education:

> Generator realised that if you give a person a fish [meaning, that if you supply them with artistic producing services], they eat fish for a day. So [Generator] took all of the services that they were offering in the sector and turned them into learning modules to teach artists how to do that themselves… the idea of the program isn't to create people who can do every single job for themselves, but just to create people who understand the scope and skill of making work, know where their strengths are, and to build a team around them so that they can do their best work.

With producing becoming an increasingly valuable skill, those who can hone the skill of production management have a "leg up" in having their work seen. However, this has raised some concerns that it's not necessarily the best artists that get seen, but rather, the best producers, and thus it is not necessarily the best theatre that gets seen, but the theatre that can grab the most attention. There is also a small counterpoint that believes that artists should only be responsible for creating art, and should not be required to deal with the administration or producing responsibilities, which is line with a rejection of the entrepreneurial values.

Community and Peer Networks (versus Competition and Barriers to Entry)

The interview data points to a culture of support within the independent theatre community. As one practitioner noted,

> I find that in some communities, it's like, "well, what's in it for me?" Whereas [the Toronto independent theatre] community is like, "I would love to prop you up and support you and help you build what you have." And I feel the same about so many people, too. I'm often thrilled when someone's like, "Hey! Can you help me? I'm doing a table read of this script I'm really excited about and I just want a bunch of people to come and give notes. Will you come, just give up your time and do it?" I'm constantly thrilled and I find the same of other people.

As the practitioner notes, the willingness of others to support one another is exciting and thrilling. When it comes to collaborations and creating works, many people will reach out to their peer networks for collaborative partners (as it is easier to ask someone you know to work with you for little pay than a stranger). As well, peer networks can provide advice to artists in determining whether or not they would want to pursue an opportunity, or whether or not someone they are working with has a positive reputation.

However, peer networks can reinforce certain patterns: as a practitioner noted,

> most [independent theatre creators] have gone through some form of institution. And their peer group from the institution carries into their peer group post-institution. We, you know, gather in the lobbies. So, like part of the replication of relationship comes from seeing each other at the same shows.

Thus, if one's peer network consists mostly of people who have graduated from the same institution, then there is likely a shared base line of values, practices, and voices. Thus, certain voices or work (such as intergenerational work) becomes more difficult to create, as the people necessary may not be in the theatre creator's network. It can also become exclusionary: one practitioner had noted post-interview that she had found it difficult to break into the independent theatre scene, having not studied in Toronto, feeling as though the networks already had been formed. Finally, it can also be self-reinforcing, as these institutional peers will go to attend one another's shows and reinforce their connections in the lobbies of the other theatres.

That is not to say that these network effects cannot be mitigated: informal training, or taking occasional workshops helps not only to expand one's theatrical practice, but also to expand an individual's network as well. Also, given the project-based nature of the independent theatre scene, an artist will certainly be working with and exposed to different people on different projects.

According to some practitioners, the sense of community in the independent scene is enhanced by the fluidity within the independent theatre community. Since there is not much of a "company culture," different artists work with one another on different shows. As well, as there is no physical gathering space for the community as a whole, the festivals, which promote fluidity between artists and disciplines, provide the temporal space for the community to come together. Because of that opportunity to meet, and the fluidity between artists, barriers between disciplines (i.e. dance, musical theatre, comedy, etc.) are beginning to break down. As

one practitioner noted, "I feel that the community barriers are blurring and people are seeing the fundamental value that each other's work can incite in other people."

However, there is also a tension between community and competition, which has to do with the "scarcity mentality." As one practitioner noted,

> We are all at some level competing for each other's audience. We are competing for media attention, we are competing for money. Whether that's fundraising money or that's ticket money or public grants or private money. We are competing for audience eyeballs when you have five opening on one weekend, you want yours to be the one that's sold out. And yet at the same time, because the community is so impoverished, there is this sense that we are all kind of in it together.

So, interestingly, the tension between community and competition is driven by scarcity of resources: because there aren't enough resources, we're all in this together, however, because there aren't enough resources, we want them. It appears as a well-balanced contradiction.

Diversity and Inclusivity

The interview data points to a feeling amongst practitioners that independent theatre is doing well when it comes to issues of diversity and the inclusion of systematically oppressed voices (though several noted that more could still be done). As noted earlier, since independent theatre happens outside of places of legitimacy, it can serve non-mainstream voices that have fallen through the cracks. With its supportive community, the independent theatre scene may also collaborate to raise up marginalized voices.

Plus, independent theatre has the ability to be responsive and flexible in a way that the institutional theatres cannot, and thus, can respond to societal changes more quickly. This is an advantage when it comes to the independent theatre, as several practitioners noted institutional or commercial theatres may face push back from their audiences and subscribers who have come to expect a specific style when confronted with unfamiliar stories and artistic forms.

Training and Exposure (versus Transition and Career)

A few practitioners pointed to the independent theatre scene as playing a role in developing new voices and training young artists. This is especially true when considering the co-dependent relationship between independent theatre and institutional theatre, and when noting that there is a gap for an artist between their training and being ready for a professional career (Jones,

2005). This is why and how the independent theatre scene became known as the "in-between", the area that artists who are not yet at established companies can create until they emerge into the mainstream (Yung, 2017).

The data also points to the independent space as a place for artists and their ideas and stories to gain exposure. This is valuable to help artists build their reputations amongst their peers, the theatrical community at large, and audiences. As one practitioner noted, "I just feel that independent theatre is a gateway for so many people to finally be, like, hey! I'm doing this! I'm proud of this! See me."

However, the data also points to a tension between older and younger practitioners. Some of the older practitioners see the independent scene as a transitional space with the goal being to exit into a career; comments along the lines of "you don't want to spend your life doing the Fringe" reinforce these beliefs. However, while some younger practitioners may carry those beliefs, and while aspiring to do work in the institutional theatres is venerable (least of all because it comes with a paycheque), younger practitioners don't see the space as transitional (i.e. a place that is left) so much as a place that is revisited throughout a career. Some long for the space to be seen as a place where one can work and make their career in and of itself. As one practitioner noted, "I wish that indie theatre felt more legitimate in a way. That it wasn't considered a stepping-stone to another thing, to another company. That you could be a full artist within the context." Thus, training artists is one more function of the independent space and, while seemingly positive, reinforces the idea that independent theatre is a stepping-stone for institutional or commercial theatre, rather than legitimizing independent theatre as an end in-and-of itself.

The Conditions of the Ecosystem
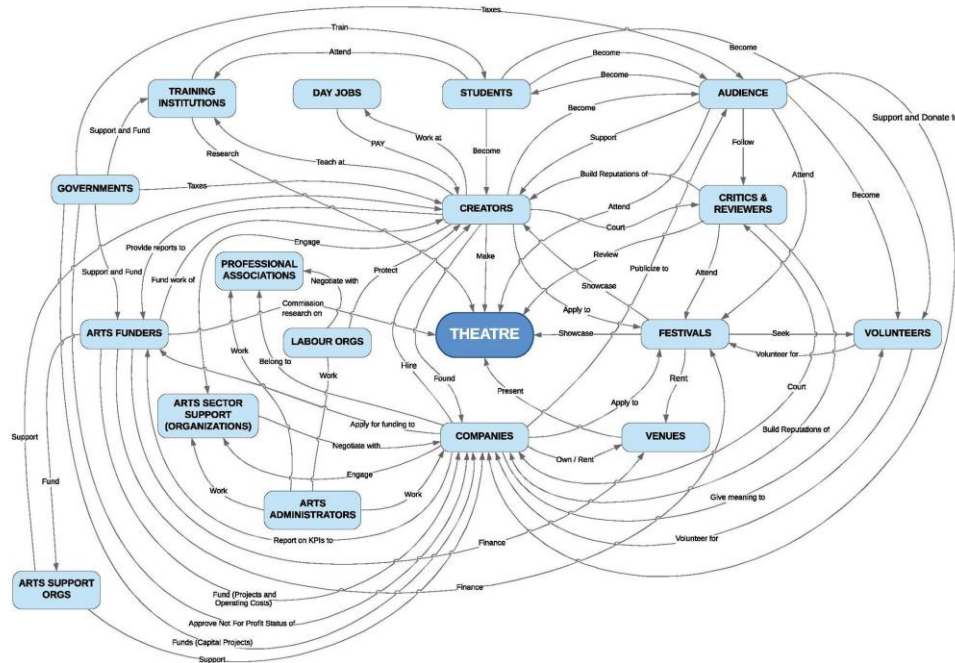
Figure 20: Systemigram of Relationships and Functions within the Theatre Ecosystem

These characteristics reflect the attitudes and thoughts of the practitioners towards the landscape in which they choose to operate, and also form part of their identity. They can be found reflected in many of the conditions of the present-day ecosystem, with dominant ones being competition and lack of resources.

Those traits will reveal themselves through an examination of some of the frequently noted conditions of the ecosystem. Some of those conditions that frequently came up in the interview data were:

- Funding and Grants
- Space and Venue
- Audiences

While some other conditions identified in the interview coding were not discussed as much as other conditions, they are worth investigation as well due to their systemic importance:

- Marketing and Media Coverage
- Formal Training
- Lifestyle of the Artist
- Institutions of Support

They are worth discussing in detail, as it may enable a cursory understanding of the conditions that have created this independent theatre identity, and show how the elements work together to produce the present-day system.

By viewing these elements and the relationships within them, we begin to see how each interplays with each other, with lack of funding leading to, for example, lack of real estate. It paints a portrait of an underfunded and under resourced sector; precarity becomes both cause and effect. These elements, which cause some of the major issues within the ecosystem, are worth examining in detail, so that we can begin to build a foundation for change.

Funding and Grants

The economy has become the dominant underlying framework for how society relates to one another, replacing culture as the language of society. Noted playwright Michael Healey gives his accounting of this transition, noting the rise of the importance of the economy to society, and its effect on the discourse of culture at the time:

> In the Toronto theatre we fought for art's usefulness, and the fight went to Ottawa and across the country. And we lost the fight. It seems harsh to say we lost, especially since there are those who continue to make the arguments, especially since the OAC and the Canada Council and the TAC still exist, but what we lost was this: Culture, it was decided, is not central to this society. It's of use, it connotes a degree of civilization, but it's not central. Culture is great, but it's not worthy of a place in our collective life like, say, the economy is. The economy, so easy to measure and parse and fight over and politicize, dominates our discussions about society, about what we mean to each other. (Healey, 2014)

Per Healey's account, the economy replaced culture as the centre of society. That replacement, however, did not only affect the discourse within society, but changed the language and discourse of culture itself:

> The earliest fights of this new era were over the economics of art: could we as artists, use the tools of the dominant discourse to make ourselves somehow valid again? Would

casting art's value to a city in monetary terms lend us credibility? Arts organizations began making economic arguments to funders. Funders began to expect these justifications from artists. And some artists hated this line of argument, made no secret of hating it, and divisions emerged between those who believed in making that pitch and those who felt it cheapened the art. (Healey, 2014)
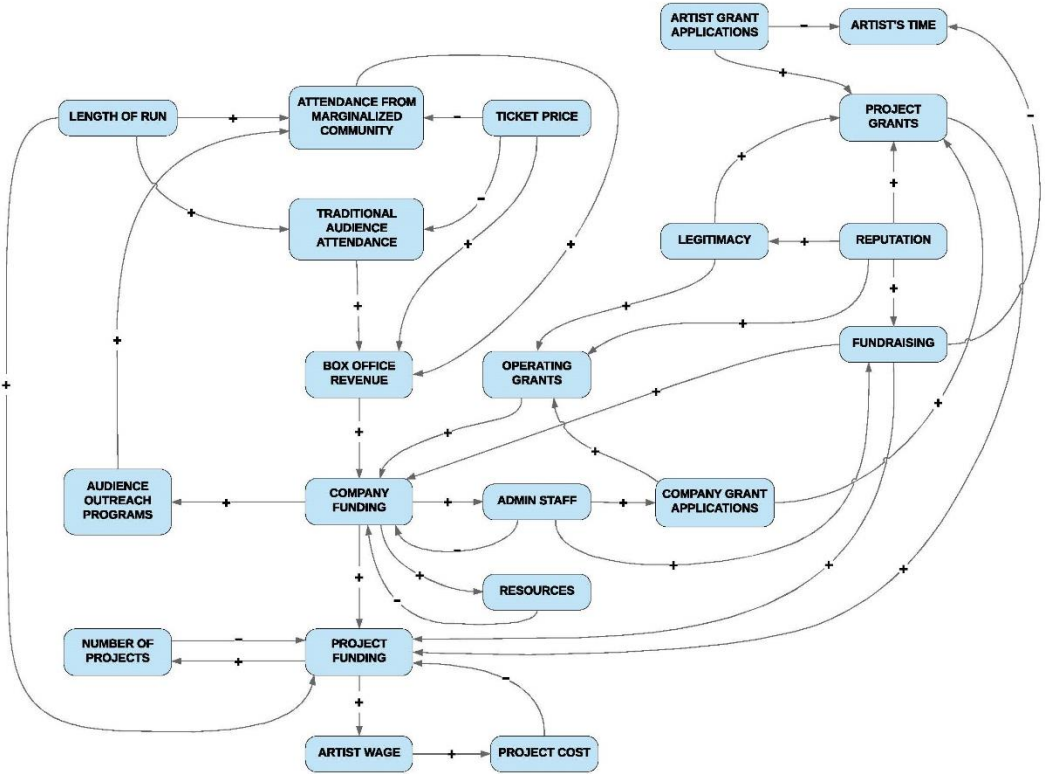
Figure 21: Systemigram of Funding and Effects

Not only does Healey observe the rise of economic discourse infiltrating discussions of culture (and consequently, requiring culture to speak in the language of economics), but also of the division that this has created between theatre artists that exist today. There is a relationship between culture and the economy, even though some may argue that theatrical activity takes place outside of the economy. In fact, despite the specific content of plays) the majority of theatre and theatrical institutions have affirmed modern capitalism more than it has resisted it in an effort to gain or maintain its legitimacy through its practices and locations (Harvie, 2009; Knowles, 2004; McKinnie, 2007). The commercial theatre of today is the most obvious example of this complicity; it is located in the downtown core, appeals to affluent patrons, and has built

global brands and followings (Harvie, 2009). The globalized commercial theatre, given its large reach, may also set the expectations of audiences and artists alike about what theatre is and how it should operate.

However, institutional and independent theatres have also been engaged in this same complicity, albeit in "a rather intricate and improvisatory choreography with the state and the market simultaneously" (McKinnie, 2017, p. 21). At this level, the market will not cover the complete cost of theatrical activities and thus, state funding is explicitly required (Lawrie, 2016; McKinnie, 2017).

Practitioners noted that state funding has the most power to shape the landscape and encourage change; to receive their arts grants or continued operating grants, theatre companies need to meet the requirements as set out by the funding agencies (McKinnie, 2017), so adjusting those requirements can lead to adjustments by the institutional theatres which can help set the tone for the Toronto scene. One practitioner gave the example of many large theatre companies recently moving towards becoming accessible, as it was a condition for them to receive their funding.

Not only can funding incentivize behaviours, but it can also legitimize artists and companies as well. Being recognized with an arts grant means that the state has recognized a creator as a legitimate artist, and can serve as a marker of status. However, because of that conference of legitimacy, what is not funded is as important as what is funded, as it can reinforce hegemonic views and act as an exclusionary mechanism. For example, the CCA uses a peer-review granting system. However, one expert noted that juries may unconsciously want to replicate their own work, or work that falls outside of their areas of practice may seem too different or alien, and consequently the jury would opt not to fund it. Thus, if the widest breadth of the theatrical sphere were not considered, the peer-review system would reinforce a hegemonic sense of culture, serving a role as protector of culture as it did in the 1970s and 1980s.[12]

One expert noted that a new granting system operating at the provincial level, the Recommender Grant system, where the provincial arts funder empowers third party reviewers such as institutional theatres and established independent theatres to solicit and evaluate grant applications and award grants to projects that align to the evaluating theatre's priorities or

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[12]As Knowles (2009/2011) noted, at that time, despite the official policy of multiculturalism, multicultural works were funded by grants intended for multicultural festivals as they were not considered professional works. This continued to encourage the reduced professional legitimacy of those works, companies, and people, while white, male artists enjoyed the benefits of the peer-review system. While this is no longer the case presently, a similar cycle of reproduction / transference of values could occur when the jurists do not recognize the value of specific voices, forms, or practices.

mandate (Ontario Arts Council, n.d.-a), is helpful because not only does it creates links between institutional and established theatres and the independent theatre scene, but also expands the possible lenses for evaluation (as long as the diversity of reviewing institutions is properly considered).

There were several mechanisms identified through which funding could be obtained:
- **State Funding**[13]
  - **Arts Grants:** Direct funding from government arts councils or funding bodies. This funding is also susceptible to the whims of the governing party; there is a perception that arts grants are the first thing cut in order to "balance the books."
  - **Non-Arts Grants**: Work or job grants or infrastructure grants can be used to help defray costs; however, these grants are not used for the direct creation of work (McKinnie, 2003)[14].
- **Market Level**
  - **Box Office Revenue:** Revenue from ticket sales can be a direct reflection of the perceived market value of a show. The market tends to value popular entertainment (Harvie, 2009), rather than content and forms that may be considered more experimental or challenging, or as one practitioner coined, "cultural vegetables."
  - **Fundraising and Donations:** Donors for the arts in Toronto tend to be from the older generation and want to support stable, accountable, transparent organization that are making "innovative" work (Toronto Arts Foundation, 2017). However, arts donations are also at the bottom of the priority list for Torontonians, with the top reason being that Torontonians don't have enough disposable income (Toronto Arts Foundation, 2017).

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[13] McKinnie actually articulates seven points where the state can and has influenced or supported theatre in Canada. They are state patronage (however organized, whether through arts councils or commissioning of new work), regulations on expression (i.e. obscenity, libel, etc.), regulating economic production and distribution (i.e. Canadian content regulations), regulation of taxation (including assignment of not-for-profit status, and tax considerations for artists), professional regulation (the Status of the Artist Act), labour market governance (both supply-led, including funding for training programs, and demand-led, including funding for theatre infrastructure), and economic development (for example, positioning a theatre as a tourist attraction) (McKinnie, 2003).

[14] Michael McKinnie (2003) writes about the use of a non-arts grant program (LIP Grants) to help establish the Canadian theatre in the 1970s. The grants were intended for job creation in all industries. Some were obtained by theatre companies and used to fund playwrights and actors. This meant that artistic creation was being subsidized by the state without the Canada Council as intermediary. It would subvert their role as arbiter of culture (as Massey had envisioned it) (Pannekoek, Hemmings, & Clarke, 2010) and threatening the status and position of established artists (after all, anyone could get a grant to make theatre, then everyone could be an artist). The LIP grant program was a powerful tool in levelling the artistic playing field. However, the public did not react well to job creation grants being used for artistic purposes and the LIP grant program was discontinued. However, the LIP grants encouraged some of the disruption that the sector is currently experiencing today: blurred lines surrounding who is a professional; expanding definitions of culture; and democratization of culture.

- ○ **Corporate Sponsorships:** Funding from here can be on par with grant-level funding, but with potentially much less administrative work. However, there is a perception that (unless there is a personal connection between the artist and the owner of the company sponsoring) a corporation will want return on investment, choosing not to sponsor a theatrical performance that would not have a large audience or that could potentially offend audiences (and thus, potential customers).
- ○ **Crowd funding:** A fairly recent innovation, these platforms can enable artists to raise funds directly from their own networks of family, friends, and fans. While this enables them to leverage the power of social media for fundraising, there is a potential for donor exhaustion if an artist is repeatedly appealing to the same network for each individual project.

Each of these funding options presents specific issues for independent theatre organizations and practitioners. Regarding state funding, of particular interest is the lack of operating funding (funding that is not intended for creative work but rather to enable a company meet its ongoing operating costs). As there is only a limited pool of operating funding, it is difficult to take it away from those who already have it (Knowles, 2009/2011). As limited new funding is injected into the system, operating funding will continue to be given to those who already have it, making it more difficult for new players to try to obtain it (Knowles, 2009/2011). Thus, regardless of their relevance, the institutional theatres continue to receive funding to survive, while the independent scene cannot participate at that same level. As one practitioner noted,

> the model of, if you work hard enough, you'll get all three levels of operating funding and you'll be able to afford a general manager who will work full-time, while you also work full-time and both of you will get a living wage, is just gone. Unless you have it, it's not happening for you.

This may be a factor in why independent theatre makers perceive a lack of funding for their discipline. This lack of funding may also be a factor (along with lower ticket sales) of the practitioner's perception that the public does not value theatre.

Consistent funding can possibly lead to institutional stagnation and support of companies whose mandates or work is no longer relevant. One practitioner noted that "this idea that there are these theatrical institutional boxes that need to survive for decades and decades and decades needs to end." The reason that this is felt by the independent theatre scene is because some may see those institutions as taking up funding that could be reallocated to different, newer, or more innovative companies or different projects and support organizations. As Jordan Tannahill

notes, "our venerable theatre institutions, we believe, are too big and too necessary to fail. And yet, failure - institutional death - is often the necessary condition from which new life and new possibilities may spring" (2015, p. 77).

When it comes to project-based arts funding, due to the perceived high volume of theatrical artists in the Toronto theatre scene, practitioners indicated that it is also difficult to be selected for arts grants simply because of the sheer volume of applications. As well, juries may not be familiar with a particular artist's work (especially if they are newer or operating in a different practice), only their grant application. This leads to the perception that it's not necessarily the best artists that get funded, but the best grant application writers. Several practitioners also noted that the level of work to obtain a grant seems disproportionate to the value of the grant, noting that "sometimes it feels like a lot of work for grants, for not as much money as I would like."

When it comes to market forces, fundraising may be more difficult given the level of organizational maturity. While donors tend to skew older, independent theatre tends to focus on younger artists and audiences. Further, the number of companies that exist on a project-to-project basis make it difficult to establish lasting relationships with donors. The temporary nature of some of these companies may be perceived as failures. While that is not necessarily the case, some believe that donors may not want to donate to a group that will exist only for a moment in time. Thus, reputation (either by the company or the artist) becomes a major factor in fundraising and seeking corporate sponsorship. Establishing, emerging, and temporary companies need time to build their reputations (or business cases).

While the focus has been on financial resources, it must be noted that those obtaining these resources require an investment of another resource: time. Whether it is grant applications, fundraising, crowd funding, or seeking corporate sponsorship, all of these require time of the artist-producer. In the independent sector, the artist does not generally have funding to hire a grant writer or fundraiser. As such, they must manage this work on the artist's own time, straining their already-limited temporal resource.

However, it must also be noted that while many practitioners would appreciate increased funding, there is also a desire for the freedom that comes with not accepting the funding of others, and thus, to be under no obligation to meet their conditions. There has been an uptick in companies of this sort that encourage more risk-taking and pursue artistic ideas that excite them (Tannahill, 2015). They serve to ensure artistic innovation in the sector, and have no qualms about being temporary in nature (Tannahill, 2015).

Space & Venues
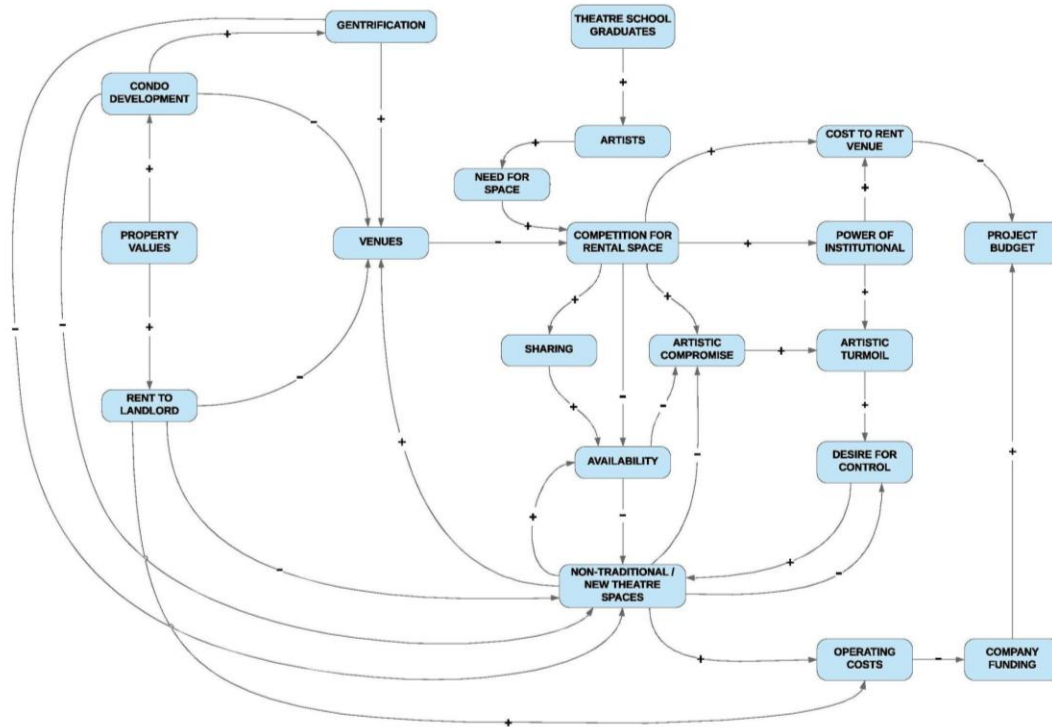
Figure 22: Systemigram of Space and Venue Effects

Theatre is intrinsically connected to space. Indeed, it is one of the elements of Peter Brook's definition of theatre (Brook, 1968/1996). Unlike the cinema where work can be viewed on demand, theatre is an event that exists only in that moment and in that space. Practitioners spoke to the role of "the gathering place" of the theatre at large, as a place for artists and audiences to come together and interact.

Because it cannot be reproduced in the same way as cinema, theatre is restricted in its geography. This restriction to space has implications for theatre at large; most smaller, non-profit or independent theatre is thus inherently performed by local practitioners (which, unlike film, may not involve artists of international calibre or reputation)[15] (Tannahill, 2015). Because of that, audience members are more likely to have a connection to the performers (and thus, perhaps, be attending out of obligation) (Tannahill, 2015). And because of its localized nature,

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[15]However, that may be changing. When it comes to the globalized commercial theatre (which constitutes part of the Toronto theatrical landscape), there are many shows that are built with Toronto casts, and many national tours involve a casting stop in Toronto. As Derrick Chua said, "Toronto is, first of all, part of the international theatre community, and some of our work is definitely as good as anything else in the world." (D. Chua, personal communication, March 7, 2019).

independent theatre may require insider knowledge of "what is good" or where it is in order to access (McKinnie, 2007).

Indeed, this restriction to place means that where a theatre is located directly affects the meaning it makes: the more centrally a theatre is located in a city, the more "social legitimacy" it accrues, while theatres on the margins remain illegitimate[16] (Harvie, 2009, p. 26). In Toronto, there is a sphere of "theatrical legitimacy" that occurs within defined geographical boundaries: in his analysis, Michael McKinnie notes that,

> the physical geography of theatre in Toronto has remained remarkably consistent over the past four decades.… Of the fifty-five performance venues in Toronto identified by the Toronto Theatre Alliance as either occupied by its members or suitable for its members' productions, forty-five are located within the Queen's Quay-Dupont-Bathurst-Don district (and several of the remainder, like the Theatre Centre, sit just on its edge). (McKinnie, 2007, p. 17)

This boundary, while not articulated as explicitly as in McKinnie's work, was identified by some interview subjects. The data showed that encouraging growth beyond the downtown core a challenge, due to perceived lack of facilities and audiences; however, thanks to condo development, Streetcar Crow's Nest, one of the most recent theatre venues to open in the Toronto landscape, was able to receive funding to build its facility in the East end.[17]

The building of Streetcar Crow's Nest was also greeted by some of the practitioners with astonishment, as it reinforced the perceived lack of theatrical venues and space in Toronto for independent companies and artists. Lack of venues and space is one of their major concerns for the sector.[18] A number pointed to the numerous venues (including non-traditional venues) that have been closing over the past few years, including Storefront Theatre's eviction (Antaki, 2017; S. Fisher, 2017). The Toronto real-estate market, with property value increasing at rates greater than what companies can afford, is often cited as the culprit. Increased rental rates place renting and renovating a space out of reach of many independent companies. Places with lower rent are often inaccessible (basements or second floors) and further out from the downtown

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[16]This has also entered the language that is used in defining theatre. Consider Broadway (which is the name of a street in New York City, and associated with success and fame in the theatre) and Off-Broadway (which literally means the theatres are not on the Broadway strip, and are considered second-tier) (Harvie, 2009).

[17]For a more in-depth review of the relationship between condo developers, municipalities, and the construction of new theatrical spaces, see Michael McKinnie's article "Institutional Frameworks: Theatre, State, and Market in Modern Urban Performance" (2007).

[18]In fact, several participants used "lack of space", "venueless", or "nomadic" in their definitions of the independent theatre space in Toronto.

core. Condo development is also thought to be responsible for evicting and tearing down many small local venues.

While, generally, new venues have been few and far between in the downtown core, some condo developers may leverage the installation of a theatre as a way to make their condo applications attractive to municipal regulators. As Carlson shows, "because theatres can signify the types of cultural values civic authorities often want to nurture - signs of success, affluence, elitism - urban planners often develop theatres and other cultural complexes to gentrify poorer urban districts, but in so doing they make little provision for what and whom the development displaces " (Carlson, as noted in Harvie, 2009, p. 30). Thus, this puts theatre companies in an uneasy situation: do you get the venue you have been longing for knowing that someone has likely been moved further to the margins in order for you to occupy your new space?

With a loss of existing venues and the minimal addition of new, formal venues, this makes space a difficult resource to obtain and navigate. As the creation of a theatre project requires the fitting-together of many different pieces that are dependant on many things, including timing, the availability of space can directly influence the artistic vision of a project. For example, if, due to other commitments, an actor or director only has a certain week available for performances, then the creative team may have to settle for a less-than-ideal space (if they can find a space at all). As one practitioner said, "that would be one of the challenges, is trying to find a space when you actually want it for the amount of time you want it for."

This lack of space creates two options for independent theatre companies:
- **Renting traditional space:** Independent theatre companies can reach out to rent space from existing venues. However, the practitioners noted several drawbacks, including the high rental costs, and the high-level of competition between companies for the space. As well, institutional companies' seasons must be set before they can offer up their space for rent, which can be a lengthy process, leaving less time for the independent companies to make their plans. As well, since the institutional company has "first dibs," the times that are offered for rent are often not the ideal times for shows. However, performing in a traditional venue confers the legitimacy of that venue to that company. However, by performing in a rented space, the independent company also runs the risk of the audience not being able to separate the space from the company (therefore assuming they are seeing a Tarragon show when it is, in fact, a rental).
- **Use of non-traditional space:** Practitioners noted that the independent scene is leading the charge in the use of non-traditional theatre spaces. Storefronts, historic buildings, and DIY venues are popping up around the theatrical landscape. As one practitioner noted "most of the TAPA companies don't have venues. The venues that we have… there isn't actually that many. That's why people make their own." This has been attributed to a desire for control of their own space without the high capital costs (and corresponding maintenance requirements) that are associated with owning a traditional theatre venue. With the proliferation of these non-traditional spaces came a corresponding proliferation of independent theatre work. These spaces can surprise

audiences, often bringing theatre closer to them in unexpected ways (Kempson, 2017).
However, as noted above, many have become temporary structures as they are subject
to the forces of the Toronto real estate market.

A small number of practitioners actually noted a proliferation of space in Toronto. While some
of that is attributed to the innovation of the independent theatre practitioners (and the
constant churn of non-traditional spaces), other venues such as community centres, schools,
bars, and even some traditional, soft seat theatres were noted as being available. A practitioner
noted that,

> the Canadian Chinese Culture Centre has a spectacular facility, like fantastic acoustics,
> but they're not operated by a professional theatre company. So, there's this real
> disconnect about how some companies view the rest of the landscape. There are better
> facilities that nobody knows about, in universities, that nobody knows about.

Whether it is cost, size, geographical, or legitimacy concerns, it appears that the concern over
space is not felt by all practitioners; it may be more accurate to say that there is a lack of right-
sized, affordable, professional, or theatrically legitimate space in the downtown area to which
the independent theatres have access.

Not mentioned as much, but also of a concern, is lack of administration space for companies and
practitioners. As one practitioner noted "I used to work out of my boss' house, which was fine,
because my previous employer, I worked at her house too." However, sharing office and
administration space is slowly happening, both in facilitated ways (via Generator), or by
companies on their own. By sharing the resource of administration space, practitioners have
noticed increases in crossover, collaboration, and sharing of resources (including human).

Audiences

Independent practitioners perceive their audience as being risk takers. They believe that they
attend the theatre because of the attraction of a unique, communal experience. They also
believe that the audiences seek a theatrical experience because they want to be exposed to new
ideas, to be emotionally affected, and to experience personal growth.

However, based on the interview data, there is a perception amongst practitioners that Toronto
theatre attendance is in decline.[19] As one interviewee noted, "I think the art side of [the theatre

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[19]In a 2016 survey of the members of the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts, despite the fact that nearly 62% of respondents
could not provide the number of unique audience members, (whether due to lack of technology for tracking or due to large numbers
of walk ups), the survey recognized that attendance was felt to be generally up between 2014/15 and 2015/16 seasons (The

landscape] is healthy; I think the audience side is not… trend lines have been showing audiences declining, despite the increases in number of performances." There are a number of reasons given as to why the general public does not attend theatre on a regular basis:

- **Ticket prices:** Ticket prices were noted by several practitioners as being a barrier to attendance and participation in the arts.[20] This could be classified as the "actual cost" of attending the theatre, while the perception of the price would be the "perceived cost", and act just as much as a deterrent as the actual cost (Mallet & Close, 2016).[21] Ticket prices necessarily keep those who cannot afford to pay the ticket price from attending. Thus, high ticket prices reinforce class structures (Gabler, 1998; Harvie, 2009, p. 37).[22] New Canadians, youth, and young families are examples of groups who may not be able to afford to see the theatre on their own.
- **A previous bad experience at the theatre:** Several practitioners noted that a previous bad experience at the theatre could influence a patron's future decisions about theatre. This could affect the patron's perception of "investment risk" (Mallet & Close, 2016).
- **Resistance to change:** Some practitioners pointed to the audiences of commercial and institutional theatres as not wanting to engage in material that challenges their perceptions or that may come from different voices.
- **Lack of time:** With many competing priorities for one's time, regular attendance at the theatre may not be a priority (especially if whatever motivates a patron to attend the theatre can be achieved in a more convenient manner).
- **"The Netflix Mentality":** Several practitioners referred to "the Netflix mentality." It is an easy handle to sum up several of the previous issues: the practitioners shared a perception that streaming services had made people used to seeing great content for a very low price (thus altering the level of investment risk that a person would be willing to take on). Further, due to the wealth of content, one can stop a film if one does not like it and move onto something else. Coupled with the convenience of seeing that

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Strategic Council, 2017). However, one must also consider that TAPA's members include the commercial and institutional theatres, and thus, this information could be viewed for the entire theatrical sector.

[20]Historically, high-priced tickets were established to keep lower classes out of the high culture theatres following the NYC theatre riots in the 1850s: prices were increased to keep the lower classes out of the new palatial houses that were being built in midtown (Gabler, 1998). This, amongst other barriers such as location and time, transformed the audience into the well-behaved audience as we would recognize it today - quiet, respectful, sitting, and clapping at the end (Gabler, 1998). Before, they would chatter, yell, and make their feelings known (Gabler, 1998). However, nowadays, even though ticket prices are high, as Derrick Chua noted, I think it's a challenge getting people out, and apparently getting people to pay what a lot of the art is worth (D. Chua, personal communication, March 7, 2019).

[21]While practitioners focussed on ticket prices, the cost of going to the theatre can be broken down into three actual different pieces: assumed cost (i.e. theatre is going to be expensive and not for me), investment risk (i.e. will it be worth my time?), and actual cost (ticket price) (Mallet & Close, 2016).

[22]While many practitioners identified ticket price as a barrier, location and time can also be barriers (Mallet & Close, 2016). Starting times (i.e. traditional start time at 8:00 PM) were not noted by any.

content on their schedule, there is a fear that the current personalization of entertainment will cause further decline in theatre audiences.

There is also a general perception that the public does not value theatre, and that there is a lack of general interest in non-commercial theatre. Derrick Chua noted,

> I think I would love to wave a magic wand and change the public, people in general, their attitude towards theatre and its value. And when I say that, I mean the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Toronto Raptors pretty much sell out every seat, and they play to thousands of people per game at an average price of a couple hundred dollars. I'm making up general numbers, but there's no lack of people who are willing to pay a couple hundred dollars a ticket just to go see a hockey game for three hours. I don't understand why it's so hard for them to pay twenty or thirty dollars or whatever it costs [for a theatre ticket]. (D. Chua, personal communication, March 7, 2019)

This perceived lack of public value and priority for theatre points to a difference in priorities between those involved in theatre and the general public. This perception from within the theatre sphere has an inherent assumption that there is value to the theatre, which makes sense: with all of the difficulties that creators must face in order to create theatre, they likely ascribe a high value to it (otherwise they may not invest as much in it).

However, some practitioners noted a disconnect between creators and the general audience, and thus could affect the valuation (or perception of valuation) of the work. One reason for this that they note is that artists and companies do not take the time to define their audience and who their work is for. When discussing audiences, one practitioner noted,

> My biggest question to theatre companies right now would be who is your audience? If your audience is only your friends who are also in theatre, you're never going to survive. That is not going to be a sustainable career.... The biggest problem is to say we want [our theatre] to belong to everyone. You can't! Nobody has time to do that, and nobody has resources to do that… Apple does not say that. IBM does not say that. So who is the audience that you want to have come to your theatre, and why? Why should they choose you? Why would they choose you?

Thus, without defining an audience, or by defining it too broadly, work gets created for a theoretical audience, or, if the audience is not considered at all, for the artist.

One suggestion that arose was that the creation of meaningful work for both the creator and the audience was to involve them in the co-creation of meaning. This shift might be best expressed by Belgian festival director Frie Leysen: "how can we make the audience a partner in adventure instead of a consumer?" (Leysen, qtd in Tannahill, 2015, p. 77). An audience desire for direct participation was noted amongst participants. As one practitioner noted,

> people want to feel more involved in the action. I think live theatre, just being an audience member in a live theatre is a way to feel more involved as well, I think it's got so much value, but people I think are looking to be more actively involved in the stuff that they do. Which is why video games are starting to become so huge.

The audience now wants to be more involved. Perhaps as audiences have become more familiar with interactive media such as video games, they now expect the same of their live media. This would return them to the pre-Victorian audiences that would talk and interact with what was happening on stage (Gabler, 1998).

However, a more subtle approach involving the consideration of the audience and reflecting them on the stage was also suggested. As one interviewee noted,

> The art that actually reflects the audience, it seems to be absent in so much theatre. Like the art that used to be "hold a mirror up to nature," that art is gone. Everybody wants to smash the mirror, break through the mirror and do like spectacular stuff. Great, fine, but Toronto can't actually support tons and tons and tons of that kind of work.

Thus, relatable theatre seems to be absent. As well, perhaps as an offshoot of the Netflix mentality, there is a desire in audiences to see stories that are relatable and about their own experience. In fact, such shows, reflecting specific experiences on stage, tend to attract new, relevant audiences; the challenge is to get them to return to see shows that do not reflect their specific experience.

Given the perceived decline of the audience, there is a general desire amongst practitioners to see an increase in theatre attendance. As one practitioner noted, "I would like to see indie theatre command the same kind of audiences that Mirvish does." However, as it stands, the data shows that creators believe the majority of the audiences for independent theatre consist of other artists. For the reasons of peer networks, and of their shared valuation of the theatrical experience, this observation would seem to make intuitive sense.

Practitioners identified some existing strategies for developing and growing audiences, including casting actors with followings from film and television, and building reputation and word-of-mouth for shows, especially for younger theatregoers. One other strategy that some are pursuing is developing a relationship between the audience and the artists. As one practitioner noted, "audiences will start to hopefully get to know artists on a more personal level and follow them as theatre artists or theatre creators on their journey, and want to support them no matter where they are." This is the same way concentration on personality emerged for cinema: it allowed the mass audience to connect to the work (Gabler, 1998). Intermission Magazine, which was launched by an independent theatre, aims to do just that: provide an outlet for artists to reach audiences and audiences to reach artists.

It is worthwhile to note that, while the specifics and details are different, these discussions of relevancy and audiences echo conversations that have occurred in the past (Julien, 2017).

Marketing and Media Coverage

The traditional role of publicity has been twofold: to build an audience for a show ("bums in seats"), and to build an artist's or company's reputation (a following amongst public and peers) (Lee, 2016). Both of these roles are important: selling the show can hopefully ensure that there is an audience to bear witness to the production (and recoup some of the production cost from the box office sales), while building an artistic reputation helps enable the theatre artist to
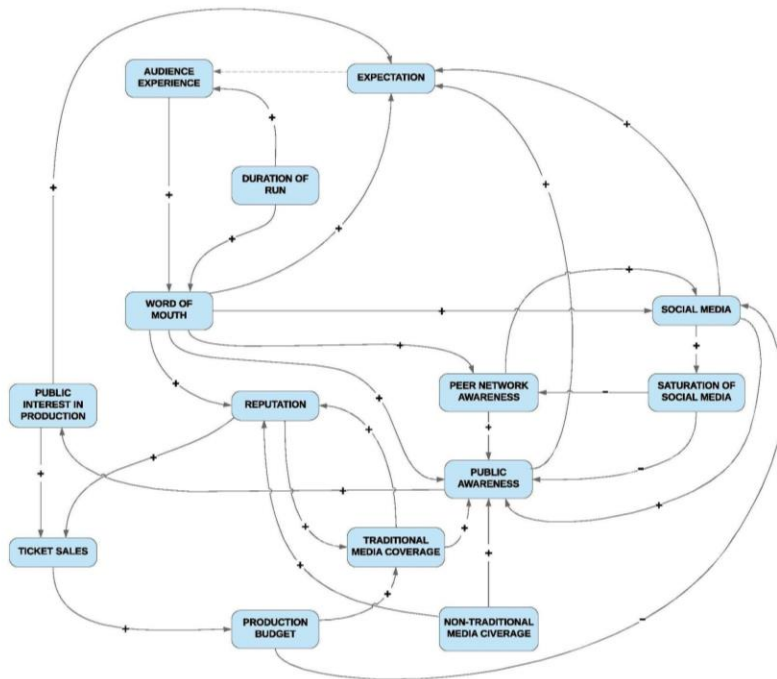
Figure 23: Systemigram of Marketing and Media Effects

potentially be engaged or sought out in the future by an artistic director or collaborator. These

two roles are interdependent: a good reputation or following may influence people to purchase tickets, while an audience member for a show may want to follow the career of a specific artist. However, approaches to those roles may differ: when focussed on building an artist's reputation, national, regional, local, and hyperlocal media may be engaged, while in order to sell tickets to an independent theatre show, due to its local nature, local and hyperlocal media may be given priority.

Whether it is earned media (i.e. stories, reviews, or word of mouth) or purchased media (i.e. advertisements), practitioners and experts identified essentially three media streams that are accessible to independent theatre practitioners:
- **Traditional (or Established) Media:** Newspapers (like The Globe and Mail or NOW Magazine), television (like Breakfast Television), and radio (like CBC Arts) usually comprise of this space. Participants noted that this is still considered the most influential of the media options (it used to be said that a good review here could make or break a show). Access to traditional media is difficult: advertisements are cost-prohibitive, and obtaining interest from reviewers (who have limited time and budget) in a saturated market outside of festival frameworks is also difficult (without engaging a publicist).[23]
- **Non-Traditional Media:** This space is occupied primarily by blogs that focus on reviews (like Mooney On Theatre or MyEntertainmentWorld) or artists and creators (like intermission magazine), and tend to focus on the local theatre scene. The reviewers who operate here may be former professional reviewers, and may also be hobbyists. Some may value the cultural cache of the blogs less than that of traditional media and question their quality because any and all people can start blogs (as one practitioner mentioned, "we live in an age when everyone is reviewing everybody.")
- **Social Media:** As the digitization of "word of mouth", social media is considered by some practitioners as a "game-changer" for its ability to cheaply and quickly publicize shows. It democratizes publicity, bypassing traditional media (and their expensive advertising prices) and allowing theatre artists to appeal directly to the public regardless of publicity budget.

Over the past few years, one of the local newspapers (The Grid) folded, thus reducing the amount of coverage available to independent artists. As well, NOW Magazine no longer reviews all of the shows at the Toronto fringe. These losses and reductions have contributed to a

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[23]One practitioner, when interviewed, shared an apocryphal story of one Toronto theatre reviewer who, when addressing a gathering of independent theatre practitioners, is thought to have said "Why don't you all get together and coordinate your opening nights? Because I can't go and see - you know, I was invited to 4 opening nights on the same night." This story, whether it is true or not, is worth noting as it speaks to not only the saturation of the theatrical landscape, but also the frustration with timelines being outside of the company's control (because of dependency on venue rentals) and the difficulty of communicating and coordinating within the independent theatre community.

perceived drop in coverage and reviews from traditional media of independent theatre in Toronto (as well as a perceived devaluation of theatre in societal discourse). The non-traditional media have filled this gap for the independent theatre community, which has embraced and legitimized the blogs within the community (Yung, 2017). The effect on the public at large, however, is unknown, as there is still a perceived lack of public awareness about independent theatre specifically and theatre in general, and the independent theatre scene (as well as institutional theatres) still struggles with ensuring that the people that whom they feel need to see these shows and stories are made aware of them.

Marketing budgets for independent theatre shows are also small or non-existent, which is why social media is a favourite marketing strategy. While the purchasing of targeted ads or publishing tweets can help get the word out in an economical manner, it may be difficult to break through the social media noise from other companies. As well, as much social media output is based on existing networks, tweets and posts may only reach artists' existing networks, reinforcing the "artist-as-audience" paradigm.

Rather than constructing a marketing strategy based on a season, some companies in the independent sector are pursuing their marketing on a show-by-show basis. The shorter seasons (if a defined season exists at all), coupled with planning uncertainties (surrounding venues, times, availability, etc.) make the show-by-show model a necessity. As many independent theatre creators are holding down other jobs, their available time and effort for publicity is also reduced. While this show-based marketing method does tie into the younger audience's desire to watch theatre on a show-by-show basis (rather than on a subscription basis), it does mean that marketing momentum is interrupted, and each show essentially has to be marketed from scratch.

However, the interruption of marketing momentum does not only affect seasons; the marketing momentum for individual shows can also be disrupted, but for other reasons. While a shorter run may be necessary due to venue ability or cost, it can disrupt the momentum of publicity generated by word of mouth. Due to the hyperlocal nature of independent theatre, word of mouth spreads to those "in the know." But, as one practitioner noted "shows that are good don't necessarily run for five years at a stretch; they run for a month and a half, and if you don't catch it, or you hear about it after it happened, too bad! It's over!"

If, as Knowles (2004) suggests, the marketing and media coverage help shape the discourses through which the audience will engage in the theatre, it stands to reason that the audiences that attend will be attracted (or at least, intrigued) by those discourses. Consequently, an over-reliance on social media for marketing may emphasize a specific kind of audience (one who has

access to and ability to use and navigate technology). This repeats the question articulated for audiences: namely, who is the audience to whom you intend to reach, and how do they engage in communication? Can awareness of the show be raised affordably and in a more accessible manner to include groups who may not normally have access?

Further, since critics act as gatekeepers for the public, the critics bring their own sets of learned values to their reviews and analysis (Lynch, 2018). These values can be based on their own experience or on a value-transfer experience (through education, etc.). Thus, non-conforming theatrical events (performances that diverge from euro-centric performance practices or stories from different lenses) may not be reviewed favourably. Intentionally diversifying the critic base, or adopting different approaches to critical review, may help to increase the visibility and disbursement of those stories.

Formal Training

Formal training programs (BFAs, MFAs, etc.) have become more and more popular (Tannahill, 2015), leading to increased professionalization in the field. Some practitioners, however, noted that these programs are not strictly necessary to work in the theatre. That being said, they can offer some advantages to the aspiring theatre maker: development of artistic practice, space and time to practice their craft without interruption, creation of a peer network (as mentioned above), and industry contacts, thus giving them a head start into the professional world (Cadwalladr, 2016).

However, these programs impart other lessons implicitly: the norms and practices of the industry, its values, the classics, and what it means to be an artist. The institution shapes expectations and points of view, for better or worse, when young artists are in the early stages of their growth, which they can then bring into their career and practice. Because of this, institutions have the power to shape the landscape, setting up mental frameworks for evaluation and criteria for success. For example, if a training institution holds up Shakespeare as the greatest playwright, then a student may leave the program seeking only opportunities to perform Shakespeare and look down on comedic work, musical theatre, or the commercial theatre.

One of the drawbacks of training, especially at a post-secondary institution, is the cost. Students can take on a significant debt burden in order to obtain their training and credentials. The young artist must then carry that debt into their professional life (where steady and paying work is difficult to find). Thus, they are already set up for a stressful future, unless they come from a privileged background. One practitioner noted,

when artists come to me and are like, "I want to go back to school." So just never go more into debt than what you can expect to make in a salary that you'll earn in your first year after it. Because that will still take you thirty years to pay off… But again, I just think that, in addition to "I want to buy a house. I want to have kids," it's one of these other giant barriers where people have to leave because they can't afford to be creative in this space because they're bound by debt.

The interview data also shows that there is a perception that these institutions are graduating more and more theatre school graduates, which increases the number of practicing artists and theatre companies being founded. This perceived influx, coupled with immobility at the top of the institutional theatres, leads to the oversaturation of the theatre scene in the city, which has effects throughout the entire system. It becomes more and more difficult for individual artists and companies to obtain funding, media coverage, or to just break through the noise. However, for the training institutions, their responsibilities end once the young artist has convocated.

Lifestyle of the Artist

One of the major concerns that the people interviewed raised was the conditions of the lifestyle of the artist, with one interviewee going so far as to simply state that "the life of the artist is in chaos right now." The sustainability of the lifestyle of the theatrical artist was identified as being the largest structural barrier to longevity in the arts scene. Many noted the instability and low wages involved. When focussing on the independent theatre space, several interviewers noted that practitioners do not get paid much, if at all, for the work that they do. Contributing factors to that are the lack of funding of the independent theatre scene, the ease of access of the scene,
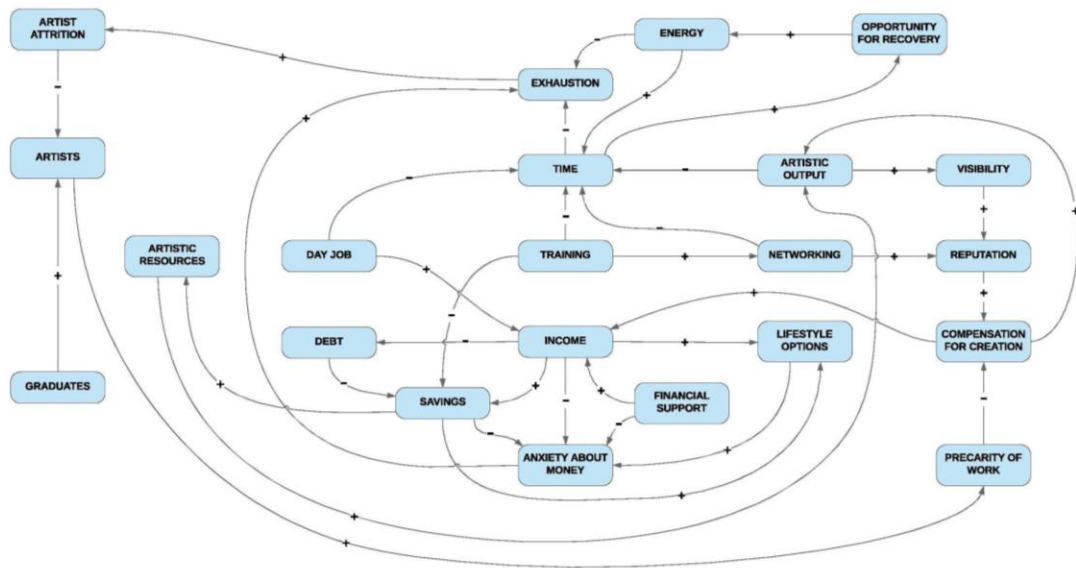
Figure 24: Systemigram of Artist Lifestyle System

and the ability to "DIY" within the scene (meaning, that while artists can create, they do so without support and rely on reputation, goodwill, and passion to convince others to join them).

Paying jobs are often not in the independent scene; they are in the institutional and commercial theatres. One practitioner noted, "people do indie theatre in the hopes that they'll get picked up by a company that will someday pay them a living wage." There is very little opportunity for compensation within the independent scene, and thus artists look elsewhere for compensation. However, another practitioner noted, "it was fun at first, but then started to feel like each show was one endless audition for one of the handful of paying jobs." This can be exacerbated by the perceived immobility of personnel at the institutional theatres. As one practitioner noted,

> no one's retiring - so there's, like, again, this build-up of artists in their 40s, 30s, and 20s who want these leadership positions and those people who are in those positions aren't leaving because, I mean, I assume that they can't afford it. And also, they're healthy, so why would they leave?

Because those with positions can't afford to leave them, it creates an environment where artists cannot move into the leadership positions. All of this creates an environment in the independent scene where artists create for free, assume all of the risk of creation, look to

institutional or regional theatres to be programmed (and compensated)[24], and can then burnout after several years of trying to survive working several jobs and barely being compensated for their work.

This delayed system effect has the result of creating one of the things that was celebrated by several practitioners: the youth of the independent theatre scene. There is a tendency for this space to be young, as it takes time for practitioners to become exhausted and burnout and, consequently, leave the field. While it's true that the younger practitioners can take risks as they may not have "as much to lose" as established artists, they can only do that for so long prior to the burnout mentioned above.

Lack of income also puts artists in the position of being unable to consider some lifestyle choices that are generally taken for granted: having a child or buying a house, for example. Many of the interviewees noted that those choices were out of reach for a working artist, and if an artist wanted to achieve them, then the artist would likely need to leave the independent scene. This is another contributing factor to why the independent scene remains young: people exit to have families, and change their careers and lifestyles to support them. As one practitioner noted,

> It's a young person's game because of that in some way, everyone who's really making exciting stuff, they're all kind of younger in a way, which is understandable because theatre doesn't provide, financially a way to sustain a long term life in it for a lot of people.

Thus, the innovation in the sector is actually driven by the lack of sustainability of a long-term life.

This lack of income has ramifications throughout the system. First of all, there is a need for artists to take on day jobs (or "joe jobs") that actually pay them so that they can survive.[25] In Ontario, 67% of artists living in Ontario must supplement their artistic work with work outside of their artistic field (Neil, 2010), meaning that most artists have to add a second job onto their demand for time. As well, rehearsal schedules have to be modified to accommodate artists' work shifts or auditions for paying gigs. It also impacts casting, as an artist may have to turn down or drop out of a project if a paying gig turns up. There is also an apparent stigmatization

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[24] One expert that was interviewed, when referring to his own experience, noted that even when a show he had created was picked up by a regional theatre, he was not compensated as an artist. Rather, he was compensated as a producer.

[25] This is the precarity of work previously identified that enables the fluidity between theatre and film and television.

felt around day jobs; some feel that there is an attitude in the artistic community at large that a true artist should not be working another job.

Further, given the lack of income, it requires a certain amount of financial privilege to be able to survive and find success in the independent scene, with one identifying class as a large structural barrier. This is not unique to Toronto: in England, only 27% of artists identify as having a working class background (Cadwalladr, 2016). Artists with a financial support system get a "leg up" and the benefit of time, resources, and opportunity. They can have time, since they can cut down on the amount of hours needed to work at their day job to make ends meet (and thus, are now able to take a class, expand on their network, or rehearse). They have access to resources, since they may now be able to purchase not only what they need to achieve their artistic vision, but also to publicize their show. The combination of these two creates opportunity, since, by having time and resources, they can expand their professional networks by seeing other shows, taking classes, or staying out at the bar, or they can manufacture opportunity by renting an institutional venue for their production and inviting the institution's Artistic Director.

Participants noted that lack of financial privilege could limit participation in artistic creation. Notably, artists from marginalized communities, first-generation newcomers, and the middle class cannot necessarily afford to take risks or make those investments. While the independent scene is open to any voice, it begins to privilege those who can afford to stay in it.

Several narratives, both within and outside of the artistic community, reinforce this lack of income or low wages. Several interviewees pointed towards a perceived attitude in the public that artistic work is not labour. This idea that art is not labour has existed for quite some time, as evidenced by the public's negative reaction to allowing LIP grants in the 1970s, which were intended to create jobs, to be used to fund playwrights and actors (which possibly contributed to the cancellation of the program) (McKinnie, 2003). It is reinforced as well by the observation by several of those interviewed that the only stable work in the arts is for administrators, and that there are large pay disparities between artists and technicians.

Another narrative that can contribute to this is the valorisation of the starving artist and the idea that a successful artist should not be making money. Several practitioners noted that part of being an artist is the pain and struggle of being an artist. Further, others alluded to the idea that pursuing a career in the arts is a commitment to a lifestyle of passion and commitment. As well, as previously mentioned, the narrative that a real artist should not do admin work or have a secondary job also plays a role. These attitudes don't acknowledge the invisible helping hand that a supportive background can provide.

It may be difficult to determine which arose first, whether circumstances produced these narratives, or narratives justify the circumstances. But they have created cycles that shape the values that surround theatre artists, as well as the ideals for success. Certain organizations, like Generator, are actively questioning these assumptions, and attempting to empower artists by reframing what a sustainable career looks like.

There can also be a sinister side to these narratives that normalize lack of income and working for free. As many practitioners in the independent scene have varying union affiliations and are viewed with differing levels of professionalization, there is the possibility of exploitation of artists by others. Without necessarily formal structures in place to guard against that exploitation, reputation and personal networks serves as a buffer. As another interviewee noted,

> I absolutely have declined to work with people that I've heard have had problematic reputations because we are such a tight knight community. And because people who I have a relationship with and I trust are saying to me, "Hey, this person is dangerous to be alone together" or not just pleasant to work with. I put a lot of stock in that if it comes from people I trust…. We're a community and we talk to each other and communities need to look out for one another.

Thus, building and maintaining your personal network is critical in order to avoid exploitation, and its importance is reinforced.

Institutions of Support

Many of the working conditions and structures of the theatre as it stands today are defined by the supporting institutions established for the professional theatre. Length of rehearsal days, compensation and many other aspects of professional theatre production fall under the jurisdiction of CAEA and PACT. However, as one practitioner noted,

> even the way we contract, even the way the bible of where we look to contract actors, choreographers, directors, it was created in the 70s by old white men who were ADs of big regional theatres. Not for independent theatre artists. Not for BIPOC artists and certainly not for women.

The way that the institutions have been set up to run do not necessarily take into account the needs of the various artistic practitioners themselves.

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Others are defined by government policy itself. Governance structures of institutional theatres, for example, have arisen out of not-for-profit regulations, not necessarily out of structures that serve the ends of the theatre (McKinnie, 2017). Those structures carry with them specific responsibilities for board members, which may enhance or detract from the artistic programme of the theatre.[26]

As previously noted, the independent theatre scene is often pointed to as the space of theatrical innovation (not only in terms of artistic work, but also in terms of modalities of production). Some practitioners feel that the involvement of supporting institutions hinders innovation without providing benefit to the independent space. Sky Gilbert, Canadian playwright, looked back at his experience with CAEA and how they inhibited the new theatrical business models that arose:

> It became increasingly clear to many of us working in theatre during the 1980s in Toronto, that Canadian Actors' Equity was not responding to the new, radical paradigm of smaller, artist-run companies…. At the time, Equity theorized an essential, universal polarity between management and labour.… Many of the small theatre companies in the 1980s, comprised of both equity and non-equity actors, were confounded again and again by Equity's position - my own included. Equity would either block our productions altogether, or ask us to jump through enormously complex and time-consuming bureaucratic hoops to realise our visions. This was, of course, all in the name of protecting the hard-working actor from exploitation. But since we were basically hiring ourselves, how could we be accused of exploiting anyone? (Gilbert, 2005, p. 16).

Gilbert's experience of the actor's union hindering their productions, remaining in a particular modality of thought coupled with the lack of resources in the sector, and not evolving to reflect the current landscape have lead some practitioners to note that many of the institutions and policies that support and define the professional theatre sector are not seen as serving the independent theatre community. One expert noted that, in the present day, smaller theatre companies do not join PACT because they do not see it relevant to them or modality of working.

Supporting institutions and government policy were responding to a certain set of circumstances at a certain time. They filled specific needs in the landscape (i.e. prevention of exploitation, or encouragement of participation in artistic ventures), and were built on a certain set of values (i.e. what is professional work, what is exploitation, etc.). But due to the fluid

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[26]Interestingly, governance arose as an issue in the literature, and with one expert. However, the majority of practitioners did not mention governance at all. This disparity is interesting, and worthy of further investigation.

nature of the independent theatre scene with its innovative methods and evolving definitions, the speed of change of the supporting institutions does not necessarily keep pace. Often times, as one practitioner noted, by the time policy is changed to reflect the current situation, the current situation has existed for quite some time; therefore, what is being experienced on the ground will take time to be reflected in policies and institutions of support.

While some change has begun in response to the independent theatre scene (PACT and TAPA's recent initiatives were pointed to as examples), not all independent theatre artists necessarily have the time to engage in the advocacy required to make this change happen at the institutions themselves, as the practitioners' time is already limited. Institutional theatre can dominate, as some may receive operating funding, and thus may be able to employ General Managers or Artistic Directors full time, who can then represent their views to those organizations. There is some intent from some of the institutions, however, to be responsive to the needs of the independent scene. As one practitioner noted, "[the government's] job is to create enabling environments that allows artists to make the best possible work, in some senses." However, some institutions may have their own internal complexities to manage, which may prevent their own change from taking place.

It is worth noting that GeneraTO is an institution of support that has arisen specifically to meet the needs of practitioners within the independent theatre space. They provide production training and shared space for some companies, and facilitate conversations of interest to those within the independent theatre space. They are considered a sector developer, and play that role within the independent theatre space.

Conclusion

Taken together, these perceptions and identities create an image of how we might understand the present-day ecosystem: an innovative, interconnected environment that is lacking in resources and presently unsustainable. It is a space where the artist takes on the risk for new work, and relies on their networks to support them. Precarity and fluidity are hallmarks of this environment because of a lack of resources. This lack of resources - space, finances, and other - reinforces its dependence on institutional theatres (while that dependence is not necessarily desired). The innovation of the scene itself, while driven by artistic freedom and youth, can produce burnout and reinforces the youth of the scene. The institutions that support the independent theatre scene are slow to change, and may not keep pace with the needs of the independent theatre scene. While so much seems outside of the control of artist, time and reputation are the main resources that the independent theatre artist can control. However, these are dependent on background, training, and other factors.

Research Sub-Question 2: How might we understand which changes practitioners believe will change the landscape, for better or worse?

Given the delicacy and precocity of the ecosystem, any changes in one area may affect it in untold ways; reducing funding and resources to the institutional theatres could both reduce the resources that they make available to the independent scene, but also could deepen their dependence on the independent theatre scene for programming. While there may be obvious changes that are desired (such as additional resources, space, and audiences), understanding, from a practitioner's perspective, the forces for change to be contented with in the landscape is of incredible importance.

The interview data points to a belief that the independent theatre scene is on the brink of change. However, through the use of affinity mapping, the sense of flux was broken down into a number of different practitioner-perceived trends and changes affecting the theatrical ecosystem, namely:
- Identity Politics
- Changes in Artistic Leadership
- New Media and Technology
- Democratization of the Arts
- Expansion of Culture and Theatre
- Changing Definitions of Success
- Emerging Values

Some of these changes are interlinked and co-dependent, but they all fall into a broader category of blurring lines, expanding definitions, and changing values. Each of these is worth exploring in greater detail to understand why they are of importance to practitioners, and what their impact may be on the delicate independent theatre ecosystem.

Identity Politics

The data points to identity politics being a key driver of change within the independent theatre landscape. Social justice movements (such as #Me-Too, Black Lives Matter, and Idle No More) are seen affecting not only the content of artistic work, but also the structures, institutions, and leadership that enable the artistic work to be created.

Examples can be seen throughout the theatrical landscape: the filing a civil suit alleging sexual harassment and assault by four actors - Diana Bentley, Kristin Booth, Patricia Fagan and Hannah Miller - triggered a transition in artistic leadership at Soul pepper and an evaluation of the culture in some other theatres (Fricker, 2019). George Brown Theatre School has faced accusations of harassment and discrimination (Lucs, 2018). Some funding agencies, like the Ontario Arts Council, have also identified priority groups with special funding streams (Ontario Arts Council, n.d.-c). These changes can affect the whole of the landscape, from changing how theatre is created to the values, norms, and modalities of creation that artists are taught to stories on the stage to the audience that is being spoken to. Changes in the training level may make different artists feel validated, and change the values that are transferred. A change in artistic leadership may change the tone of the theatrical landscape in Toronto. It may change the professional opportunities available at the institutional theatres, given the new tastes, directions, and mandates, meaning that different artists or work from the independent scene may be considered.

Changes in Artistic Leadership

As alluded to earlier, changes in the artistic leadership at the institutional and commercial levels can create changes that resonate in the independent theatre scene. As noted Canadian theatre scholar, Ric Knowles, notes,

> like any ecosystem, any change in the ecosystem changes the whole system. Having a new artistic director at Soulpepper, having a new artistic director at Cahoots, or Franco leaving The Theatre Centre means that the whole scene changes in all kinds of ways. (R. Knowles, personal communication, February 28, 2019)

During the course of research for this study, a number of transitions were occurring in the artistic leadership of the Toronto theatre landscape. As the top gatekeepers to the institutional stages, artistic directors can exert influence over which artists and works get legitimized or validated and brought into the mainstream to a larger audience.

Diversification of artistic leadership can bring with it welcome changes. As one practitioner noted,

> unless our [artistic] leadership diversifies, it will take time to undo those bad habits from the way we talk to each other and they way we tell stories; the way we train and teach our future artists how to create art. "There is only one way to do that and there's only one way to see it."

Thus, a change in artistic leadership means not only a realignment of artistic priorities, but can also mean a shift in production practices and the general tone of the theatrical landscape. It provides an opportunity for new views, ideas, voices, values and priorities to take root, and set the tone for the overall theatrical landscape.

New Media and Technology

The data points to anxiety surrounding how new digital and streaming media will affect theatre and its audience.[27] With the belief that more people are living their lives digitally and becoming used to personalized entertainment, there is fear that theatre may become obsolete. For some practitioners, there is a fear that the effort involved in theatre attendance will be a hurdle for potential audience members.

However, theatre has also experienced similar fears and challenges before with the introduction of film and television. In his seminal essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin examined the impact of technology on artwork (Benjamin, 1936/2008). Technology enables the mass reproduction of a unique artwork, which leads Benjamin to note that "even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (Benjamin, 1936/2008, p. 2). Comparing the cinema and theatre, Benjamin argues that "liveness" of theatre is part of its "aura" (the term that Benjamin uses to describe what is lost, including authenticity, between the original and the reproduction), and that the aura is tied to the actor's presence, which thusly means it disappears in film, as aura cannot be replicated (Benjamin, 1936/2008). Thus, he establishes the superiority of the live event.

However, later media theory begins to consider the concept of remediation: where new media take on characteristics of old media, while old media refashion themselves from new media, and thus both media exist, side-by-side, refashioned and influenced by one another (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). Through remediation, Benjamin's "aura" is not destroyed by reproduction, but merely, refashioned, leaving both media to be considered valid and maintain their respective "auras" (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). Remediation brings along several corollaries, including the desire in the new media for the status accorded to the old (think: the status of theatre actors versus those in television), and the dependence of the economic success of the new media being based on the public being convinced of their dissatisfaction of the old (Bolter & Grusin, 1999).

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[27]See "The Netflix Effect" briefly discussed earlier in Chapter 4 - Audiences.

Theatre has been remediated by both film and television (Auslander, 1999). The introduction of the new media triggered discussions of what the essentials of theatre were. Luminaries such as Grotowski established new and different practices and points of view focussing on the irreducible (and non-transferable) qualities of theatre (Grotowski, 2002).

Given the above, with the new digital and streaming media entering the stage, the theatre may be in a moment of transformation and remediation. The anxiety surrounding the effect of these new media on the theatre is well founded, as it will certainly transform the form, but, as practitioners also noted, since the theatre has survived to this point, there is a good likelihood that it will continue to survive in some form or other.

Democratization of the Arts

Technology is also enabling the democratization of the arts. The data points to a perception that technology has enabled participation in the arts. While the act of creating theatre has often been accessible, film and broadcast have become within an artist's reach with the advent of smartphones and YouTube. This means that more people, theatre artists included, can now experiment in multiple media. Some may no longer define themselves solely as "theatre creators", but more broadly as "creators," as theatre is just one of the disciplines in which they participate. As mass media theorist Marshall McLuhan noted, "in our age, artists are able to mix their media diet as easily as their book diet" (McLuhan, 1964/2003, p. 59).

The interview data also points to a perception that with the democratization of the arts came a corresponding devaluation of the arts. Because everyone can create a film or theatre piece, then everyone lays claim to the title "artist." With a saturation of work, it is given away for free, and thus, creates an artificially low expectation of the price points, in some cases to build reputation or audiences. Because some have achieved a level of almost-immediate success this way (rather than through years of hard work), some practitioners pointed to a creeping sense of new artists focusing on the end goal, rather than the work itself.

Consequently, this democratization affects the line between amateur and professional artists. While this line is natural fluid in the artscape already, democratization continues to challenge it.

Expansion of Culture and Theatre

The interview data points to another trend, one of different disciplines and artistic practices coming together under the banner of independent theatre. Stand up, comedy, drag shows, and parades were all given as examples of theatre that were not accepted forms under the

dominant, Euro-centric, high-culture view. However, in the independent theatre scene, crossover between genres, artists, and practices is occurring to a larger degree because of the natural fluidity caused by the festival structures, creating more acceptance for non-traditional theatre practices. While much of the traditional attitude and definitions may be embedded and codified in the structures that surround independent theatre (i.e. funding structures, training, etc.), as attitudes shift within the independent sector, revaluation and reassessment may hopefully occur.

Changing Definitions of Success

Many of those interviewed acknowledged that financial success was one of the existing metrics for success. One practitioner noted that "I used to and still wrestle with this idea of economic success…. 'Oh, I'll be successful when I can make a living doing this.'"However, only making financial performance as the criteria for success can be detrimental: in a profession where there are already so many barriers to a financially sustainable career, making economic success a sole criterion for achievement can create an impossible ideal and set artists up for failure.

However, the data points to a changing view of success, as well. Some noted that, on a show basis, financial and critical success may be the metrics for institutional theatre, but the independent theatre can use other metrics. For individuals, success can be personally defined (some gave the example of reputation, freedom, or belonging). In Yung's previous study, some artists chose work-life balance, or rightsizing their size of their audience as their metric for success (Yung, 2017). For companies, some believed that growth or institutionalization was perceived as the bar for success, but did not necessarily have to be.

While perceptions of success may be learned during training or reinforced by funding agencies and funding criteria, new values and metrics for success will continue to crop up as practitioners continue to redefine how they wish to work and live. This may continue to form a cycle that will help the institutions and infrastructure of support to redefine their criterion for success as well.

Emerging Values

Success is just one such value that is shifting. The data points to some commonly held beliefs and assumptions that are beginning to be challenged as they do not serve the current context of independent theatre in Toronto. For example, the valorisation of the concept of the starving artist, of artists being bad at math, of successful artists only being the ones that create pure theatre (not work in community), of suffering being required to be an artist, or of the theatre sitting outside of the neo-liberal economy, are values and assumptions that arose. Some of

these values were seen as setting unrealistic expectations for artists, and contributing to feelings of failure or anxiety if not achieved. For example, given the current conditions of the independent theatre landscape, not being able to dedicate one hundred percent of time to creation is unrealistic; however, some noted that they feel it's the expectation of being an artist. There is also resistance to the emerging value of entrepreneurship within the space.

However, some groups, like Generator, are actively working to change and shift some of those values. As some of the values are transferred from instructors at educational institutions to new artists, and some of these values codified in supporting institutions, perhaps another cycle of value adjustment may be hoped for.

The Broader Theme: Blurred Lines, Expanding Definitions, and Changing Values

Many of these observed trends seem to interact or intersect with one another; the definition of success is affected as much by the democratization of the arts as the democratization of the arts is affected by the changing definition of success. They all tend to have one thing in common; they overlap in the "definition" category of the VERGE framework. This means that these trends are affecting the processes of "defining" within the sector, meaning that they are trends and changes that are affecting values, blurring lines, and expanding definitions. These expanding definitions range from the definition of "artist," "independent theatre", and even "theatre" itself, and the lines between professional and amateur, various disciplines and practices, different media and industries, and between high and low art, are blurring. New values more connected with the space are emerging and challenging existing assumptions about what it means to be a practitioner in the theatre, and what theatre itself is.

Technology has enabled this shift by democratizing the ability to create and disseminate cultural work. Where many artists used to be constrained by discipline and/or media, many practitioners now see opportunity to explore and create in multiple modalities. As well, broadening public perception of cultural activities has also broadened what would be considered "legitimate" theatre and is shifting values and definitions: musicals and improvisation have now gained more legitimacy. However, traditional "high-culture" and Euro-centric attitudes still exist (and some would say, dominate) the supporting institutions and the landscape.

Some may embrace the expanding definitions, blurred lines, and even find success by embracing new values. However, others may react differently. If the boundaries are opened up, the question becomes what is lost by the existing practitioners, and what obligation is owed to them?

Further, some may choose to hold fast to the traditional definitions and values, seeing themselves as protectors of the theatre, rather than letting it grow and expand. Others may call for professionalization[28] although the perceived increase in credentialing and fine arts training programs for theatre practitioners would seem to suggest that this response is already occurring.[29] However, as these tensions and changes are still in flux, they have yet to play out completely.

The data points to some of this tension being intergenerational, with some of the established values transferred from instructors at educational institutions to new artists, and some practitioners perceive these values, assumptions and habits are entrenched in supporting institutions.

Conclusion

There are a number of specific changes that theatre creators have observed and are grappling with. However, whether they are enabled by emerging technology or societal shifts, we may understand the changes that the practitioners are contending with as changes that have arisen out of the natural fluidity of the space: they are changes of definition, changes of blurred traditional lines and understandings, and changes of emerging values. Because of the systemic nature of the theatre space, these fundamental changes, even if not directly involving the independent theatre space, can have effects large effects on the future of the landscape, and simply by virtue of being articulated as changes, seem to imply a particular version of the future landscape.

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[28]One participant noted that many other disciplines (like graphic design) responded to the expanding definitions by requiring designations, creating guilds, etc. However, they also noted that the arts has not yet officially responded in kind.

[29]It is also likely a result of the perceived oversaturation of creators in the landscape. Thus, in order to stand out, some may be attempting to get advanced degrees. It then becomes a cycle, with a resulting increase in additional gatekeepers, as Sharon Pollock noted:

> I think what a hypocrite I am to be working with playwrights knowing that their access to a producing company is so restricted. I think that when I began, before we had M.F.A. and Playwriting departments, at least then, a taxi driver, George Walker, could walk in to Factory Lab and start talking about plays. If a taxi driver walked into Alberta Theatre Projects today, I don't think he'd get past Security. But the person with an M.F.A. in Playwriting from the University of Alberta will walk up and speak to the Assistant Dramaturg. The Gatekeepers are accumulating in different ways. (Pollock, as quoted in Grace, 2003, p. 30)

Research Sub-Question 3: How Might We Understand the Future of the Independent Theatre Sector from a Practitioner Perspective?

The independent theatre is a delicate ecosystem, with many challenges: precarity of work, lack of resources, such as funding and real estate, and constant change. There are many major contextual changes to contend with, from Toronto's burgeoning real estate market to variations in government funding levels. However, the fundamental changes revolve around issues of definitions, lines, and values.

Given that, it is of interest to understand how independent theatre creators think of, understand, and perceive the future of the space in which they have chosen to work. That information is useful in helping to determine the shape of a future ecosystem that practitioners would find engaging. Using theming and affinity mapping, the data yielded interesting opinions on how the practitioners viewed the future (if they did, indeed, view it at all).

Hesitancy About the Future

In her original study, Yun noted that practitioners were optimistic for the future of the independent theatre space (Yung, 2017). Many practitioners in this study did express hope for the future; however, others did not.

More generally, however, the thematic coding of the data pointed to difficulty in articulating a future vision of the arts space in general and independent theatre space in particular. There is an acknowledgement that change that is occurring, but where that change can lead is difficult to understand and discern.

There is no clear reason as to why there was such initial hesitancy in articulating a future vision. Many practitioners noted the large amount of change that is occurring in the sector.

Some practitioners felt that thinking of the future can be overwhelming. This seems like a valid observation, especially given that work in the sector is so precarious. With the focus being on day-to-day survival needs and trying to figure out where the next job is coming from, contemplation of the future (beyond the immediate) could seem like a luxury. Further, perhaps time to consider the future may be limited, given that time is a resource that is in short supply within the independent theatre scene. One practitioner noted that he did not have a vision of the future of independent theatre as he felt like "such a small part of a big system."

Returning to interview coding, those who served in administrative and support functions were usually more reluctant to describe hopes for the future than theatrical creators, with one administrator noting that they would simply facilitate the vision that the artists would bring to them.

Visions of the Future

While visions may exist for the institutional theatres or for Toronto's arts space in general, some independent practitioners felt that they were not consulted in the creation of other future visions or strategic directions. Some independent theatre practitioners felt overlooked in the creation of the official futures of their landscape. For example, for one practitioner, the CCA's emphasis on digital strategy was viewed as benefitting institutional theatres and private sector digital strategists while not having a direct impact on addressing independent theatre. Some of these future visions, programs and strategic directions may benefit the institutional theatres, but may be felt to overlook the vitally important independent theatre scene in Toronto.

This question was more difficult to answer than anticipated. There has been strategic foresight work done before in the cultural space, including, for example, the Toronto Arts of Tomorrow Initiative (TATI) 2025 (Stein, Newton, & Sandoval, 2018) and 2020 Media Futures (van Alstyne & Stein, 2011), the independent theatre scene seems to have been overlooked. That may be due to the informality of the independent theatre scene, the diversity and youth of practitioners, they can be overlooked during formal strategic foresight processes. Further, given that one of the previous findings is that the independent theatre scene has a lack of formal organizational structure, it would make sense that strategic foresight work is difficult in this space. When people talk about the future, they tend to think in terms of organizations. However, the independent theatre pace is a grouping of practitioners who are operating individually, or as (potentially) temporary collectives. The assumed infrastructure for completing foresight work does not exist, and would need to be created.

The future was, however, discussed indirectly, often in terms of changes to existing issues in the landscape. More space, finances, diverse voices, and audiences, and a re-emergence of societal value for the theatre were wished for. Anxieties surrounding the impact of technology on audiences were articulated. Fluctuations around state subsidies were a "given", though whether they would be up or down was dependent on which future government would be in power at the time.[30]

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[30]It must be noted, however, that several structures and companies within the scene are working to improve some of the conditions noted in the present day assessment of the landscape. The establishment of Intermission magazine, or GeneraTO's artist-producer

As well, examining the answer to the previous question regarding changes to the landscape, the changes that were articulated seem to be pointing towards an unarticulated vision of a future landscape; one where blurred lines and expanding definitions play a major role.

Conclusion

When asked directly about the future, the majority of independent theatre practitioners were hesitant to articulate a vision. While there exist official strategies and visions of the future, those within the independent scene feel overlooked in the development of the sector. This may be because, as previously noted, the independent theatre scene is fluid, informal, diverse, and lacking the formal organization and structures that are inherently taken for granted in traditional strategic foresight work. Without a vision of a future sustainable ecosystem, it becomes difficult to move towards a future without being able to hope or dream of it. As such, practitioners seem to be caught in the present day, where considerations of the future are framed primarily in terms of needs to change in the present day. Thus, we may understand the future of the independent theatre landscape as an area of potential, in that it has yet to be developed by the practitioners who operate within it. It is an area of hope, but remains fuzzy and unclear. Strategic foresight may provide an opportunity to help develop that vision of the future landscape.

Primary Research Question: Given the perceived changes in the cultural and entertainment ecosystems in Toronto, how might we ensure the future sustainability of the independent theatre sector in Toronto?

We now understand the present day ecosystem of independent theatre to be a precarious, ungrouped space, populated with individual practitioners relying on informal networks rather than formal structures to achieve their goals. The highly valued innovation and fluidity is facilitated by practices and effects that are unsustainable for practitioners. The space itself is fluid and is contending with forces that are expanding fundamental definitions, blurring established lines, and adjusting long-held values.

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classes are examples of initiatives that have arisen to fill specific needs. However, they do not necessarily represent a vision of the future, but rather, solutions to problems within the current landscape.

However, while all of that is occurring, the future of the space, as articulated by practitioners, remains fuzzy and unclear. While they would like changes to the present conditions to make it more sustainable and resilient, they do not hold a unified vision of the future. Given that, we may begin to explore how we might ensure the future sustainability of the independent theatre sector in Toronto.

Practising Strategic Foresight in the Independent Theatre Space

To understand how we might ensure the future sustainability of the space would require looking at a remodelling of the future ecosystem and associated infrastructure. This means using strategic foresight techniques.

Strategic foresight is a practice that encourages the creation of multiple stories of the future in order to make strategic decisions in the present to either enable or hinder certain futures from occurring.[31] It is used when there is a large amount of uncertainty to help foster discussion and bring clarity to assumptions about the present through discussion of the future. Its methods are fairly well established and are in use in the federal Canadian government (Jones, 2017), as well as to assess other parts of the cultural sector (Stein et al., 2018; van Alstyne & Stein, 2011).

There is no single, "correct" way to engage in strategic foresight (Jones, 2017; Nikolova, 2014; Wilkinson, 2017). Rather, there are a multitude of tools available to the foresight practitioner, each with its own strengths and weaknesses, depending on the situation.

There is power in using the foresight tools to create a vision of the future. As Angie Wilkinson, a foresight practitioner with over 30 years of experience, notes,

> A vision is a normative description of an imaginable future (preferred or to be avoided) which reflects shared values and motivates a change in action. Positive visions are developed to help clarify and reduce the gap between the expected 'business-as-usual' outlook and an agreed, 'better' outcome. Imaginative and inspirational visions are needed to realign values, help forge new common ground and provide strategic direction that is essential to shared agenda setting, inclusive prioritisation and cooperative action planning. To avoid unrealistic dreaming, it is necessary to tether a vision to reality. (p.27, Wilkinson, 2017)

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[31] For a more in-depth dive into introductory strategic foresight, see "Strategic Foresight: A Primer" (Wilkinson, 2017).

Thus, a strategic foresight process designed to develop a shared vision of a future landscape can enable cooperation amongst stakeholders, and development of the first steps towards a preferred outcome.

Given the conditions of the independent theatre scene, a strategic foresight approach is a more difficult task than anticipated at the outset. One of the previous findings is that the independent theatre scene has a lack of formal organizational structure, making strategic foresight work difficult in this space: the assumed infrastructure for completing foresight work does not exist, and would need to be created from scratch.

However, the sector would likely benefit from such an exercise. Given the hesitancy of practitioners to define their visions of the future beyond articulating what needs to change today, enabling them to think through a changed ecosystem would help to give them the space and authority to consider their own futures. Developing a shared vision of a preferred future would also enable the diverse stakeholders to hear one another's concerns and build a specific vision for this time and context.

Building Momentum for Considered Change

Developing this practitioner-led shared vision is the critical answer to the primary research question. Examining the aptly-named "Change Formula" from the field of organizational development (sometimes erroneously referred to as "The Beckhardt-Harris Change Equation"), it states that resistance to change (R) must be less than the combination of dissatisfaction with the status quo (D), articulated first steps (F), and a vision for the future (V) in order for change to be acted upon (Cady, Jacobs, Koller, & Spalding, 2014).

Figure 25: The Change Formula (otherwise known as The Beckhardt-Harris Change Equation) (Cady et al., 2014)

All three must be present in order to overcome resistance to change within an organization (Cady et al., 2014). Notably, the independent theatre scene, as has been previously noted, is not

an organization nor has a formal organizational structure, however, this provides a framework of understanding for how the community of practice, as a whole, could begin to take steps to ensure a sustainable future.

To bring about a meaningful change, Kathie Dannemiller, one of the people who helped to refine the formula, provided steps for its use:

> [Build] a common database about:
> » how we all see the past (dissatisfaction) and why we need to change,
> » a positive picture of the future we all prefer (vision), and
> » actions we can all agree are worthwhile in order to begin to change (first steps) (Dannemiller Tyson Associates qtd in Cady et al., 2014, p. 34)

Given this equation, the findings to the first sub-research question indicate a certain dissatisfaction amongst practitioners with the present ecosystem (D). Further, the findings to the second sub-research question can act as practitioner-led first steps towards change (F). However, as the findings of the third research sub-question noted a lack of a preferred vision for the future independent theatre scene (V), it reduces the ability to overcome resistance to create positive change to zero.

Thus, the articulation of a future vision is critical, and it must be co-created by practitioners, given that the independent theatre scene has no *de facto* leadership, only various practitioners, structures, and institutions that exist within the scene and each have their own priorities and goals. By enabling them to come together to remodel the ecosystem and infrastructure (not just financially, but culturally as well), this would enable the development of additional "first steps" (F) towards ensuring the future sustainability of independent theatre in Toronto.

Conclusion

The fluid and precarious independent theatre ecosystem is not sustainable as it is: concerns around space, resources, and lifestyle are encouraging burnout and difficulty. However, that unsustainability produces many of the benefits of the sector: its fluidity and innovation are directly related to the sector not being sustainable. Independent theatre practitioners are good at finding work-around solutions to particular issues: the ecosystem has, in fact, developed a co-dependency between the institutional theatre and the independent theatre in order to ameliorate some of those issues.

However, any changes made in the delicate ecosystem will affect the system as a whole, as well as its future.

The independent theatre landscape is also by no means stagnant. Everything presently occurring in the independent theatre ecosystem can bring us to an overwhelming point of crisis, and may explain practitioners' hesitancy at describing the future. If the material conditions become too strained, then we may not rely on the sectors existence into perpetuity. Ecosystem change is needed at multiple levels to ensure its future and its role within the present theatrical landscape. Ultimately, to ensure a sustainable future, a practitioner-led vision of a preferred future of the independent theatre scene in Toronto is necessary. While that may seem like a simple answer to the primary research question at present, another, smaller but nagging question rises: given everything now known, how might we build that vision?

Chapter 5: Innovation

Introduction

The current ecosystem of the independent scene is built on precocity and is not sustainable. However, in order to begin to make that change, co-creating a practitioner-led shared vision of the future is necessary. Otherwise, steps taken towards creating a sustainable future may not properly consider those in the independent theatre sector, or, given the sensitivity of the ecosystem, have unintended consequences.

In order to build such a preferred vision, we offer a sample of a workshop that may enable practitioners to develop and discuss their preferred future state for the independent theatre ecosystem.

The Three Horizons Framework

The Three Horizons Framework

The three horizons framework is a useful framework for creating preferred futures. It was developed by Merhdad Baghai, Stephen Coley, and David White, and adapted significantly for foresight use by Bill Sharpe (Curry & Hodgson, 2008). It is based on the observation that institutions, organizations, policies, and societies follow similar cycles of initiation, growth, dominance, and decay, and views them as overlapping waves of change (Sharpe & Hodgson, 2014). It is a framework that enables three different streams (or horizons) to be considered:
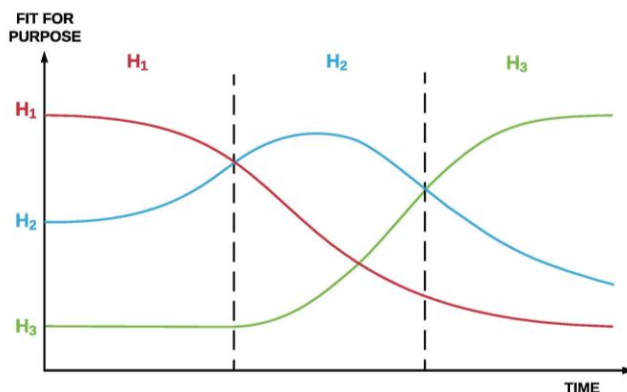
Figure 26: The Three Horizons Framework

- 1st Horizon: the current or prevailing system as it continues into the future, which loses 'fit' over time as its external environment changes
- 3rd Horizon: idea or arguments about the future of the system which are, at best, marginal in the present, but which over time may have the potential to displace the

world of the first horizon, because they represent a more effective response to changes in the external environment.

- 2nd Horizon: an intermediate space in which the first and third horizons collide. This is a space of transition which is typically unstable. It is characterised by clashes of values in which competing alternative paths to the future are proposed by actors. (Curry & Hodgson, 2008)

The three horizons framework was chosen as the preferred framework for creating the workshop outline as it enables different participants with different mindsets to be able to collaborate on a desired future state (Sharpe, 2013). Given the differences in values and stakeholders, the three horizons can work as a sensemaking framework, bringing to light differing points of view. It also provides an opportunity to take into account the differing mindsets of the manager, innovator, and visionary (Sharpe & Hodgson, 2014). This is useful in this particular situation, as the creators may tend towards innovation and visionary, while administrators may tend towards manager, and each would present valid experiences and understandings of the ecosystem, and place valuation in different locations.

Implementing the Three Horizons Framework

In practice, the three horizons can be used to map the current system to the first horizon (H1). By doing so, conversations can be unearthed about the current perception of the system, and what is no longer working (Sharpe & Hodgson, 2014). Conversation can then move to the third horizon (H3), where participants can create and discuss their own visions of the future as reconcile alternative visions while unearthing any alternate value systems (Sharpe & Hodgson, 2014). From there, participants can discuss the second horizon (H2) and review and identify innovations and initiatives underway that can lead to the transformative change that the participants seek (Sharpe & Hodgson, 2014).

To enable a full and robust discussion would necessarily take a large deal of time. However, as noted in the findings, time is of short supply for independent theatre creators. In order to encourage participation, workshop length could be reduced by pre populating the three horizons with existing data.

Prototyping the Workshop

An early iteration of this workshop was prototype on July 15, 2019 at 205 Richmond Street West, OCAD University, with a single practitioner expert who served as the participant. The participant had a background as a creator in the independent theatre scene, with some

crossover into institutional theatre and film and television. The participant also had experience in the administrator and supporter category.
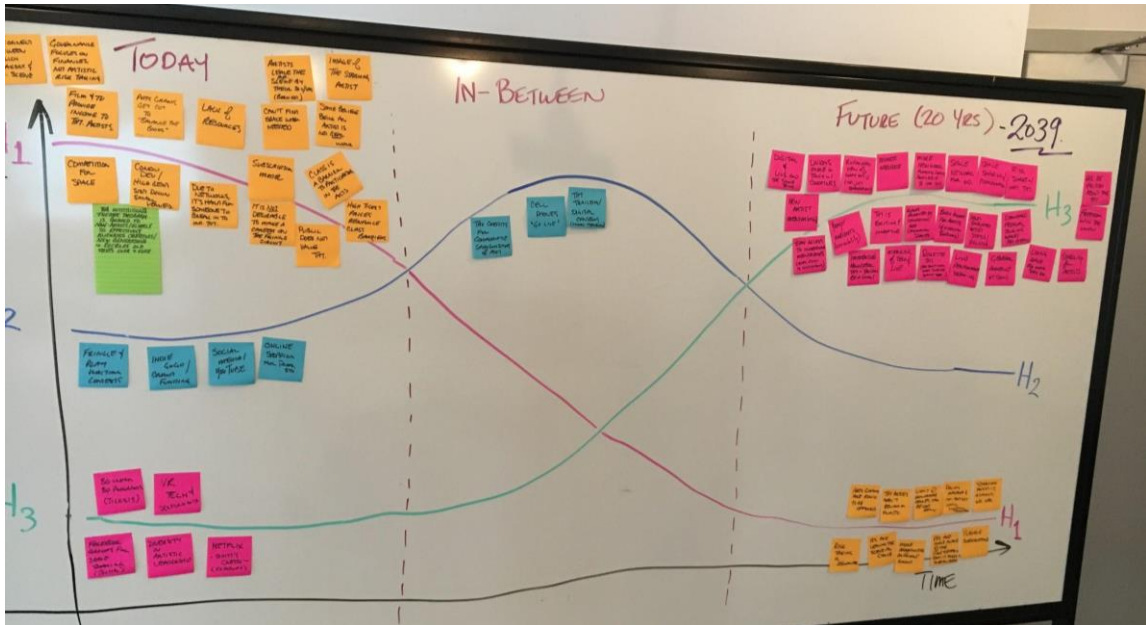
Figure 27: Photo of Completed Three Horizon Framework from Prototyped Workshop

Using a twenty-year time frame, the participant created a third horizon future, and was able to fill in a few innovations into the H2 that would enable said future. While the specifics of the future that was created under these simulated conditions is not of import, it is interesting to note that the participant's vision involved resource sharing, new creative forms, lifestyle stability and income. The future embraced blurred lines while accounting for a higher valuation of theatre in the general population.

Figure 28: Photo of Third Horizon Developed during Prototyped Workshop

Participant Impressions of the Workshop Simulation

When it came to reflecting on the future she had created, the participant was surprised by her concern for financial priorities, when she had previously thought she was concerned about the creative future. She realised that her anxiety was not truly about the future of the creative aspect of the independent theatre, but rather, about talent being driven out of the sector by poverty (which would then lead to concerns about the creative aspect of the sector).

The shift from concern about the creative future to focussing on the larger picture of what surrounded the independent theatre scene was freeing. Providing context to the ecosystem enabled the participant to break free of her regular pattern of the future. That practitioner's experience bodes well for the intent of this workshop: to enable a holistic view of the future of the landscape.

At the end of the session, when asked to reflect on the workshop as a whole, the practitioner noted that they found it enlightening, encouraging, and hopeful. The participant felt like she was now in control, able to see the future she desired, and the signals of it in the present to nurture. She noted that discuss the future is daunting, but that this workshop enabled her to do just that, and left her feeling inspired and encouraged.

Facilitator Learnings from the Workshop Simulation

By facilitating the workshop, a few key learnings and adjustments have been made to the original workshop outline. As observed, and noted by the participant, there was hesitancy at first to begin to "dream big" about the future. Thus, adding a review of the current ecosystem to provide context, and providing personal reflection time to the participants is a worthwhile adjustment. Once the participant began to unravel and consider their future, they began doing so quite rapidly, as if the ideas were spilling out of the participant. In order to capture them, the facilitator took on the task of transcription. As such, one recommendation would be to have another facilitator or assistant ascribed to each group to serve as transcriber, and to capture the ideas that are shared via whatever modes of expression onto post-it notes.

Regarding pre-populating the various horizons, different horizons were approached differently. H1 was presented as an active exercise, rather than a passive one, as originally intended. As such, the research was presented *a la carte*, with individual post-its grouped into themes from which the practitioner could choose the elements that were no longer fit for purpose and challenge the placement of some in the first horizon. The participant was also encouraged to add anything that they deemed was missing. By doing so, it appeared she was actively engaged

in considering the present landscape, and constructing it as they understood it by prioritizing certain traits.

By contrast, the second (H2) and third (H3) horizon pre-population data was kept hidden, and was only to be used if there was hesitation on the part of the participant to develop their own versions of those horizons. The pre-populated data for those two horizons was not needed in the test case.

While there wasn't much data on the second horizon (H2), the fact that the participant engaged in that horizon was partially the grounds for her feeling of control and inspiration. As such, discussion of the second horizon (H2) is vital, and should be allowed sufficient space within the workshop setting.

Overall, however, the prototyped workshop appeared to work as intended. It enabled a practitioner to create a future vision of a sustainable independent theatre ecosystem, based on the current ecosystem, and begin to identify innovations and steps towards such a future. Achieving a critical mass of participants would now be essential to enable the cocreation of a vision that encourages multiple stakeholders' views from which additional existing innovations can be identified and nurtured (through recommendations for further funding or expansion, for example), while other potential steps towards the future and corresponding value shifts could also be identified.

Proposed Workshop

Workshop Outline

The following high-level workshop outline is proposed in Table 1.

Table 1: Proposed Workshop Outline

Workshop Objective: To cocreate a participant-led vision of the future of a sustainable independent theatre ecosystem in Toronto, and to articulate steps that are being taken and could be taken to achieve it.		
Time	**Section**	**Objective**
10 min	Welcome	Review ground rules and workshop objectives.
20 min	Introductions and	Encourage participants to meet one another and

	Icebreaker	mitigate the impact of any existing power relationships.
10 min	Introduction of Three Horizons Framework	Develop familiarity with the framework and process that will be used to achieve the objectives.
5 min	Practitioner Reflection on Present State of Ecosystem	Encourage practitioners to begin to consider the present ecosystem through their personal lens.
15 min	Review H1 Horizon and Research	Review the existing ecosystem as a whole in order to orient the workshop activities.
45 min	Develop H1 Horizon	Enable practitioners to share points of view into the current ecosystem and build together a common view of the first horizon. Includes debrief and reflection.
20 min	Break	
75 min	Develop H3 Horizon	Enable practitioners to cocreate the third horizon, building on insights from the first and the visions of other practitioners. Includes debrief and reflection.
25 min	Identify H2 Horizon	Enable practitioners to identify existing innovations and additional steps to move towards an idealized future, as well as encourage hope.
15 min	Questions and Wrap Up	Provide practitioners an opportunity to express any unexpressed thoughts or observations.

A more detailed workshop outline, along with recommended activities, has been proposed in Appendix B. An earlier iteration of this proposed workshop design has been simulated, and learnings drawn from that simulation which have lead to the outline above and referenced in the appendix.

Workshop Design Considerations

Given the uniqueness of this sector, there are several workshop design considerations that must be considered, including participant selection, modalities of participation, and workshop timing.

Participant Selection

Given the previously-noted finding of expanding definitions and blurring of lines, careful selection must be taken when selecting participants. As creators meet in time and not space, running the workshop jointly with TAPA's IndieX conference or during the Toronto Fringe Festival may help to achieve the requisite variety of participants. An open call for interest may be able to be made through peer networks and Facebook groups as well. However, these participants would self-select and would necessarily be the ones with interest and time.

Thus, others may need to be invited directly in order to achieve requisite variety. Artistic discipline, form, and practice, as well as level of experience, recognition, and gender and cultural background would all be considerations. As well, a variety of roles within the ecosystem should be considered, such as:

- Current independent creators
- Former creators who have left creating
- Small venue managers (i.e. Assembly Theatre, Comedy Bar, etc.)
- Training program facilitators
- Festival organizers
- Artistic Directors of institutional theatre companies
- Arts administrators
- Representatives of support organizations (like GeneraTO, unions)
- Arts council representation from municipal, provincial and federal level

One note of caution would be to consider the power dynamics amongst workshop participants. Given the precarity of work in the space, depending on who is attending, some participants may want to try to impress someone. Facilitators should be aware that this might occur, in order to create an environment where that can be mitigated for the sake of both participants.

Modality of Participation

A note must be made about modality of participation: as this workshop would deal with the creative sector, some participants may want to express themselves through a highly creative manner, whether it is through song, dance, or tableau. Others may be intimidated by such expression and require space to reflect and express themselves privately. These modalities may seem extreme, and may not be found in other workshop environments (a bank, for example). However, in this particular case, both modalities are a consideration in the workshop design.

Some participants may be used to collaborating in their personal practice. They may be familiar with the "yes, and" approach of improv, which should be taken as an approach to collaboration

by the facilitator.

Frequency of Workshop

Due to the speed with which change occurs in the independent theatre scene, the visioning and assessment should not be a singular event. Rather, it should occur on an annual or bi-annual basis. Aligning it with the Toronto Fringe Festival, TAPA's IndieX conference, or as part of GeneraTO's outreach, would help give it the consistency required to not only assess the contextual landscape at the time, but also to incorporate new participants who have just entered the landscape into the discussion. However, another timing option would be in January to March, as early spring and most of summer and fall tend to be the festival seasons for independent theatre practitioners.

Mapping Findings to the Three Horizons Framework

If undertaken shortly after the completion of this report, the findings from this report could serve as data to prepopulate the first horizon of the Three Horizons Framework. This would provide reduced running time, provide the participants with an overview of the present-day entire ecosystem, and potential provide inspiration to consider aspects of their ecosystem in a new light.

A potential mapping of the major findings is noted below. A more granular breakdown of findings can be found in Appendix C, mapping research findings to all three horizons.

The First Horizon (H1)

The following findings could be mapped to the first horizon (H1):

Independent theatre is viewed as a place for:
- **Edginess and Freedom:** There's a sense of freedom surrounding the independent theatre. This comes from the view that those in the independent sector are not beholden to the operating costs that the institutional theatre have taken on to run their own facilities, or that independent theatre, since many structures are temporary, do not receive funding from granting agencies and thus are not beholden to their constraints. However, with this freedom comes a corresponding lack of resources.
- **A prevalent scarcity mentality.** Many practitioners noted a perceived oversaturation of creators competing for the same resources: venues, financial resources, audiences, and media attention. The accompanying scarcity mentality creates a tension between community and competition.

- **Innovation and Experimentation:** Many practitioners believe that the independent theatre space is a space where people can take risks, as they are not beholden to artistic reputations, audience expectations, or the need to fill 1,500 seat houses to pay their operating costs. Because independent theatre is smaller, and because it can exist outside of the supporting structures (i.e. unions, funding agencies, etc.) it can be more flexible, both in terms of organizational structure and artistic pieces. As well, because of the shoestring budget, frugal innovation comes into play in a strong way. Many companies and structures exist only temporarily, which enables space for new ideas to replace older ones.
- **Entrepreneurship and Hustle:** There's a "Do-It-Yourself" mentality in the independent theatre scene. As many practitioners are directed to create their own work, a natural "hustle seems to arise, since in order to get your work seen, an artist must be able to sell it. This is leading to a prevalence of artist-producers, as well as a perception that it is not necessarily the best work that gets seen, but rather, the best produced work that gets seen.
- **A community built in time, not place.** There is a lack of physical location in which the independent theatre scene can go to meet. Some practitioners perceive that the community is not well connected. However, festivals, which exist in a temporary space, fill that need and give space for practitioners to meet, exchange ideas, and collaborate. This is important, as peer networks are extremely valuable in obtaining work and determining whom to work with, but can be self-replicating.
  - Given the importance of peer networks, **reputation is currency.** Given that practitioners in the space may not belong to formal structures (such as unions, etc.), an individual's personal and artistic reputation is incredibly valuable to help determine whether or not they are a person that someone would want to collaborate or work with. In fact, reputation is one defining factor for some practitioners to determine professionalism. Peer networks help and reinforce these reputations.

However, there is no consistent definition of independent theatre held by practitioners. Some supporting institutions and organizations have their own official quantifiable definitions of what "independent theatre" would be in Toronto, often tied to budget or venue. However, these markers are no longer accurate, as the definition is contextual and continues to evolve based on the given circumstances of the city and the theatrical landscape. Many practitioners defined it by feel - "gritty," "creative," "innovative," "resilient," "nomadic," "edgy," and "shit disturbers." No matter how it was described, however, independent theatre seemed to maintain a specific characteristic, which could form the basis of a new definition.

Independent theatre does, however, happen outside of places of theatrical legitimacy. One expert had described the independent scene like this, and most other definitions seemed to connect to a lack of theatrical legitimacy in some way. This could include a lack of artistic reputation, union affiliation, experience, resources, funding, venue (or venues outside of traditional theatre spaces) or use of non-dominant (i.e. non-Eurocentric) performance practices, stories, voices, or structures. This means that independent theatre is always standing a little outside of the mainstream (institutional and commercial) theatres, and that placing specific markers (i.e. lack of venue, or lack of operating funding) only defines the space for the current, contextual moment.

Independent theatre and institutional theatres are co-dependent. Independent theatre and institutional theatres rely on one another for different things: the institutional theatres look to the independent theatre as a training ground for artists, and as a source for some programming. The independent theatre artists may look to the institutional theatres for space, legitimacy, and, if programmed, payment (indeed, it has become part of the business model of the independent scene - create a piece to be programmed, as that is how you will receive compensation). This co dependence enables the cash-strapped institutional theatres to program successful independent work without the development costs. Indeed, the artistic leadership of the institutional theatres in Toronto is seen to be very open to meeting new people and hearing new voices (compared to, say, New York City). However, this means that independent artists may bear the brunt of the financial and artistic risk in creating work (as they may not recoup their cost at the box office). As well, institutional theatres then must be incredibly conscious of the voices that they are crating, as not only must they serve their subscriber base, but also they should (but are not always) be conscious of the voices that they are presenting.

Some as transitional sees independent theatre, but there's a longing for legitimacy. Many of those interviewed pointed to the independent theatre scene serving in a subservient position to the institutional and commercial theatres: acting as a training ground for artists, as well as hoping to be "picked up" by an institutional company that could pay the artist a real wage. It appeared as a stepping-stone between graduating from theatre school and institutional theatres. However, some practitioners also lamented the fact that a career in independent theatre was not possible, and wished for a career in independent theatre to feel more legitimate.

Precarity breads fluidity. There is fluidity of artists and work between types of theatres (i.e. independent, institutional, and commercial), as well as sectors (theatre, film, and television). While this enables cross-pollination of ideas, disciplines, and genres, the fluidity is due to the instability and precarity of the sectors. Since there is no stable work, artists try to get paying

work wherever they can. Particularly, because of the precarity of work and pay in the theatrical landscape, the film and television industry has served as financial support to artists who work in it. For some, working a week in film and television can provide enough income to be able to fund their theatrical pursuits for an extended period. However, the need for it can disrupt the creation of theatrical work (i.e. early leaving of rehearsal to attend auditions, overnight shoots, etc.).

Legacy values are causing some anxiety. Some underlying values or assumptions surrounding theatre do not serve the current context of independent theatre in Toronto. For example, the valorisation of the concept of the starving artist, of artists being bad at math, of successful artists only being the ones that create pure theatre (not work in community), of suffering being required to be an artist, of the theatre sitting outside of the neo-liberal economy, can all contribute to unrealistic expectations on artists in the current context. These values are transferred from instructors at educational institutions to new artists, and some of these values are codified in supporting institutions. Primarily, the values surrounding who is an artist, what a successful artist is, and what art is worthy are the values worth examining.

Practitioners feel that current support institutions (i.e. arts funders, advocacy organizations, unions, etc.) are disconnected from the needs of independent theatre artists and companies, but they are trying to change and connect. Practitioners felt a disconnect between many support organizations and the independent scene, seeing them as a hindrance to their practice and innovative ways of working. This may be because a support institution arose at a particular time to address a particular issue (i.e. unions were created to deal with the exploitation of artists). However, as the context evolved and changed, the organizations did not (i.e. at one point, unions were actively punishing members who would work in artist collectives under a profit-share model, as they considered it exploitative, while the artists didn't understand how they could be exploiting themselves). Because of the rapid experimentation and prototyping (both artistically and operationally) within the independent theatre sector, and the tendency of larger organizations to respond slowly to change, this friction has arisen. However, in recent years, several organizations have tried to adapt to the needs of the current independent theatre scene.

The theatre artist lifestyle is not currently sustainable. Work is low paying (if at all) and unstable in the independent theatre scene. Given the perceived immobility of artists at the institutional theatre, it creates an environment in the independent scene where artists create for free, assume all of the risk of creation, look to institutional or regional theatres to be programmed (and compensated), and then burnout after several years of trying to survive working several jobs and barely being compensated for their work (especially should they

choose to have children or wish to buy a house). With the acceptance of the idea of the "starving artist," this may seem like a natural cycle; however, artists who have to choose between family and art may feel like they have failed in their artistic life.

Survival requires privilege. Because of the unsustainability of the lifestyle, privilege helps success. That may come in terms of financial privilege, as access to financial resources reduces the need of a practitioner to take a second job, and thus increase the amount of time they can spend creating. It can also enable an artist to take the time and resources to take a class and expand their network, to rent a legitimate space to put on a show to be noticed and programmed by an institutional Artistic Director, or to stay up late and chat with the artists after the show. Other forms of privilege come into play as well, given that the space and structures were created and dominated by white men for so long.

The independent theatre scene is young. The independent theatre scene tends to be filled with younger artists, especially given the lack of sustainability of the artist lifestyle (i.e. burnout). This can enable some of the innovation in the scene since, as they do not have an established reputation or anything to lose, they are free to experiment and develop their voices. As well, given the role that peer networks play in creating work, they can reinforce the youth of the scene (as there is a perception that young artist's networks would likely not include older artists).

The Second and Third Horizons (H2 and H3)

The goal of the workshop would be to have practitioners develop these two horizons in particular. As such, having them pre-populated may not necessary be of benefit. However, having some of the granular research from Appendix XX available to the facilitator may be useful to jump start conversations with practitioners in the event that practitioners find it difficult to articulate their own versions of the second (H2) or third (H3) horizons.

Conclusion

Due to the fluidity and informality of the ecosystem, practitioners may be easily overlooked during traditional foresight and strategy practices addressing larger sectoral issues. Further, because of that same fluidity and informality, the formal structures that are taken for granted in traditional foresight practice may not exist in the independent theatre scene. As well, some practitioners exhibited hesitancy in describing the future that they want for the sector in which they have chosen to work. Thus, in order to move towards a future sustainable ecosystem, a practitioner-led vision of such an ecosystem must first be developed. A three-horizons workshop, such as the one described above, may bring practitioners closer to developing that

vision. Early prototyping of the workshop seems to suggest that not only would it make practitioners more aware of the present, but also expand their concept of the future, and enable a sense of control in an ecosystem where so much is out of the hands of the individual practitioner. As such, implementing this workshop, with an appropriate group of stakeholders at an appropriate time, may help to facilitate the co-creation of such a vision, and identification and support of innovations that exist in the landscape to help move towards it.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

By attempting to answer the main research question "*Given the perceived changes in the cultural and entertainment ecosystems in Toronto, how might we ensure the future sustainability of the independent theatre sector in Toronto?*" we embarked upon a journey that brought us through the past, present, and future of theatre in Toronto. This exploration has almost been like a play itself: moments of despair, excitement, and resolution. While we had set out on a journey to create a more sustainable ecosystem, we arrived at a destination that reminds us that there are voices in the wilderness that must be brought together to determine what that ecosystem would be.

To begin the journey, we asked *how we might understand the current state of the independent theatre system.* It can be understood as a vibrant, innovative, fluid space, populated with diverse, passionate, practitioners. Practitioners believe it to be free and edgy, innovative and experimental, and diverse and inclusive. It is a space where entrepreneurship and hustle are valued, and there are no formal structures, meaning community and peer networks and reputation are as much a currency as time. It serves a unique role in the independent theatre landscape, training artists for future work.

However, there are also drawbacks to the sector: many of the positive traits, its innovation and fluidity, is dependent on precarity and artist burnout. The sector is under-resources, and lacks space, funding, media coverage, and audiences, which each have their own causes, effects, and relationships. Financial privilege promotes success, and those that don't have it must work several jobs, making time the most precious resource, critical to success, but is lacking. There are few to no formal institutions within it, and those that exist for the sector take time to respond to the sector's needs. It exists co-dependently with the institutional theatre space, themselves in dire need of additional resources and funding. In short, the current independent theatre system, though creating great work, is unsustainable.

Because the present ecosystem is so incredibly interconnected with and influenced by the other theatre and entertainment ecosystems, while being so tenuous, we looked to determine *how we might understand which changes practitioners believe will change the landscape, for better or worse.* Changes in artistic leadership, identity politics, new media and technology, democratization of the arts, changing definitions of success, and emerging values will all shift the ecosystem in different ways. This broadening of definitions, blurring of lines, and establishment (or expansion) of new values may lead to either retrenchment to the safety of tradition, or exploration into the broadening unknown. Likely, though, as the independent

theatre scene is comprised of an informal group of individuals, there will be many who will fall in the spectrum between the two.

Given that the future seems uncertain, we asked *how we might understand the future of the independent theatre sector from a practitioner perspective.* This question was more difficult to answer than originally anticipated. Since the independent theatre scene has no formal structures and is comprised of ungrouped individuals, the conditions that are taken for granted in regular foresight practice do not exist; they need to be forged. For the most part, the practitioners themselves were hesitant to provide their personal visions of the future, often acknowledging that there was a great deal of change, but for whatever reason, whether it be due to practitioners being in survival mode and trying to simply make it to the next gig, or because the thought of the future is confusing and overwhelming, they were not able or willing to paint a picture of their desired landscape.

Thus, *how we might we ensure the future sustainability of the independent theatre sector in Toronto* would be to develop a practitioner-led vision of a future sustainable independent ecosystem. Given that some of the characteristics of the ecosystem that practitioners value are resultant from its lack of sustainability, it becomes essential for them to collectively develop their own vision. From there, identification of innovations both within and outside of the control of practitioners can help create steps towards a sustainable future.

Next Steps

Given the need of the above-mentioned practitioner-led vision, this report offers a workshop design for creating just that. A prototype of the workshop designed in this report showed promise in enabling practitioners to create their visions of a future, sustainable landscape, and engaging them in conversations in how to move closer to that desired future.

Given the promise shown of that workshop design, and the current state of the ecosystem, the intended next phase would be to convene said workshop to enable the desired facilitation of a vision of a preferred future landscape. Gathering and synthesizing that data produced from those visions, as well as the articulation of participant-observed first steps towards that vision, would enable recommendations to be made to policy makers and arts councils, as well as other interested parties, as to how to achieve sustainability for a future independent theatre landscape in Toronto.

The Knowles' Triangle

The value of this work does not only lie in the future. After much of the analysis, returning to Knowles' triangle (Knowles, 2004) from the introduction, we can see clearly now how the conditions of production and reception can affect the performance text and the meaning that is made. The detailed examination of the present-day ecosystem outlined some of the conditions of production (space, institutions of support, funding,

Figure 29: Triangular Model for Making Meaning of Theatre. From Reading the Material Theatre (First Edition, p.19) by R. Knowles, New York: Cambridge University Press. Copyright 2004, Cambridge University Press.

working conditions via lifestyle of the artist) and conditions of reception (marketing and coverage, audience, ticket price) from which the relationships between both can be clearly seen. While this report was not intended to analyse the making of meaning, capturing those conditions at this moment in time will hopefully enable future academics to be able to analyse the meaning made by the independent scene in Toronto.

Areas for Future Research

This study unearthed many questions related to the independent theatre landscape in particular, and about the theatrical and arts spaces in general. Some of these questions were hinted at or cursorily discussed. These questions would be fruitful territory for future research. Some questions of interest would be surrounding the following topics:

- **Values and Assumptions Surrounding "Art" and "Theatre" and Those Involved with its Pursuit:** questions about how these values and assumptions around art and artists are changing or remaining the same in the present context, as well as how these values are transferred. Engaging in a Causal Layered Analysis (Inayatullah, 1998) may prove fruitful in uncovering the deeper layers of myths and beliefs surrounding art.
- **Sustainability of The Artist's Lifestyle:** interwoven with the various research questions in this report, the artist's lifestyle was a dominant and recurring theme. While further research into the independent theatre landscape will certain affect this topic, concerted research on it will also be beneficial. Ways to improve the perception of the artist in society and their lifestyle at a policy level, as well as the societal assumptions surrounding artists, may be of interest.

- **The Audience's Point of View:** this study focused primarily on the conditions for creators, as do many of the studies in this area. A fruitful avenue of inquiry would be to determine the (both casual and frequent) audience's perspective, attitudes, and habits towards theatre in general and independent theatre in particular, in order to add their voice to the conversation. Starting points could be a review of behaviour, such as Kershaw's patterns of audience participation in the twentieth century (Kershaw, 2001), a study of audience motivations (for example, Walmsley's work (2011)), or examining the perception of the audience through a practitioner's lens, unearthing the attitudes and assumptions towards audiences and art along the way.[32]
- **Expansion Beyond the Formal History of Canadian Theatre to Include Non-Colonial Based Histories**. The history of theatre in Canada, as referenced in this paper, uses as its base documents and books that have been collected in official anthologies, recommended by theatre scholars, and available in libraries to which the researcher had access. However, as noted earlier, these formal accounts and documents exist within the colonial history and frameworks. Expanding the formal history of Canadian theatre to include a cross reading of the histories of non-colonial theatrical practices, forms, and traditions (such as queer histories, indigenous histories, and other identity and practice-based histories) would help enrich and open conversations around the future of theatre in Canada at large, and independent theatre in Toronto in particular, given that the independent theatre space sits outside of the mainstream. Further, given that the Euro-centric influence exists in many revered structures as well, such an undertaking may provide insight into alternate structures for future ecosystems. An account of the history of Canadian theatre in Toronto (Yoon, 2002), as well as Ric Knowles' analysis of multicultural theatre and the performance of the multicultural script, providing context from the 1960s onward (Knowles, 2009/2011, 2017), and the overview of the history of indigenous theatre in Canada (Schafer, 2013) would be a starting place to not only incorporate these voices and practices into the official / professional history of expression. By doing so, it would help to identify how practices and forms that stand outside of the formal, traditional structures could be identified and invited into a futures-process.
- **The Future Forms of Theatre Performance and Theatre Practice:** Earlier, when discussing the anxieties that practitioners feel when faced with new technologies, this report touched on the remediation of the theatre. While much of this report has been focussed on the discussion surrounding the conditions and context of theatre, there is fruitful territory for the exploration of the future of the theatre form and of live

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[32] One could look at Guay's article (2015) about how audiences should be trained to appreciate the theatre (and others like it) to begin to dissect the various mindsets and attitudes.

performance - will it exist on physical stages, as mixed media events, as interactive events, be co-created in an online world? Again, another historical overview of not only the incorporation of technology into the theatre (beginning with hydraulics of the Romans, or the winches used to have the Gods descend to resolve the play (i.e. Deus Ex Machina) in the times of the Greeks, and leading to present day audio-visual and holographic technology (Shaw & Cellan-Jones, 2012)), but theatre's response to and redefinition in light of the introduction of other media (like film and television) would provide an interesting insertion into the conversation of the future of an artistic form that some would say is anachronistic. This could then be examined in the light of new media, such as video games and digital. Auslander's analysis of live performance and remediation (Auslander, 1999) may provide an interesting starting point, as well as an examination of the theatre through McLuhan's media tetrad (McLuhan & McLuhan, 1988), with an understanding of what (and how) the theatre retrieves and recovers what was lost as the media landscape moves forward.

Conclusion

The independent theatre landscape in Toronto is an important piece of the overall Toronto theatre landscape, serving those who may not practice in the mainstream, while serving the mainstream itself. While it is a fluid and dynamic space, it currently functions in an unsustainable manner for both companies and practitioners. By enabling practitioners to develop their own visions of a future ecosystem that is sustainable and meets their needs will enable first steps towards a healthier, more sustainable, and potentially more meaningful ecosystem that will benefit not only them, but ensure its health to support artists in years to come.

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Appendix A: List of Thematic Codes

The following is the list of themes generated at the end of all synthesis methods.

Thematic Codes				
Marketing				
	Effects on the Reception of the Work			
	Perceived Lack of Public Awareness			
	Social Media = Cheap Media			
	Accessible Marketing			
	Understand the Audience			
	Season vs. Show by Show			
	Word of Mouth			
Coverage				
	Media Power			
	Reduced Media Coverage			
	Legitimization of the Blogs by Creators			
	Lack of Critical Conversation			
	Diversity of Critical Voices			
	Traditional Role of Media			

		Building an Audience		
		Building Artist's Reputation		
		Reduction of Theatre Coverage (Compare to Film)		
		Promote Canadian Content		
Funding				
	Donors			
		Donor Profile		
			Older Generation	
			Downtowners	
			Lack of Singular Wealthy Patrons	
		Donor Motivators		
			Help Small Groups	
			Make a Difference	
			Trustworthy & Stable	
			Connection	
		Donor Hindrances		
			Lack of Disposable Income	
			Lower Priority	
		Disconnect between arts orgs & public		

	Crowdfunding			
	Impact of Funding			
		Setting the Agenda		
		Funding as a Shaper of Landscape		
		Lack of Funding		
			Focus on Fundraising	
			Missed Opportunity to Build on Success	
	Arts Grants			
		"Success to the Successful"		
		Big Effort, Little Reward		
		Grants do not Mean Good Work		
		Peer Granting Reinforces Hegemony		
		Putting People in Boxes		
		No Cost of Living Adjustments		
		Too Many Applicants	(Oversaturation)	
		Funding Cuts		
		System Change		
	Non-Arts Grants			

	Corporate Sponsorship			
Independent Theatre in Toronto				
	Ecosystem			
	Discipline Focus			
	Discipline Crossover			
	Networks			
	Sense of Community			
	Tension			
		Community vs. Competition		
			Scarcity Mentality	
			Saturation	
			Lack of Resources	
			Resource Sharing	
	Public Perception			
	Lack of Direction			
	New Direction			
	Growth / Next Steps			
	Solutions			
	Self Definition by Indie Creators			
	Freedom			

	Motivation			
	Hope			
	Advocacy			
	Lack of Legitimacy			
	Institutional Reln			
		Indie Theatre as a Resource for Institutional Theatre		
		Co-Pros		
		Fluidity Between Spaces		
		Artistic Leadership		
			Tone set by Institutional Theatre	
				Accessibility of Institutional ADs within the Indies Community
				Value of Institutional Artistic Leadership ($)
				Disconnect with Public
	Season Planning			
Professionalization				
	Definitions of Professional and Amateur			

	Blurring of Lines Between Professional and Amateur			
		Ultra-professionalization		
		Training and Degrees		
	Exclusion			
		of People		
		of Work		
Festivals				
	Effect on Landscape			
	Hierarchies			
	Temporary Nature of Festivals			
	Festival Focus (Too Long)			
	Entry into the Independent Theatre Community			
	Festivals as a platform to:			
		Circumvent Power Brokers		
		Build Reputation		
		Be Seen by Institutional ADs		
		Reduce Costs		
		Guaranteed Audience		
		Build Community		

		Commingle Disciplines		
Government & Policy				
	Role of Government			
	Pace of Change			
	Policy Levers			
	Policy Goals			
		Cultural Promotion		
		DIsconnect between Policy & Independent Theatre Makers		
	Future Vision			
	Fear			
Class & The Arts				
	Inequality & Privilege			
	Consequences			
		Empathy for Others		
		Decreased Working Class Participation		
		Repeating / Reinforcing Middle Class Values		
Canadian Theatre Identity				
	Role of Independent Theatre			

	Little Theatre Movement			
	Transnational vs. Home Grown (National Voice)			
	National Voice to Identity Voices			
	Stratford Festival			
		Continued Reverence for Shakespeare		
		Devaluation of Canadian Work		
	Looking to America			
Space				
	Space is an Issue			
	Loss of Venues			
		High Rent		
		Condo Development		
		Gentrification		
	Rental Spaces			
		Dependency on Rental Spaces		
			Compromise Artistic Vision	
			Lack of Community	
			High Cost	

			Booking Uncertainty	
			Confusion Between Company and Space	
			Bad Time Slots	
			Competition for Space	
	Desire to Own (Control)			
		Capital Costs		
		Loss of Independence		
	Excess of Theatre			
	New Venues			
	Shared Office Space			
	Non-Traditional Spaces			
		Pop Up / Storefronts		
		Found Space / Site Specific		
		Benefits		
Urban Landscape				
	Theatre Legitimacy in Downtown			
	Theatre Outside of Downtown			
	Suburbanizatio n			

	Urban Processes			
	Sites of Discourses			
	Theory & Lenses			
Sense of Place / Locality				
	Theatre as a Gathering Place			
	Independent Theatre as Hyperlocal Theatre			
		Insider Knowledge to Locate		
		Local Talent (Not International Calibre)		
		Obligation to See (Know Someone)		
Exposure				
	New Voices			
	Being Seen			
Training				
	Formal Education			
		Saturation of Grads		
		Value of Education		
		Peer Networks		
		Shaping Expectations		
		Responsibility of Institution		

		Gap between Education and Career		
		Disparity in Admissions		
		Informal Training		
Hustle & Entrepreneurship				
	Future Vision			
	Entrepreneurship & The Associated Value			
		Hard Work		
Being an Artist / Producer				
		Making Your Own Work		
		Artists as Producers		
Governance				
	Board Member (what they get out of it)			
	Qualifications			
	Power & Accountability			
	Fiduciary Responsibility			
	Funding			
	Board Structure			
	Tensions			
Culture				

		High Culture VS. Low Culture			
			Culture as a Signifier of "Class"		
			All forms of entertainment together		
			The "Elite" View		
			Segregation of Forms		
			Protectors of "Capital C" Culture		
			Co-Opting		
		Expanding View of Culture			
		Challenges to Cultural Development			
		Models Based on Individual			
		Cultural Transmission			
		Role in Defining a Nation			
	Technology				
		Digital Opportunities			
			Amplifying Voices		
			Streaming Theatre		
			Democratization of the Arts		
			Devaluation of the Professional Arts		

		Entitlement / Skewed Success		
		Facilitator of Interdisciplinary Arts		
		Disruption to Government Policy		
		Non-Linear Storytelling		
		Role of Live Performance in a Digital World		
	Theatre and Tech as Historic Bedfellows			
	Resistance to Tech			
		Lack of Knowledge		
		Stick with the Status Quo		
	Future			
	Other Media Influence on Theatre			
		Influence on Theatre Practice		
		Fluidity Between Theatre and Other Media		
		Evolution		
		Concept of Remediation		
			Nitty Gritty	
			Remediation of Live Performance	

		Film VS Theatre		
(Liveness)		Origins of "Liveness"		
(Liveness)		Cultural Cache of "Live"		
	Public Broadcasting			
	TV Perception of Theatre			
Film				
	Development of Cinema in Canada			
	Interest in Cinema			
	Impact of Cinema			
Artist Lifestyle				
	Sustainability			
	Income			
		People Work for Free		
		Stability of Income / Work		
		Youth (Disenfranchisement)		
		Limited Life Choices		
	"Being an Artist is a Lifestyle"			
	"Arts Aren't a Real Job"			
	Joe Jobs			

	Fluidity (Film / TV)			
	School Debt			
	Get Picked Up			
	Lack of Opportunity			
		Head to the US		
	Pay Disparity Between Artists and Technicians			
	Administrators as Secure Paid Employees			
		Exploitation of Artists		
	Relationship to Money			
	"Status of the Artist" Act			
Working Structures				
	Rehearsal			
	Training			
	Health Hazards			
	Mental Health			
	Self-Created Social Programs			
	Enabling Environments			
Identity Politics				
	Future			
	Force for Change			

	Tension			
		Safe Space		
	Exclusion of Voices			
	Diversifying Artistic Leadership			
		New Voices		
		Role Models		
		BReaking Down Traditional Structures		
Diversity & Accessibility				
	Cost of Accessibility			
	Independent Theatre is Doing Good with Inclusivity			
	Diverse Stories			
		Marginalization of Work		
		Adoption by Mainstream		
		Audience Diversity		
		Ensuring Access to Creativity		
	Institutionalizing Marginalization / State Legitimacy			
		Space		
		Funding		

	Working Structures			
		Different Expectations		
Audience				
	Audience Motivation			
		Social / "Be Seen"		
		Risk Taking		
		Personal Growth		
		Unique Experience		
		Communal Experience		
		Fun!		
	Barriers to Participation			
		Actual Cost (Ticket Prices)		
		People are Busy		
		Competition for Attention		
	Effects of Theatre			
		Connection to Place		
		Connection to People		
		Exposure to Ideas		
	Audience Growth			
		Access to New Audiences		
		Relationship Building		

		Reputation Building		
		Bad Experience		
	Meaningful Theatre for the Audience			
		Shift from Consumer to Collaborator		
		Relatable Theatre		
		Co-Creation / Participatory		
		Community / Identity-Based Theatre		
	Audience Resistance			
		Perceived Cost		
		Subscription Model		
		Resistance to Change		
		Leaving the House		
		Netflix Mentality		
	Decline of Toronto Audiences			
		Earn Your Keep (Market Forces)		
		Commercial Success		
	Current Audience			
		Desire for Larger Audiences		

	Artist is internally motivated (Value)			
	Disconnect between Artists and General Audience			
	Disconnect between Artists, Peers, Audience, and Funders			
		Undefined Audience		
		Theoretical Audience		
		Actual Audience (Artists)		
			If you don't keep the audience in mind	
				Perceived lack of public value of theatre
Success				
	Forms of Success: Critical & Financial			
		Prioritization of Financial Success		
		Changing Perspectives		
		Other Perspectives		

			Growth / Institutionalization	
			Freedom	
			Reputation / Respect	
	Difficulties			
		No Metrics		
		Comparing to Others		
		Success is Long Term		
Assumptions				
	Basis for Assumptions - Euro-Centre Frameworks			
	Entrenched Systems			
	Values			
		Art for Art's Sake		
		Starving Artist		
		Bad At Match		
		Pain / Struggle		
		Activism		
		Growth		
		Classics		
		Importance		
			"Life Changing Work"	
			Magic of the theatre	
			Inspiration / Expression	

	Assumptions from Outside of Arts Landscape			
Neo-Liberal Economy				
	Independent theatre operates on micro-economies			
	Theatre Sits Outside the Economy.			
		Disdain of Economic Values		
	Theatre's complicity within the Economy.			
	Globalization			
		Festival Spaces		
		Homogenizing Effect		
		No More "Canada" (as a market)		
	Value			
		Undervaluing Work		
		Need to Demonstrate Value		
			Adoption of Language of Economy	
			Benefits of Theatre to Economy	

	Culture's Relationship to the Economy			
		Market Rewards Popular Theatre		
		New Goal: Elevation from Independent to Institutional		
In Flux				
	Change as a Defining Trait of Independent Theatre			
	How Change Happens			
	Theatrical Landscape is on the Brink of Change			
	Changes in Artistic Leadership			
	Too Many Changes			
Definitions				
	Definitions of Theatre			
	Politics as the Driver of Definitions			
	Definitions in Flux			
		Independent Theatre		
		Canadian Theatre		
		Theatrical Forms		

		Artist		
		Culture		
	Characteristics of Independent Theatre			
		Non-Venued		
		Outside of Legitimate Spaces		
		Other		
Theatrical Practice				
	Independent THeatre's Effect on Play Development			
	Lack of Love of Process			
	New Work Incentives			
	Moment to Moment			
	Variety of Work			
	Quality of Work			
Community Theatre				
Entry Points into Theatrical Landscape				
Gatekeepers				
	Accumulation of Gatekeepers			
	Removal of Gatekeepers			
Youth				

	"Youth Don't Go to Theatre"			
	Independent Theatre is Young			
	Arts Outreach to Students			
Status / Hierarchy				
Institutional Theatre				
	Rejection Of			
	Defining Role			
	Supporting Institutions			
Innovation				
Failure				
Focus on Established Theatre Conventions / Companies				
Artist Relationship to Audience				
Exchange of Ideas				

Appendix B: Proposed Workshop Outline

Details:

Duration: *3 Hours*

Who: *8 - 16 participants*

Goals:

- To determine potential future desired states of the independent theatrical ecosystem in Toronto.
- To understand what needs to change to achieve those desired states.

Agenda:

As people come in...

- o 5 minutes prior to the session, announce that the session will be beginning in 5 minutes.

- o Participants can grab coffee, food, or washroom.

- o Encourage participants to fill out name tags on way in.

- o Depending on the number of participants, they will sit at assigned tables in predetermined teams of three or four.

- o Current research to be displayed around the room so people can review when they arrive.

▪ 10 min **Welcome**

- o Welcome and thank everyone for making time to attend the session.

    - ▪ Advise that everyone here has been curated for their background, expertise, and knowledge, and for their point of view. Each person a different vantage point into the room.

- o Introduce the researchers and the project.

    - ▪ RQ: Given the changing cultural and entertainment ecosystems, how might we ensure the future sustainability of the independent theatre scene in Toronto?

- o Review the agenda for today's session.

- o Review workshop ground rules:

    - ▪ Assume everyone has good intent.

    - ▪ Respect one another's opinions.

    - ▪ Speak from your own experience.

    - ▪ Keep today's discussions (and identities) inside the room.

- ▪ One conversation at a time.

- ▪ We're all peers here. (Ignore the hierarchies at the minute)

- ▪ If anyone feels stressed, or needs to step outside for a moment (or get a better coffee), that is completely okay, and will not be judged.

- ▪ Ask if anyone would like to add any ground rules.

- ▪ 20 min **Introductions & Ice Breakers**

  - o Introduce and demonstrate ice breaker (Connected Web)

    - ▪ Process:

      - ● Participants stand around a table building connections among shared interests and experiences.

      - ● The first person begins talking about themselves as a person while holding a ball of yarn.

      - ● When another person around the table hears something specific about that story that is similar or related to their own experience, they call attention to themselves by clapping or raising their hand and calling out "connect".

      - ● The first person then passes the ball of yarn to that person while holding on to the end.

      - ● The second person then begins talking about themselves until a third person calls out a connection.

      - ● The second participant would then hold on to their end of the yarn and pass the ball to the third person.

      - ● This dynamic continues for several rounds, until each person standing around the table had made two or more connections with others, and an intricate web of yarn is spun between them.

      - ● The web of string is a visual marker for these connections among them.

  - o Debrief on the ice breaker

    - ▪ What were some of the interesting points of connection?

    - ▪ Was there anything that connected everyone?

- ▪ 10 min **Introduction of Three Horizons Framework**

  - o Explain Three Horizons Framework from IFF participant handout.

- ▪ 5 min **H1 Horizon - Warm Up**

- o Each practitioner is encouraged to develop a statement for themselves as to how they understand the current state of the independent theatre ecosystem.

▪ 15 min **H1 Horizon - Review**

- o Review H1 findings from this research.
- o Note: H1 information will be presented *a la carte* for selection.

▪ 25 min **H1 Horizon - Creation**

- o In groups of four, practitioners select from the options the items that are no longer fit for purpose.
    - ▪ One person selects a post-it, and presents it to their group for a rapid, two minute discussion.
    - ▪ If there is something that is missing, practitioners are encouraged to add it.
    - ▪ This continues around the circle for the duration.

▪ 5 min **H1 Horizon - Personal Reflection**

- o Now that we've completed this activity, before we share the horizons, please take a moment to reflect on:
    - ▪ How that activity made you feel.
    - ▪ Any interesting insights / surprises.
    - ▪ How your feelings towards the present ecosystem has changed or remained the same.
    - ▪ Any other reflections you may have.

▪ 15 min **H1 Horizon - Share Back**

- o Each group shares their present ecosystem concern with the entire workshop.

▪ 20 min **Break**

- o During the break, participants can continue to add to their first horizon, based on the information they've heard from the other groups.

▪ 5 min **H3 Horizon - Explanation**

- o Participants will be asked to create a preferred future system 20 years out. Consider these questions:
    - ▪ What values will support it?
    - ▪ What is falling out of favour in H1?
    - ▪ Ask prompting questions, if needed.

- o It can be created in any means that you see fit:
  - ▪ Paper, pen will be provided for words.
  - ▪ Colored pencils and paper will be provided for drawings.
  - ▪ Performances will be videotaped.
  - ▪ A reminder that anything created will be collected and kept by the researcher as data.
- ▪ 5 min **H3 Horizon - Warm Up**
  - o Participants will be asked to create a statement for themselves about what a healthy / sustainable / vibrant sector would look like in 20 years.
- ▪ 10 min **H3 Horizon - 1, 2, 4 method - Phase 1**
  - o Participants will work alone to create a preferred future.
- ▪ 10 min **H3 Horizon - 1, 2, 4 method - Phase 2**
  - o Participants will then pair up, discuss their futures, and create a hybrid future together.
    - ▪ Note: what was the same? What was different?
- ▪ 15 min **H3 Horizon - 1, 2, 4 method - Phase 3**
  - o Groups of two will pair with another group (for totals of 4), share their futures, discuss their futures, and create a hybrid future together.
    - ▪ Note: what was the same? What was different?
- ▪ 5 min **H3 - Personal Reflection**
  - o Now that we've completed this activity, before we share the futures, please take a moment to reflect on:
    - ▪ How that activity made you feel.
    - ▪ Any interesting insights / surprises.
    - ▪ How your feelings towards the future changed or remained the same.
    - ▪ How your feelings towards the present changed or remained the same.
    - ▪ Any other reflections you may have.
- ▪ 15 min **H3 - Sharing**
  - o Each group share their futures with the entire team.
    - ▪ Each team embellishes the other's future.
  - o Once both have shared their futures, see if we can develop something more radical.
- 10 min **H3 - Reflection**

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- o Feedback on activity
- o Discuss any individual insights
  - ▪ What don't we know that we need to know?

- ▪ 20 min **H2 - Discussion**
  - o Ask if anyone knows of any innovations anywhere in the world that might be growth points for the future system.
    - ▪ What should we do today to enable this tomorrow?
    - ▪ Are there any items that are within your control?
    - ▪ How can we enable this positive change?

- ▪ 5 min **H2 - Personal Reflection**
  - o Encourage the participants to reflect on the innovations and trends occuring in the system that have been identified.
    - ▪ Are there any insights / surprises?
    - ▪ Have your opinions towards the future / present changed?
    - ▪ Any other reflections?

- ▪ 10 min **Questions & Next Steps**
  - o Review what has been done today.
    - ▪ Development of aspirational future ecosystems.
      - ● Creates a shared understanding of an ideal state
    - ▪ Identified steps towards this future state.
  - o Open the floor for questions
    - ▪ Ask: Is there anything that you would like to say that has not yet been discussed?
      - ● Allow them to opportunity to express on paper as well, if they are not comfortable expressing in a group setting.

- ▪ 5 min **Feedback Survey**
  - o Thank all participants for participating
  - o Distribute survey for participants to fill out
    - ▪ Intended for facilitator reflection

- ▪ **Total time:** 240 min

Inputs:
- Data Capture Sheet
- Powerpoint of Day's Events (Agenda)
- Camera
- Video Camera

Supplies:
- Coffee & Water
- Healthy Snacks
- Name Tags
- Sharpies
- File Folders
- Pens
- Tissues
- Ball of String (x3)
- Notepad (for researcher)
- Pen (for researcher)
- Signs to direct people to room
- Painter's tape
- Post It Notes
- 3 Horizons Maps for Wall
- Colored Pencils
- Data capture package

Outputs:
- Shared vision of future
- Potential "first steps" toward future
- List of innovations / programs for investigation (for funding, etc.)

Preparation notes:
- Participant List
- Data Capture Packages
- Feedback Survey
- "Anything else?" Sheet
- Pre-written items for 3 Horizons Population

Next steps after the workshop:
- Clean up
- Collect data sheets

- Take photos of room
- Jot down impressions
- Write out immediate personal reflection

Appendix C: Mapping of Specific Findings to H1, H2, and H3 (Three Horizons Model)

Should the workshop as described in Chapter 5: Innovation take place shortly after the release of the report, this mapping of specific findings from research sub-question one (regarding investigations into the present-day independent theatre ecosystem) to the relevant horizons (H1, H2, and H3) could be used to pre-populate any horizon, or to "prime the pump" for those in the room should they not assistance in beginning their conversations.

Overall Theatre Landscape

H1 - Present Day Conditions
- There is fluidity of artists and work between different parts of the theatre landscape in Toronto
- There is not really any repertory theatre, meaning that all work is gig-to-gig
  - Precarity enables the fluidity
- The relationship between independent theatre and the institutional / commercial theatres is one of codependency
- Independent theatre acts as a resource for the institutional theatre
  - Institutional theatres are facing a relevancy issue and are looking to the independent theatre to help solve it
  - Institutional theatres may have experienced budget cuts and look to the independent theatre for programming
  - Institutional theatres may help encourage / develop the voices of independent artists
    - They can then shape those voices
  - Institutional theatres provide the independent scene with space, resources, and access to a different audience
- Independent theatre practitioners may be tempted to create in order to be programmed
- Programming into a regional / institutional theatre is one of the only ways for an independent theatre artist to be compensated for his / her / their work
- Institutional theatres can act as gatekeepers, determining which voices gain access to their space
- Toronto's artistic leadership is accessible to artists as they want to hear new voices and meet new people.

H2 - Trends & Innovations
- N/A

H3 - Future Vision
- **N/A**

Festivals

H1 - Present Day Conditions
- The major festivals in the independent theatre landscape are the Toronto Fringe Festival and the Summerworks festival
    - The Toronto Fringe Festival bases its admissions on lottery
    - Summerworks bases its admissions on an admission's jury
- Festivals are the primary entry points for artists into the independent theatre scene
- Festivals provide a platform for artists to put up their own work cheaper than producing their own show
- Festivals have "guaranteed audiences"
- Festivals provide the opportunity for institutional artistic directors to see artists in situ
- Festivals help to raise the profile and reputation of artists
- Festivals help build community amongst independent theatre practitioners
- Festivals encourage the co-mingling of ideas and disciplines
- There is a perception that it is not desirable to make a career on the festival circuit.

H2 - Trends & Innovations
- The Toronto Fringe Festival is less indie than it was before

H3 - Future Vision
- N/A

TV & Film Connection

H1 - Present Day Conditions
- There is fluidity of artists between theatre and film / tv
    - Precarity of the work enables the fluidity
- The film / tv industry enables a vibrant theatre scene by supplying work to theatre artists
    - An actor can make as much in a week on film / tv as they can in a year in theatre

- Theatre creation processes must accommodate the film / tv processes (i.e. ending rehearsal early to attend auditions)

H2 - Trends & Innovations
- Technology enables artists access to create in film, television / broadcast, and theatre

H3 - Future Vision
- N/A

Independent Theatre Landscape

H1 - Present Day Conditions
- There is no practitioner-led agreed-upon definition for Independent Theatre
- There is creative freedom in the independent sector
- Independent theatre practitioners are not necessarily beholden to funding agencies, mandates, or audiences.
- The independent artist bears all of the financial risk for his / her / their projects
- There is a lack of resources in the independent theatre sector
- There is a perceived oversaturation of creators in the independent theatre sector
  - Due to the oversaturation, Toronto is a difficult city in which to create
- A "scarcity mentality" in the independent theatre community
- Independent theatre is the seat of theatrical innovation
- The creators in the independent theatre scene are young
- Independent theatre stands outside of the structures that the institutional theatres must deal with
- There is an entrepreneurial, DIY attitude in the independent theatre sector
- The independent theatre artist must also act as producer (and "hustle").
- Some fear that it's not the best artists that get seen, but the best producers
- Generator is helping to fill the gap by teaching artists producing and business skills needed to run their own company
- Some believe that artists should only be concerned with making art, and not have to deal with other work
- There is a culture of support within the independent theatre community
- The sense of community is enhanced by the fluidity within the independent theatre community
  - People will work with different artists on a project-by-project basis
- Peer networks help artists get gigs

- Peer networks can reinforce existing points of view / methodologies
- There is a perception that the independent theatre community is doing well with issues surrounding diversity and inclusion of non-mainstream and marginalized voices.
- Independent theatre can serve non-mainstream voices
- Independent theatre can be flexible in a way that institutional theatres cannot be
- Some view the role of independent theatre as a training ground for artists (i.e. the "in-between")
- The independent theatre space serves to build / enhance the reputation of artists
- There is a desire to be able to make a career in the independent space.
- Toronto artistic leadership is accessible in the city
- An artist must produce to be seen

H2 - Trends & Innovations
- Barriers between disciplines are coming down.
- Creators are the ones who will shape the landscape
- Definitions are in flux
- Audiences want to hear diverse stories

H3 - Future Vision
- More resources / resource sharing (within independent theatre and between institutional and independent theatres)
- No more "scarcity mentality"
- Independent theatre is a space where one can be a full artist (not just a stepping stone)
- More socialist system where people with UBI so that people can create and not hustle
- More spaces for diverse voices on stage

Funding

H1 - Present Day Conditions
- Economy is at the centre of today's society
  - Everything must behave in the language of the economy
  - Metrics for success are often set by economic (i.e. financial) standards
- Theatre is not apart from the economy, but complicit within it
- Theatre is a fundamentally uneconomic activity, requiring subsidy from the state to make up for the lack from the market
- There is a perceived lack of funding for institutional theatre and independent theatre.
  - This leads to a perception of lack of value of theatre

- - Theatre must always be proving its worth
  - Arts grants funding legitimizes artistic activity
  - Arts grants often get cut by governments looking to "balance the books"
  - Arts grants can reinforce hegemonic cultural values
    - Arts grants can force artists into specific boxes and exclude others who do not fit into those boxes. Those boxes can be based on discipline, practice, or background, amongst others.
  - Criteria to give out artistic funding can act as a lever to create a specific kind of landscape
  - There is a perception that arts grants are a lot of work for not as much money as you would like
  - No new operating grants are readily available
    - The dream of having a General Manager and earning a living wage are dead unless you already have it.
  - The necessity of fundraising diminishes the time that can be spent on artistic activities
  - Corporate sponsorships are looking for return on investment
    - There is a perception that corporations want to engage large audiences
    - There is a perception that corporations won't sponsor anything that scares audiences
  - Some legacy institutions and infrastructure has become stagnant on its continued operating funding
  - Reputation plays a key role in obtaining various types of funding
  - Donors are primarily older and looking to help innovative companies.

H2 - Trends & Innovations
- Crowdfunding platforms enable artists to seek funding directly from their networks.
  - Donor exhaustion can become an issue if there is repeated "asks."
- There has been an uptick in smaller venues and non-funded theatres, leading to more artistic innovation.
- New granting programs are bringing institutional and independent theatre together.
- New granting programs are allowing grants to be given by people more familiar with the work.
- Globalization of theatre is leading to a hegemonic cultural event and forming expectations of what theatre is.

H3 - Future Vision
- The death of some of the current institutional theatres (evaluation of infrastructure)
- Reallocation of existing funding to difference companies, artists, and voices

- More funding for theatre in general

Training

H1 - Present Day Conditions
- Formal training is not necessary for the theatre industry
- Institutions provide opportunity for new theatre artists to learn their practice
- Institutions transfer the values, norms, and practices of the industry
  - This can affect definitions of success
- Networks develop from institutions that are then brought into professional life
  - It becomes difficult for the uninitiated to enter into independent theatre
  - Informal training can help grow one's peer network
- Training at an institution comes with a large price tag
- There is an oversaturation of theatre grads in the scene
  - It becomes more difficult to break through the noise to be seen or receive funding
- Institutions cannot support graduates much once they are in the independent scene
- Independent theatre is seen as a training ground, filling the gap between school and the institutional and commercial theatres

H2 - Trends & Innovations
- Professionalization and credentialing of theatre is increasing
- The number of theatre programs is increasing, resulting in an increase in theatre graduates entering the theatre scene

H3 - Future Vision
- Independent theatre is viewed as a legitimate end in-and-of itself

Space & Venues

H1 - Present Day Conditions
- Due to geographical restrictions, independent theatre is performed by local practitioners
  - Audience likely feels a sense of obligation (i.e. Hey! I know those people)
  - Not necessarily all international calibre performers / shows
  - Require insider knowledge to discover
- Theatrically-legitimate space are concentrated in the downtown

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- It has been difficult to move theatre outside of the downtown core
- Many small, non-traditional pop-up venues (storefronts, etc.) were in the landscape, but shut down due to high rents or condo development.
- Toronto's real estate market is putting ownership of space outside of the reach of most independent theatre companies
- Independent theatres struggle with finding space when they want it, for how long they need it.
  - This leads to competition for ideal theatrical spaces within the community
- Lack of permanent space can affect the sense of community
- Independent theatre companies are renting space from the institutional theatres
  - Places independent theatre in a subservient role to institutional theatre
  - A desire for control of space may arise
- Many spaces not run by professional theatre companies (in community centres, etc.) remain underused.
- Independent theatre is happening in site-specific locations, anywhere where they can find space

H2 - Trends & Innovations
- Some venues (storefronts, etc.) are starting to reopen, but further outside the downtown core
- Sharing administration space is occuring, fostering collaboration, cross-over, and sharing of other resources

H3 - Future Vision
- N/A

Artist Lifestyle

H1 - Present Day Conditions
- Life of the artist is in chaos.
- The lifestyle of a, independent theatre artist is not sustainable.
  - There is a lack of paying / stable work.
    - The only stable work is for administrators.
    - In many instances, technicians get paid more than artists.
- Artists burn out and leave the independent theatre scene.
- Artists want to have a family or own a home, and consequently, leave the independent scene.

- The independent scene is young, because it takes time to realise that you cannot survive (and older artists burn out and leave).
- Some artists do independent theatre with the hopes that they will be picked up by the institutional / commercial theatres (and paid a living wage).
  - These artists may work for free in exchange for opportunity or exposure.
  - Some artists may work for free for the opportunity to work on challenging material or simply because they believe in a project.
- There is a perception of immobility at the institutional theatres (i.e. senior artists are not retiring and making room for younger artists)
- Some people exploit artists for their own gain.
- The independent scene has artists with various levels of professional affiliations (i.e. union designations).
- Reputation and personal networks are incredibly important to help connect people to new work, and to determine who to work with and who to avoid.
- Many artists take on day jobs to survive.
  - Accomodations often must be made in the creative process to facilitate the work that is actually making artists money
  - There is a hierarchy: actors who take on day jobs are further down the list than those who can afford to only create art.
    - Some feel that there is an attitude that artists should only be making art.
- Financial privilege enables artists to be successful.
  - This limits the ability for marginalized voices, new Canadians, and others to be heard / find success.
- There is a perceived attitude that artistic work is not "real work."
- There is a valorization of the "starving artist"
- There is a perception that pursuing a career in the arts is not a vocation, but a passionate pursuit of a lifestyle - passion and commitment are what guarantee success.
- There is a perception that an artists should only create, and not do any admin work.
- The precarity of the work in theatre enables the fluidity between theatre sectors, and between film and television and theatre.
- People take on debt to increase their professional credentials / attend school.
- Class is a large barrier to accessing / participation in the arts.

H2 - Trends & Innovations
- Practitioners and administrators are actively questioning some of the fundamental narratives and assumptions that have arisen, both in the general public, and in the artistic community.

- Generator is enabling artists to reframe what "success" looks like.

H3 - Future Vision
- More diverse set of people working in the arts throughout the course of their lives

Supporting Institutions

H1 - Present Day Conditions
- Many working conditions for professional theatre are defined by supporting institutions (government policy, unions, etc.)
- The way working practices have developed have not necessarily taken into account the needs of non-male, non-white people.
- Due to the conditions of creating independent theatre, independent practitioners may see the supporting institutions as hindering, rather than helping, them.
- Often, supporting institutions (especially government) take a long time to respond to the conditions on the ground
- Independent theatre artists don't necessarily have the time or structures through which to advocate for themselves
- There is a disconnect between policy makers and the independent theatre scene
- Governance structures may not encourage companies to take artistic risks

H2 - Trends & Innovations
- Independent theatre innovates on governing structures and working practices.
- New artists have different expectations of how the industry will work.
- Some supporting institutions (TAPA, PACT, CAEA, etc.) have begun to reach out to smaller theatres and independent practitioners to see how they can change.

H3 - Future Vision
- A future government will dismantle the support systems that exist in order to let market forces take over art.

Media & Coverage

Summary:

H1 - Present Day Conditions

- Media not only builds audiences, but builds artists' reputations as well
- Independent theatre shows have small / non-existent media / marketing budgets
- There is a perceived lack of public awareness of independent theatre
    - There is difficulty in ensuring that the people who "need" to see these stories know about them.
- Short-run shows hamper the ability to build word of mouth
- There is a perception of saturation of theatrical events in the landscape (and a limited amount of advertising / media space)
- The critical discourse remains on the level of reviews, not discussion of ideas

H2 - Trends & Innovations
- Traditional media coverage of theatre is in decline
- Non-traditional media are arising to fill the gap (and it is being legitimized by independent theatre artists)
- Technology is enabling social media as a low-cost method of spreading the word about a show (thus democratizing publicity)
    - Due to saturation of social media, it may be difficult to break through the noise.
    - Due to social media's dependence on existing networks, this may reinforce the "artist-as-audience" paradigm.
- Increasing saturation of reviewers: everyone is reviewing everyone's work.
- Independent theatre shows are marketed on a show-by-show basis (rather than as a traditional season)
    - Can disrupt marketing momentum.

H3 - Future Vision
- Diversification of critical voices
- Decline of single power brokers (i.e. a single critic can make or break a show)
- Accessibility of marketing
- Understand the audience in order to communicate with them how they would like to be communicated with

Audiences

H1 - Present Day Conditions
- Practitioners perceive their audience to be risk takers.
- Practitioners perceive their audience to be seeking opportunities for personal growth.
- Practitioners believe audiences are attracted to the unique, communal experience.

- There is a challenge in getting people to pay for the real cost of theatre
- There is a perceived decline in attendance at theatrical events:
  - Ticket prices act as a barrier to audiences
    - There are many people in Toronto (marginalized people, new Canadians, young families, etc.) who cannot afford to go to theatre
    - High ticket prices reinforce class structures
  - Previous bad experiences at the theatre may influence future choices
  - Some audiences are resistant to changes in material / classical canon
  - Theatre competes for time in people's busy lives
    - If they can get what they need from theatre in a more convenient way, then they may opt for that
- There is a perception that the public does not value theatre
- Art that reflects the audience seems to be absent
- There is a perceived disconnect between artists and the general public
  - Many companies and artists have not defined the audience they wish to speak to
- Current independent theatre audiences consist mainly of other artists
- Independent theatre thrives on reputation
- Younger theatre goers are more word-of-mouth
- Casting actors from other mediums bring along their followers to the theatre

H2 - Trends & Innovations
- People are engaging in personalized entertainment via streaming services
- Audiences are shifting from consumer to co-creators of meaning
- Audiences are seeking participatory experiences
- Audiences are seeking relatable stories where they can see themselves reflected on stage
  - It is difficult to get those same audiences to see different stories
- Direct relationships between artists and audience are being built in the independent scene
- Younger audiences operate are more last minute
  - They do not operate on a subscription model
- Younger audiences are more price resistant
- Artists are becoming more conscious of the audiences that they currently have

H3 - Future Vision
- Personalized entertainment will cause decline in attendance at traditional theatres
- Increased general public valuation of theatre

- Audience growth (lineups to get in to see shows)
- Artists creating meaningful work with the audiences that they serve
- Work that is more engaged with the people who are seeing it

Appendix D: Workshop Data Capture Sheet

This is a sample of a data capture sheet for the workshop proposed in Chapter 5: Innovation.

Please use this worksheet to record your thinking, reflection, and responses.

Idea Parking Lot!

> Please use this section as a "parking lot" to store any ideas, thoughts, or questions about the research or process to later share with the group.

Warm Up: The Present Landscape (H1)

> Please use this space to develop a statement for yourself as to what the current landscape of independent theatre in Toronto looks like. If you had to Tweet about it, what would you say?

Reviewing the Present (H1)

Please use this section as a "parking lot" to store any ideas, thoughts, or questions about the present state (H1) of the independent theatre landscape to later share on the board.

Reflecting on What We've Done

Use this space to reflect on the discussions that had just occurred and selections that were just made. How did that activity make you feel? Did you have any interesting insights? Any interesting surprises? Did your feelings towards the present or future change or stay the same? Anything else?

Creating the Future (H3)

Warm-Up

Create a statement for yourself about what a healthy future independent theatre landscape would look like 20 years out.

Vision of the Future (Solo)

Create your own vision of the future of the independent theatre landscape 20 years out in as much detail as you would like.

Sharing your Future Visions (Pairs)

What was the same? What was different?

Vision of the Future (Pairs)

Create a vision of the future of the independent theatre landscape 20 years out in as much detail as you would like, using pieces from your vision and your partners vision, and new ideas as well.

Sharing your Future Visions (In Fours)

What was the same? What was different?

Vision of the Future (in Fours)

Create a vision of the future of the independent theatre landscape 20 years out in as much detail as you would like, using pieces from all visions presented, and new ideas as well.

Reflection on the Future Activity

Use this space to reflect on the visioning that had just occurred. How did that activity make you feel? Did you have any interesting insights? Any interesting surprises? Did your feelings towards the present or future change or stay the same? Anything else?

Embellishing the Future

Jot down any notes about how to embellish the other futures as presented. Consider using "yes, and" to build it.

Making a Common Future

Use this as a parking lot for any thoughts about the collective future that is being created.

Examples of the Future in the Present (H2)

Use this as a parking lot for any signals of the desired futures in the present.

Reflection on The Middle Ground

Use this space to reflect on the discussion that had just occurred. How did that discussion make you feel? Did you have any interesting insights? Any interesting surprises? Did your feelings towards the present or future change or stay the same? Anything else?

Anything else?

Is there anything else you would like to say that has not yet been discussed?..